



COURTESY OF ALICE CHENG YUK-FONG

Transparent

Photos and text by Grace Wong

Art

A vivid fish hides under several layers of glass on a plate. Alice Cheng Yuk-fong, a glass artist at the Selling Point glass studio, was extremely satisfied when she proudly displayed her masterpiece and described how fresh the fish looked on the plate.

“You can feel the fish is swimming,” Cheng said with a laugh.

Finding it challenging yet fascinating, glass-lovers revel in the boundless world of the creative medium of glass. To them, the more complicated and unpredictable it is to work with glass, the more passionate they are to do it and to strive for success.

Cheng had failed seven times before she accomplished the plate. “I had to carefully sketch the details of the fish on thin glass. Afterwards, I fired it in the kiln for more than ten hours while checking it constantly,” Cheng said. She regarded these attempts “tiring but satisfying”.

The finished plate contained bubbles and displayed a gradual change of blue colour in between the layers. These unexpected effects, which brought the fish alive on the plate, were “very nice surprises” to Cheng.

Cheng had used a technique called “slumping” to create the plate. This is a process in which artists melt and reshape the glass to create their desired artwork.

Slumping, in which the glass is heated at 750 to 900 degrees Celsius, is considered a “warm work” technique in glass art.

Another example of warm work is microwave fusing. Pieces of glass can be joined together by heating in a microwave kiln. This technique brings fun to those who want to enjoy glass art at home.

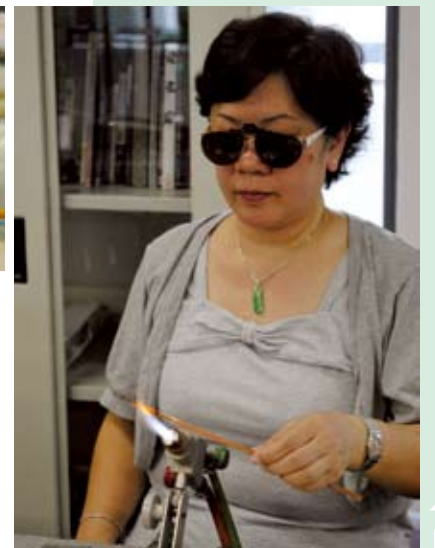
Besides warm work, glass production can also be categorised into “cold work” and “hot work”.

Artists can produce glass creations at room temperature. Glass can be cut and polished to give gleaming facets without any heat. This so-called cold

1 Alice Cheng Yuk-fong melts the glass bottle on a mould by kiln casting, then consolidates it into a plate.

2 Estella Tam is using the lamp working technique to make her small fish-shaped pendant.

3 Glasstudio.HK holds a glass blowing workshop.



“You have to learn not to let it (glass creation) control you, but the other way round.”

work is usually applied in the post-production of artwork.

Hot work refers to glass pieces that are produced at temperatures above 900 degrees Celsius. Examples include glass blowing and lamp working.

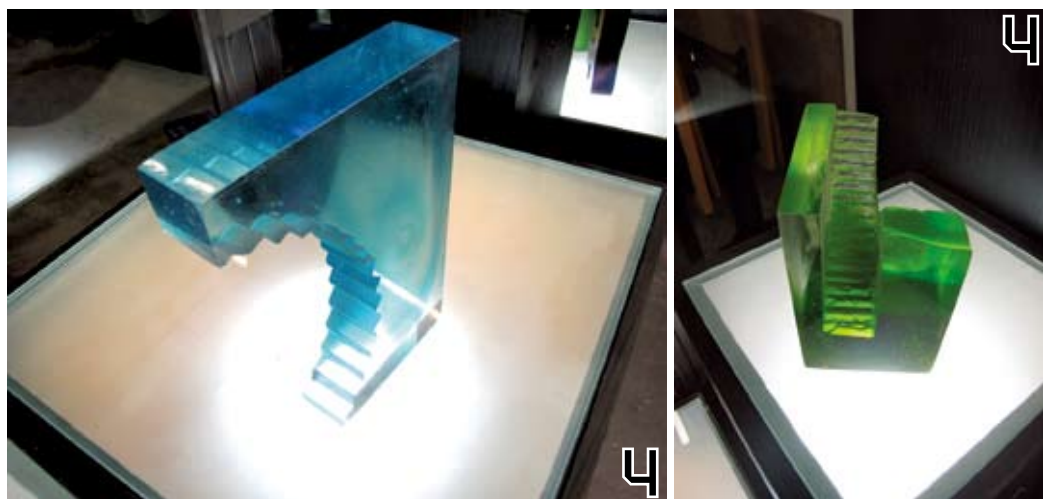
Andrew Lo Kwok-hung, a glass artist at the Ceramic & Glass Studio, regards glass blowing as proof of ability and technique. With the aid of a long blowing tube, artists blow and shape hot molten glass into their desired forms, which are mostly large hollow pieces.

“You can proceed to a higher stage (of glass art) through glass blowing, in

terms of the technique’s variability and creativity,” Lo said. “The whole process is very fast and exciting... Each step has to be done precisely in order to finish a good art piece.”

Estella Tam is retired and has been making glass art for more than three years. When *Varsity* visited Glasstudio.HK, she was working on a small fish-shaped pendant using the “lamp working” technique.

Although she was sweating, Tam focused sharply on the flame of her bunsen burner, trying her best to reshape the fish, which was missing a tail.



COURTESY OF RUBY WOO

4 Glass casting, under the category of warm work, is applied in the series *Stairs*.

5 Ruby Woo adopts a local, rarely-used silk screen printing technique for her masterpieces. It involves a few complicated steps, including the making of a silk screen and printing onto films.

“I would like my artwork to have symbolic meaning.”

“Observing the heat flow is essential in lamp working,” said Tam. “It determines the twirling movement of the glass tubes.”

However, it is not always easy to bring home a completed art piece. Managing and controlling the temperature makes lampworking a challenging technique to master.

“It is very difficult to grasp the technique of glass creation,” Tam concluded. “You have to learn not to let it (glass creation) control you, but the other way round.”

Other than trying to perfect their techniques, some artists have developed new perspectives and ideas about glass art, basing some of their masterworks on their lives.

Wong Kwok-chung is a glass artist at Glasstudio.HK. He has been engrossed in glass art for over 16 years. When asked about his favourite masterwork, he shared with *Varsity* a series of artworks inspired by his living environment.

Wong had once lived in a *Tong Lau* (old low-rise tenement buildings in Hong Kong). His favourite series of artworks, themed *Stairs* was greatly inspired by the stairs of such buildings.

“Stairs are similar to life...As you walk upstairs, the process becomes more difficult since the stairs themselves become sharper and narrower,” said Wong. “We (people) strive for excellence as we walk along life’s path.

But surely, the further along we go, the more obstacles we encounter.”

Another local artist, Ruby Woo, began her relationship with glass after she made her first attempt at glass blowing in 2003.

Woo imbues her work with the identity and memories of her birthplace – things she feels are fading away because of modern development in Hong Kong. She noticed this idea of lost identity while studying in England, where she felt a strong sense of historical culture. “I would like my artwork to have symbolic meaning,” she said.

Woo believes everyone should have their own memories of Hong Kong and she wants people to connect with them through her glass artwork.

To achieve her yearning for the past, Woo has created food-like art pieces printed with images of places. These are places linked to people’s childhood nostalgia, including the old Kai Tak Airport and the Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park.

The “foods”, including double lollies (an ice confection) and egg tarts, symbolise Hong Kong, as this is their place of origin. Woo uses them as a metaphor to show that local memories are “devoured” by modern development. Audiences can “degust” the memory again through her artworks.

Meanwhile, back at the Ceramic & Glass Studio, novices in glass art were discovering the joys and challenges of their new hobby.

Ng Wai-lu was having her third glass-making lesson. She said glass art is unique because of its special feature of transparency.

“I enjoy the comfort glass brings to me,” said Ng. “Other kinds of art creation, like painting, cannot express the same kind of feelings.”

Her classmate, Lee Lai-ying, was also learning about the special qualities of glass. “Glass art is difficult,” she laughed.

Lee was measuring the length of a glass piece that she needed to cut precisely.

“But I find that I can put aside all my troubles when I concentrate on my work with glass,” she said. “It is tough work, but you will surely find it rewarding afterwards.”

Experience the fun of making glass accessories at home

Tools needed:

- Microwave
- Microwave kiln
- Glass tubes
- Pair of pincers
- Glue
- Fusing paper
- Pair of tweezers



1 Cut the glass tubes with pincers, around 5mm per piece.

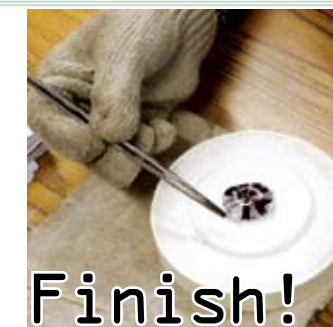
2 Place the fusing paper on the kiln. Use tweezers to align the glass pieces on the centre of the paper.
*Make sure a margin is left around your work on the fusing paper.



3 Use glue to keep the glass pieces in place.
*Make sure the glue is thoroughly dry before putting into the microwave.

4 Fire the kiln in the microwave for 3-5 minutes (depending on the size of your microwave) until the hole on the kiln becomes bright orange.

5 Cool down the product on an inflammable surface for 30-45 minutes with the kiln’s lid closed.



Finish!

