

Grants Pass Daily Courier

Artistic alchemy: Ruch's Suzan Hatch melds glass and earth elements to create her work

By Kathleen Alaks of the Daily Courier

ASHLAND — Color and light meet geometry and chemistry in the fused glass mosaics of Suzan Hatch of Ruch.

A beautiful blend of art, math and science, her work is currently featured at the Ashland gallery, Art on First.

On the art side of the equation, Hatch uses color and shape and texture in intricate and intriguing combinations. She often incorporates earthy elements — seashells, coral, pieces of metal, semi-precious stones — for added depth.

"It's such an organic feel for me. It's a very tactile experience," Hatch says of her creative process. "It's a very intuitive process, how you connect with the materials."

On the science side of things, Hatch depends on chemical reactions to get her intense colors and on precise temperature control in her kilns — she has five of them — to melt pieces of glass to create a single unified piece.

"Glass is fabulous but tricky," she says.

She usually starts with large sheets of glass, then arranges or stacks pieces or strings of glass into the mosaic design she wants.

"It's kind of like making a pizza," she says, though the process takes much more careful planning, material selection and temperature control.

The glass pieces are fused — heated and melted — in a high temperature kiln and cooled slowly.

A full fuse, for a smooth, uniform surface, is 1,470 degrees, Hatch says. A tack fuse, which adds texture and contour, is 1,300 degrees.

She uses metal oxides and metal foils to color her pieces.

"I focus on the reactions of metals and metal oxides. The glass color is made from the reactions of different metals," she says.

Copper can produce shades of blue and red, for example, selenium makes pinks and reds, cadmium makes yellows.

"Purple and violet colors are made with gold, but that's too expensive," she says.

Her work ranges from functional pieces such as spoon rests and trays to decorative plates and bowls to abstract wall hangings.

Her newest creations she calls spirit sticks. These are textured, rectangular wall pieces, about 3 feet long and 6 inches wide, incorporating glass and other three-dimensional elements in earthy and fiery combinations and colors.

"The magic happens in her spirit sticks," says Art on First gallery owner Karina Mendoza-Wittke, where she is combining all the different knowledge of her craft to result in these fabulous compositions."

Hatch has been a working artist for about 20 years. With a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in computer science, she worked several years as a computer software system engineer.

In 1999, she moved to Sedona, Arizona to explore art. She took art classes — drawing and painting — at a community center. When she turned 50, she "decided to embrace beauty," she says, and taught herself fused glass.

"I remember I admired a glass in the light and was taken with how glass plays with light, how it dances with light," she says. "That's what drew me to glass, I think. And I just got started."

She left Sedona in 2017 and lived for a time in Colorado, where she started working with a new mosaic style.

In 2020, Hatch found a new artistic home in Ruch.

"Her house is completely built around her art," Mendoza-Wittke says. "She built an incredible studio."

Hatch's glass mosaics are being featured at Art on First through August. She also shows her work at Brian Scott Gallery in Brookings.



JULIE ANDERSON / Daily Courier
Suzan Hatch explains her creative process in making fused glass mosaics and using metals to give her pieces intense color. Her work is featured this month at Art on First, a Gallery of Beautiful Things in Ashland.

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If you go

WHAT: Fused glass mosaics by Suzan Hatch

WHERE: Art on First, a Gallery of Beautiful Things, 20 S. First St., Ashland

WHEN: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, through August

EVENTS: The gallery hosts artist receptions every first Friday of the month from 5-8 p.m., and Art in Action artist demonstrations every third Thursday of the month, times vary.

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