

Architectural Commissions

Creating Designs for Site-Specific Artwork

by Gil Reynolds

Ever since I started doing glass art back in 1972, I have favored commission work over gallery art. Working with stained glass was probably what led me down that road. The marketplace for site-specific stained glass was much larger than the market for gallery style autonomous panels.

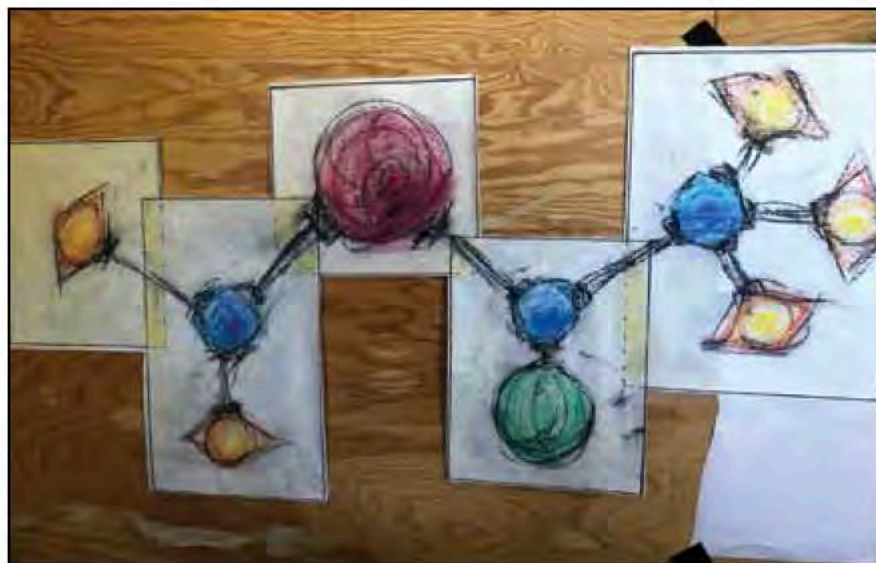
It's not that I didn't make panels without a home in mind. I actually did a series of stained glass panels called the *Intro-Liner Mindscapes* back in the mid '70s. They were each singular expressions of visual themes that I felt an attraction to, but they weren't made for a specific location—just art for art's sake and to convince my art professors that glass was more than just a craft. Doing site-specific work is a whole other ball game.

Ins and Outs of Designing for Specific Spaces

I have always enjoyed the dynamics and the collaboration that goes along with commissioned artwork. So many factors come into play such as the lighting and scale of the intended location, existing motifs and colors, the client's intent, and how much money is allotted. All of these factors work together to shape my design concepts. Sometimes clients don't even know what they want, or in the case of the *Isoflurane Molecule* design, they don't even know that they wanted art. Let me explain.



The client's new office entryway AANW Logo made out of stainless steel and edge-lit with LEDs and strips of dichroic glass.



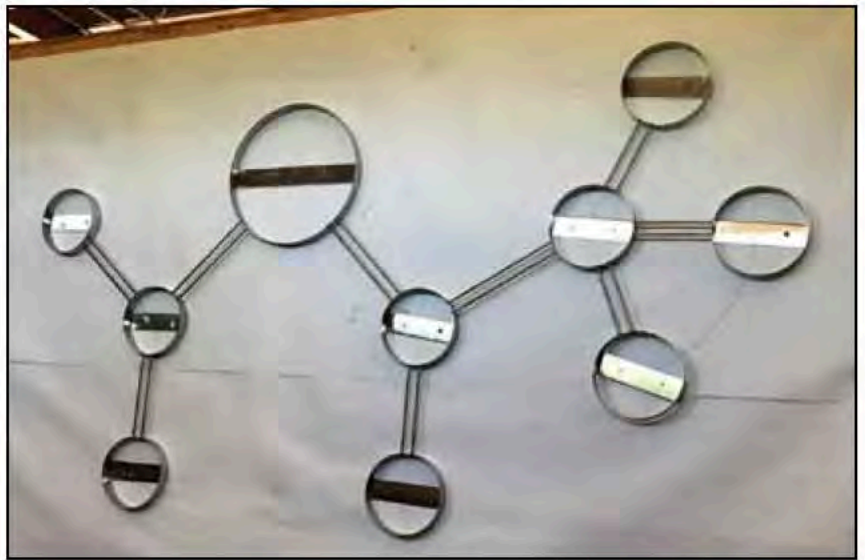
A series of sketches showing the structure of Isoflurane that led to the full-size pastel drawing presented to the client.

I was hired by the Anesthesia Associated NW (AANW) to make a logo for their new office. That was a fun project made out of stainless steel and edge-lit with LEDs and dichroic glass. While I was installing the logo, I noticed that they had a lot of large empty walls, so I brought over one of my pastels to see if it was something they might be interested in purchasing.

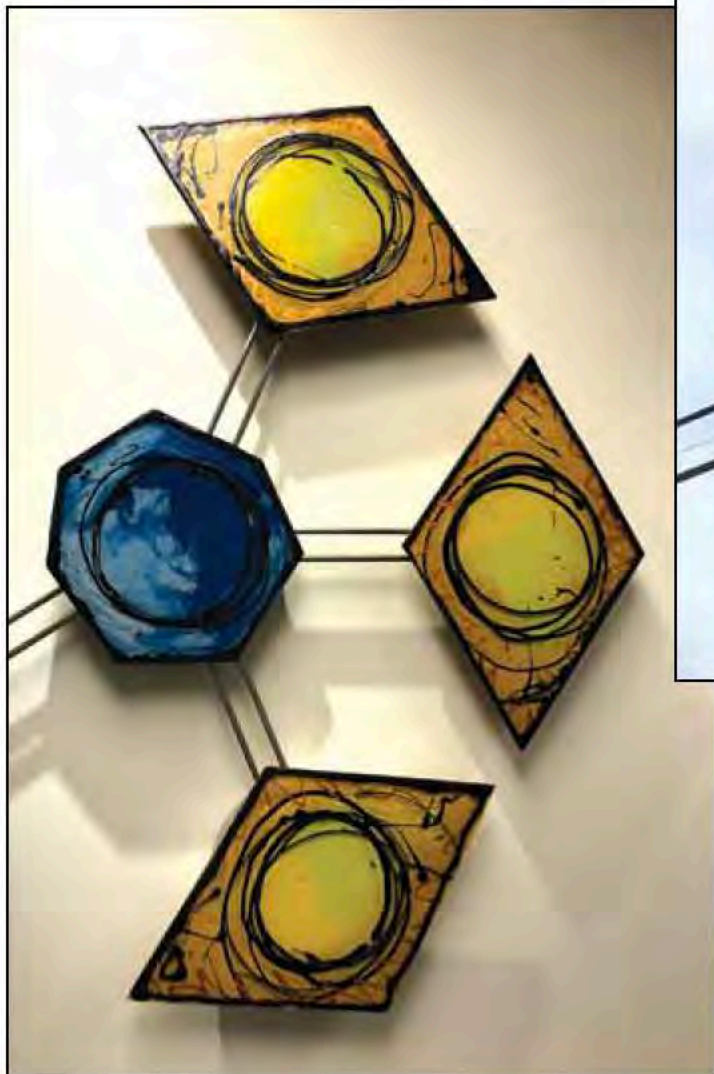
When I checked back several weeks later, they said it wasn't really up their ally, so I started thinking, "Okay, I need to find something that has more connection." I began researching anesthetics and found a picture of an Isoflurane molecule that had a very cool visual rhythm. After making a bunch of sketches, I started stylizing the molecule and made a full-scale drawing with pastels on paper and a sample panel on a piece of glass. Then I made a presentation and left the samples for them to live with for a while.

They loved the idea and my stylization, but they wanted the total image to be about 30 percent larger than my initial proposal. That was problematic, because my initial idea was to paint the molecules onto large rectangular glass panels. My biggest kiln is 48 inches by 36 inches, so I had designed my presentation around that size. Increasing the overall project meant I had to revise my concept, so I thought, "I can do that. No problem."

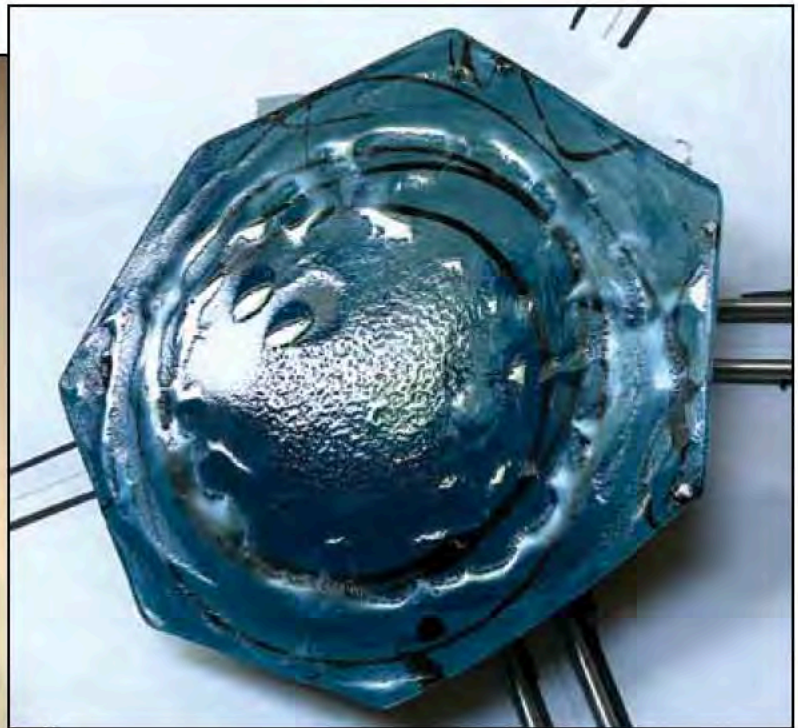
After about a dozen reworks I came up with the concept of having each element be its own piece of glass connected to the other elements with nonglass materials. Again, I created sketches and models, playing with different ideas until I happened upon using stainless steel rings and rods as my "structure" to display the glass components. I came up with the idea to use casting rings and flow bar rods, parts I already had. That idea seemed feasible, so I started making prototypes.



The mounting system consisting of stainless steel rings and rods.



Similar but different, Reynolds wanted each part to work on its own yet flow in unison through the overall design.



Experimenting with different textures to break up the perfect glossy surface inherent with float glass.

Selecting the Right Glass, Colors, and Textures

I wanted the glass to have depth, color, fun patterns, and an irregular surface. Thick quarter-inch float glass gave me visual depth without bubbles or flaws, but the surface was too perfect and didn't have any character. I used some Soft Cast Sand contained by a Flexi-Form stainless steel band to texture the front side of each piece of glass.

To add color, I used Fuse Master LO low-fire, lead-free enamels painted on the back side of the glass. I created my own color blends with different Fuse Master LO – Low Fire, Lead Free enamels mixed on a sandblasted plate glass pallet, then used Water Friendly Medium diluted with five parts water to one part Medium. The paints were fired to 1175°F with the enamel side up at low enough temperatures to avoid changing the texture on the other side of the glass. This gave texture to what would eventually be the front viewing side of the glass.



Finished installation of the AANW project.

Finishing Touches

A total of six firings were used for each piece of glass to add texture, black and mica lines, layers of LO colors, and a final face-up firing with black details. Experimenting with different textures was a key part of breaking up the perfect glossy surface inherent with float glass.

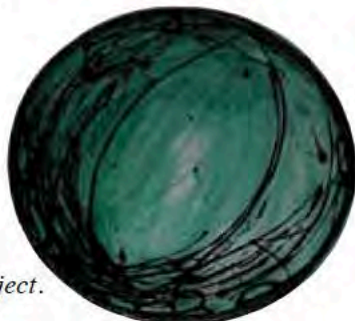
I constructed the stainless steel structure to support the glass pieces. The overhead lighting near the wall where the piece was to be installed played a part in my decision to get the elements away from the wall. That allowed the shadows to be incorporated as part of the design, which is one of my favorite design elements when working with overhead reflective lighting. The rods were temporarily taped to the mock-up as I tried several different connection ideas.

All of the parts for the mounting system, which consisted of stainless steel rings and rods, were assembled on my temporary studio wall, then carefully packed up for installation. Most of the pieces were welded together, but some had the rods loosely fitting into the rings so that everything could be reduced to sections small enough to fit into my car.

Everyone at AANW seemed extremely pleased with the finished artwork, and I was honored that they believed in my vision. When entrusted to make a commissioned piece of art, I feel it is my obligation to dig as deeply into my creative self as possible in hopes of discovering and building something that will bring life and joy to its new home.

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Gil Reynolds was recently a guest on Glass Art magazine's Talking Out Your Glass podcast. Subscribe on iTunes or Stitcher to hear this and many more fascinating interviews with glass artists by visiting the "Talking Out Your Glass Podcast" link under "What's New" at www.glassartmagazine.com.



Detail of the bottommost section of the AANW project.



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