



Left to right: artists Shannon Muse, Pat Winger, Mary Matchael and Robert Burch. John Matchael is standing behind his wife Mary.

Glass vase by Robert Burch.



Celebrating Artistic Community at Crystal Glass

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHY
NICOLETTE TOUSSAINT

Historic Studio Marks 44th Anniversary with Holiday-Themed Show

gesturing at glass sculptures, artistic gifts and holiday ornaments, Shannon Muse reflects, “I love a collaboration. I like the momentum, the camaraderie, the creativity. When it’s more than just me or an individual project, we’re more than the sum of our parts.”

“I like the energy, the sense of collaboration rather than competition. We’re all here because we love the beauty inherent in the materials,” adds fellow artist Pat Winger.

Winger and Muse are two of the 13 artists whose work is being showcased at the Crystal Glass Studio, which is celebrating its 44th anniversary over the holidays. Its gallery opened last July.

Crystal Glass was founded by Mary (Fasanaro) Matchael, a self-taught artist who moved to Carbondale in 1972. Mary first opened a studio in the historical Dinkle Building after convincing the landlord to rent the building's empty upper level to artists and nonprofits like radio station KDNK and Carbondale Arts. Then, in 1993, Mary and her husband John Matchael built the nearby 4,000 square-foot adobe building that now houses Mary’s office, gallery, studios and classroom.

Mary Fasanaro was a legal secretary in San Francisco when she first became interested in stained glass. When she inquired about learning glass art at local galleries, she was rebuffed. Local artisans were secretive and aloof. But armed with a library card and a fiery determination to learn, she taught herself. Four decades later, Mary and John Matchael receive commissions from famous clients worldwide, creating mostly functional pieces: doors, tables, lighting and windows. They are also the creators of the popular stained glass windows at the Church at Redstone.

Thrilled to make her living as a glass artist, Mary has poured her heart into building Crystal Glass into a thriving business and then into teaching. “It’s exciting to connect with emerging artists as Crystal Glass becomes more of a teaching art center dedicated to keeping the craft alive,” she says.

Although a generation younger than Mary, Robert Burch has a reputation and resume to rival Matchael’s. After graduating from high school, he went to work for Japanese artist Tadashi Torii and then artist Martin Blank. He also worked with Dale Chihuly’s glass team.

Burch, who recently “moved back home” to the Roaring Fork Valley, appreciates both the gallery and the artistic company. He exhibits at both Crystal Glass and at S.A.W., where he has a studio. “Everyone has their own unique style, and no one is repeating someone else’s work,” he comments. “In bigger cities, there’s a sense of animosity. There’s more camaraderie here.”

In addition to Burch, Matchael and Winger, the gallery’s contributors include glass artists Rick and Kathy Steckel, Dylan Balderson and Jacqueline Spiro-Balderson of Spiro Lyon Glass, woodworker Wesley J. Beuter, blacksmith Stephen Lock, and furniture maker Bob Johnson.

Johnson says he’s spent more than 30 years working solo. He prefers word-of-mouth marketing to galleries because “you pay half of what you get to the gallery, just so people get to see it! And most galleries tend to be expensive and hard to deal with.” But this one “is local, and about community.”

Pat Winger is a guitarist with world music group Valle Musico, as well as a woodworking artisan. To break down competitive barriers, he invited other music school students to share their homework. “There was no way in the world we were going to be ‘the best’. There are so many musicians! We could only aspire to a certain level, and we could get there by collaborating, by helping others... Here, we’re past all that. We see the beauty of being in it *together*.”

Muse chimes in, “I have been team designing for a couple of years now. If I’m working alone, I’m really critical of myself. But I will *NOT* let anyone beat up on my team.”

What? Could it be that Muse, creator of the Carbondale Library’s celebrated glass mosaic pillars, suffers lacerations from an inner critic? Oh, yes! Muse explains that despite more than 30 years’ experience, she has no related degree. A nasty voice inside her head—one that artists will recognize—often tells her that she’s “not qualified”.

CONTINUED >



LEARNING TO FUSE GLASS

"These projects are laid out for you so you can't fail." Laughter greets this assertion from Shannon Muse.

For the past 45 minutes, the half-dozen students in the glassroom have been learning about the myriad variables involved in firing glass, about the physics of this remarkable material. It turns out that, because of the viscosity of glass, both a 1" thick slab and a 1/8" inch piece will turn out to be about 1/4" thick when fired. While eggs cool faster at altitude, glass fires faster here than at sea level. Marvels and mysteries!

But Muse has assembled all the tools and materials, and she teaches the techniques needed to reliably craft a wide array of holiday ornaments. Students sift powdered glass through stencils, score and trim glass bars, and decorate with thin glass ribbons and glittering beads of dichroic glass. Muse tours the room, offering help and encouragement.

At the end of three hours, it all goes into the kiln. Then, like kids listening for reindeer, the students must wait. Their no-fail projects will need to cool after firing. Their holiday surprises won't be revealed until several days have passed.

Collaboration turns out to be an antidote for that poison. "It knocks back the inner critic."

Muse says that that the library's "Pillars of Light"—the work of more than 20 hands—were what really opened her eyes to the power of artistic teamwork. Since then, she's been working with interns, learning by teaching.

John and Mary Matchael and Muse all share their passion by teaching. In a spacious "glassroom" behind the gallery, these creative collaborators offer exactly what Mary Matchael was so huffily refused in those San Francisco galleries: encouragement, a guiding hand and introductory classes that range from glass fusing, etched glass and sandblasting, to glass mosaics, and stained and leaded glass.

The glassroom is equipped with broad tables, patterns, forms and glassworking tools. Rows of rainbowed jars hold the fine-ground glass called "frit" that is used for coloring fused glassworks. The facility is exactly what any newcomer wanting to learn studio glass technique would want—if they had 30 years hindsight and plenty of funds to spend on tools and supplies!

Muse, who's interested in human nature as well as glass, teaches a three-day "spirit of glass" series here. Students create a mandala using "fusing and sand-blasting techniques, poetry and imagination."

Creator of many church windows, Muse seeks to capture a sense of spirit, a moment of emotion, and wonder in her work. "Glass has metaphorical qualities. It can be a mirror, your reflection. It's stone, yet it's ephemeral. Its color and light changes through the day. It's a paradox: fragile and fleeting but strong. It's so breakable, but some pieces still survive from Egyptian times. To stand in a cathedral with the color of ancient stained glass windows washing over you, that's just color therapy!"

Local residents are invited to engage in color therapy both by shopping the gallery, located at 50 Weant Avenue in Carbondale, or by signing up for a class. See CrystalGlassStudio.com for details.



Fresh fashions and home decor

- » Ladies Clothing
- » Jewelry
- » Handbags
- » Unique Gifts
- » Handmade and Painted Products
- » Bath and Body Products

Receive a
**free
button**
when you show
this ad



823 Grand Ave. #100, Glenwood Springs, CO 81601
970-319-8894 • follow us on Facebook and Instagram