

ART

A Framed Tradition

written by heather quintero

There is something about stained glass.



It has an appeal to the senses that is seeped in history. The union of light playing on the heaviness of glass and metal to create something new is unlike any other form of art. Artist Shelly Latriel works to create unique and innovative works of stained glass art in Bedford. Just like the many hues of the glass she uses, Latriel's work is multi-dimensional. She employs stained glass, oils, watercolor and pencil and her latest efforts involve a combination of the mediums.

Latriel hails from Syracuse, New York, and ended up in Bedford about 10 years ago with her husband and then one-year old son. She began working in stained glass when she took a class in the craft at a local studio. "Right out of high school I took classes. I loved it." Her love of the medium and rapid learning curve quickly led to a job. "At that time I was waitressing and not really wanting to do that. As I was working I kept asking "are you guy's hiring? I'll do anything, I'll be a janitor, I'll do your clean up, just to get in the door." It just happened that somebody left and they said 'Come on in!'

It was Latriel's quick techniques with glass that landed her the job. "They were watching while I was doing the class, plus when I went on a trial basis, they timed me on a window and I cut, built, soldered, and cemented a window in a day. Within a year, their artist left and they hired me as the art director. So I did all the drawings for church windows and so on. I ended up working there for about six and a half years."

Latriel has never been a staunch old-school artist. "When I was in Syracuse working, I was taught traditional church window, traditional Tiffany. But I like to design and when I would come up with these ideas, like doing copper foil in the center and then lead aroundâ€¦ I would get 'No, no, no, that won't work'. Now that I am here, I have no boundaries."



Latriel explained how she ended up with a studio in Bedford. "We were driving around town, saw a place for rent and thought 'Why not?' I wasn't working at the timeâ€¦the rent was very reasonable, especially compared to New York. I had never, ever thought about having a shop in New York. ..the rent was so high. I've always done art, even since I was a little girl. So I knew it was something I would do anywhere. This just happened to be a great price, to come here and have a studio. I needed a studio space to show my work and take care of my son at the same time."

Stained glass is a craft of many processes, but it is, according to Latriel unlike other forms of art because, "It is actually more forgiving." Latriel teaches beginners to create their own works. "I've had people come who were not into stained glass and for the whole three to four hours have been joking around 'Oh, this is going to be so horrible.' But you just keep going and they get done and hold it up and say 'oh my god, I can't believe I made that!' I had one student who cut all her pieces too short, there was quite a bit of gap between the pieces, but once you put the tape on and the solder

the gaps disappear and they become negative space. So all you see is the color and the design. I haven't had any student upset when they are done."

There are two basic types of stained glass: leaded and copper. Leaded glass is the more historic method, while the copper method has been in use for about 100 years. According to Latriel, both methods are useful to gain different effects with the glass. The leaded glass is the type often seen in old church windows. Making leaded stained glass is a craft that in many ways is unchanged since its origins in medieval Europe. A piece using the lead method will give you "straight lines... the lead is only so wide, so it gives a crisper, sharper look, with really clean, even lines." Lead glass is the method which has been in use since medieval times and is often seen in church windows where it was originally used to present a "poor man's gospel."

Latriel enjoys lead work but admits that it is more difficult, messy and time consuming. "Lead work is not really something you would want to do in your basement," she states, and is cautious about using lead and wears gloves and makes other safety precautions when working with the medium.

The copper method was made popular by Tiffany and is used in pieces which require more detail than is possible with lead. Tiffany's method became popular almost immediately and is widely used in hangings, windows and lamps. This is the method which Latriel teaches and uses most often. "Copper is easy to learn and is much stronger." She enjoys the method because "You can keep much more detail because you can keep your lines thin."

"Stained glass breaks away. It is a craft, not an art. This is why it has been challenging and somewhat difficult to combine the two forms." Latriel has just recently been enjoying the challenge of combining media with the craft of stained glass. She often will sandwich watercolors in between two pieces of clear glass and use the stained glass to complete and frame the painting. The technique may be too innovative for purists to readily accept. Latriel tells how she had created and submitted several pieces for an art show. "They questioned them (the art works) and ended up not accepting the pieces because they were not framed traditionally."

"My challenge is to combine my fine art with my craft and show something completely different." Latriel recently completed a piece integrating found glass from an old chapel window in Lexington. She used the found glass with other stained glass in a piece which pictures the old chapel. She painted trace lines on clear glass and then used a watercolor of the church behind that to give the piece a multidimensional look. She says, "I think I am putting something out there that is different than what you can find anywhere else."



Shelly Latriel often adds painted elements to the glass as she did in a large window featuring a Madonna. The piece has stained glass face, hands and toes. Learning the techniques to paint on the glass was fairly simple for Latriel. "I didn't find it hard. You sort of play with the medium and find out how it works." In one of her works featuring roses, Latriel painted the center of the roses using watercolor and then completed the rest of the piece in stained glass.

Latriel says that her favorite piece is usually the most recent one she has done. Currently her favorite is a large round hanging done in various hues of purple. "The center is mouth blown glass." Latriel then used shades of purple glass fitted around the blown piece and joined it with copper foil.

Her largest project to date has been a desk front constructed of stained glass panels for a local resident. "That was a rush job," she states. "It took me about a month including ordering the materials." The desk was constructed of three panels. "It took me a week to build the first panel and then another week to build the last two. I worked seven days a week on it."

Most of Latriel's work has been by commission for private homes, but some of her work is on display around the area. You can see her work at Melinda's on Church Street in Downtown Lynchburg as well as Stones and Bones at Graves Mill and Artfully Framed at Smith Mountain Lake. Shelly Latriel's studio is called SER-art and can be found on North Bridge Street in Bedford. Her artworks are also viewable on the web at <http://www.serartgalleryandstudio.com>.