

Artists & Galleries / Glasswork

Groundbreaking Glasswork

JOHN BARBER AND SUSAN MAROSZ TURN TO INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES TO CREATE STUNNING ART PIECES.

By ASHLEY RYAN



John Barber, a longtime glass blower, is now using molten glass to make pyrographic art.

A New Beginning

Lagunan John Barber is no stranger to creating glass art—in fact, it's been more than 50 years since he traveled to Germany, witnessed Erwin Eisch at work and convinced the glass master to give him an apprenticeship at Eisch's Frauenau factory.

A few years later, Barber brought a wealth of knowledge with him back to the U.S. and built his own private glass studio in Santa Monica. By the late 1970s, he had moved to Laguna Beach and discovered the famed art festivals in the canyon. He has shown his glass vases, bowls, stemware and sculptures at Sawdust Art Festival for the last 46 years, with additional displays set up in the gallery on his Laguna Canyon property; as the area is zoned for dual residential/light industrial work, Barber has been producing blown glass pieces here since the 1980s.

This doesn't even begin to cover the half a century his career spans. But his ever-busy schedule slowed down during the COVID-19 pandemic and gave him time to consider his future. "I'm not going to be able to blow glass until I'm 90 years old," Barber explains. "It's physically a very strenuous endeavor. So I thought, what's another medium I could bring my 50 years of glass blowing into?"

The answer he came up with was watercolors—but Barber's pieces aren't your standard watercolor paintings. In a technique he developed himself, which he calls pyrographic art, he places a sheet of heavy watercolor paper on plywood in front of his furnace, then drips molten glass onto the paper to burn a design into it. After that, he uses paint he makes himself to add color and finish the piece. "What I'm doing is making my own watercolors using



"Pole Dancers," one of Barber's new pieces

powdered, colored glass as my pigment," he adds. "That way, these watercolors will never fade in the sunlight. And, to me, that adds a lot of value."

Barber's paintings vary in subject matter, ranging from landscapes depicting Catalina Island to imagery with figures or even abstract pieces. "I choose a title and then, when I sit down to paint, I can bring out the things I see in this piece—and I've never had to do that with glass," he says. "When I'm painting these, I'm smiling ear to ear. It's something brand-new for me."

Clients at the Sawdust festival have embraced this new avenue since he debuted his pyrographic pieces for the first time during the summer show in 2021. Barber was also invited to give a presentation at the Loca Arts Education annual meeting back in October, where he detailed his new process and shared some of his creations with guests at the brunch.

"The whole thing was a challenge. That's what intrigued me so much," he says of developing the pyrographic technique. "I'm kind of reinventing myself." Find Barber's new pieces, along with his blown glass, at the Sawdust Art Festival this summer or at his private gallery.

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RIGHT: JOHN BARBER



"Garden Gate" by Susan Marosz

Creative Combinations

Vibrant ocean scenes and floral gardens come to life in Susan Marosz's glass pieces, which hold texture with just as much importance as they do color. This is achieved through her unique process, leading to pieces that are both one of a kind and stunning to view.

With no formal art training, Marosz worked as a freelance muralist and decorative wall artist for years, but says it was always a job rather than a calling. When her cousin, who is a glass artist, got his own kiln, he invited her to try something new and she spent the next few years testing out techniques in his studio between freelance projects. "I was looking for ... a more challenging way to express my art," she explains.

Eventually, she came up with her own distinctive technique working with glass and she's now been crafting her own pieces for more than a decade. After creating a rough sketch of her idea, Marosz takes a sheet of clear glass as a base then assembles various cut, crushed and powdered glasses to create the design. Sometimes, she also adds mica powder as well. Next, the piece is placed into



"Waterfall," a colorful glass piece by Marosz

the kiln and Marosz uses strictly controlled settings to ensure all of the parts merge into one cohesive piece while maintaining the shape and texture of the individual sections. To finish, the back side of most of her artwork is painted with glass enamel, which Marosz says enhances the details and the color in the glass.

"Glass itself is not a unique medium. However, the process I use is my own so the resulting work is unique," Marosz explains. "In my process, the glass has texture and vivid colors, and the thickness and transparency of glass allows [the] layers to be visible, adding depth and interest to the artwork."

She uses both clear and dichroic glass; the latter provides a somewhat changeable color with dramatic results. Her paintings showcase stunning natural scenes, like crashing ocean

waves, fields of flowers, verdant meadows and underwater reefs, in addition to dramatic and emotive abstracts. "Nature is a big influence. But, really, as I'm putting a piece together, I'm thinking of a place I'd like to be or a feeling I have and that is what you see most reflected in my work," she says. "As I work, whether the piece is realism or abstract, my intent is to express feelings like power, movement, beauty, peacefulness or a graceful flow."

Although she lives in neighboring Corona del Mar, Marosz shows her artwork at Laguna Art-A-Fair and has also appeared at Sawdust Art Festival's Winter Fantasy. In the spring, her unique glass art will be on view at the Balboa Island Artwalk in Newport Beach. ■

SUSAN MAROSZ ART:
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