

# Glass proves perfect medium for a colour-loving artist

COLOURFUL is a word which epitomises Deborah Hewertson-Tisdall. It's not just her hair and her clothes — the word sums up her life and her personality too. It's no wonder that her artwork and jewellery centres around exactly that.

She lights up even more when she talks about her work, which is all made from dichroic glass, a fired medium which creates vibrant colours, which change in different lights and from different angles.

Yet Deborah (*right*) has never considered herself an artist — until now. An art history graduate who has no formal training in art itself, she has a firm view of what is art. For her, the glass jewellery she has made for almost 20 years is not it.

"Art lives on its own," she said. "It is not applied. Jewellery has to be worn, but art only exists for itself. It is only art if it serves no function other than being looked at or touched."

Yet, now, she is a fully fledged artist, in her own eyes as well as those of her customers, after moving on to creating glass pictures too, varying from small tile-sized pieces to quite large-scale works, all of which are currently being exhibited at High Head gallery, near Ivegill.

In her attitude to her work, Deborah is probably more "artistic" than most. While she admits to envying those with formal art training, her own lack of training gives her a unique relationship with experimentation. Entirely self-taught, she learns through trial and error and it is this which has led her to try so many different techniques, before stumbling upon glass as her favoured medium.

Deborah has been making jewellery since 1988 when she set up a stall selling what she now fondly refers to as "beads on

sticks" at Newcastle's Eldon Gardens under the name of Gild the Lily. She ran the business for five years, working seven days a week, spending Sundays at the Armstrong Bridge market. However, she got bored with "beads on sticks" and she and her artist husband at the time, Rolf Parker, then of Alston, decided to move to Cockermouth to open a gallery, Skylark Studio.

The couple split about 10 years ago and Deborah met her present husband, Gerald, who is 24 years her senior, while they were singing in a choir together, but Deborah and Rolf remain friends and her jewellery is still sold at Skylark. She also credits a lot to him.

"I learned a lot from him, because he is a trained artist," said Deborah. "I always envy people who have had formal training, but everyone tells me — even artists themselves — that it doesn't matter."

Leaving Skylark forced Deborah to start anew with her business and she and Gerald formed the company Dancing Peacock. They bought a house at Wordsworth Street, Penrith, and Deborah started working from Wetheriggs Pottery, where she became fascinated watching other artisans making glass. The couple now live at Carlisle.

Over the years, Deborah has experimented with many mediums, from enamel to silver, but her time at Wetheriggs inspired her to order a glass-making kit from America. It sat unused for a couple of years, after she and Gerald opened a Dancing Peacock shop in King Street, Penrith, but, after trade slowed, the pair decided to shut up shop and Deborah found she had more time again to concentrate on her work, rather than simply being a shopkeeper. The



glass kit came out of mothballs and her unique relationship with glass began.

"I've tried lots of things, but I love glass and I can't see myself ever working with anything else now," she admits. "It's fabulous stuff. It's almost as if it's alive. If you score it and leave it, it heals itself, because it's like liquid inside."

Dichroic means, literally, two colours. The colours come out when metal oxides are fired into the glass. Results can vary, meaning no two pieces are the same, but this is part of its appeal for Deborah.

"I'm not a control freak," she admits. "I like to be surprised. The glass works like a rainbow and I love that you never know exactly how it will turn out. I produce

them, but the glass itself does something I'm not expecting sometimes."

Her fascination with colour stems from some of her favourite artists, such as Kandinsky and Klimt. Though one evolved to create entirely abstract work and the other was more of a symbolist, colour was important for both and it is this which appeals to Deborah about their work. Her own artwork also ranges from symbolic depictions of the Cumbrian landscape to entirely abstract forms exploring colour and depth, which she loves naming. One such piece is *Random?*, the questionmark depicting the irony of the title.

"It looks completely random, but, of course, it is not random at all, as I spend

hours moving about the shapes, deciding where to put everything. I think there is a sense of humour in my work," said Deborah.

She continues to experiment with her work, having just obtained a glass saw, allowing her to create unusual shapes. And for her, the learning curve will always continue.

"My grandfather was a cabinet maker and joiner and my grandmother was a seamstress. I literally learned at their knee," said Deborah. "I remember spending hours in my grandfather's shed watching him tinkering about with things."

Deborah's artwork, clocks and photograph frames are all on display and for sale at High Head until 17th August.