

# Helene Boyer

After a successful career as an educator in northern Tasmania, Helene began the journey of a self-taught glass artist and has established an ongoing workspace at the Tin Shed Artist Studios in Launceston. She is committed to celebrating and valuing the complexity, fragility and beauty of the natural world and to raising awareness of related environmental issues. She has a particular focus on Tasmania's unique marine and terrestrial environments. Her sculptural work combines flame-worked, mouth blown and kiln-fired glass forms with glass paints, clay, metal, found objects, concrete or acrylic. Few glass artists in Australia combine 'pate de verre' (kiln-worked glass) or objects from nature with flame-worked glass. She publishes examples of her working processes and completed works on her Instagram page @hmboyer.



## What underpins your creative life?

My artistic practice is totally grounded in the fact that I am Tasmanian – a proud resident of this heart shaped island at the bottom of the world whose precious natural beauty always inspires. I am committed to celebrating the complexity and vulnerable beauty of our physical environment and I employ forms drawn from nature to comment upon contemporary themes, especially linked to environmental issues.



My chosen medium of glass means that I am drawn to the manipulation of light, colour and translucence. Glass is a unique amorphous material – it can be made liquid, shaped, then achieve solidity and be melted and remade once more.

I was introduced to the techniques of flame-worked glass through glass bead making and although I continue to create glass jewellery, since retiring from working in Education in 2013, I have pursued my preference for communicating through 3D sculptural forms combined with painting and markmaking.

I utilise both soda lime and borosilicate glass to sculpt and blow forms in the flame of a gas and oxygen fired torch before annealing the work in a kiln. I usually add colour or texture to the glass surface through sandblasting and wax pencil or painting and firing with glass paints before utilising the forms in sculptures or jewellery. Sometimes I use the pate de verre technique where small grains of glass and glass powders are layered to make forms which are kiln fired. Sculptural assemblages may also incorporate materials and objects from nature with glass and clay.

An ongoing series over the past few years of 'exotic botanicals' are often captured under glass like the scientific specimen displays of the 19th century. If we do not act on the challenges of climate change, many of our botanicals will become extinct or rare specimens in scientific collections.

## Where do you make your art?

My studio space is a small cordoned off section of the Tin Shed Artist Studios in Russell St Launceston. A large unlined tin structure originally containing auto businesses which began its artistic life as a group pottery business, and now with a community garden alongside, The Tin Shed is a unique mix of

approx 16 leased artist studio spaces (painters, jewellers, weavers, sculptors, ceramicists, printmakers), casual group/individual workshop spaces and highly valued community kiln firing facilities. The opportunity to converse or collaborate with other visual artists is one of the reasons that I base myself there. There are also small areas for 'buy direct from the artist' retail displays near each studio space.

One corner of my studio space at the Tin Shed contains my flame-working benches with torches and tools, stores of glass rod and tubing and oxygen and gas bottles. Adjacent is my small table top sandblaster and compressor. Another corner is set up for table work – colouring glass forms with glass paints or wax pencils, constructing assemblages and for work in progress. The remainder of the studio is taken up with storage of glass forms yet to be utilised and lots of different materials that might one day “come in handy”. Most artists are hoarders to some degree.

I have a small glass firing kiln at home which is used for annealing every piece made at the torch and also for kiln-fired vessels and objects.



### **Where do your best ideas come to you?**

My physical environment, especially the natural environment of my island home, is the stimulus for investigation in most of my work. I am especially drawn to the miracles to be found in “the smaller things” – past and present sculpture series have focused on nudibranchs, native plants, then fungi, lichen, moss and slimemoulds and also orchids. I always seem to return to marine colours, forms and textures though. I cannot go for a walk without noticing the smaller ‘treasures’, constantly taking pics with my ipad, and my sub conscious seems to store these experiences away for future investigation.