

# Tight Buds and Blossoms

by Carmen Anderson

I am a collector of contemporary art glass beads. I have a lot of respect for those artists whose body of work demonstrates that they are constantly challenging themselves and learning new techniques, yet still manage to have their voices resonate throughout their work. Not only do these artists continue to evolve, but they also manage to preserve the common thread that is woven throughout their work.

As a collector, it becomes obvious to me when the artist has not, for whatever reason, experienced the challenges, frustrations, and celebration that come with moving forward or taking risks. I must admit I do avoid collecting beads from artists who have been tied to the same style for years.

I am drawn to the bead artists who are not only good technicians but also explorers and good “visual linguists” who interpret their vision and voice into a piece of glass I can hold in my hand and look at and have it silently speak volumes to me. It’s a bead that touches my “sweet spot” and makes my heart sing.

I have selected five lampwork artists who make beads/pendants that are a passionate creative performance—works of art that are a result of their own curiosity, motivation, purpose, exploration, discovery, and even failure. These artists made the arduous journey from a tight bud to a blossom. This collector is looking forward to seeing what the rich imaginations and bold spirits of these “blossoms” reveal in the future.

*“And the day came when the risk to remain  
in a tight bud was more painful than the risk it  
took to blossom.”*

*Anais Nin*



# Kate Fowle Meleney



**Kate Fowle Meleney** believes that if you are a creative person you most likely have a need to always have your hands working on something. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that she has been involved in fiber/textile art, lace making, quilts, basketry, and metalsmithing at some time in her life before she began lampworking beads and pendants.

Kate has a lot of interest in surface treatments on glass and spends a lot of time chemically altering the surface of the glass she has in her palette of Effetre glass. She uses enamel powders and paints, ceramic overglazes, electroforming, and other techniques to produce beads and pendants that look different from those that other artists produce from their palettes of Effetre glass. For example, Kate explained, "When fuming with silver, you can chemically change some of the colors. This is when you aren't using it for the actual silvery shine but using it so that you can combine it with the other chemicals in the surface of the glass and create an illusion of a raku finish."

Kate's current work uses a lot of surface treatment, particularly electroforming. Although she learned how to do electroforming in the 1980s, it wasn't until the 1990s that she began using it on her enamel-covered vessels and goddess beads. Her inspiration for doing the vessels and goddess beads was glass blower, William Morris. Additionally, Phoenician petroglyphs (1500 B.C. to 500 B.C. images of rock carving) also influenced her to do the them.

When Kate began to use electroforming extensively during the late 1990s, she developed a series she calls Biotech, one that reflects her vision of the minimalist style as well as her interest in doing something abstract. It is still sculptural in nature but not referential to her vessels and goddess beads. This new style was created during a time that directly related to when her interest in contemporary art increased. During this time she began collecting contemporary jewelry and immersed herself in books on the subject. There were several jewelers to whose work she was drawn, including minimalist artists Talya Baharal and Gene Gnida, among others.

Kate named the series Biotech because the beads and pendants combine the abstract shapes found in microorganisms such as amoeba, protozoa, and spores with a multitude of techniques used in surface treatments (i.e., copper electroforming, ceramic overglazes, and enamels, liver of sulfur, metallic foils and acid etching). Her recent work is to apply this same Biotech style to pod-shaped forms. They are still less organized in form, however, and have stringer work on them that is intentionally more random. Kate includes electroforming work on the top at the stem portion. This includes the addition of copper wires added to appear like tendrils on the pods, which are also electroformed. Granulation is worked into the pod to give an organic look.

Kate likes the timelessness of her Biotech series and will continue to expand it by including new surface treatments, combining existing treatments and applying them to new lampworked abstract shapes.

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# Kristina Logan



**Kristina Logan** originally worked in wood sculpture. Her transition from wood to glass did not happen overnight. When she worked for glass artist Dan Dailey, she was around glass and color for four years. During this time she observed a woman lampworking beads. What interested her about the lampworking was that it could be accomplished alone without having a large studio and several assistants.

Kristina revealed that she has a perfectionistic side and wants to be “really, really good” at what she does. She explained that in order to perfect her technique in any art she pursued, she would need to immerse herself in it all the time. Lampworking beads allows her to do that and fits her lifestyle. Kristina describes her work as having a timeless quality based on classical principles, symmetry, and balance. She views her work as constantly “shifting.” Whatever she is currently working on is generally a hybrid of something she has done in the past.

For example, she recently returned to making lampworked glass rings. These rings are a result of her constant endeavor to combine metals with glass. In the past she has made rings, some of the first items in which she combined glass and metal. After more than ten years, the rings have returned. Instead of being diminutive in size, however, they are now bigger and bolder in size and color. In other words, her new direction is actually a shift from the old to create something new.

This premise of shifting was present with all of the examples she gave me when I asked her what new items were on her menu. The brooches have shifted away from the monochromatic palette she used in the past to a color palette that makes a bigger statement. The earrings that were ivory in the past will now have more color. Her necklaces will shift from being composed of larger lampworked components to components that are of a smaller scale and more asymmetrical. The color palette she is using in her beads now has shifted to colors that could be described as lighthearted and playful.

Revisiting and shifting old designs may seem as if it would pose few challenges. However, this is not the case with Kristina’s flameworking. An example of this would be the work she is doing with her new rings. One of the challenges presented with them is how to combine the metal and glass together so the glass she flameworks doesn’t crack. Another challenge Kristina has with her new rings is making sure they are aesthetically pleasing. In order to do that, she has to maintain a harmonious balance of the glass and metal. The weight of both elements must appear equal.

When asked to describe how she plans what direction her body of work will take, Kristina responded, “It’s not that heady.” She does not plan what direction to take. The words she uses to describe her approach to working are “methodical, resolute, dedicated, and consistent.”

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## Sherry Bellamy

**Sherry Bellamy** uses glass as a conduit for her creativity, which comes as no surprise, since she has an affinity for it. She collects glass and at one time made stained glass objects. The transition from stained glass to flameworked beads was natural, because functional art appeals to her and the idea of melting glass excites her.

Within the past year a common characteristic in Sherry's flamework is her focus on the interior of the bead. Sherry explained, "I'm beginning to realize that when I create a bead I need to think in terms of the interior and work from the inside out." This focus on the interior of the bead can be seen in her Chaos and Shipwreck beads.

The Chaos bead is created using a technique she developed in which she extrudes glass through copper mesh in the interior of the bead. She has refined this technique and has produced a tutorial for it, which is popular in the lampworking bead community. The Shipwreck beads depict the remains and destruction of a ship and are void of any aquatic sea life. Sherry creates these beads by using a variety of techniques and metals to represent the "fabric" of a shipwreck (i.e., corroded steel and iron, decayed wood, wave action, and sand). She creates this montage within the interior of the bead.

Sherry has been experimenting with layering colors to achieve subtle effects as well as with metals such as fine silver and copper. She has started working with palladium and finds it rewarding, "I love palladium for its subtle shadings of almost patina-like color, and I love that I can cook it to death without melting it!"

A significant achievement has been made by Sherry within the past year by owning her uniqueness as an artist. She explained it this way: "I've learned to make what makes me happy without worrying about how it will be received. I know that not everyone "gets" what I do—or likes it, for that matter. I fully understand and accept that."

Sherry has been taking risks and doing a lot of experimenting. She has had mixed results in her experiments with making marbles. There have also been experiments with silver foil. This involves her layering pieces of silver foil with different colored glass. This technique has presented some challenges, one of which is the fact that when she layers the foil and colored glass, it results in a larger bead than she wants. She is refining her technique to overcome this challenge. Sherry is also experimenting by making spheres of fine silver to include in the bead. She calls these spheres "hidden treasures." She is still perfecting this technique and hopes to resolve the issues that remain soon.

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# Melanie Moertel

**Melanie Moertel** was first introduced to flameworking when she went to a class for bead lampworking. During the class, Melanie discovered that glass had an element of permanency that appealed to her. While making beads in the class, she found that there was a great degree of difficulty in changing a finished bead. This appealed to her: "Before I worked with glass I used to paint, and I always painted over and over again on the same canvas. I liked what I was doing for only a few days. I was too impatient to do it correctly on the first attempt." She explained that the "hot" glass forces her to work with more patience and think through the process and technique. Melanie believes this helps her express herself much better. Shortly after the class, she immediately purchased a torch and concentrator and began working as a full-time bead lampworker.

There was one other factor that influenced her to adopt glass as her medium of choice. Melanie loved glass jewelry before she started making beads. It was the shiny character of some of the glass beads in the jewelry that appealed to her. This is somewhat ironic, however, because many of her current beads have an opaque quality to them. She now chooses to use opaque glass in addition to transparent glass. The opaque glass offers her a more intense color palette that she feels better represents her.

These two factors are primarily what lead Melanie to trust her instincts and accept that she had found an appropriate medium to communicate her artistic voice. She continues to take classes and reads books and magazines that force her out of her comfort zone and into new territory. Melanie explained, "Knowledge never restricts you; it just helps you grow."

This summer Melanie had an opportunity to do her flameworking from the other side of the fence. She became the source of knowledge rather than its receiver. One of her former students contacted her and asked her to teach bead lampworking at the Eugene Glass School in Oregon. Melanie accepted. This was a challenge, since English is not Melanie's first language. It was, however, the first language for her students, and she overcame this challenge. During the class she taught her students fine stringer control, color choices, elephant beads, free-form beads, murrine, and design concepts. She also discussed her studio setup.

Melanie has cataloged many design ideas in her mind over the years. These designs provide an endless variety of possibilities when she wants to explore a new technique. She calls this source of inspiration her "inner design library." She visited that library on one occasion when someone asked her to custom-design a bead for a birthday present. Her client's only request was that she create something that she had never done before. Melanie explained: "I sat

down and thought about it. I painted a small scribble on paper and immediately began to make the bead.

The result was doing a fairy on a bead."

Melanie said that the fairy on the

bead was meant as a symbol of friendship and good luck. She called the bead "Pixie Land."

It is her favorite bead. The client also got a bonus, since the expression on the fairy's face is something unrepeatable.

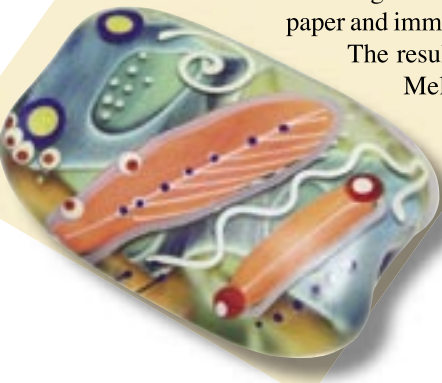


There are no plans for new direction in Melanie's work. She relies, rather, on the unplanned randomness of life. An example of this would be the new Indian elephant beads she has begun making. Before coming up with the design, she thought about designing a bead that not only represented her as a person but would also give her a big opportunity to include many styles and techniques in her design. While pondering this, she came across her small collection of elephants that she had amassed since she was seventeen. These elephants were the catalyst for the Indian elephant beads she does now.

Another example of how the randomness of life is reflected in Melanie's beads happened within the past year. She explained that her private life has changed a lot over that time, and she believes that is visible in her beads. When asked how so, she shared: "I'm doing more focals now. My beads became larger with more complex stringer work. I put more of my heart and soul into each bead."

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# Terri Caspary Schmidt

**Terri Caspary Schmidt** began her creative journey in fiber arts. Although she had an interest in glassblowing, the logistics of doing it posed problems and made it impractical for her to do. Terri discovered that beadmaking would resolve the logistics problem and allow her to pursue her creative desire to work with glass. She has been lampworking beads since 1999. When asked why she chose glass as a medium to express herself she responded: "I was drawn to the quiet meditative aspect of lampworking. I like the permanence of glass and the historic context of glass."

Terri's work can be described as complex and symmetrical. Her designs are built on a network of lines and repetition. As she explained, "In the past few years I've become interested in the manipulation of lines on the surface of the bead to create intricate tessellated patterns." Terri describes her approach to making beads as very old school. She is heavily influenced by artists who are the pioneers of the American beadmaking movement (i.e., Tom Holland, Larry Scott, and Kristina Logan). Terri says, "I like using the standard Effetre/Moretti colors and basic lampworking techniques of surface design such as precise dot application, masking, pick work, and optical color blending (layering transparent colors over opaques)."

This past year, looking for some relief from the precision and repetition that dominate her beads, she decided to pick up some stringer and created a fish on the surface of a bicone. Terri says that she is not sure if she will continue in this direction, but she's had a lot of fun creating these new fish beads. "Each one has it's own unique, fishy expression."

These new fish beads have led to her refining her basic techniques of applying stringer to the surface of the beads. Terri is mastering stringer techniques that reflect the same degree of the intricacy that she presents in her body of work. She is also experimenting with new glass colors as they become available, as well as with silver leaf and fuming.

Terri's beads pose some challenges because of the precision required to produce the complex designs in her beads. Mistakes are typically highlighted and difficult to correct. Making her new fish beads also poses challenges for her. Terri explains: "I struggle with issues such as heat control and having long bicones crack during the process." And her current designs are creating additional new challenges for her. "I'm finding that I have to learn to refocus my attention in different, sometimes very subtle ways when I'm working on new designs."



Despite the challenges she faced with the fish beads, they are her favorite beads that she has made within the past year. The fact that the design is different from the other beads she has made plus the Japanese influence makes them appeal to her most. As Terri explained, "The fish has a crusty, rough-hewn quality, which I believe relates to the beauty that lies in imperfection." These fish beads are an obvious departure from the perfection seen in her usual complex, symmetrical designs.

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*Carmen Anderson, a resident of Houston, Texas, enjoys collecting beads. Her collecting habits are currently focused on contemporary art glass beads. She is a member of The Bead Museum (Glendale, Arizona), Houston Bead Society, and the Bead Society of Great Britain. You can reach Carmen at [rice827@yahoo.com](mailto:rice827@yahoo.com).*

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