

HELENE BOYER, TASMANIAN ARTIST



When The Flow asked me to write about my work, I was at first very humbled and unsure that a description of my self-taught process skills would be worthy of publication. However, glass artists around the world have shown their generosity by sharing their expertise and knowledge online, with institutions and publications enhancing the spread of their information; those offerings have been a major source of learning and inspiration for me, and in turn I hope to show my thanks through this article.

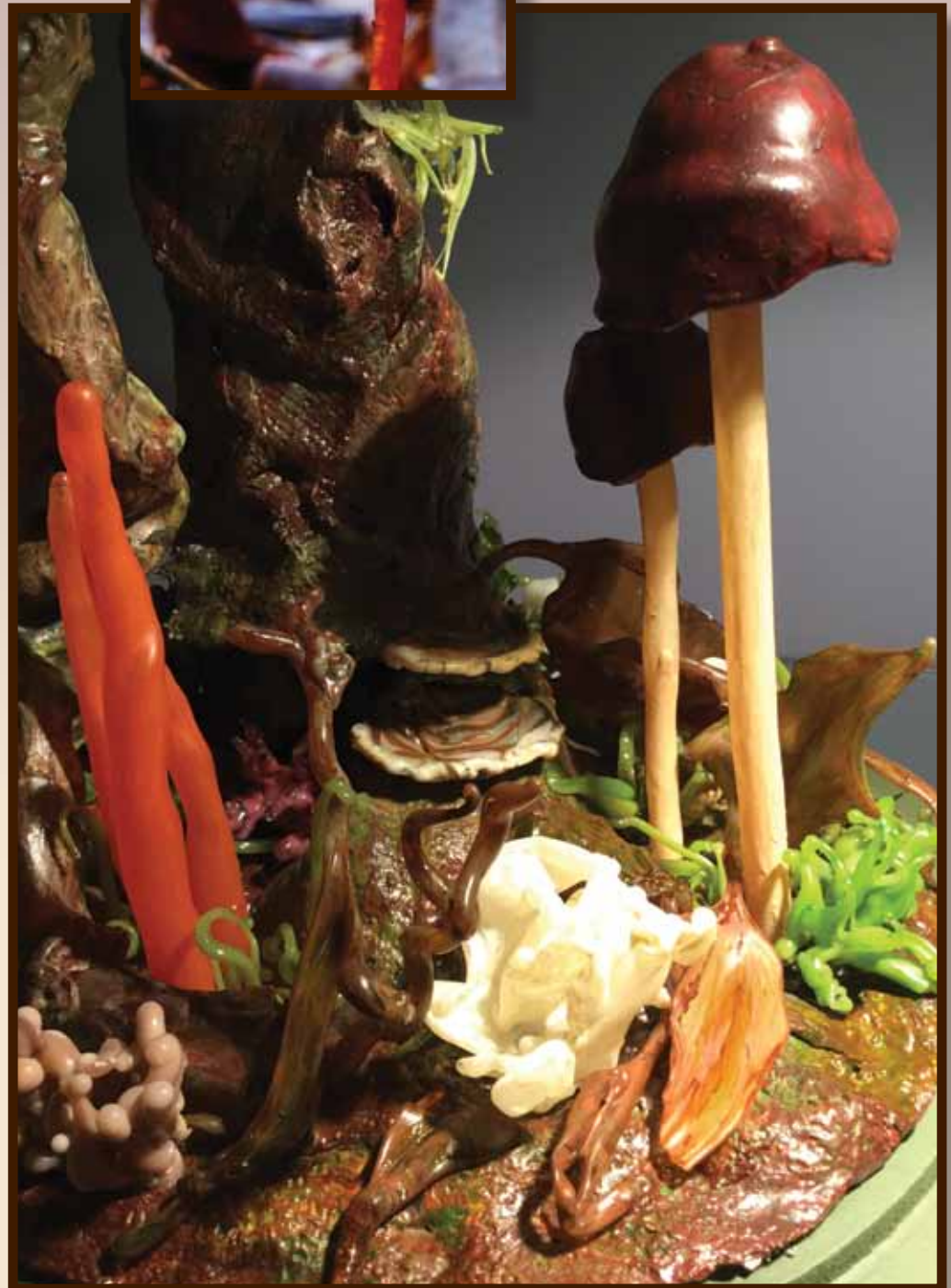
I am fascinated by the smaller things in nature like nudibranchs, anemone, jellyfish, native plants, fungi, lichen, moss, and slime molds. I deliberately challenge myself to work within the constraints of limited flame and temperature and to employ a smaller presentational scale, drawing attention to fragility, beauty, and diversity by enlarging the size of botanical and zoological details for the viewer. My sculptures are not always direct copies of the stimuli; usually I create botanical or zoological forms drawn from my imagination but still evoking actual marine or terrestrial plants or creatures. My “exotic botanicals” are usually captured under

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glass like the scientific specimen displays of past centuries. I wish to remind that if we do not act on the challenges of climate change, many botanicals and the creatures that live alongside them may become rare specimens found only in scientific collections. The creations in my ongoing *Botanica Vulnerabilis* sculpture series are given quasi-scientific names that reference existing organisms, but also may point to possibilities and cross fertilization between terrestrial and marine life forms.

My sculptures are tableau with many elements created from either colored soda lime rods and frit, or clear boro tubing and rods, which are then textured and colored with glass paints or sandblasting and wax pencils. Sculptures may also contain pâte de verre forms alongside flame-worked pieces. My choice of glass material for a work is linked to its suitability with regard to evoking the color, texture, fragility, and energy of the original stimulus and also how it contributes to the overall harmony of the piece.

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I am not an artist who plans a piece carefully and then constructs the elements. As I am also stimulated and inspired by the expressive forms that arise from melting and shaping glass in the flame (often arising from my subconscious), my working process is more organic in nature. I experiment and create a number of different glass elements linked to a subject or idea prior to deciding on which ones will be included in a specific sculpture. My sculptures develop a life and spirit of their own as each glass element is added to the work and further forms are created to build detail or a "habitat."

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The step-by-step construction process of my larger domed sculpture *Fungi Fiesta*

During the long, lonely months of the mid-2020 pandemic lockdown in Australia, I began a sculpture series inspired by the more than 600 fungi varieties found in the wilderness areas of Tasmania. I chose to recreate them in as realistic detail as possible and drew upon photos published on the Tasmanian Fungi Facebook page. I spent weeks carefully sculpting forms in flame, then annealing before painting or coloring each one with glass paints and firing for permanence (sometimes multiple color layers).

One of the first decisions in the process of constructing one of my sculptures is the choice of dome or enclosure, as these dimensions will determine the constraints on size of the finished work. Once the dimensions of the glass enclosure are known, the base earth or seabed and any supporting armature for sculptural elements in each sculpture are created from clay. For *Fungi Fiesta* I chose a commercially produced dome with a wooden base that measured 42 cm x 26 cm. Deciding I needed an armature of a central “tree stump,” I utilised plaster bandages for strength and texture. These foundation components are dried and colored before any glass elements are added, and additional layers may also be painted after the glass elements are installed.

I assemble the sculptures by first carefully positioning the various glass elements within the base, continually checking that the work can be contained within the chosen glass enclosure; for example, the long glass branch lying against the stump needed to be angled so that it didn't knock against the glass dome. Each element is glued into position. I like to challenge myself to extend the dimensions of the final assemblage to the very edges of the available space within its enclosure so that each piece can be viewed from all sides or above. I especially enjoy it when the viewer exclaims about a detail or view that they have not seen until they look further into the work or traverse around it.

As *Fungi Fiesta* grew, based on reference photos and samples that I had collected on forest walks, I returned to the torch and created the mosses, lichens, slime molds, and leaf litter details that surround the fungi on the forest floor and on fallen vegetation.

When completed, *Fungi Fiesta* contained 14 examples of Tasmanian fungi, plus a slime mold, lichen, moss, and ferns created from glass and “captured” in a large glass dome habitat. It resides with a collector in Melbourne, Australia.

I will be exhibiting more fungi sculptures at the Nolan Gallery in Hobart, Tasmania, in November 2021.

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Helene's artistic practice is grounded in the fact that she is Tasmanian, a proud resident of a heart-shaped island at the bottom of the world with unique and precious natural beauty. Her work celebrates the vulnerable beauty of our physical environment, especially botanical forms, and comments upon contemporary themes, especially linked to environmental issues.



Her completed sculptural assemblages are usually very detailed with many small glass elements that have been annealed, colored, and assembled, so the creation of each work can take many weeks.

*Helene has exhibited in group shows in Australia since 2013 and she is represented by the Nolan Gallery in Hobart. She was a finalist in the 2020 national Tom Bass Prize for sculpture. Her first solo exhibition *Of Wet and Wildness* was held at the Cradle Mountain Wilderness Gallery Oct 2020 through February 2021. This exhibition contained 10 sculptural works inspired by Tasmanian fungi and slime molds.*

Helene publishes examples of her working processes and completed works on the Instagram page @hmboyer and her sculptures and jewelry can be found at www.nolanart.com.au.