

Emergence of an Artist—Gail Crosman Moore

by Christine Hansen

Photography by Gail Crosman Moore
and Charley Freiberg

Riveting use of mixed media, exquisite attention to detail, and inspiring combinations of color are hallmarks of Gail Crosman Moore's work. Known for her striking borosilicate beads and her beaded embellishment of felted wool, it may be surprising that Gail launched her trade show career making handbound books.

Educational Beginnings

Gail studied horticulture in 1975 and 1976 at Penn State. Then in 1990 she earned her BFA from Massachusetts College of Art, where her studies included metalsmithing, glassblowing, and ceramics. "That's where I blew glass and really got the bug. I loved the process, but the large scale was not for me, nor was the concept of keeping a furnace full of hot glass. When I was finished at Mass Art, I thought working hot glass was over. Flameworking was not part of my education, so the possibility of working glass on a smaller scale, as with a torch, never entered my mind."

After graduation, Gail wound up creating handbound books, designing a new line each year and displaying and selling orders at American Craft Council shows. "Though it was nice to be able to schedule the pace of my work, I really was not inspired. Buyers placed orders on the line that I designed, and I'd go back to the studio and just make, make, make, like a manufacturer. That grew old quickly."

The Siren Call of Lampworking

In 1995, courting artistic and professional burnout, Gail complimented a friend on the bead she wore. "She said, 'I made that' and explained the process to me. I knew it was what I wanted to do, working with hot glass in a home studio with no furnace." Soon after that, Gail took a lampworking class from Kristina Logan.

"I'd drive home from the class and look at my beads while I was driving and think, 'This is dangerous. I'm half concentrating on the road and half still back melting glass.' I bailed on the handbound books, finished up the orders on my desk, and tooled up for a lampworking studio."

Gail's glass work sold almost immediately. A couple of months later, a friend who owned a bead store asked if Gail wanted to do a bead show in Providence, Rhode Island. "I said 'Sure!' and I did really well there. It was perfect. It really validated that I was doing the right thing, so I kept doing it." Thirteen years later, Gail is still at it, creating and selling her beads, jewelry, kits, and materials, and teaching felting and embellishment—and sometimes glass—classes nationally and internationally.



Combining Media

As a mixed media artist, Gail works primarily with borosilicate glass, precious metal clay (PMC), and felting and embellishing wool roving. She combines these elements to create fluid, organic pieces that reflect the inspiration she finds in nature. "Glass is mesmerizing and therapeutic, because you need to pay it full attention and be right there. You can't daydream or look around. It demands your complete concentration."

"PMC is a miraculous discovery," explained Gail. "The elastic nature of it really appeals to me, and with heat, it turns to fine silver. It's amazing, and it answers my need to get whatever I'm working on out of the second dimension and into the third. It's such a direct use of material, I really respond to that. I feel the same way about the felt. There are not many steps, and with felt you can make your own house."

In 2002 Gail applied for and received an Art Renewal for Teachers grant, which provided her the resources to learn all she could about felt. "I work the felt much like I use clay. I love clay, and the felt can have that volume, but without the weight. Too, it's much more forgiving, and the matte surface is great to embellish."

One way that Gail uses felt is to create floral lariats, embellished with her own boro beads and seed beads, resulting in stunning neckpieces. "It's the juxtaposition of felt and glass whatever I'm putting on the surface, the opposite, the matte, the shiny, the hard, the soft, the cold, the hot—all of those things create visual excitement."

Gail is also excited about artistic collaboration. She's worked with Karen Flowers since 1998 and more recently with Stephanie Sersich, Michele Goldstein, and Kate McKinnon. "I really like the notion of collaboration. One head's good; two are better. And on and on it goes. I think collaborating is a great way to go for excitement, to get out of your own way, the give-and-take. I think everybody should do it. It's enriching all the way around."



Entrepreneurial Challenges

Running a business is challenging, and even more so when you're an artist. Gail confesses that her business has evolved over the years without a business plan. "As with many artists, the business part is painful. I am so busy — and happy — with the making of my work, that overview analysis is the last thing I pay attention to." One of Gail's biggest challenges is time. In addition to creating and teaching, she does all of her own packaging and marketing.

Another big challenge is the physical stress of using her hands to create her art. "My hands are giving me trouble," says Gail, who suffers from arthritis. "I don't know what I'll do if I ever have to cry 'uncle.' In the meantime I take breaks and stretch. That's probably a really positive vote for working different materials. Doing bead embroidery every day just kills me. I have to move on to something else and try to keep different parts of me active."

While there have been transitions, such as when Gail switched from books to glass and when she received the grant to learn about felt, most of her career has consisted of plugging along. "It's like,



what area of my inventory or my development is screaming the loudest?" Her multifaceted approach means she must produce beads and jewelry, assemble kits, and plan classes. "I plug along, basically putting out the biggest fire first, and once in a while if I have a great idea that needs attention, I say 'the hell with the fires' and do something new."

If she could, Gail would happily make glass beads every day. "With a good book on tape, I am in heaven!" Embellishing felt demands her attention as well, though. "Given the time, I love to embellish the felt. The sad part is that there is just no way to speed up the process, and it can tend to be obsessive work, so I put other things aside to make it happen."

Finding a Personal Vision

Gail pays little attention to style trends, seasonal colors, or what her competition is up to. "I need to stay true to myself. I don't look at what the competition is doing, because I don't want to be influenced. I just keep my head down and do what feels right," she says. "I don't use words much or often, so it's important to me to make tangible these thoughts, vignettes, whatever you want to call it. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to do any of this. All you need is your vision. I think it's important to articulate that vision, whether it's in words or in a body of work that says what you want it to."

Gail exhibits her work nationally at many shows including Bead and Button, Convergence, Art and Soul, the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show, and Bead Fest. She's currently preparing a submission to the Saul Bell competition and working on ideas for the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show. Additionally, Gail's work can be found in the Glass Museum in Kobe, Japan, and at the *Possibilities* exhibit hosted by the Sandwich Glass Museum.

Attending shows is an integral component of Gail's business strategy. "I don't like the way my beads look online. I sell a bit on the Internet, but I prefer to have a lush and thorough presentation at a show, which just can't be rivaled on the Internet. Also, going to shows gives me a lot of information from meeting the people who want my product."



Looking to the Future

What does the future hold for Gail? She'll be teaching in Mexico, Switzerland, and England during the first quarter of 2009. She adds, "I'd like to do artist residencies in foreign lands. No place in particular. I just want a perspective from another country, a different way of looking at how people live, away from the distractions of the American trap of acquisition. I'd love to go someplace where there's more connection with the land and the people, maybe not quite so Westernized. I can't think of a sweeter space to occupy than to be able to dedicate a big chunk of time to develop new bodies of work."

Though she's been featured in numerous exhibitions and publications, Gail hesitates to list her achievements. Instead she says, "My personal achievement is to have found a way to work within my parameters to find meaningful work that feels honest and true and offers some insight into what I find important. This notion of emergence and an inner life force are what spur me on."

Visit www.gailcrosmanmoore.com to find more of Gail's work.

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