

# Dennis Brady Glass Art Growing Bigger in All Dimensions

by Colleen Bryan

Photography by Jason Brady

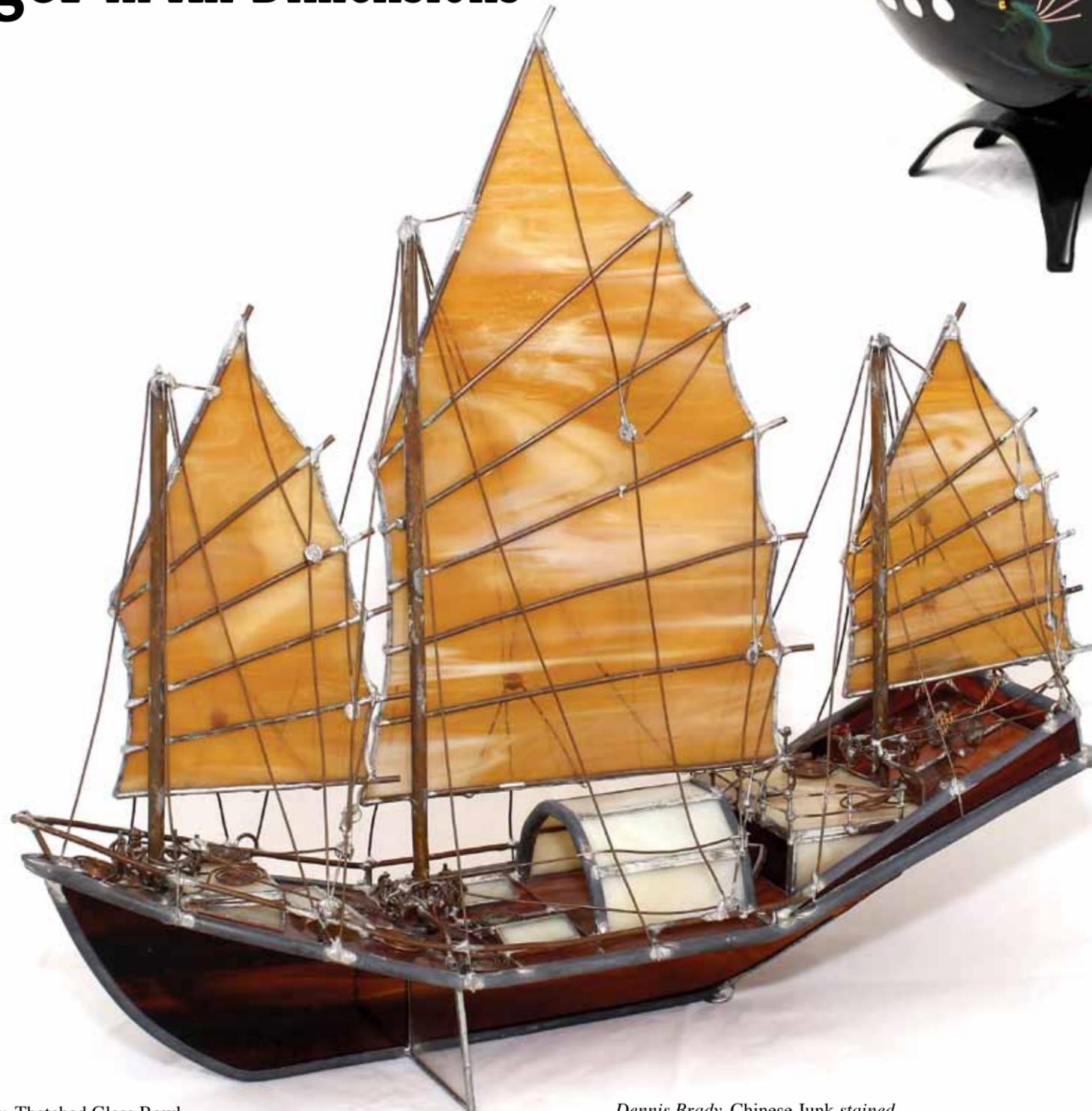
Dennis Brady of Victoria, British Columbia, lays no claim to a particular talent at reading the art market. The glass artisan says easily, "I'm so good at guessing what will sell that now I only get it wrong four times out of five. You can make something ugly and it sells immediately, or something lovely that nobody buys. I've entered more than 100 craft fairs over the years, and you develop a thick hide." But the longtime entrepreneur, retailer, and glass educator experiments, observes, and comments on what he sees across the glass art market, and it is clear that he finds it exciting terrain.

Brady notes that the market for finished glass art is very solid. But whether people are selling art or T-shirts, they cannot earn a comfortable living by selling the same thing everyone else does. Success requires that an artist be inventive and innovative in both the concept and the execution of the finished piece.

"Artists generally don't recognize the differential value between design and workmanship. In every field—technology, architecture, music, or visual art—it is the designers who are the big income earners. A lot of artists can't seem to come to terms with the reality that a really fine rendering of an existing idea is not as valuable as a unique design. They don't get credit for the design. And while technique or workmanship may be exquisite and help a piece sell, fabricators won't be paid as well as designers. High-quality craftsmanship is wonderful to behold, but the marketplace always rewards the composer, designer, or inventor—the person with the new idea."



Dennis Brady, Thatched Glass Bowl, created with stringer made from a virtigraph melt, 12" diameter.



Dennis Brady, Chinese Junk stained glass model, 16" tall x 18" long.



Dennis Brady, Dragon Trio bowl, made with kiln formed flashed glass (fusing iridescent clear, transparent green, and black glass). The dragon pattern is sandblasted through the layer of black glass to expose the green glass beneath. This "Kilnformed Flashed Glass" technique was invented by the artist.

## Loss of the Middleman

Brady believes we live in a time when the market for art has never been greater. The Internet allows people to see what is out there, unrestricted by the inventory of a particular local gallery or gift shop.

Across industries, middlemen of all sorts are falling away. Individual artists increasingly recognize that they don't need galleries and agents to sell their art. Much work is moving from individual artists directly to consumers. The losers in this evolving construct are the art galleries.

Dealing directly with consumers may be a good business model for wholesalers as well, as they try to position themselves in a shifting marketplace. But Brady says he is ethically repulsed by the ways that some manufacturers and wholesalers are lowering the thresholds for bulk purchase discounts, opening up retail outlets and buyers' clubs, setting fee structures around technical advice, and generally putting themselves in direct competition with the small retail shops that supported them for decades. "Bad ethics is bad business. You can't get away with it for very long." He is pleased, however, to see other glass manufacturers going in the opposite direction with tighter requirements. As these manufacturers strike alliances and collaborate to gain the edge in consistent quality, variety, and price, he predicts they will command greater customer loyalty going forward.

Brady tries to keep ethics at the center of his own business relationships. "Only do business with people you trust, and do business in a way that people will trust you. You can play the short game or the long game, but to play for the win, build relationships you can trust and rely on." The caliber of businesses can be judged by how they deal with their customers and their partners when things go wrong and times get tough.

*Dane Brady, HMS Nonsuch stained glass scale model from the plans of an armed frigate operated by the Hudson Bay Company, complete with leg cast canons and kiln slumped glass sails, 18" tall x 18" long. Design and pattern by Dennis Brady for son Dane, the family boat building specialist.*



*Dennis Brady, Glass Weave Tray with matching stand, 12" long x 8" wide.*

### **Innovation**

Brady accepts the fact that the art glass industry is enormously competitive but wastes no time bemoaning the cheap goods that are coming out of Asia. "I think that is the best thing that has happened in the modern glass industry. For a long time, glass artists just coasted by on the wings of a couple of good innovators. Now we can't do that. I think this is a great time for people going into the glass industry, because there is a true renaissance, an explosion of glass innovators around the world, and the environment demands that artists be creative."

Referencing two opposing worldviews and the different economic views they generate, Brady shares: "Those who see the market as a fixed-size pie fear competition. Others believe that when you expand the market, everyone benefits. The former feeds a protectionist stance, while the latter supports an expansionist one. I have gotten a lot of support over the years because of my commitment to support and expand the whole industry for all of us."

The Internet has become an idea generator, since new techniques are now immediately and universally available. "Almost a third of the techniques that we use on a regular basis didn't exist five years ago. For example, freeze-and-fuse builds off of the old *pâte de verre* technique of mixing glass powder into any gummy organic material. The new innovation allows the artist to build three-dimensional pieces without the need for high-temperature molds. A guy figured out how to put the glass powder in a candy mold with water and freeze it. Then he popped it out of the freezer and into the kiln where the water steams off, forming a cast of the original shape. The moment he figured out that it worked, he posted the technique on the Internet. I know that when he first posted it, he was accused of misleading people and had to demonstrate its viability. But as he did, it was out there for all to use."

That innovation fed the work of new artists such as Heidi Eriksen, who works from Stavanger, Norway, to cast molds of zippers and delicate cast glass flowers and leaves. Similarly, rollups combine fusing with glassblowing to produce a huge variety of designs. "The basic techniques, which in themselves are revolutionary, quickly spread to people all over the world. They foster an integration of techniques in new and unusual ways. In that way, knowledge of glass art expands like blowing up a balloon, getting bigger in all dimensions at once." **GA**

*Find more information on the many avenues Dennis Brady uses to teach others the art of creating in glass in the September/October 2014 issue of Glass Art.*

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