



Donna Strong  
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 for author biography]

# A Passion for Glass

Pushing the Envelope by Donna Strong

Editor's Intro: Never underestimate the power of a 'mistake' that leads to something brand new and exciting! That's one of the wonderful tidbits of information and inspiration that writer, Donna Strong, gets from her interview of glass bead maker, Stacy Russom. Stacy goes on to describe her creative process, and how she found an organization instrumental in maintaining her edge.



**T**he English poet and artist, William Blake, once said, "Exuberance is beauty." Stacy Russom is beauty in action when it comes to a passion for glass and sharing it with others. "I love to get people excited about beads! Beads are so diverse, offering so many possibilities to make something beautiful out of

a small piece of glass, using a little bit of equipment. It is an art form that has been around for thousands of years. The Egyptians made glass beads. In the last 3 to 4 years, there has been a huge response to lampworking with glass bead making. The number of people getting into it is huge! There are classes in the U.S. and around the world."

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A visit to Stacy's San Clemente, California studio proved an old saying to be true, enthusiasm is contagious. Stacy was as lit up as the torch she uses to make beads, and before the interview was complete, I felt the calling to explore the alchemical process of heating glass and see how it moved and formed while it was vitreous.

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#### *A lucky break*

With more than thirteen years of experience now, Stacy has had wide exposure to working with different forms of glass art. Last year she felt the old 'push comes to shove' and her glass bead making process came to a pivotal threshold; she had to

move to another level. "Cracking glass beads in half by accident happens all the time because of thermal shock and I decided to do it on purpose. I came up with a method that cracks beads in half every time. Everyone else doesn't want to break beads, but I did, to experiment." This process led her to what have become known as 'half-baked bead bracelets.' Some of these beauties have the sparkle of polished gems, bearing a resemblance to tiger's eye or lapis lazuli. Other half-baked beads are glass demi-globes glowing in fluorescent flashes of color.

Stacy continued pushing the edge on fluid glass to see how far she could take it as a form. The inner urge to create led her beyond the technique she had mastered to make eye-pleasing round-shaped beads, the norm for the form. In her words, "I had to get out of the box, just seeing where the process goes and know that it may not be immediately pleasing to someone else's eye. You experiment to produce shapes that are unusual but may also be beautiful. What I like to do is bring in something that makes people stop



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for a moment. While I really like the round, I may sculpt it into something different, like the vessel shape of an Egyptian amphora bottle, just to work and learn how to shape the glass while it is fluid."

"When you place that rod of glass on the mandrel, gravity wants to pull it down and you need to bring it back up and manipulate it so it doesn't fall. There is so much excitement to it, starting to create something and the molten glass drops. It is such a thrill to figure out how to manipulate it and be creative in the moment." She added with working pragmatism, "It's also a long process, with a lot of failure and frustration. I may work very hard and in a moment it fails, having taken it a bit too far..."



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*Taking it one step further*

At the present, her passion is leading her to investigate beads in all their forms. Stacy has begun to explore incorporating the glass into a fusing background, seeing what the possibilities are in this area, once the bead has been cracked, to see what else she can do with 'puddles' of glass. This led her to begin working with a form that she calls 'cabochons.' With inspiration drawn from the glass roundel form, Stacy's cabochons are rounds about the size of a quarter. She works the glass much as she does for bead making, but a cabochon is left as a good-sized disk with embellishments. Then it is set in the kiln, to puddle it and fuse it down. It becomes a thick disk of glass with inset patterns.

Stacy is experimenting to use the cabochons in larger pieces of stained glass work and mosaics. She is also continuing her practice of making decorative forms to wear as cabochon broaches. These beautiful, embellished buttons of glass have a striking similarity to the French decorative textile adornments known as passementerie 'macarons.' Both art forms require a skillful hand to control the process, and each expresses a celebratory exuberance in using materials in a designer fashion. Stacy had never seen French passementerie prior to that moment. For her, making cabochons is simply a process of taking what she knows and continuing to apply it, to play and have fun while she is in the discovery process and see what new applications result.

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*A support system*

Stacy's zeal for hovering on the edge of discovery has been recognized by a community of glass bead makers. She is an active member of a professional association known as Wet Canvas. While Stacy and others have a focus on beads, she acknowledges Wet Canvas as a vehicle for the "greatest community I've ever been into, it includes every kind of art medium for artists to share." She lights up again as she tells me she has never seen such a diverse group of people come together and share what they are doing so openly, exchanging information so freely. Over a year ago, this group of colleagues took a step beyond the creative synergy of sharing information. Beginning with a simple act of admiration, her friend, Val, sent Stacy a gift bead. This 'chance' exchange of sending a bead began seeding a movement, known as 'Random Acts of Bead Kindness.'

Bead makers now send beads to one another, much the way generations of gardeners have shared their bounty of living green treasures and quilt makers exchanged family fabric remnants used in the making of prized textiles. As the natural world knows, cross-fertilization can lead to highly fertile outcomes, and through adaptation, extend the range that a plant can proliferate. The creative-cross-fertilization process occurring through bead exchanges, exemplified by Random Acts of Bead Kindness, is definitely leading to a greater outpouring of creative bead expression, as well as building a more resilient community of enthusiastic colleagues dedicated to spreading the word about beads.

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