

Heart of glass

Fused-glass
artist Verena
Daniels

By Mike Trippitt

“I’m a good old Suffolk girl,” says fused-glass artist Verena Daniels from her studio in the heart of Felixstowe’s artists’ quarter. Her home county, its coastline and countryside inspire her work.

“Because I have always lived by the sea, I have always enjoyed looking out to sea, looking at the colours of the sea. And being in Suffolk as well, it is definitely about light and sky.”

Although a proficient painter in oils and acrylics, her first real interest was ceramics. She says she found three dimensional art and pottery very practical and wonders whether “it is in my genes”:

“My parents were always very hands-on. My Mum was a great sewer and embroiderer. My father was similar; he was great with wood. They were very practical people. I think that is why I veered towards ceramics. Fine art was a bit highbrow. I could never quite relate to that terribly well.”



Verena became a competent ceramic hobbyist, but a chance meeting with former school friend Pat Todd led to a reunion that changed the course of both their lives.

As their friendship rekindled, they embarked on a City and Guilds in Art at Suffolk College together. Three years later, in 1998, they enrolled on a degree course at Colchester Institute. Verena recalls that

they were both “in their fifties” when they became undergraduate students and smiles as she describes them as “slightly mature!”

It was not easy to combine the commitment of learning and progressing through the course as a mature student, with the routines and demands of a busy family life. Verena says that studying with a friend was a great benefit and “being in it together” was a big factor in her success:

ABOVE: Verena Daniels

LEFT: Some of her work in the kiln.



"We just supported each other. We had deadlines; we had pressures to present work or complete work. You do it differently, but you know you have these pressures, and we were sharing those pressures."

When speaking of her motivation to complete a degree Verena wells up. She says that from the age of 11 she had always wanted her own studio in which "to do her art, whatever that may be." But she says that for family and financial reasons that had not been possible:

"So I suppose in the back of my mind, I'm thinking if I gain a degree, if I get this far, then it will give me some sort of 'I want my own space; I can do this'. 'This is not just a hobby, this is not something I'm going to do in my back garden'."

With passion she adds: "This is something I am going to do!"

The breadth of Verena's studies gave her opportunities to see art both in the UK and abroad, talk to other

“ Verena's glass pictures, sculptures and bowls capture the light, the mood, and the essence of county life.

artists and to explore new media. From these experiences, she says, she "formulated the idea of what I did actually want to do". Her interest and expertise in working with fused glass was born.

On Saturday 6th October 2001 Pat and Verena opened their first studio and workshop in the building adjacent to where she is now. It was called



MAIN: Verena in her studio

LEFT TOP: Jars of glass 'frits'

LEFT BOTTOM: Work on display in her studio



Pat had both, in separate ways, got a bit of money. We were able to think that we may possibly buy the property. So we all got together in a pub, where all big decisions are made."

They talked it through and decided to go ahead. The building was purchased and Reunion Gallery opened its doors in May 2002.

In seven years Verena Daniels had transformed herself from shop assistant, mother and hobby ceramicist to a professional fused-glass artist and gallery owner.

For 10 years Verena and Pat loved exhibiting their own work in the gallery and promoting the work of many local artists, some of whom Pat had spotted as up-and-coming at Suffolk College. But it closed in 2013 leaving them to concentrate on their own work. They remain close friends.

So the room that was once the gallery is now

Verena's studio. The space she longed for from childhood.

In one corner the £3000 kiln, capable of heating and fusing glass at over 800°C sits with its door open, the

latest creations laid out tidily on the kiln shelf.

Jars of glass frits (small pieces of coloured glass) stand on shelves like candy in a Sweet Shop. Plain float glass, reflecting light like a mirror, lies alongside work in progress on her workbenches.

From her studio, Verena is constantly creating new ideas and developing new techniques and designs:

"There's always something that keeps you on your toes and makes you think you haven't quite cracked it (pardon the pun)."

She says these ideas and designs do have to come from within her: "It has to come from where you are. There has to be a certain element of personal observation."

Verena's glass pictures, sculptures and bowls capture the light, the mood, and the essence of county life. Views of sailing yachts and simple coastal scenes, sit comfortably with images of sheep farmers working and working horses ploughing. Crisp straight lines in pictures of container ships and Felixstowe docks contrast with subtle curves of billowing sails and swifts in flight.

Reunion Studio Felixstowe is Verena Daniels space, her domain. She lives and works within its walls, but her fused-glass artwork reflects her love of Suffolk's great outdoors.

■ **Reunion Studio, 36 Gainsborough Road, Felixstowe, IP11 7HR. 01394 273366. www.reunionstudio.co.uk**

ABOVE TOP, MIDDLE AND BOTTOM: Verena Daniels' work, photos by Douglas Atfield.

RIGHT: Verena's work on display in her studio

Reunion Studio for it symbolised the reunion of two school friends who went on to be art students and then professional artists together.

Early in the following year the premises next door came up for sale. Could they acquire them, expand and create a gallery as well? Verena talked it over with husband Dick, and Pat with husband Mike.

"Sometimes things are meant to be aren't they?" says Verena.

"As luck would have it, Dick and I, and Mike and

