

For the Love of Beads: Jennifer Geldard's Glowing Glass



"Victorian Garden," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass, silver leaf and enamels – 15 x 62mm.



"Enamel This!," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass and enamels – 17 x 64mm. 2005.



“Autumn Push,” Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass, enamels, copper wire and epoxy – 47 x 68mm. 2005.

By Donna Strong

Jennifer Geldard, also known as *glass girl* via her website, is a woman with great affinity for the ocean. While growing up in Massachusetts, she spent long hours gazing at the creatures in nearby tidal pools. Today, she still possesses a childlike ability to lose herself and become completely absorbed in her creative process as a bead artist.

While lampworking with glass requires finely tuned precision, Geldard describes her process as a meditative movement between herself and the molten glass. A keen observer of tidal flows, she uses her ability to work with the *movement* of molten glass in the making of her beads. She fuses her skill with being present in the moment, understanding the properties of her medium and knowing when to abandon the rules and follow where the glass wants to take her.

Says Geldard, “When I’m in the studio, it’s about solving puzzles day by day. Glass has certain rules. If I stop moving the mandrel, it drops like honey. As I’m working, there are always surprises. The process is what is most important to me, learning in the moment what the glass will allow and playfully experimenting. It’s just a joy.”

Throughout her career, Geldard has learned from her mistakes and allowed them to help her develop new ways of expressing herself through her art.

One mistake led her to layer glass in a manner that produced richer color. Geldard layers transparent glass over richer opaque colors, thus creating a bright shimmer in her beads. The



“Vintage Ivory,” Jennifer Geldard. Soda Lime glass and silver leaf – 18 x 52mm. 2004.



"Flotsam," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass, enamels and epoxy – 47 x 54mm. 2004.



"Storm," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass, silver leaf and enamels – 45 x 49mm. 2005.

sectional designs on many of her beads evolved as a result of working with one portion of a bead that had become problematic, dragging one part into another and reworking it to arrive at a new stylized design that has great aesthetic appeal. Trial and error also led her to experiment with enamel, which she uses in conjunction with a patina to give her beads an ancient look.

While making a barrel-shaped bead that became misshapen, she added glass that looked odd until she tweaked it, twisting the molten form at the junction where the glass mixture merged. Voila! The first of her "Twisted Hearts" was created.

In addition to experimentation, Geldard credits her career in beads to her dissatisfaction in art school. She ended her training at the Massachusetts College of Art because the curriculum required a substantial number of courses in commercial art, which frustrated the artist. She says, "In retrospect, leaving school sent me off on my own path."

Geldard is mostly self-taught, never taking a class, but learning



"Abundance," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass, enamels, steel wire and epoxy – 56 x 73mm. 2004.

from books and watching friends work with glass. After leaving art training, she immersed herself in life: getting married and having a son. Throughout this 10-year period, even while working a day job in retail, she made hats, handmade paper and sketched, to "keep herself sane."

She also started collecting beads. "I was stringing beads at home, and the sheer bulk of my supplies caused my husband John to make the suggestion of starting my own business," she explains.

In 1992, Geldard opened a bead shop in Concord, Massachusetts. This initiative eventually led her to trade shows where she saw amazing glass beads being made by contemporary artists. Her admiration for beads was met with an unusual gift from her mother, a Hot-head torch.

The momentum was building. Geldard taught herself the basics on her torch. But after the birth of her son, she put the torch away when he became old enough to get into everything. She sold the shop and began doing stained glass.



"Emergence," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass, borosilicate glass, enamel and epoxy - 46 x 83mm. 2004.



*"Octopus," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass and enamels - 22 x 48mm. 2005 (ABOVE).
"Oceana," Jennifer Geldard. Soda lime glass and enamels - 18 x 52mm. 2004 (BELOW).*



Geldard made stained glass figures of women in dresses. With etched mirror faces and wild spiral hair that she soldered on, she suddenly had an idea one day to add some beads to her *glass girl* creations. She picked up her Hot-head torch, grabbed some glass and began melting it in an impromptu beadmaking session. That was five years ago, and she never went back to stained glass, much to her existing clients' dismay.

Now, says Geldard, "I can see myself working with beads forever." The consistent theme through this time of creative exploration was an interest in textural work with tactile qualities. At last, her career was galvanized by glass, or more properly, *all fired up*.

Like other lampworkers, she too, eagerly jolts out of bed, and makes a mad dash to the kiln after an overnight firing to see the final result in the clear light of day.

Most of the time, Geldard works five days a week, four to six hours a day. Sometimes when her creative juices are really flowing, she has to be coaxed out of the studio, because there's just one more bead and a few more puzzles to be solved before she can turn off the torch.

She enjoys working primarily with Moretti soft glass, because "the bold colors and compatibility with enamels and metals allow for a degree of spontaneity and texture that can't be achieved with hard glass." Soft glass also suits her color sensibility; it allows glass etching, which deepens the richness coming through the surface texture, providing greater visual and tactile appeal.

After four years of intensive focus on beadmaking, Geldard has turned some of her attention to sharing with others. Now a teacher at the Worcester Center for Crafts in her home state, she is also beginning to teach classes around the country. Teaching too, is an exploration, one that allows her to extend herself from private concerns with color and texture, to demonstrating her process so that others can be encouraged to express their own natural inclinations.

Geldard brings to her work and her teaching a welcome source of inspiration to do what feels right and continue on until that moment when you know you've arrived in the right place, a pleasure like no other. It is a great opportunity for

Geldard to reflect upon her process and the gift of beadmaking.

For so many adults, pleasurable childhood memories have faded into dust. Not so with Geldard. She plays with her nine-year-old son Max, which she credits with keeping her perspective expansive and flowing. She quotes Willy Wonka, 'A little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest of men.'

Her work, available through online auction and at bead shows throughout the country, is a celebration of light and life, with a large dash of whimsy to spice it up. The ocean that fascinated her as a child is given homage in her design motifs. She consciously uses enamels to give beads a soft aged quality that is reminiscent of sea glass. She is able to achieve effects with color so that an inner glow emanates like those of shimmering sea creatures. Through it all, she achieves her purpose, "to tickle and delight with the magic of glass." For Geldard, her chosen medium provides an endless ocean of possibilities.

For more information www.glassgirl.com. ♦