

Dawn Merselis Interview – Historic Kenwood Artist Enclave

By Brian Lynch

This is another in a series of interviews with Historic Kenwood artists as part of highlighting our “Neighborhood of the Arts” and our soon to be Artist Enclave.

How did you get started in your craft?

I started designing jewelry with standard stringing wire and beads. I actually quit a full-time job with benefits for a part-time job working at a bead store in Madeira Beach. I learned at a young age that, at least for me, it was more important to do something that I am passionate about and make less money than make more money at a job where I am miserable every day. Working in the bead shop opened up many creative outlooks for me. I soon discovered I had a knack for wire wrapping (wrapping stones, metal shaping, and forging). I always had a passion for glass art in every form, especially those incorporating dichroic glass. When I first started teaching myself how to work with fused glass techniques, it was mainly so that I could make glass cabochons to wire wrap into pendants and bracelets. Then I started discovering all the other amazing things that could be done with glass and I got totally hooked. By that time I had left the bead store and started where I’ve been for the past two years (Grand Central Stained Glass and Graphics), teaching not only glass jewelry design and wire wrapping techniques, but also functional fused glass and stained glass.



What is your “method”?

I design dichroic glass and different types of metal sheets and wire into a unique form of jewelry unlike anyone has tried before. It’s my glass design style combined with my wire wrapping style; sometimes I fuse wire wrapping directly into the glass to make it unique.

How has your work developed through the years?

My main specialty is still jewelry design, but I have also advanced into much larger kiln-formed glass sculpture as well as creating my own stained glass designs.



What would you call your style?

I guess my style would be considered very modern and abstract. I hear the expression “Wearable Art” quite often and I like that, but it’s not quite the right expression I want to use for my jewelry. I want each of my pieces to be a form of art that makes the consumer feel they have purchased something that helps them express their own uniqueness, their personality, and their style, and it makes them feel special to be able to show that part of their soul through something I was able to create. So, I guess I’m still searching for the right group of words to sum that up.



What are the best and worst things about being an artist?

I have the hardest time with dividing my creative mind from the business mindset I know I need to be successful. If I had it my way, I would just create all day long. But of course if I did that, I'd just end up a financially broke person who owns a ton of art made by an unknown artist.

The best part for me of being an artist is how fortunate I feel every day. I have accomplished a dream I've had since I was a little girl. I fulfill my day with creativity and passion, and someone actually pays me for it!



What has been inspiring/influencing your work lately?

I really enjoy challenging myself. I'm constantly on the lookout for new techniques and materials, as well as creating new techniques on my own. I go online to research new products, but I try to avoid looking at too many other artists' work. I want every piece I make to be truly unique, so I don't want to unconsciously copy someone else's work.

Who are your favorite artists in your field?

Actually a lot of them are my students. One of my favorite parts about teaching is when a student teaches me something. I'm always expressing to everyone the way I see things so it's really nice when I get this new creative soul in my class with a different outlook that ends up making me see something in the glass that I've never seen before. There are many amazing glass artists out there, but my students are the ones who give me the most inspiration.

What is your favorite customer quote or story?

This is my favorite compliment from one of my students recently:

Just want to give you a shout out for being such a great resource to me with my stained & fused glass projects. I appreciate the time & patience you spend with me - & want you to know how great it is to be able to rely on your expertise. You are a good teacher & a talented artist!

Thank you, Dawn.



What is your favorite piece of art or fine craft that you own?

Wow. That's a tough one. I guess I'd have to say right now it's my Christmas tree! For one, this was the first year my husband and I had Christmas at our house, so having our own tree made it special. But secondly, it's filled with so many wonderful pieces. Of course I made some of the ornaments, but it has many other pieces from friends and students who have shared their artistic take with me on the holiday. I look at it and it makes me see beauty and reminds me of all the special people in my life. Plus I did a kick ass job on the floral design for the tree topper! Too bad it's coming down on Sunday.

What advice do you have for aspiring artists

Don't be lazy. Take a business or marketing course. Also, learn everything you can about FaceBook, Pinterest, and all the other social media sites. We all love creating, but no one will hear of you or see your skills unless you get the business side together.