

# GLASS ART

For the Creative Professional Working in Hot, Warm, and Cold Glass

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# Lorisdawn Designs

by Colleen Bryan

Loris Nygaard works with light mediated through glass. From her home on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, she gravitates toward small gems and multifaceted crystal jeweled fixtures that capture the energy, then like a kaleidoscope pitch the light across a room. *Glass Art* spoke to Nygaard as she was undertaking to rebrand her Lorisdawn Designs around the slogan, "The Lights that Turn You On."

Nygaard is self-taught, and her work differs strikingly from most other products on the lighting market. "I separated and left Gold River in 2003, and from then on I was a single parent raising my three children alone. I don't go to the cities or to trade shows, so there is little opportunity for other artists or trends to influence my art." Rather, she believes, her relative isolation allows her to pursue her own creative inquiry and to develop a recognizable personal style.

The artist's designs were born of experimentation with form. "I began to develop my signature filigree work by sketching intricate swirling designs, then twisting wire into similar shapes and loving the results. I moved to working with clay and glazes, making coil clay pots at about the time my children were newborns. I eventually applied the same swirling motion to work in glass, creating ornate filigree. Then I began working with rich colors that had so much more impact with magical light behind them."

## The Elements of Her Art

Nygaard works with quarter-inch pieces of glass that are time consuming and difficult to grind. She has been advised that she could produce much more artwork to sell if she would only work with larger pieces, but she demurs. "I've always loved petit point, bangles, and intricate detail, so working with big chunks holds little interest for me. It can be difficult when I am working for somebody else and trying to price competitively, but I cannot just make a piece of art to meet a budget. I have to create something that I feel is beautiful in the end."

A basic copper foil technique is used by Nygaard to construct her lights. "I patina everything black using 14- and 18-gauge copper wire to create my filigree. My work is strong enough that I can just have my glass artwork run up to the top without a vase cap." She buys retro and swag lamps to scavenge their parts and incorporates retro fittings into her designs.

Nygaard twists wire detail, sitting with her pliers on the couch in the same way that some women crochet. "When the kids were young, I was a hockey mom wrapping gems with copper foil on the bleachers as I watched the children play. I have been known to take lamp shades to the beach for polishing." These days she hires someone to wrap the copper foil, and Nygaard keeps drawers full of thousands of gems already foiled and ready to incorporate into her elaborate illuminated art pieces.



*Loris Dawn Nygaard, Tiffany-style tree lamp, 2012, earthy, colored stained glass, handmade links with tassels, unique filigree wire work.*

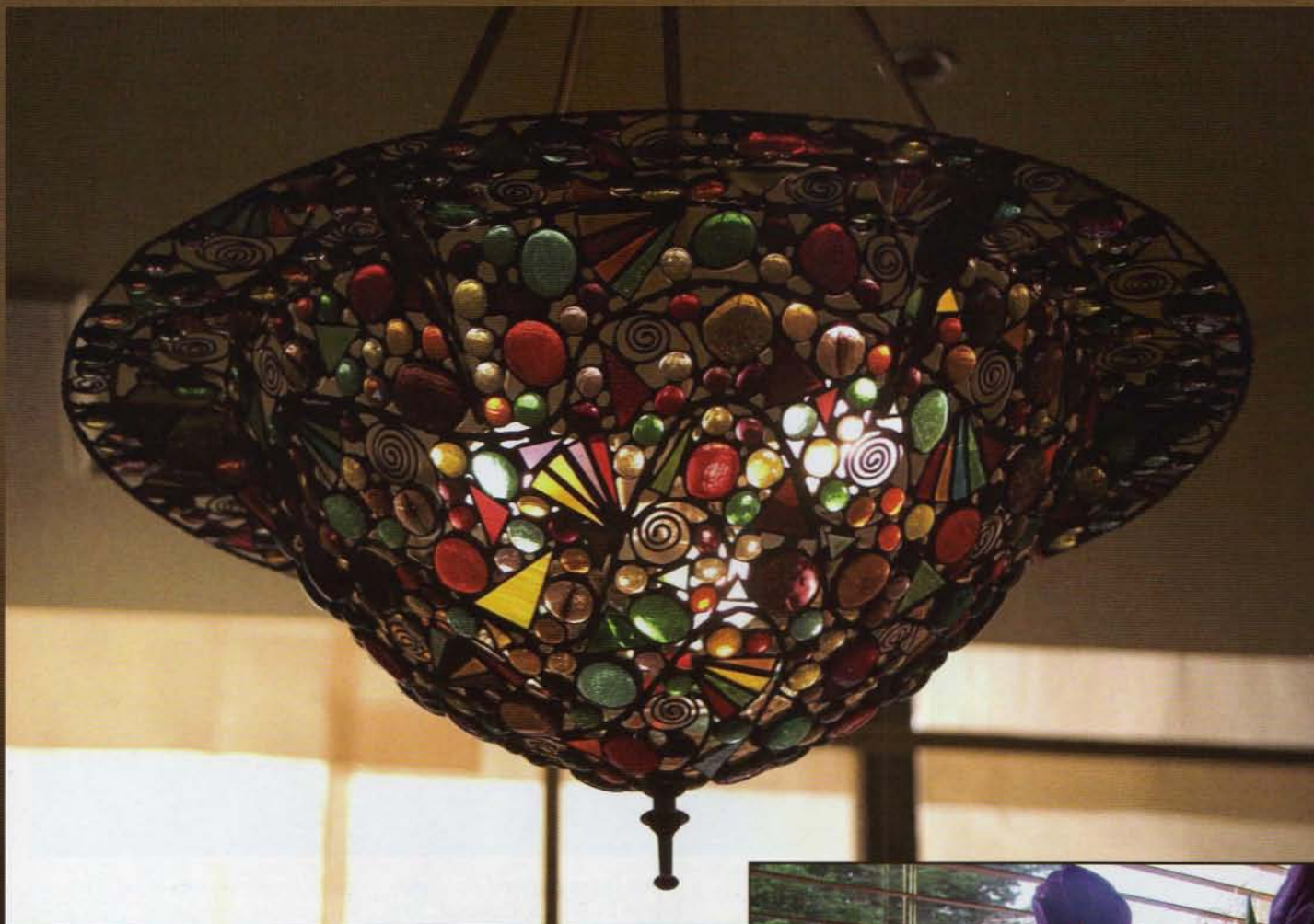
"There is quite a lot of detail on my images that you cannot see with light shining only from behind. I finish off the bottom of a lamp with twisted wire and tiny clustered balls of solder, using steel wool to remove the patina and highlight the silvery detail. There is plenty of negative space. These features may not be cost effective, but they contribute greatly to my satisfaction in creating."

"I know I'm making a good product. I grind the tiniest pieces of glass and wrap the foil tight with perfection. Each link I make for the tassels are soldered closed. When I wax my lights, I use the wax that dries white, which means I have quite a chore to get it all out and buff all around each gem, but that is the way I know I've been thorough. I want each light to last forever."

## Color, Light, and Energy

Nygaard enjoys exploring the therapeutic uses of color and light energy with her work. Eastern medicine practitioners have long used light and color, vibrating at a specific frequency, to bring about physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual healing as each color interacts with the viewer. Determining the kind of energy a client wants to bring into a room is part of the conversation when Nygaard accepts a commission.





*Loris Dawn Nygaard and Sandy Nygaard for Roger's Chocolates (Granville Island, British Columbia, Canada), 2008, colorful glass gems and stained glass. Photo by Audra's Photography.*

The energy of color benefits Nygaard as well as being part of what she brings to her creations. "Whenever I'm feeling down I start choosing colors for my next project. I can feel the vibrations as I pull one color out and substitute it with another, as the colors work together. It is incredible to me. That energy is an integral part of my art and something that only I can do for Loris Dawn Designs. My color choices and combinations are distinctive. I work mostly with stained glass, faceted crystals, and glass gems. The latter limit your color selections. Stained glass opens up the palette of colors available. I use two different suppliers to get the broadest array of color possibilities for my work." Future plans include buying a glass kiln so she can make her own gems and experiment with new custom colors.

Nygaard finishes each commission in a bedazzling, glittery rush of energy. While she confesses to some sadness to let her finished work go, there is also great satisfaction in knowing that something new and wonderful has been born and is opening up room to create again. "I have one standard for knowing that a piece is finished: if the buyer should decide not to take a commissioned work, I would cherish it and be thrilled to live with it."



*Loris Dawn Nygaard, clear crystal glass table lamp, 2010, clear faceted crystal jewels, stained glass, and glass gems, 10" high.*





*Loris Dawn Nygaard and Sandy Nygaard for Strathcona Hotel (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada), 2009, clear faceted glass jewels, glass gems.*

### **Anchored in Place**

Nygaard's town of Comox consists of 64,000 people and sits in the middle of Vancouver Island. The valley enjoys a wealth of regional music and art within a tranquil natural setting. Residents enjoy skiing, hiking, kayaking, and eating healthfully, reveling in the slower pace. Nygaard finds peace walking alone on the beach and credits being in an embracing and comfortable space with allowing her to explore her creativity.

As a single mother, Nygaard places clear priority on being a mom, homemaker, and gardener. She enjoys an evening job as a waitress, which provides steady income and some welcome opportunity to interact regularly with other people. "It is a funky place where they have wonderful artwork that changes every three months. It also serves as my gallery, and I network there quite a bit. I serve people nice wine and food, and I get to be in the public. It is fun to get dressed up and be a lady during the evening." But during the day, every day, she makes her lights.

Nygaard looks ahead to the near future as a time of transitioning roles. Her 16-year-old is still at home, a 21-year-old daughter works in Victoria, and her 24-year-old son in Vancouver is very artistic. "As they grow older and more independent, I have more free time to focus on my artwork, which is the rest of my life. At age 51, I have no desire to do anything else but be a homemaker and a creative artist." She looks forward to buying a downsized home after the children are launched, one with a studio and gallery better suited to her emerging identity, as well as requiring less financial outlay and maintenance than the current family home.

In the meantime, Nygaard works from a garage studio, where afternoon sun pours through the window. "I have a great venting system and take care to avoid the fumes from the flux. I'm always changing my gloves, sweeping up the cut glass, and taking precautions when I work with lead. A 10-inch fan sucks out the air, and two heaters keep my legs warm, which allows me to work throughout the year."





*Loris Dawn Nygaard, crystal mini pendant, 2007, clear faceted crystal jewels, stained glass, glass gems, 4-1/2" square.*

## Trusting the Universe

Nygaard is confident that the universe will provide a steady stream of new work and creative opportunity. "I have complete faith that the work will come. As each job is finished, a new one always comes over the horizon."

A sister, Sandy Nygaard, is an interior designer in Victoria who wanted something "unique and crazy" for a restaurant remodel. She commissioned Loris to make a line of lights for her. While she appreciates Sandy's business, Loris is quick to point out that she does not rely on nepotism for commissions. "My sister doesn't use my artwork unless someone specifically requests me."

Roger's Chocolates in Vancouver commissioned Loris Dawn Designs to create signature lights in its seven outlet stores, the most recent one opening at the Vancouver Airport. "They use my lights in all the outlets and hand out my business card when someone compliments the lighting."

Most of Nygaard's customers are local, and she markets primarily in Vancouver and Seattle, Washington. Most of her work ends up in residential renovations or being used as personal gifts, while about 40 percent are for commercial restaurant installations. She works with a few interior designers.

Should time ever drag between major projects, Nygaard can make smaller pieces to maintain cash flow. "I spent some time making whimsical small gem creatures—ladybugs, bees, frogs, dragonflies, and cats. Stick figure people held balloons, rode bikes, carried hockey sticks, and sat on carpets made of twisted wire and glass. I sold those little creatures at art shows and delivered 20 at a time to galleries and gift shops. If sales of my lighting ever lag, I would be willing to do that again."

## Communicating Art to a Wide Market

Marketing her product is trickier because of both the volume and type of artwork she generates. Nygaard wants enough demand to provide a constant stream of projects but not so much that she cannot handle orders working alone. The filigree design of her gemmed lights fits more naturally into certain design aesthetics than others, creating a marketing imperative to reach specific sectors of potential patrons.

In the past, Nygaard made use of venues that, these days, she would rather avoid. The time commitment for arts and craft shows is considerable, and galleries take a high percentage of each sale. She has submitted her lights to juried art shows but has found that strategy impersonal and unsatisfying, so she will not use it going forward.



"Some customers find me through my website, which I use as my portfolio. That is how I talk to people about how we can create work together." Using the website gives her considerably greater geographic range. "I got a job last year from a Dubai design firm decorating a Marriot Hotel in Azerbaijan. In China and Dubai, people love fancy, glittery things, and my jeweled filigree fits the regional aesthetic. I would like for my art to be known and respected by the eclectic, important people in the broader world."

Other customers find Nygaard through serendipity. She displays her lights and artwork throughout her house and features them in the local restaurant where she works. One client couple interviewed stained glass artists up and down the island before wandering into the restaurant where she works. "He picked up my brochure, liked what he saw, and I was busy with their projects for a solid year." That commission involved creating a three-foot interior window, three pieces of lighting for their bathroom, a chandelier for their bedroom, and another for their dining room. Nygaard anticipates making another chandelier for their hallway during the summer of 2012. All of the pieces invoke a cherry blossom theme, but otherwise the client allowed Nygaard to create as she saw fit.



Loris Dawn Nygaard, Contemporary Table Lamps, 2008, cordouroy glass staggered, frosted white glass interior lamp, 14" x 6".

## Freedom to Create

Nygaard's favorite customers are those who trust her judgment and give her free reign with design. "Beyond an idea or a shape, they don't give me any parameters. When I work for clients who just let me do my thing, I get to elaborate without constraints. That really gets my juices flowing." To some extent, this is because Nygaard's own judgment has proven reliable. "One lady ordered a lamp and chose some colors, but after cutting she wasn't satisfied. After three or four sessions, she finally turned the project over to me. She ended up loving her piece but only after she was able to get out of the way of the creative process."

Nygaard's commissions can be quirky. A different customer wanted a piece of her filigree glasswork for his fish tank. He built a bird aviary outside, and Nygaard built five panels for his birdhouse. Now he is considering a spider web and lacy branches inside a round exterior gate. "He's one of my favorite guys to work with." Another couple in Victoria ordered several pieces, including five-by-one foot filigree cabinet doors. It seems some clients are not satisfied with just one piece.

"I am happily eccentric," Nygaard admits. While her signature artwork uses glass gems and a filigree technique with swirling wire, she has also used china plates and glass in tiny tesserae mosaics. One project involved pressing seaweed and burlap between two sheets of glass and foiling them as part of a patchwork of ceiling panels for a restaurant. Some of the glasses were clear, and some had various hues. Some of the glass panels were smooth, and others textured. "You press seaweed in the same way you dry flowers. It takes about a month for pressed seaweed to dry. The resulting shapes are so organic, and the colors are remarkable." As an added bonus, the experimentation with different media and techniques primes her creative pump for future work.

To new artisans, Nygaard feels comfortable recommending the course she has taken. "Experiment. Try different media, techniques, and ideas. Play. I would encourage anyone interested in becoming a creative artist to go beyond the pattern, to expand an edge. Doing so has opened up a world of creativity for me."

"My dad calls me a hummingbird," she muses. "I'll be in one corner fluttering my wings fast and furiously, then off to someone else. Nothing I make is ever the same. And by being true to this central part of my nature, I find joy in the glass art I make."

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*Look for **Subscriber Benefits** coming to **Subscribers Only** via links in upcoming e-mails from Glass Art. This **Bonus Content** will include information on how Nygaard is reaching out to a broader audience through an upgraded Web presence.*



Photo by Boomer Jerrit

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