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HEATHER HARTLE

THE MANY FACETS OF Glass Art

By Cathy Welch



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

"Art has been an important part of my life as long as I can remember," engraved glass artist Heather Hartle says. "I love getting an idea in my head and watching it become a reality in my hands."

Born in Wheeling, West Virginia, Heather earned her Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and Biology from Longwood College. She spent 17 years working in basic medical research. She also took stained glass and china painting classes.

In 1993 Heather moved to Williamsburg.

"When we moved here, the kids were two-and-a-half and seven," she says of Alex, now 23 and Laura, 28. "So it was time for mommy to stay home."

Heather began her stained glasswork with the instructional classes she took before her daughter was born. She had a stained glass studio built in the third bay of her garage in Kingsmill and began to take on commissioned glasswork.

She joined Peninsula Glass Guild (PGG) in 1994, holding office since 1997. PGG promotes quality art glass and provides a forum for glass art-

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ists to meet for education and support. Joining the guild opened opportunities for Heather to expand the future focus of her glass art.

In 1999 Heather opened Cristallo Art and Glass Studio with two other glass artists on McLaws Circle. The studio was open for five years, and she taught stained glass-work. During that time, her focus took a new direction on a trip to San Francisco where she visited an antique shop. There she fell in love with a turn-of-the-twentieth-century lamp from the studio of renowned glass artist Émile Gallé.

"It inspired me and my thought was, I'm going to figure out how to do that," she explains. "That's where the whole glass carving started."

She began with sandblasting which evolved into engraving with copper wheels and various stone wheels.

"As far as the engraving goes, I've been very fortunate to study with some of the greats," she says. "It's important to get that now because many of the people that have been working in the field for years and years are in their eighties."

Heather studied with many famous glass artists at The Studio in Corning, New York including Jiří Harcuba, Katherine Coleman and Max Erlacher. She traveled to Australia to study with glass engraver Alasdair Gordon.

Eighteenth century glass artists, Thomas and George Woodall, also inspire and inform her artwork. They have several pieces at The Chrysler Museum of Art.

"My M.O. is when I'm getting ready to start a new piece I need to come up with some ideas," Heather explains. "I go to The Chrysler and spend time with those pieces which always puts me in a place where I can think about what I'd like to accomplish."

Inspired by nature, Heather begins each cameo engraved piece with a blank of fused glass fired in a kiln. After creating drawings that inform her piece, she develops



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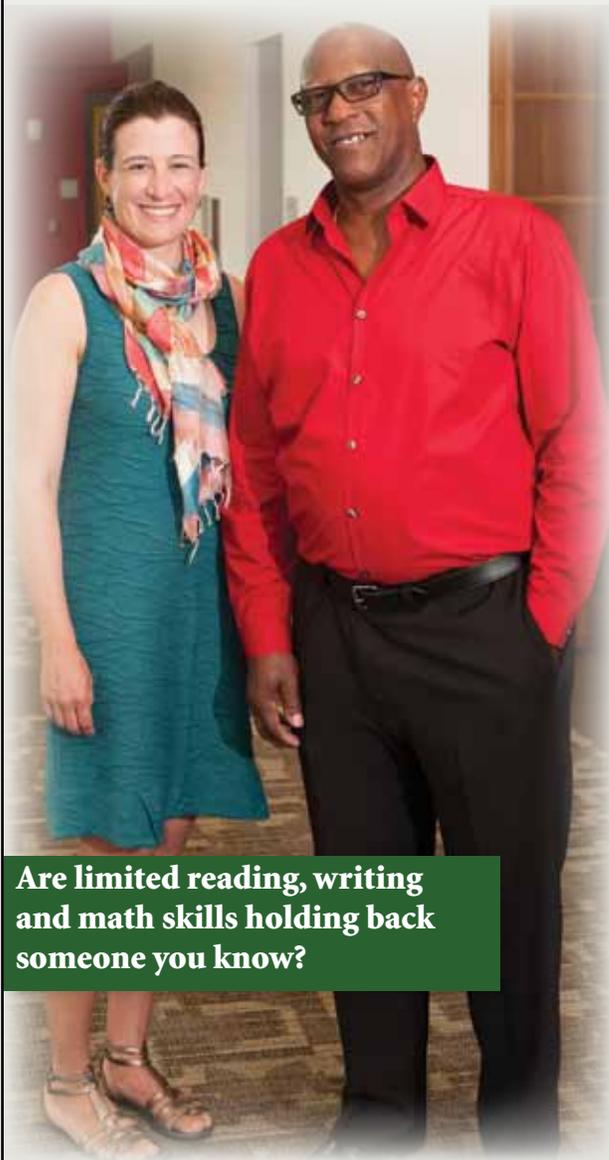
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a pattern that she uses to sandblast away the negative space between her design elements. Then the engraving begins.

Heather works with two engraving lathes in her sunny home studio. Her prize possession is a 19th century lathe from the Krall family of Ohio who brought it to the United States in the early 1900s and used it until mid-century.

“What a lovely gift,” Heather says. “It came to me in a little box in the mail.” The lathe was separated from the spindles and wheels required for engraving so she has been hard at work crafting these elements that make the lathe functional. Each wheel can take four to five hours of fashioning to form the exact profile needed to create individual elements of a finished piece.

Heather has taken a glassblowing class at The Chrysler Museum of Art and worked very closely with Charlotte Potter who runs the glass studio. She crafted the finishing engraving on two of Charlotte’s installation pieces. The first one, finished in 2012, is entitled, “Charlotte’s Web” which is a compilation of 864 engraved glass cameos of Charlotte’s Facebook friends. Originally installed at the Oklahoma Museum of Art, the piece has since been acquired by The Chrysler.

“It is a very clever piece,” Heather says. “Imagine the thrill of going to The Chrysler and seeing something that I worked on.”

She recently collaborated on a reprise of this artwork which includes nearly 400 cameos of Charlotte’s additional Facebook friends added after “Charlotte’s Web” was completed. Both pieces are currently installed and open to the public at the Tidewater Community College’s Visual Arts Center in Portsmouth.

Heather’s work is in three galleries: Charles Taylor Art Center, Cristallo Arts Center in Newport News and Gloucester Arts on Main. Her original artwork is featured at the Peninsula Glass Guild’s annual juried exhibition in December at Charles Taylor Arts Center in Hampton. Last year their show was voted one of the five best gallery shows in Hampton Roads. If one of her pieces is not sold during the show it will go to galleries on commission. She began creating children’s portrait work after completing “Charlotte’s Web”.

“After you’ve done 864 little faces you kind of think, I’ve got some experience at this,” she jokes. “I found that I really enjoyed doing children’s portrait work.”

Heather is currently creating new engraved glass pieces including a calla lily and leaf cre-

ation to be in PGG’s show for Williamsburg Arts Month at Legacy Hall in New Town from September 26 through 28. She is managing the show for the third year in a row.

“We’ve had a good response from our members for participating and will have a wide range of art from jewelry pieces to very beautiful sculpture work,” Heather explains. There will be blown glass, cast glass, fused glass and engraved glass.

Heather says, “It’s not hard getting our members to commit because most of us are very anxious for an opportunity to show our artwork. The challenge is convincing the public to prioritize their busy schedules to the point that they want to come to enjoy the artwork.” Heather has a definitive explanation for what takes a particular art piece from a technically, well-executed piece to true art.

“It’s the personal experience. The piece evokes some emotion,” she says. “A piece can be very well done technically but if it doesn’t touch your heart, it doesn’t make you feel. I just want you to have a connection with it.”

Her ultimate experience is when she sells a piece and knows that someone connected with it enough to want to take it home and live with it. **NDN**

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