

Conversations with the Inspiring Anita Loomis



Today we'd like to introduce you to Anita Loomis.

Anita, please share your story with us. How did you get to where you are today?

Idle hands were not appreciated when I was growing up; we continually needed to be doing, making or fixing something. I always appreciated all types of artwork, but as a maker, I always felt that the object I created should also be useful and serve a purpose. I decided that I wanted to be a glass artist when I was 15, which was not something that girls did. I always felt lucky that I knew where my passion lied at an early age.

Like many artists, I loved to work with all types of art mediums and spent most of high school in the art department. My mother had done craft work with glass suncatchers when I was little, but I had more

ambitious goals. I started off by trying to design my own lampshade. It was extraordinarily ugly and terribly made, but I thought it was a wonderful achievement for a teenager. There was no one around me who knew how lampshades were made, so it was trial and error... with lots of error.

My artistic interests were most strongly encouraged by my mother and my grandfather who was a sign painter and owner of Haddad Sign Company of Worcester in the 1950's. When I was little, maybe 8, he would have me make sketches of nic-nacks when we visited. If the drawing was good, he would pay me 5 cents and hang it on the wall. If it was terrible, he would show me how to make it better. My high school art teacher and painting teacher for a number of women in my family as well as painter Emily Boosahda. She was a very successful professional artist in her own right and was a fantastic and fiery art teacher! Any student could work in any medium they had a mind to, and her art room was a wonderful place to learn. Her passion for art and teaching was boundless and contagious.

After high school, I was an art student at Westfield State College and then at Framingham State College (now Universities) where I graduated with a BA in Studio Art. During my final semester, in 1989, I interned at the stained glass studio where I had been taking classes at night. Upon graduation I purchased the small studio from the two wonderful people who were retiring, and I set up my own home based business in West Boylston, offering lessons as well as custom designed residential stained glass lamps and windows. After a few years, a local church approached me to commission a large round stained glass window. Working on an architectural project of this scale was new, challenging and very exciting. I loved working on larger scale projects but sensed that I needed to know a great deal more about the proper construction of leaded glass windows. As there were no stained glass schools, and, being happily married with two beautiful young kids, an apprenticeship was not an option open to me. But in 1995, while on a short relocation and job hunting trip to FL, I decided to approach a studio I had read about in the national publication, the Stained Glass Quarterly. I knocked on the door of J. Piercey Studios of Orlando. When there was no answer, I left my resume in the door's mail slot. A couple of hours later, I received a call while at the hotel where we were staying (no cell phones yet folks). I was invited to interview for a position the next day, and was offered the position of office manager and studio assistant at a national architectural glass studio! Remember, we were on a trip from Massachusetts. When I was asked if I lived nearby, I lied and said that we were living on the coast (I did not specify which one) but promised to move my family nearby within a month... and we did. I don't condone stretching the truth beyond recognition, but the glass was predominantly a man's world, and we were already planning the Florida move. The likelihood that I would have another opportunity like this was slim to none. I had to take my chance, and my husband supported our move.

I had nine fantastic years working for Mr. James Piercey. J. Piercey Studio was and still is, one of the top contemporary architectural stained glass and mosaic studios in this country. I was involved in all aspects of business, design, production, and installation. Our projects were for churches, hospital chapels, educational facilities and occasionally, a residence. The projects were located in many states, and quite a few were multi-phase projects that were executed over years. The projects were for leaded glass windows, faceted glass windows, glass mosaics, stone mosaics (before they were mainstream), as well as sculpture and liturgical furnishings in partnership with a prominent studio we worked with in Italy. It was the best, and most valuable, work experience of my life. As fulfilling as it was, after nine years, I felt a need to take myself in another direction. Although deeply involved in all of these magnificent projects, the work and the artistic expression was not my own. All of our projects were, as was necessary and proper, designed by the principal artist and executed by a team of professionals. I needed to break away, so I went back to school and earned an MA in Liberal Studies and Arts Management, as well as a

graduate certificate in Public Administration, at the University of Central Florida. While working on my new degree, I started drawing and painting my own projects again. With such an exquisite reserve of art experience to draw upon, I was surprised and delighted with the new work I was creating. When I graduated at the close of 2006, it was time to relocate back to Massachusetts, and early in 2007, I was fortunate to be offered a position at the highly regarded stained glass restoration studio, Stained Glass Resources of Hamden, MA. SGR has been entrusted with the restoration and re-leading of priceless original Tiffany windows and other significant works of art glass. Again, I had the privilege of being around some of the nation's greatest craftsmen and women working on world-class projects. I was not in the studio here, though. I was managing marketing, supporting sales, documenting restoration and assisting in the management of projects. And then, the great recession hit, and business was greatly affected. It was again time to move on.

At the end of 2007, I left SGR and the world of architectural glass. Leaning on my public administration degree and computer skills, I took a position working for the Commonwealth of MA as an administrative assistant for the Dept. of Youth Services. While my sense of public duty was being served, my artistic endeavors were now completely private. After two years with DYS, I left and later took a position in the accounting office for the Town of West Boylston, my hometown, where I still work today. Over the past ten years, I have slowly and steadily grown as an artist and a painter, keeping my day job and art life separate. While the glass work has stayed in my past, my passion for color and line, and my drive to create has continued to grow. I am happily creating an ever-growing body of work, experimenting with different ways to use and combine mediums, and over the past two years I have had the good fortune to exhibit in China and Japan, at Miller White Fine Arts gallery of South Dennis, and be accepted as a core artist with Fountain Street Fine Art gallery on Harrison Ave. in Boston. As art opportunities continue to arise, I embrace those I pursue with enthusiasm and appreciation. As for my daytime employment, I am now striving to become an art teacher! I have much to share and I can't think of a more worthwhile way to invest my time. I am also starting to work in glass again after all these years. I am very lucky to have made my way down a very unusual and colorful path, and I have so much further to go. I'm very excited about where I might end up next.

Has it been a smooth road?

There are always challenges. The best advice I ever received was to just keep working; always push ahead and pursue your passion. Do not give in to self-doubt or obstacles. I was married and had children when I was in my early 20's. It was wonderful, but obviously, there were always financial struggles when the kids were little. You might not be able to afford the course of study you think you'd like, or pick up and move when you might want to pursue an opportunity. So, be creative and make the most of what IS available to you. Inform and educate yourself, and don't be afraid to take chances or make opportunities for yourself. If the path more traveled is not available to you, take some calculated risks and make your own path. Run like hell with those scissors girls!

I also struggled with weight, anxiety and health issues in my life. You MUST take care of your health in order to take care of your family and follow your passions down whatever road they take you. To fully enjoy your journey, you should be as healthy as possible. If you are an artist, please be careful and read about the materials you are using so that you take proper precautions. Much better information is available now than in the past.

In your art practice, STRETCH outside of your comfort zone as much as you can. Being a master at your medium or craft is very fulfilling but challenge yourself so you can grow over time. Try other mediums, subject matter or styles that you normally wouldn't. Read, read, read about your subject area or the

things you are passionate about. Be as well informed as you reasonably can be. And take action. Don't sit in your chair talking about doing things – actually, do them! Take a class, watch YouTube, exhibit, participate in local demonstrations or workshops. Keep learning! It is very important that you go to art events and see art in person. Visit galleries!

Last but not least, treat people well. Being kind and treating people with respect does not cost one cent. But being rude and unprofessional can cost you untold lost opportunities. If you strive to carry yourself with dignity and behave as a professional you will (for the most part) be treated accordingly.

So let's switch gears a bit and go into your business story. Tell us more about the business.

At this time, I am still enthralled with oil paintings. However, I am starting to move in the direction of glass art again. I don't expect to be fabricating lamps or windows, but I am working with kiln formed glass. I'm a bit of a chameleon and work in a number of styles and subject matters, but mostly I enjoy working within my own interpretation of expressionism. My paintings are contemporary, often abstract and contain references to architectural glass, cartoons, and touch on relationships or social themes.

Anyone and everyone is encouraged to view the artwork on my website at www.anitaloomis.com, or better yet, check out an exhibit. I have a significant two-person exhibit with painter Alexandra Rozenman at Fountain Street gallery, Boston from August 29th through September 30th, 2018. Through my Fountain Street Score membership I also have work available on 1stDibs.com. I love to hear from people, so please drop me an email and let me know if there is something that you'd like to know more about. For those interested in architectural glass work, please visit the website for J.Piercey Studios at www.jpiercey.com. I also recommend that you explore the Stained Glass Association of America, the SGAA, at www.stainedglass.org. Yes, there is now a stained glass school!

What do you feel are the biggest barriers today to female leadership, in your industry or generally?

In the world of architectural glass, the work can be physically demanding, That can be limiting if you are leading windows or working an installation. However, I believe there are more women than ever actively owning and operating studios, and working in architectural glass. In painting, I feel that it is hard to gauge how level the playing field is. It seems that female contemporary artists are commanding sale prices that rival that of male colleagues, but I think that progress is localized, and the fine arts, on the whole, have been struggling since the recession that started in 2008. There are certainly fewer glass and painting studios and businesses overall.

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Anita Loomis
"Olde Port"
Oil on canvas
60"x60"



Anita in front of the oil panel "Air" from her triptych, "Air, Land, Sea"



"Enlightenment"
Oil on canvas
30"x30"



"Mauve"
From the Interwoven Series
Oil on canvas
30"x60"



Above: "Air, Land, Sea"
Oil on canvas triptych, 120"x50"

Below: "Toil"
Oil on canvas
60"x30"





"Meet Me on the Bench"

Oil on canvas

40"x50"



"Oro"

Watercolor, ink and gilding on paper

22"x30"

Image Credit:

2 Personal photos of Anita Loomis – Photo credit: Jane Haddad