

Life



Art Parts

Imagine That

GRAND GLASS ART TAKES SHAPE AT D'ART CENTER WITH LAMPWORK ARTIST CATHY-JO RAMSEY OF GLASS IMAGININGS

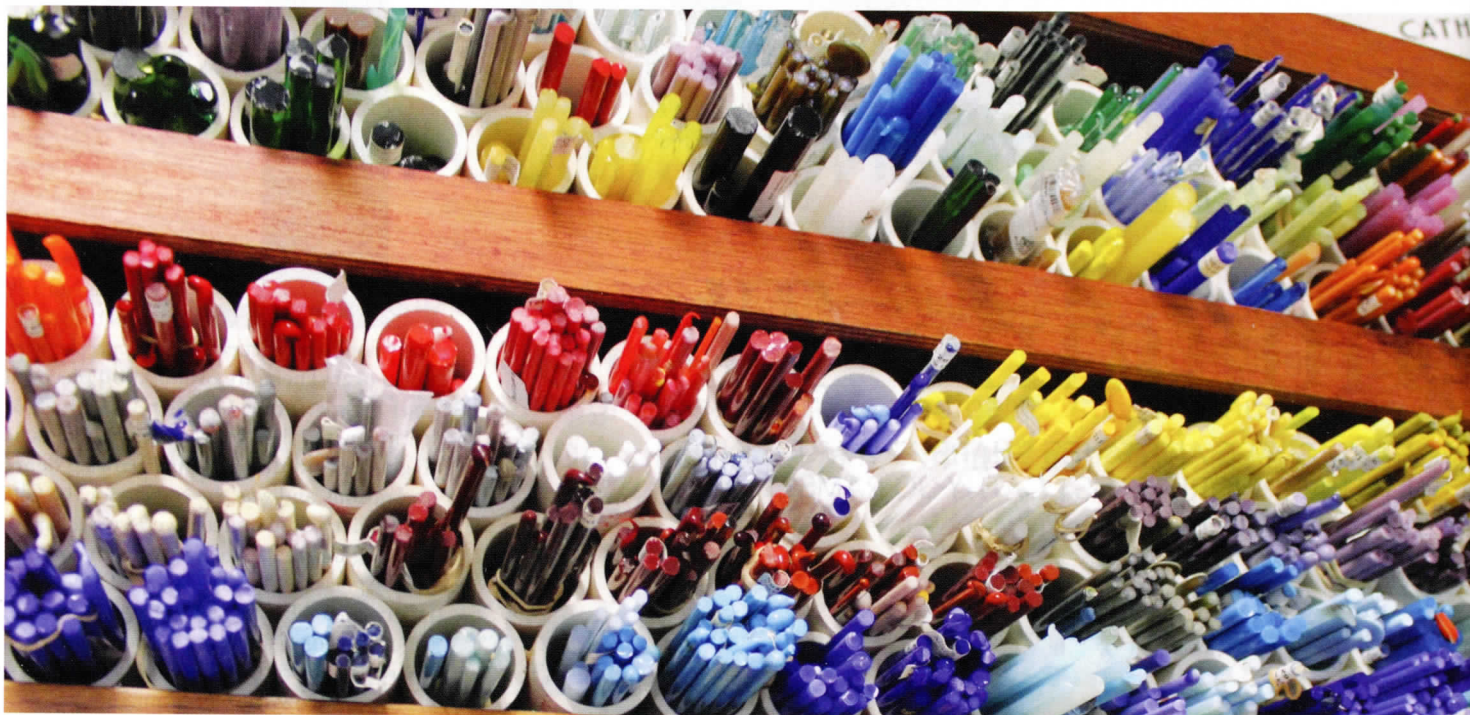
Story and photos by Ryan Miller

The glass arts community in Norfolk mirrors the most marvelous glass art cultures found the whole world over. There are over 30,000 pieces of glass artwork in the Chrysler Museum's collection, while their Perry Glass Studio is host to glass art production, glassblowing demonstrations and was the setting for the Glass Art Society Conference several years ago bringing international artists from contemporary glass to the city. Their NEON Arts District neighbor d'Art Center, a community art center for visionaries in the visual arts, is where Cathy-Jo Ramsey creates her gorgeous glasswork known as Glass Imaginings.



At Ramsey's studio space there's an array of glass plates; tiled landscapes and seasca-
pes; ornate ornaments such as fish and
trees; an assortment of accessories includ-
ing nightlights, wine stoppers and pulls for
ceiling fans; eclectic earrings in designs such
as dice, hearts, teapots and dogs; precious
pendants and necklaces; and her one-of-a-
kind oysters. Ramsey's wearable and dis-
playable glass is made through lampwork—
sculpting glass by melting colored glass rods
over a gas-oxygen torch—and with a kiln
using heat to bond separate pieces of glass.
She regularly gives dazzling demos within
her workshop for her luminous lampwork,
shaping glass as it bends in a blaze and its
colors glow over the flame. This skillful pro-
duction of glass itself is as enchanting as the
final product.

Originally from Chincoteague, the island's
coastal culture was the muse for Ramsey's
glass oyster creations. Now a Norfolk na-
tive for many years, Ramsey learned more
about the craft from classes and mentoring
under masters John Quillen and Ali Rogan
among others. She juried into d'Art Center
over 15 years ago and is their only glass arti-
st. Lampwork was unique yet ubiquitous
to Murano, Italy, where in the 16th and 17th
centuries women would use a foot bellow
to heat up oil lamps to melt glass rods. "I
should have married an Italian and gone to
Italy and learn glass and done that," Ramsey
says jokingly, though it's a fact that her craft
has been shaped by the culture of Coastal
Virginia. She adds, "I love what I'm doing."

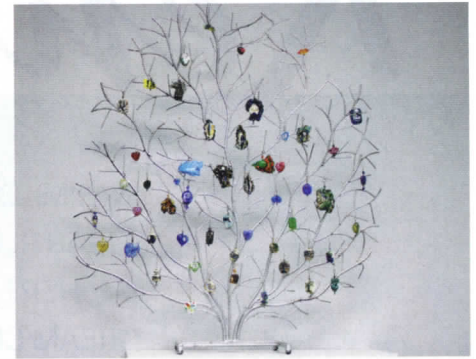




Ramsey begins with a stainless steel mandrel for her earrings and pendants and an off-mandrel technique for her oysters. She uses a prod, heats it up to resemble a blob that she mashes that's identical to a lollipop before infusing different colored rods. "I use Italian glass...but these are my colors, this is like my palette where a painter would have their paint, I have my rods," Ramsey explains. "It creates beautiful, beautiful different colors." She uses tweezers and a spoon to compress the object into a concave shape along with a punty as she melts an end of an oyster so she can draw strings of a necklace through it. On average, an oyster takes 20–30 minutes to make, while only four minutes for her fish.

Each piece of glasswork enters an annealer (or kiln) at 960 degrees and gradually decreases in temperature over the course of six hours so that the inside and outside of the object cool off evenly to prevent stress in the glass. Handmade and crafted by torch and flame, this imaginative glasswork is now ready to be worn and displayed as flawless fine art.

Learn more at D-ArtCenter.org and visit [Cathy-Jo Ramsey](#) for a demonstration and to purchase her glasswork at [d'Art Center](#) at 740 Duke St., Norfolk. [CoVa](#)



Glass Gallery (Top Left): Cathy-Jo Ramsey with her art at d'Art Center; **Earrings and Ornaments** (Top Center): Ramsey creates fish ornaments to teapot earrings and anything else from her imagination; **Lighting Up for Lampwork** (Top Right): During a d'Art demo, Ramsey's torch shapes this hot rod into a glass heart; **Oysters On the Half Shell** (Bottom Right): Ramsey uses her lampwork and glass rod palette to whet your palate by making a platter of oysters with a squeeze of lemon; **Rainbow of Rods** (Bottom Left): "Where a painter would have paint, I have my rods," Ramsey explains, using Italian glass for her colorful creations.