

Loy Allen Glass— Finding Satisfaction in New Arenas

by Colleen Bryan



La Promesa

From Loy Allen's perspective, craft moves into the direction of art at the point where the mind no longer charts the journey, where the hands no longer know from the outset exactly where a specific piece will end up. Allen, who produces a line of flameworked botanicals from her home studio in Hermosa, South Dakota, has begun to hone her artistic abilities with the creation of four tabletop multimedia works for a regional exhibition in Rapid City, South Dakota. The show, entitled *Glassified*, consisted of Loy's four pieces and the work of three other glass artists. "Two years ago I set a goal for myself to create some experimental work. This was the product of that commitment.

Definitive Art

The first piece is called *La Promesa*, which in Spanish means the promise. "My husband and I travel to Mexico for one month each year, and I am passionate about the place. Someday we hope to own a small shack there, and this piece is about my personal hope that I can spend more of my time there. An old medicine cabinet is filled with mosaic and flameworked images of the Virgin, *milagros*, corn, and a prickly pear cactus. The piece represents hope for the future.

“Tomato Altar is a meditation on my personal spiritual development and my experience of the divine through the natural world. The piece is intricate and took nearly three months to complete. The cabinet is custom-made of walnut. I designed and fabricated the stained glass door panels. Inside the cabinet, a large tomato plant stands with a welded steel stalk and frameworked glass tomatoes, foliage, and roots. In the top of the cabinet, white frameworked butterflies alight on a metal rod, conveying a sense of angels hovering over earth. The shape of the cabinet and the stained glass communicate the sense of a church in form and material. The intricate piece can be taken apart to move.

“Nursery Box depicts loss through its use of stained glass and frameworked glass, handmade paper, a wasp’s nest, and preserved insects inside a medicine cabinet. *Sky Box* is the culmination of months of staring up at the night sky following the death of my brother and wondering about the big questions of life. Sheaves of frameworked wheat shiver against a night sky wrought from stained glass inside a fabricated wooden cabinet.”



Nursery Box

Making a Personal Statement

Allen’s love for this work is obvious in the way her voice lingers over the telling. “It would be a luxury except that last year I worked on these pieces nights and weekends around a full-time production schedule. It was something I needed to do for myself. My production work is known, but this show is a personal statement. I plan to spend the next two years continuing this series to make a fuller body of work.”

The new work has forced Loy to stretch beyond familiar skills. “The *Tomato Altar* had stained glass doors, so I had to learn stained glass. *La Promesa* needed mosaics. This being pulled into new media by the requirements of an artwork is new to me. I’ve only ever done framework before. But here, the need to learn different glass processes is driven by the necessity of the piece. And while my work is still primarily glass, I have to puzzle through the technical challenges of incorporating found objects, wood, and steel as well.”

Loy works with local crafters on the wood cabinetry and metal armatures for her pieces. “For the past seven years I’ve contracted with a metalworker who lives nearby. I sketch two-dimensional designs, and he translates them into the three-dimensional metal framework. We generally work back and forth a couple of times through refinements to come up with just the right piece.”



Sky Box

Redefining Production Lines

As important as the new skills she must acquire, the new work forces Loy to question some of the absolute tenets that define her production lines. "These pieces are definitely large and not easily shippable, and there are far too many components to delegate on-site assembly. Questioning long-settled imperatives forces me into a sort of mental exercise. Am I going to approach this work the same way I do my production work? Or do I decide to make it whatever size it demands and commit myself to physically transporting it to shows and treating it as an installation? Does shipability remain a major criterion? And depending on the answer, what have I done to my relative isolation and the solitude I have protected, the solitude that has allowed me to work?"

Allen confesses: "I don't know where this work is going to go, or if it will translate into something larger. This work is fresh and unpredictable and defies preconceptions—even my own. It is such a major investment of time and effort, and it is not at all clear that someone will be able to look at a piece and recognize a signature work, will be able to say of this, as they do of my production lines, 'That is a Loy Allen.' I do this new work for my own satisfaction. It gives me an avenue to explore the process of being an artist and to set out on the artist's journey. I am practicing having some trust in my art and in my future. The process is fearful but, oh, so exciting. Now I totally get why people are addicted to being artists." **PGQ**

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You'll find more about Loy Allen's South Dakota studio and her three-decade career in *flameworking in the Winter 2008 issue of Profitable Glass Quarterly.*

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Prairie Bouquet