

glass



SUJATA TARAKESAN talks to **ANJALI VENKAT** whose childhood fascination for a kaleidoscope ignited in her a creative flame that makes her produce a unique range of designs in glass today!

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njali Venkat works out of her modest, cozy studio tucked away in Besant Nagar, Chennai, a space where she unleashes her creativity on glass, using the brittle medium to do her bidding by cutting, melting, fusing and soldering with aplomb. She displays her handiwork in her studio under the banner Anjali Design, which she created in 1995.

CHILD'S PLAY

Even as a child, she loved all things that shone and shimmered. Her first tryst with glass happened when she was ten and had a kaleidoscope gifted to her. The almost magical effect of light on glass in the kaleidoscope mesmerised her, from there on she began paying special attention to all things glass like old church stained glass windows...even glass bangles caught her eye! Dexterity and an inborn talent enabled Anjali to put her interest into action. However, aside from her training in commercial art and a few classes in Tanjore art, she never had a formal training in art, preferring to teach herself through trials, errors and practice.

LET THE GLASSWORK BEGIN!

Anjali began experimenting with stained glass in 1995 after observing and studying glass as a medium. It took her just two weeks to learn the rudiments of cutting glass. Her first piece of glass art was a stained glass inset panel for an ornamental table top. She soon discovered that working with glass called for a different set of skills and she admits to having braved a few burns and cuts in the course of attempting to master this 'tough and scientific art', as she calls it. She has attended glass workshops in Australia, Norway and the USA, assimilating knowledge in glass cutting, fusing, glass blowing and more. She soon began creating glass lampshades, tabletops, diyas, sun catchers, candle shelters, trays, etc.



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WEARABLE ART

Says Anjali: "I have been very lucky to have got the support and encouragement throughout as an artist, coupled with some happy coincidences that lead to new avenues of creativity." One such happy coincidence is her wearable art collection.

Making ornaments from glass happened quite by accident, when she was looking for a new accessory to sport for a party and made earrings out of pieces of stained glass. Before she left the party, she had a few orders for glass earrings! Thus came about her extensive wearable art collection that comprises glass earrings, neck pieces, bracelets and bangle cuffs. Bangle cuffs are the latest in this section, where Anjali has hand moulded molten glass to make it curve around the wrist. She is all for experimenting and not averse to using gold, silver and other embellishments to enhance her pieces.

INTRICATE BUSINESS

Anjali loves the challenge of complicated designs and working with small, intricate fragments of glass to realize her creations – a lampshade, a piece of jewellery and so on. "The more intricate the work, the better!" declares Anjali, quite at home with the hard labour that is all part of the game of working with glass. "At least a bit of complexity in designs," she says, "offers more scope for innovation and imaginative thinking, and pushes the challenge rung higher up since it is a high precision job to cut, layer and melt smaller pieces of glass." She simply revels in the textures and hues that are a result of layering and fusing different coloured glass fragments.





To this end, she has recently begun working with dichroic glass. She cuts wafer-thin shards of dichroic glass into tiny designed slivers on nature themes (such as a dragonfly, a tree, a bird), finally fusing them on to art glass to make a pendant or an earring.

"If it's not challenging, then it's not fun" proclaims Anjali.

WALKING THE TALK

Anjali Venkat was never satisfied with being just a master craftsperson. She believes that it is a true artist who works with her heart, mind and soul and that it is passion that takes craft to a form of art. The latest in Anjali Design is fusing a photo image onto glass resulting in a sepia tone image, which is then made into fan lamps and candle shelters.

Art at its most endearing has many a time been inspired by nature. Says Anjali: "What I like to do is include 'organic elements' in my work – like slices of agates (a natural stone). I simply delight in the wonderful patterns and colours that come out through natural elements. I also like to combine glass with sea shells to create a unique piece of art. This involves some delicate handling to retain the shell intact."

"Making functional art out of glass is my forte – platters, tableware, slumped bottles, etc. I am

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quite passionate about adding character to any object (like glass bottles) in an aesthetic manner.”

THE BUSINESS OF ANJALI DESIGN

"There is a phrase to describe the reason why my creations are a success. It's called 'word of mouth'" beams Anjali Venkat. "I have sold my work to kind people from all over the world who have appreciated and encouraged my pursuit..."

Not one to pre-occupy herself too much with the commercial side, Anjali is crystal clear that above all, she needs to find her art satisfying.

Anjali Design's wearable art collection ranges from Rs 500 to Rs 2,000, lamp shades are for between Rs 2,000 and Rs 10,000 depending on the labour, while serving platters are Rs 400 upwards, and the glass diyas are for Rs 100 and above. "There's something for everyone," smiles Anjali. Taking this glass artist's work to a grander scale are the large, elaborate window panels she creates for residences.

Every year, before Diwali, Anjali Venkat holds a three day exhibition at her studio. She makes every exhibition special by adding some attractive products with at least a tinge of exotic in them like hand bags and other accessories. The studio is a designated space for her 'glassy pursuits' and she conducts classes and workshops there too.

Her website is www.anjalidesign.com