



My love for travel has exposed me to different cultures and they all have an impact



> SOME OF ANJALI VENKAT'S RARE AND INTRIGUING PIECES OF JEWELLERY AND OBJETS D'ART

#### How did you get into the space of glass?

One of my earliest memories is of trying very hard to crack open a round glass paperweight... this being of clear glass with some colourful bits and pieces ...to see what's inside and of course spending hours and hours looking through a kaleidoscope forming seemingly endless patterns and colour combinations. I had decided very young that I would do something with glass. I used to break glass bangles and melt them over a candle flame to make strings of glass and collect every bit of glittering glass, tile or mirror I could lay my hands on.

#### Did you go through any formal training to achieve your ambitions?

I used to buy and read over and over every book on art glass (those being the pre-internet days). My in-laws bought me my first set of tools from the US. With these and a passion for glass, I finally started working with glass in 1995. I love to travel and have attended glass workshops in Perth, Australia, and the Corning Museum of Glass, New York state. I have witnessed glass blowing in Oslo, Norway and have observed glass masters at work in their domain in Murano, Italy. In glass, as with most things, there is no end to learning new and innovative techniques.

#### How is glass as a medium to work with?

Glass is wonderful! If one thinks about it... it all goes back to sand. Yet the final products can vary from a humble glass bangle to a gorgeous Tiffany lamp to a piece of avant-garde furniture. It is a tough medium to work with because it is so fragile and when heated it seems to have a mind of its own. To control glass in its different states and to shape it as you want is the challenge. Working with glass is always an experience, be it cutting a simple 10-piece sun catcher or a 250-piece lampshade or a four-layered fused pendant. I like to combine different techniques to make my pieces. The only issue is that glass does not always behave the way you want. Cutting a sheet of glass exactly to the shape one wants is difficult and then when one takes it to 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit, all sorts of things happen. It sometimes gets deformed, changes colour, does not fuse properly or simply cracks. I have taken hours to assemble patterns and designs to fuse them, only to have them turn out as misshapen blobs. Of course when one sees the final

outcome — a piece of well-made glass jewellery in all its glittering glory or a gorgeous lamp — it's all worthwhile.

**Do you feel you are in the minority as a glass artist, as opposed to artists who work with other mediums?**

In India, studio glass artists are in a minority. Maybe because of the cost of raw materials, the equipment required and their availability. It is extremely time and labour intensive. A cold fact is that when money is involved, art sometimes suffers. Art glass jewellery is fragile and to people's minds its value does not compare with the intrinsic value of precious metals. I personally enjoy the science behind the art; following the rules and then breaking them to give a new twist to my work.

**As an artist, where do you draw inspiration from?**

Inspiration comes to me in flashes...it could be anything, the play of light and shadow on leaves, the iridescent wings of a dragonfly and of course colour... Kanjeevaram silk sarees, pottery, block prints anything. My love for travel has exposed me to different cultures and they all have an impact. I basically dream of glass. I could start with deciding a colour combination, then figure out if it would suit a lampshade or a candle shelter. Sometimes a sheet of glass is the inspiration itself. I love including organic materials in my work. A slice of agate could decide what I do with it.

**What exactly does an Anjali Venkat piece of jewellery entail?**

My jewellery is made by melting up to four layers of glass — these being of different colours and textures. I cut wafer-thin shards of Dichroic glass into intricate shapes inspired by nature and fuse them onto a glass base. Once I decide what I want to do, I draw the pattern on paper. The different sheets of glass are hand cut to the shape required. These are then assembled either by copper foiling each piece and soldering them or by fusing them in a kiln. Sometimes I use a method called 'draping'. The fundamental behind this being that if you heat a sheet of glass long enough and hot enough it becomes molten and will start bending. This can be controlled and one can achieve a wonderful draping effect. I love making things that are used and appreciated everyday and can serve multi-purposes... draped containers that serve as vases, lamps or penholders. Little bowls to hold a tea or to serve chutney. Keeping recycling and reusing in mind, I slump bottles to make serving dishes or cheese trays.

**Which is your all time favourite piece?**

My favourite pieces have been the lamp shades that I have made using slices of agates and shells. I pick up interesting lamp bases in ceramic and wood on my travels and try and design shades to suit them. Also some of my jewellery, pendants and bangle cuffs are among my favourites. The designing of finely-cut glass, fusing pieces together, and shaping the molten glass to curve around the wrist is extremely satisfying. I like making birds and tortoises as pendants as they require intricate cuts and layering of minute pieces of glass.

**The most difficult?**

Given the strict rules in the making of my jewellery, these are often the most difficult to make. I have to give intricate cuts;

cut glass to such small pieces that I need forceps to pick them up, layer them up to four layers, transfer them to the kiln and then fuse so as not to let any of the glass shift or slip and maintain the shapes planned. Sometimes things go wrong, but sometimes there are happy mistakes too!

**What do you expect your clients to know before they venture out to buy your pieces?**

One has to remember that my work is glass. However well crafted the final product is, it is fragile. Also each piece is hand crafted. Most people are exposed to the easily available and common 'painted glass', therefore are unable to understand art glass in terms of pricing, details, feasibility and the intricacies involved.

**What is your advice to those who want to learn your craft?**

Pursuing glass is expensive and not for the fainthearted. My



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only advice is to be prepared for loads of hard work... blood, sweat and tears, literally! With tenacity anyone can learn.

**And the agony and the ecstasy of your passion?**

My work gives me tremendous pleasure. Designing and fabricating an accessory for someone or for their homes and to watch their eyes light up as they appreciate the final product is a great experience. Each and every piece at my studio is made by me and that itself gives me a sense of accomplishment.

— P. Mistry