



The Magic of Glass:

MEET THE MAKER, WENDY NEWHOFER

In a seasonal series of evocative mini landscapes created by Oxfordshire Artweeks artist Wendy Newhofer, dark shapes of trees stand out against soft-blue translucent skies and looking at these small glass panels you can almost feel the healthy clear air of a bright January day. Ethereal, some seem almost brushed with silver as if crisp snow is about to fall; others glisten in Narnian moonlight beneath a glowing supermoon, and all have a feeling of tranquility.



Wendy Newhofer

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“They’re inspired by the beauty of a winter walk,” says Wendy, “I live in Oxford, near Port Meadow and love to get out early when the world is covered in frost or snow, when it’s quiet in the morning mist or on those days when the sky is high and blue and the sun shines and promises that spring is on its way. On those days, I love to see the shapes of the silhouettes, stark against the sky at the field edges,” says Wendy. “They are simply spectacular when they are stripped bare in the winter and the character of the individual trees is far more evident than in the summer when they’re in leaf.”

Wendy works in a palette of refined organic hues which has become her trademark and, although they suit her quiet elegance perfectly, she laughs that this hasn’t been a conscious decision so much as the result of the way she chooses to work.

“Lots of glass art, especially fused glass, is very bold in colour, but when I first worked with glass at college, I was transfixed by the amazing blue you achieve by simply adding copper leaf to clear float glass and it’s a combination I have continued to use. Each May when I open



my studio to visitors for Artweeks everyone is always surprised by the before and after, and nearly twenty years on I too am still amazed that you can put a sliver of metal leaf between layers of glass and create colour simply by heating them together in a kiln. Because of this, I have always allowed the materials to characterise what I create," she explains. "I also use lots of silver and aluminium leaf too, along with metal foils which are slightly thicker and wire in various diameters, and the colours you see in my pieces are all purely the result of the chemical reactions that take place when the glass and metals are fired together. By using different thicknesses of leaf and foil, and different combinations I can include yellow, gold, green, pale pink and dark red in my designs. I use copper to create the beautiful blue that underpins most of my designs, but if you use a thicker layer you get an iridescent black instead, and, thicker still, will produce a red.



It's exciting that just a small tweak can change the end colour dramatically. I keep samples of the different combinations I have used and what the final effect is so I can try and recreate different hues. It isn't a perfect science as any piece of foil will give slight shade gradations, but it is pure chemistry and it always feels like a mysterious medieval alchemy!

The process I use is relatively low tech although it is fiddly and intricate – I use scissors mostly, a glass cutter and a kiln. I always begin work on each ▶



glass panel with a drawing in front of me and start by cutting shapes and laying out the leaf and wire combinations that will make the picture, using the wire to create lines, and I build up the design almost as if I were drawing. The balance of shapes is very important to me and everything is very precise until the moment the piece goes into the kiln. Then the magic happens! There's an element of serendipity as the kiln works its magic like a magic paintbrush softening the bold glitter and shine of the metal elements and transforming them into something which has a subtle painterly quality. I never quite know what the finished pieces will look like so it's always a real thrill when I open the kiln and see how each has turned out.

I have been enjoying working on this small scale over the last couple of years," she smiles, "because I spent 2019 working on a dozen really big panels for a garden at the Chelsea Flower Show with garden designer Helen Elks-Smith and it was wonderful to have a change. The small landscapes are very tactile and truly miniature in size - the glass measures just 12.5 x 7 cm so people have no problem to accommodate them in their homes!

The design of the Chelsea Flower Show panels were developed from the shapes of leaves and other organic shapes, and over recent months I have also been working on a series called Life Forms, exploring forms of cyanobacteria, some of the oldest organisms in the world which were responsible for oxygenating the planet many millions of years ago. Fossils of these bacteria many millions of years old have been found and they are still around today more commonly known as blue green algae: under the microscope they look like bead necklaces and have a wonderful



fluidity. In glass, they have an expressive abstract quality.

One of these pieces is currently in the British Society of Master Glass Painters Centenary Exhibition, one of 60 panels selected to go 'on tour' around the country until August when it arrives in Stourbridge for the biennial International Festival of Glass and I'm very excited to be part of it.

I have a love of textile design and an extensive collection of beautiful books with illustrations of fabric patterns through the ages. These have been a big inspiration for much of my work, especially the 50s mid-century modern designs which have had a resurgence in popularity over the past few years. I am looking forward to developing my range of abstracts influenced by these. I enjoy their repeated motifs and find myself continually drawn to their strong visual impact. I'm working on some new designs now and at the exciting stage of not quite knowing how they will develop. However, they'll certainly be very different from the winter trees!"



See more on Wendy's glass art at www.wendynewhofer.com