

Epidemic of Local Inspiration

Area artists excel in a variety of crafts

By Jennifer Heyns

Getting Inspired

In ancient times inspiration that resulted in poetry, song, and art was attributed to the famed Muses of Greek mythology. Notorious artists like DaVinci, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, and Rodin were no doubt among those thought to be gifted by the goddesses of inspiration. It's hard to say if mythological gods are at work today, but it's apparent that Fauquier County is truly an inspirational place to be. In and around Warrenton are a tremendous number of talented artisans who are passionate about their craft.

For Holley Green, a local photographic artist, inspiration comes from nature. "It comes from being outside, in God's world," said Holley, a Warrenton resident of 35 years. "If I'm the only one who sees the beauty in one little rose petal then that's enough for me." Although she did admit that while she loves finding aesthetic treasures in nature, she derives great pleasure from photographing her finds and sharing them with others.

Tom Veirs also loves to share his craft with others through his Warrenton glass studio and gallery, but said that his inspiration comes mostly from his mother. "When I was a young boy, my mother would take me around to lots of glass houses," he admitted. After retiring from the EPA, Tom realized that those earlier field trips had laid a deep seeded passion for glass art.

For Joyce Gould, of Warrenton, developing her craft of quilting didn't start as a passion, it began as a way of enhancing a skill she already possessed. "I already knew how to sew and I just thought that quilting would be fun, too," she said.

Joyce revealed that she could never have been a quilter 100 years ago, when all of the stitching was done by hand, although that's exactly what she faced with her first lesson. "We learned to do everything by hand to give us an appreciation for the craft," Joyce explained. She now uses a long-arm quilting machine to craftily sew together each quilt top to a layer of batting and a backing material and although the machine has templates for several standard quilting patterns, Joyce prefers creating her own designs. She derives her inspiration from the fabrics and designs in each quilt top.

Getting Started

Photography is not something that came naturally to Holley. She is a professional gardener by trade. "I can't draw and I can't paint, but I wanted to do something to create art," she said.

"My first gardening friend, Gladys, who was my grandmother's age, explained to me that life imitates the seasons and that I should save a new passion for a later season of my life." When her four boys were grown, Holley decided it was time to take her friend's sage advice and begin a new hobby. Another local gardener and photographer, Karen Rexrhode, convinced Holley to join the Manassas-Warrenton Camera Club, a decision she relishes every day.

Holley credits the camera club with providing great mentors who have helped her learn what a camera can really do and to inspire her to keep reaching for a higher level of ability.

Holley, Karen, and two other camera club members have formed a sub-group to challenge and inspire each other continually. The photo-taking quartet takes a monthly field trip to

a location that one of the members knows intimately. Holley lit up when she recounted the last field trip in which the group went to the Aldie Mill at night for what she calls "light painting". They photographed the mill illuminated only by flashlights and "dollar store glow sticks". Some of the photos will be entered in the Aldie Mill Art Show and Sale, which will take place from September 1 to October 1.

Joyce also merits a friend for encouraging her craft. In 1991 she contacted Karen Walker, owner of the Quilters' Confectionery in Warrenton, about taking quilting lessons. Not only did Joyce learn the art of quilting, she also found new friends with a common thread. In 2000 one of Joyce's quilting friends asked her if she was interested in sharing the cost of a long-arm quilting machine – a commercial quality piece of equipment that rings to the tune of nearly \$10,000. The pair agreed to partner up for the purchase and planned to make back their investment by taking on projects for others.

In order to get a better understanding for the new equipment and what it could do; Joyce studied at the Long Arm University in Springfield, Illinois.

Taking classes was also a necessity for Tom, who admired the art of glass blowing but needed some help learning and understanding the process. "My very first piece started out as a juice glass," Tom admitted with a laugh, "but every time you reheat the glass it gets shorter – so it made a very nice coaster." He quickly grasped the process and decided to turn his new passion into a full-blown career.

Four years ago he purchased the building where his gallery is now located and started creating glass artwork. In the fall of 2005, he opened his gallery to the public, where he encourages people of all ages to visit, watch him in his creative process and ask questions.

"It's amazing the questions that people come up with. I especially like to hear what children want to know," said Tom. It is this inquisitiveness that feeds Tom's creative nature and energy and so, when he can, he teaches his art to those who wish to learn.

Bringing Art to Life

Many artists will agree that their best creations are the ones that came from deep within themselves, from their heart and soul. Regardless of where the inspiration comes from, however, each artisan must go through some sort of process to bring an idea to a tangible result, hopefully something that others will admire and find inspiration in.

For Tom, the process of creating art can be a dangerous one from the 2000-degree oven to the blazing hot molten glass to the broken shards, or the frit he uses to add color to his work. Glass projects can take Tom anywhere from 15 minutes to hours to complete, but they all start out the same. Glass chunks called cullets are melted in an oven while blowing rods are kept hot in a small fire-filled chamber. "The irons have to remain heated or the liquefied glass won't stick to it," explained Tom.

The iron is dipped into the glass and Tom begins a mesmerizing and careful method of shaping, coloring and transforming the drooping glob into a fabulous piece of art. He uses rather simple tools like a cherry wood block to make round shapes, wet stacks of newspaper to smooth his work and even his breath to enlarge objects by blowing through the iron.

If a project requires more than one shape or layer, each piece must be made separately and then melded together, which sometimes causes a piece to fall, crack or break, sending Tom back to the drawing board to begin again. He tries not to get discouraged by the broken pieces of artwork and has come to realize that even his mistakes can be valuable to someone else. His assistant, Nauecho Melton, enjoys scooping up the pretty shards and turning them into stained glass projects, barrettes and other colorful artwork.

When he is successful, which is most of the time, Tom has a lovely glass object to display in his gallery. He creates a wide array of kaleidoscopic pieces like necklace pendants, rondels, lamp globes, vases, Christmas ornaments, paperweights, flowers and bumblebees.

Colors also plays an important role in Holley's art. Although she isn't creating the color like Tom, she toils to present colors in the most

intriguing or pleasing way possible.

Holley isn't a fan of the conventional photograph; instead she likes to manipulate her photos so that she displays a facet of nature, as you've never seen it before. "It's art, I want it to evoke emotion," she said.

Amazingly enough, quilting is like photography in this respect. Joyce also spends much of her time manipulating and sandwiching, but for her it's a matter of layering all of the pieces evenly so that it can all be stitched evenly. Joyce has become very proficient with her long-arm machine and can complete a quilt in about two hours. She admits, however, that it takes 45 minutes just to pin the quilt together and get it set up in the machine.

When she can, Joyce creates her own quilting design and makes a pattern in the form of a drawing, which she lays out on the machine table. With the machine, she then uses the handles along the arm to trace the pattern while the head recreates the design in the form of stitching on the fabric.

Although technology has brought the quilting world to the point where digital machines could do all of the work, Joyce enjoys doing the quilting manually with her machine. "I think it's part of the art to do it by non-digital machine and to have the human factor apparent in the work," said Joyce. "You can see little glitches here and there on my quilts, but with a digital machine, it's all so perfect – it just seems like cheating."

Keeping Up

The world of art is ever evolving and artists must find new challenges in order to keep up. They may take formal courses, challenge themselves to try new methods or to create something they've never made before.

For Joyce, challenge comes with trying to continually create with new quilting designs so that each of her quilts is unique. She also challenges herself by making quilts for charity. Joyce has created over 70 quilt squares per month since January for Marine Comfort Quilts, an organization that assembles and donates quilts to the families of fallen soldiers.

For Tom, his goal is just to enjoy his retirement and bring beauty into the lives of

others. He is very satisfied with how far his craft has taken him. He made more than 85 percent of the pieces in his gallery and he also displays his work in other galleries as well as the oldest yacht club in Ireland and the White House.

He challenges himself by coming up with new objects to make. "I love the ability to create your own expression," Tom said. "It doesn't matter what you make – it's always neat."

Holley believes that her photos become such great pieces of art because she is always trying to learn more about her craft. "If you're going to step up to the next level, you have to challenge yourself, keep learning new things and taking classes," she advised.

One of the greatest gifts Holley's artwork brings her is twofold. "I do really enjoy sharing what I see and it gives me such a sense of accomplishment," she said.

Tom Veirs is the owner of Veirs Studio Glass and Gallery which is located at 5197 Lee Highway, Warrenton, Virginia, just 6 miles east of the Town of Warrenton, toward New Baltimore. For more information visit www.veirs.com. Joyce Gould performs all of her quilting from her home workshop; for more information call 540-347-0112 or email RJ-Q@hotmail.com. Holley Green does not currently have any of her work on exhibit, but will be represented in the Aldie Mill Art Show and Sale starting September 1. Some of her work can be viewed on the Manassas-Warrenton Camera Club website: go to www.mwcc-photo.org and click on Galleries, then go to Holley's name.