



Elizabeth Johnson Art Glass

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BIOGRAPHY

I grew up in rural New England as part of a large family. My father is an avid organic gardener and we also raised our own livestock, eggs and milk. I spent many childhood summer hours picking produce, feeding chickens and churning milk into butter. Playtime in the warm weather consisted of imaginary games in the woods around our home. Handling plants on a day-to-day basis gave me a chance to observe them closely, and I developed a love and appreciation for the beauty of flowers, leaves, berries and seeds that has stayed with me ever since.

I have been working with glass since around 1990, when my husband noticed how much I loved glass and encouraged me to work with it as an art medium. I began with stained glass windows. A few years later he brought me to see the Blaschka Glass Flowers at Harvard. Then in 1996 he arranged for me to travel to Murano, where I saw the realistic glass insects made by internationally renowned flameworker Vittorio Costantini.

On my return my husband helped me to locate my first flameworking class, during which I made two glass irises. I was thrilled with the qualities of the molten glass and the potential to make extremely life-like sculptures from it. In 1998 I set up a flameworking studio at home. While my children were launching into adulthood I worked a full-time day job and built my glassworking skills at night. I've been a full-time glass sculptor since 2008.

My current work focuses on lifelike fruits and berries. I first attempted to make raspberries out of glass because I wanted more time to enjoy their beauty, as the real ones get moldy within hours if left in the open air. After many, many attempts I managed to make the first glass raspberry that looked quite real. A friend suggested it would make a beautiful piece of jewelry so I made several more glass raspberries, strung them on a wire and wore them as a necklace. People stopped me in the street to ask how I kept the raspberries from staining my blouse!

Since those first glass raspberries, I have taught myself to make many other berry varieties and have developed them into a line of jewelry. The jewelry and the glass berry sculptures are sold in galleries around the country, and have found homes with other berry lovers as far away as Moscow, Japan and South Africa.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I discovered that, like me, most people have some happy childhood memories of berry picking. Whether it was blackberries, blueberries or gooseberries, we all remember the heat of the sun, the sticky fingers, the smell of the warm berries and the incredible explosions of taste that made all the mosquito bites and thorn scratches worthwhile. Many of us also associate those memories with lost family members. Because I picked blueberries with my beloved Grandmother, they will always make me think of her.

Even people who weren't privileged to go berry picking when they were young love the sensual appeal of berries – their brilliant colors, luscious shiny or velvety skins, tastes and fragrances. Berries speak to us of abundance and healthy pleasures. I want my glass berries to capture those memories and pleasures in a permanent form.