

Jen Violette

ON EXHIBIT AT EDGEWATER GALLERY
ON THE GREEN, MIDDLEBURY

Glass art is as contradictory as it is versatile: functional pieces are still fragile, an object's weight often belies what the eye expects, and a glass piece may appear to be the single moment of inspiration of an artist, when it is in fact the result of years of study, repetition and hard work behind a hot torch.

BY ISABEL
LOWER

Artist Jen Violette, of
Wilmington, Vt., is a master

of this tricky medium. She makes wall mounted sculptures of fruits and vegetables — a single peach dusted in yellow and crimson powdered glass for its "fuzz," a pair of eggplants, or two apples of different sizes titled "Mother and Child." These rest on a wooden shelf against a stainless steel background. Another series are her farmscapes, which feature cast glass houses that beg to be held in your palm, but mainly rest on painted mahogany "land." Violette does the wood and metal work in her sculpture, and she paints and works in bronze as well, but her skill in glass, whether it's cast, blown, or lamp-worked, is remarkable.

See her work at the Edgewater Gallery's group exhibit "Of The Land" at the gallery on the falls in Middlebury through October. Don't worry, if you miss the last few days of the group exhibit, Violette's work is also part of the regular collection of artists shown at Edgewater year round.

Violette's dexterity in this medium stems from



Jen Violette is a glass artist from Wilmington. Her work is on exhibit at Edgewater Gallery in Middlebury.

her extensive glass education. She received her BFA from Alfred University, and has taken workshops at some of the top institutes for glass including the Pilchuck School, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, the Penland School of Crafts, RISD, and the Corning Museum of Glass. In a recent interview, Violette spoke to how her education has shaped where her work leads her now.

HOW HAS YOUR EDUCATION INFLUENCED YOUR WORK WITH GLASS?

I've been very fortunate to study with a lot of very well known, famous glass artists. I was really lucky early on in my glass career; I was in the right place at the right time. Sometimes I look back and I'm a bit surprised that I was able to do that. I was pretty young then, between the ages of 19 and 21, and I was able to see a whole bunch of stuff from glass

masters. I really absorbed all of the teachers I had. I did a lot of watching and learning and trying to pick up on every detail.

It's pretty phenomenal that early on I got that really good base of hand skills that at this point I still reflect back on that, how it helps me make whatever I want to make.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST START WORKING WITH GLASS?

It was in 1991 when I was 18, during my freshman year at Alfred University. I was studying art, working mostly two dimensionally — painting and printmaking — and a good friend of mine who was a grad student in glass convinced me to try glassblowing. I was hooked from the first time I tried it and have loved it ever since.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING ON RECENTLY?

About a month or so ago I went back and took a class; I hadn't taken a class in 13 years. This was at the Corning Glass Museum, and I ended up getting a scholarship to a glass workshop, called "Sculpting Inside the Bubble." It involved learning a whole bunch of techniques from this Czech glass master, who's only 36 years old, Martin Janecky.

It was fabulous to be a student again. Martin had a lot of cool tricks that I hadn't seen before. I got inspired again to make new pieces, and I worked on making glass hands that were holding a glass acorn, or a glass radish. It was interesting, when I was making the hands, that this was the first time I'd been away from my family in a long time, so the hands I was making ended up being the size of our sons' hands. We have two young boys, 6 and 7 years old, and the scale I started working

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on just happened to be the size of their hands.

HOW DOES YOUR WORK FIT INTO THE GROUP

EXHIBIT "OF THE LAND"?

The fruits or vegetables in the hands fit well into that. But also my farmscape pieces. The inspiration for those comes in part from our own home. We live in an old farmhouse in Willmington that we renovated ourselves, and we have two old barns that we lovingly restored. One of the barns is my art studio. There's a lot of history in our property, and we've been here 15 years.

Living in this atmosphere, working in an old barn, I'm inspired by the barn form and the houses, the way they lay on the landscape. I get a lot of inspiration from driving around, looking at the old buildings and imagining who maybe lived there, years ago. So I think about the history and how the buildings sit on the ground, how they're really overgrown all around them, which I try to get through the painted mahogany bases I make for my pieces, to make it seem like the buildings have sat there for a while.

And I am always simplifying the buildings. I try to simplify the barn forms to be really basic. This maybe ties into having young kids and being around their toys. Sometimes they create their own landscape, they're always playing with Legos. But I've always been into toys, even before we had kids, I like simplicity in form, simplifying the barn down to the essence of the barn.

CONSIDERING THE GLASS FRUITS AND VEGETABLES THAT YOU CREATE, DO YOU DO ANY GARDENING WITH REAL FOOD?

I do a fair amount of gardening here in our yard. We have a lot of big blueberry bushes and we have a lot of old apple trees in our yard, and we grow a lot of vegetables. It's very inspiring to be growing the stuff and then harvesting it. Working with molten glass year round, it's sort of like I can feel like I'm gardening year round, like I'm creating these forms in the middle of winter. It's a nice to be using those vibrant colors when it can be a little bleak outside.

Sometimes I make these little flowerpots with a little glass seedling sprouting out of it. Those are fun because I put the little sprout in a kiln nearby that stays warm, and I sculpt the little flowerpot

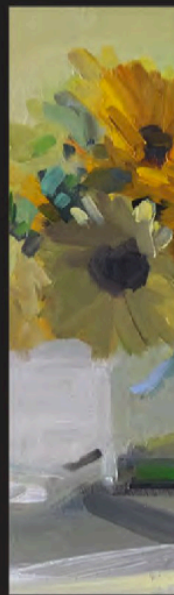
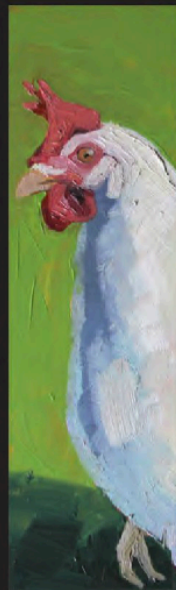
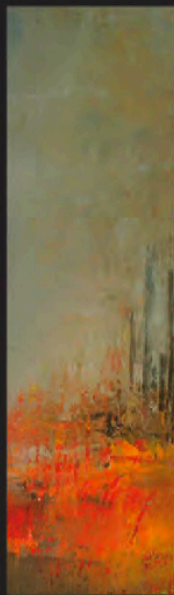
then I "plant" the seedling. But I'm using a lot of heat with the torch, so this thing comes to life by becoming molten and hot, and it sort of has a little life of its own.

I try to simplify my fruits and vegetables too, I don't want to create every last little detail. With the glass wall sculptures, the fruits and vegetables, I like the simplicity of the color and the form, and how it plays up against the stainless steel background, and I make it have different surface texture on the glass than the texture on the metal.

Isabel Lower works for Edgewater Gallery.



Child-Sized Hand with Green Apple (on mahogany base) - \$675.



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