

Fire and Brimstone (2008) – new materials have been harnessed to remarkable effect

Ulvi Pepinova – a unique Azerbaijani artist

Such words as 'unique' are often overused but, in the case, of Ulvi Pepinova, such a description is most appropriate. London resident Pepinova was born in Baku, being brought up and educated in Russia and Turkey, thereafter working in the business environment. In recent years, her focus has been artistic, her unusual medium of expression being glass painting, both of glass panes and glass decorative objects. I met up with Pepinova to find out more:

What or who stimulated your interest in art, and in which media did you originally undertake artistic expression?

The development of my glass painting is relatively recent – I first felt inspired to follow an artistic path around three years ago. However, my love and appreciation of art is a much older story. At a very young age, my dear father nurtured my taste for art by regularly taking both my elder sister and I to exhibitions. He managed to awaken our souls to a genuine interest in the artworks on display. In Moscow, where I was brought up, the Pushkin Museum, Tretyakov Gallery and, most importantly, the ZDH Central Art Museum (modern art), became my favourite places. I spent a large proportion of my childhood and adolescence in these galleries. My strong appetite for art, especially for modern art, was related to the transitional Perestroika era, in which I was involved during my impressionable years. The newly-opened borders with the rest of the world, including the artistic sector, were overwhelming. We were able to view artworks that my parents' generation could only appreciate in books. There was also a revival of artworks by dissident artists.

How were you introduced to glass painting?

I had no specific introduction to glass or glass painting, nor any sudden inspiration that stimulated my desire to transfer visual concepts to glass. I liked the texture of painted glass; its transparency; brightness and glossiness. I just loved it – glass has its own sensual qualities of smoothness, silk and gloss, creating a stunning effect.

I gradually extended my interest in glass painting by reading self-teaching manuals and undertaking a practical general course in stained glass decoration. At the outset, I took childish pleasure in each result, boasting and being reassured by family and friends. Eventually, the house walls could no longer accommodate my increasing amounts of self-expression on glass, and those around me were tired of complimenting me on every occasion. Subsequently, two established artistic friends suggested that I should consider exhibiting the paintings, and that is how my artistic career began.

In order to eliminate potentially prejudiced attitudes, I discovered a simple, yet fundamental, principle that artists should adopt. If you have a passion, it is necessary to achieve expression via your desired medium, and essential to love and cherish the completed artworks.

Which materials did you originally utilise? Which materials do you find the most malleable? How do you achieve the desired texture?

I originally only adopted traditional glass painting techniques, solely using glass paints. However, my passion was for natural minerals, rock patterns and minute intricate structures that re-echo my admiration for images of the earth taken from the air and space. This stimulated my imagination with regard to the materials at my disposal.



Pepinova is a pioneer of glass painting as a medium of expression

PERSONALITIES

In addition to glass paints, I enjoy experimentation with various recently-developed decorative base materials, such as pitches; resins; textured paints; liquid stone; marble, granite and glass granules. I also use flexible stone, comprising a unique extraction of natural stone patterns suspended in a smooth paste, with viscosity akin to paint. I sometimes feel that I am in a chemistry laboratory where I am testing new reactions and awaiting the outcome. Glass is resistant to certain chemical compositions in the materials. However, it can also be flexible and malleable, giving successful results in most cases. In my opinion, glass is a considerably more accommodating material than is generally perceived to be the case.

Your works either feature abstract expressionism or are more figurative. Are they inspired by your homeland of Azerbaijan?

The main influence on my work is my entire life experience, including happy, sad and static moments. Furthermore, my core interests are inspirational. As I have Azerbaijani and Turkish roots, with strong links to my homeland, I am very passionate about Turkic Kilim carpets and Azerbaijani mugham music.

Kilim carpets are manufactured by anonymous tribal women, being highly appreciated in the art world for their unique symbolic visual language. The bright tribal colours, lines and geometrical symbols found in Kilims are brilliant influences on artistic creativity. In my opinion, Kilims and fairy tales have stimulated my love for vivid, colourful, elements.



Glass decorative objects, as painted by Pepinova, can now be found in many social spaces

I also consider music to be an integral element in the creative process. This can be classical, jazz or rock. I consider Azerbaijani mugham to be a wonderful source of inspiration and supremely spiritual music.

You also paint glass decorative objects. Do you find that the aesthetics of each object serve to inspire the design?

Not necessarily – in some cases, the objects dictate a colour scheme, determined by their practical use.

Where have you exhibited? Who are the typical purchasers of your work?

My first joint exhibition, entitled *Vitreous Tales*, opened in November 2008 at St Mary-le-Bow Church in the City of London. My second exhibition took place in March 2009 in Moscow. The most recent show was held in June 2010 at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead, London, taking place in conjunction with a charity concert by Renara Akhoundova, a talented Azerbaijani composer and pianist.

My glass decorative items, such as vases and candleholders, attract a wide range of purchasers. The contemporary design of my glass paintings renders them most suitable for modern residences, lounge bars, and offices, although some buyers live in traditional homes.

How do you see your art developing during the next few years?

I need to undertake more experiments, explorations, and to extend my search for aesthetic beauty. Together with developing existing themes in my work, I have considered designing glass sculptures, working together with the glassblowers and painting the sculptures using a lighting effect, wherever possible. I love the qualities of glass, and the works bring an incredible light and colour to my life.



In Fragment 1: Moving (2010), the use of colour is remarkable

CONTACT

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