

GLASS ART®

For the Creative Professional Working in Hot, Warm, and Cold Glass

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Cappy Thompson

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Cappy Thompson,
The Lion and the Mouse,
Photo by Michael Seidl.

Above: Sarah Vaughn,
Looking Back, Waiting, (detail),
Photo by Echard Wheeler.

Editorial Calendar Advertising Deadlines

September/October 2023

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A Celestial Journey

by Dr. Julie Anne Denton

Cappy Thompson is well known for her warm and hot glass artworks, the themes of which narrate rich mythopoetic contemporary fables. She draws her inspiration from her surroundings and her own personal experiences. Mythology, nature, and traditional folklore play a major role in Cappy's creative process.

Thompson's journey as an artist began in stained glass before she discovered her passion for reverse glass painting and grisaille. Originally a painters' technique, grisaille windows developed after a prohibition on the use of colored glass was issued by a monk in 1134 in France. Interestingly, this clergyman, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, cofounded the Knights Templar. Cappy's ability to balance the traditional with the contemporary and scale from the intimate through to the monumental has allowed her to develop a distinctive style that is recognizable worldwide. Her work is characterized by intricate details and a vibrant color palette that bring her narratives to life. Thompson continues to embrace experimentation both in technique and style, making her work feel as fresh at 70 as it was at 30.

Cappy Thompson, Lord Shiva Grants Me a Boon, vitreous enamels reverse-painted on blown glass, 21.25" x 12.25" x 12.25", 1993. Photo by Michael Seidl.



with Cappy Thompson through Real and Imaginary Worlds



*Cappy Thompson,
Blue Sun, vitreous enamels
reverse-painted on blown glass,
21" x 13" x 7", 2013.
Collection of the Museum of Glass,
Tacoma, Washington.
Photo by Lynn Thompson.*



Cappy Thompson, I Was Dreaming of Spirit Animals, vitreous enamels painted on float glass with reverse-laminated stained glass, 33' x 90', 2001–2003. Public Art Commission for the Port of Seattle, Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Fabricated at Derix Glasstudios. Photo by Russell Johnson.



Cappy Thompson, Tulip Mistress, vitreous enamels reverse-painted on blown glass, 19.5" x 13.5" x 7.5", 2013. Photo by Lynn Thompson.

Discovering Painting on Stained Glass

To understand Cappy Thompson a little better, we begin with her formative years. During her childhood, Cappy's mother was a serious painter, although not professional. As tradition would dictate in the fifties, a married woman's job was more often that of homemaker, and in this specific case, mother of four children to boot. "I grew up drawing. After graduation, I attended college and followed a traditionally academic route, which I did not enjoy. A year of higher education under my belt, I decided to take a year out, and my mom and I took classes together."

The *Factory of Visual Arts* where Cappy began her journey was a school for professional artists founded in Seattle, Washington, in 1968 that acted as a hip alternative to the traditional university art education at the time. "I decided after two years of classes to attend Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. At Evergreen, I concentrated on painting and printmaking. In 1976 at the age of 24, I received my bachelor's degree. In that final year, I had some friends who owned a stained glass business in the area called Mansion Glass, and I worked for them in the summer."

These friends suggested that Cappy research glass painting. They reasoned that Cappy, as a painter in training, might find the subject interesting or useful. "I received extra school credit for trying to find out how to paint and fire on glass and concentrated on that in the final two quarters of my degree. I made so many mistakes during that testing period! Essentially, I discovered and gained knowledge of painting on glass through rigorous trial and error."



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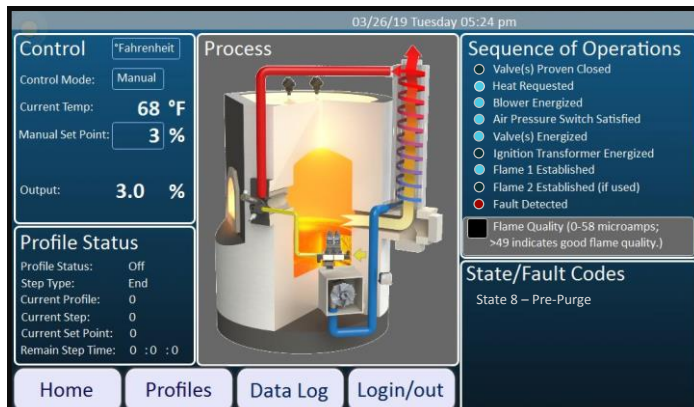
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An Apprenticeship Period Longing for God

"My glasswork has developed in a particular way because I am self-taught. The first pieces I created were inspired by Japanese woodcuts. I was still working in the stained glass studio at that point, and I wanted the lead came lines to integrate with the drawings themselves. Thereafter, I was drawn to the paintings of the Persian miniaturists. I translated two miniature paintings into large wood-framed, freestanding glass screens, and I believe this was my apprenticeship period."

Cappy became very interested in grisaille during that time. Grisaille involves painting in gray-tonal values on the glass panel, which is then fired to fuse the enamel onto the glass. Cappy uses her process in the following way, and everything starts with a drawing. In the stained glass tradition, the final design that artists use to create their glasswork is called a cartoon. The cartoon is a full-size drawing at 1:1 scale. Thompson traces her cartoon design onto the glass surface, a process that is aptly called tracery.

Thereafter, Cappy applies tonal values with a monocolour wash that is smoothed on with a badger brush. The enamel is then subtracted with a brush to create the desired shaded image. Painting glass with the grisaille technique is a unique and challenging form of art that requires careful planning, attention to detail, and in Thompson's case, up to five separate firings in the kiln. Tracery is often applied to the glass using a small brush to create intricate details. Cappy has even been known to use a quill to apply color, a method used by medieval monks who, in reverence and love, are illuminating their calfskin manuscripts.



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Cappy Thompson, I Imagine Us as a Holy Family Engaging in the Great Work of Increasing the Light, vitreous enamels painted on float glass with reverse-laminated stained glass, 10' x 66', 2006. Washington State Arts Commission in partnership with The Evergreen State College. Fabricated at Derix Glasstudios. Photo Courtesy of The Evergreen State College.

Cappy Thompson, Dreamscape: Three Aspects of My Soul, vitreous enamels reverse-painted on glass mounted over brushed aluminum, 23" x 28.75", 2009. Photo by Lynn Thompson.

Once Thompson settled in Seattle, she began an ambitious series of framed glass panels based on the fables of Aesop, such as *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, *The Lion and the Mouse*, or *The Fox and the Grapes*. "I personally found that stained glass was very public, and I felt I must create something that would please people. In almost direct opposition, creating grisaille panels felt intimate. Painting gave me the freedom to express myself without fetters."

It was during this time that Thompson set down the keystones of her trademark style. She utilized a tailor-made form of oblique projection in her drawing while simultaneously adding a three-dimensional quality that breathed life into the narratives. Oblique projection is a drawing method developed to create a two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional objects, which results in a distorted perspective that doesn't correspond to any view. Since the 1980s, Cappy has been using vibrant colors and monotonal palettes in unison with symbolic detail. Her artwork has a great sense of movement and energy, making her pieces both visually stunning and captivating.

Gaining Strength from the Glass Art Society Conference

After graduation, Cappy rented a shop front and studio in Olympia for some years while selling through galleries in the surrounding area. "I did well in this early career period. At my first visit to a Glass Art Society Conference in 1981, I met the famous Czech kiln casters, Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtova. I showed Libenský and his wife slides of my work, and they were very encouraging to me. I knew I was creating interesting and original pieces, and their animated approval and positive feedback were validation enough for me to back myself and move my practice to a new studio in Seattle by 1982."



Cappy Thompson, Ladder to Heaven, vitreous enamels reverse-painted on mouth-blown sheet glass laminated to a brushed metal-clad wood panel, 61" x 44", 2008. Photo by Lynn Thompson.



Cappy Thompson, Angel Walking a Tightrope, leaded stained glass, painted, silver stained, 26" x 20", 1986. Photo by the artist.

An Evolution of Themes and Style

As Cappy has matured as an artist, her themes and motifs have concentrated more and more on the human condition, spirituality, and the natural world. "From the 1990s onward, my work became more self-referential, like a mythopoetic reflection of the psychological issues I was going through while making the work." These everyman themes give Cappy Thompson's artwork a universal quality. In critique, Cappy Thompson's 2020 artwork, *Wrestling*, is reminiscent of the style of the French impressionist painter Paul Gauguin, who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Gauguin's paintings, which are similar to Thompson's screens, are characterized by a more flattened, two-dimensional approach that emphasizes pattern, line, and color over realistic representation.

Gauguin was also interested in the art and cultures of non-Western societies and often incorporated elements of traditional art forms into his own work, just like Thompson. She shared, "I wasn't interested in copying nature. I am drawn to the images, symbols, and painting of the medieval period, but not just the Christian tradition of Western Europe. I love the content of Hindu, Pagan, Judaic, Buddhist, and Islamic painting as well. I enjoy the flat perspective used and the way important elements are larger. I enjoy that the scale in these earlier works has nothing to do with reality. I love the naïve naturalism and devout simplicity. In terms of design, I appreciate blocks of solid color, decorative elements and borders, and of course, the storytelling quality of traditional art is key for me."

From 1984 onward, Cappy Thompson began working intermittently in numerous capacities at Pilchuck, the glass school founded by Dale Chihuly in Stanwood, Washington. "Chihuly was important to my career. Dale came to visit me when I had my shopfront in Olympia, and he was very encouraging and inclusive." Through her association with Pilchuck, Cappy also met the wider community of artists both working in glass and in the area. "For my first two summers at Pilchuck, I worked as a studio coordinator. This presented an opportunity to create all manner of mini workshops to help students. In reality, this was a golden and career enhancing moment for my work!"

"Flora C. Mace walked into my work area at Pilchuck in the late 1980s and gave me a small blown vessel. She asked me to paint a porcupine on that vessel. Flora was a natural-born teacher, and I think she knew this would excite me. What I loved about painting on a vessel was how my drawings became sculptural, and that is when I began reverse glass painting. The circular format of the blown object was a perfect structure for a narrative. The next ten years of my life were dedicated to painting on vessel forms." Once this became an important part of Cappy's oeuvre, she employed excellent glassblowers such as Ben Moore to create specific forms for her to paint, often in opaline white. Initially, Thompson worked in grisaille and, thereafter, in reverse glass painting with transparent color and/or grisaille.

Commissions, Grants, and Awards

After the ten-year period when Cappy worked with vessels, she undertook public art commissions. "I created large pieces but carried on with my own narrative. I basically unwrapped the vessel!" A fine example of her public artwork can be seen at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in Washington State. *I Was Dreaming of Spirit Animals* is an artwork consisting of 63 units of 5 feet by 9 feet insulated glass panels.

From 2001 through 2003, Cappy Thompson worked on the Seatac commission with the help of the German company, Derix Glassworks. It is said that Derix, which was established in 1886, is one of the oldest architectural glass companies in the world. The artwork measures 33 feet by 90 feet and features animal constellations forming the sky over the home of a dreaming couple with evergreen trees on the ground. "It's the biggest piece I have ever made, and it was such a wonderful project."

Thompson has also been the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and the Libenský Award from Pilchuck Glass School. Her artwork has been exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the United States and abroad, including the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Washington, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and The Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York.

One Artist's Contributions to the Evolution of Glass Art

Thompson is a respected educator and has taught glass painting and engraving at institutions such as Bild-Werk in Frauenau, Germany, and the Canberra School of Art in Australia. She has mentored many young glass artists and is known for her generosity and collaborative spirit. Among other things, Cappy has also been an artist in residence at Pilchuck Glass School and the Toyama Institute of Glass Art, Japan.



Cappy Thompson, Love Intoxicated, vitreous enamels reverse-painted on mouth-blown sheet glass laminated to brushed metal-clad wood panel, 36.5"x 51", 2010. Photo by Lynn Thompson.

The unique style and techniques of Cappy Thompson have inspired many artists and have contributed to the evolution of glass art as a medium. Her use of the grisaille technique has expanded the possibilities of glass painting. She remains an important figure in the world of glass art and continues to create beautiful and thought-provoking works that captivate audiences around the world. Cappy Thompson's exquisite work can be found at the Traver Gallery in Seattle, Washington, and at numerous public sites around the United States and abroad.

GA



Cappy Thompson
www.cappythompson.com
Instagram @thompsoncappy

Cappy Thompson designing a grisaille painting. Photo by the artist.



Dr. Julie Anne Denton received her doctorate in the combination of sand cast and flameworked glass for artists in 2017. She has been schooled in the Italian flameworking tradition and has worked alongside some of the best flameworking and sand casting artists of the day. Settled in Zurich, Switzerland, Julie runs her design firm, www.atelier315.ch, and virtual school, www.zurichglassschool.com, from the center of the city. She works with a small team beside her who all care deeply about quality.

Julie Anne creates work that resonates beauty, workmanship, and authenticity. Her key themes are people, folklore, nature, and counterculture. She has received worldwide recognition for her storytelling skills as an artist and her technical skills as a glassmaker.

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