

Inspiration

by Lisa St. Martin

Photography by Jerry Anthony



After being a hot glass artist for almost thirty-five years, I still want to be excited about sitting down to my torch every day. This proves to be a challenge at times. All artists go through periods of time where they stare at that flame and think their time could be better spent scrubbing toilets or folding socks—hardly favorite occupations of mine.

I have been asked many times by students where I get my ideas and how they can find their own inspiration. Let me share just a few of the things I do to keep the creative juices flowing.

Glass Art Inspiration from Other Art Mediums

When I moved my studio to the Workhouse Art Center in Lorton, Virginia, one of the first things I bought was a big, comfortable chair for reading or napping, plus I needed a place to put all of my books. since I have gathered a fairly large and varied library. Of course, I have lots of books on beads and glass, but I also really treasure my books on textiles, pottery, furniture, antiques, and lots of fine-art books. These books are an irreplaceable resource for shapes, colors, textures, and—especially—ideas.

My mother was a wonderful artist, so I was blessed to grow up in that environment. She always kept a file filled with torn-out magazine pages, sketches, and notes about things she found interesting and delightful. As a small child, I remember her looking through her file and pondering over an idea for a painting or design. I like to ponder over an idea also. Sometimes I will kick an idea around in my head for quite a while until I have it figured out, especially if it is technically challenging.

After seeing a Van Gogh painting at a museum and realizing that it was all made up of dots and dashes of color, I knew it could translate into a bead using stringers. These developed into my Impressionist Landscape beads. Feeling that I have them sort of figured out, my brain started thinking. “Okay. What now?”

Looking to challenge myself, and taking what I had learned, I turned to trying my hand at portraits. Sitting down in my lovely chair, I looked through all of the lovely art books. I have a great collection of books on the art of Van Gogh and Monet that I used for research for my landscape beads. Van Gogh also painted many intriguing faces, but they didn’t really fit into my style. Honestly, most of his portraits are not very pretty, and I’m more drawn to a more elegant design. More chair time brought me to the work of Modigliani. I love his elegant long lines and his color sense. I also thought that his style would lend itself to a glass bead. Now I just needed to figure out how to draw a face with a stringer on a hot bead. They are coming along and I am pleased with their direction, but I feel that I still have a lot of work to do. I envision many more landscapes and portraits bouncing around in my head.

Inspiration.
Where does
it come from?

What do we do if
it is nowhere to
be found?





One Technique Leads to Another

I view every bead as a learning experience—sometimes a good one, sometimes not. But each bead should lead you in a direction. Sometimes I'll look at a bead and think, "Yuck. Okay, I'm not doing that again." But sometimes I'll look at a bead and say, "Okay, there is potential there. What if I try this color or shape?" A whole new path to travel then appears. Copper leaf has me intrigued right now. I've been working on using it in a bead reminiscent of Chinese watercolor landscapes. Hmm . . . back to my books.

There are so many resources available to the glass artist these days. Use them. Look at things on the Internet. See what other artists are doing. Keep a small notebook where you can draw and write down ideas. I'll see something of interest, and if I don't jot it down, it's gone! I use the notes application on my phone and the camera to record things that catch my eye.

Go to the library. Find the used book stores in your area. I'm really fortunate to be in an art center with over a hundred resident artists in all forms of media, and I encourage you to look at other forms of art—not just glass. Get out there! Be inspired!!



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Lisa St. Martin, who is classically trained in art education at the University of Maryland and has taken graduate courses in Glass Technology at the University of Kansas, has been working with hot glass for over thirty years. Working under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Lisa studied glassblowing and engraving at the Jon Meyer Studio and with artisans from Steuben in Corning, New York.

With work all over the world and in many books, Lisa's time is spent refining her craft, developing new techniques, and teaching. She serves on the International Society of Glass Beadmaker's National Conference Team as the Loss Prevention Specialist/ Artist Liaison. Lisa is the recipient of the ISGB's 2010 Hall of Flame Award and a Resident Artist at The Workhouse at Lorton. She lives in northern Virginia where she tries to keep husband, two sons, and many cats at bay!

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