

# CORE CREATIVITY

ARTIST CARLYN RAY BRINGS CREATIVITY TO CLIENTS AND UNDERSERVED YOUTH

BY ALAENA HOSTETTER



Imagine using art as a teaching tool: inspiring young people not just to create, but to achieve things previously unimaginable in their worlds.

That's what Carlyn Ray has been doing for the past five years with her organization Art Reaching Out (ARO). The 501(c)(3) nonprofit partners with

schools and organizations that cater to underprivileged youth and teach STEAM subjects (science, technology, engineering, art and math). The curriculum is augmented by Ray's beautifully crafted glass creations that they create at her studio in Dallas' Design District.

ARO projects include instal-

lations with Big Thought, Girls Inc, Irma Lerma Rangel Young Women's Leadership School and upcoming installations with Cristo Rey Dallas College Prep and Café Momentum.

Laid out on a workshop table this past summer was a soon-to-be-installed creation by the adolescents who staff

Café Momentum. The downtown Dallas café trains and hires at-risk youth who've spent time in juvenile detention facilities, rehabilitating them into adults with marketable skills.

Ray brought them to her studio to create a one-of-a-kind piece. They used hot glass to burn designs into the wood backing that the glass will hang on, pulling the molten glass from the fiery inferno that burns 24/7 in the workshop.

Ray giddily reaches for her cellphone to play a video of one of Momentum's employees, who'd initially been afraid to touch the glassmaker's tools or go near the furnaces. On the screen is a young woman, about 16 years of age, tentatively grasping a steel pipe that's dipped into the vat of molten material. She is visibly concentrating as she brings a ball of radiating molten glass toward the workbench, then she gleefully turns toward the camera once she's finished the task without a hitch.

It's spiritual moments like these that Ray lives for. "I knew glass would be my path, but I also wanted to help out with kids who didn't have the family and support that I had," she says. "I wanted to provide an



Photograph courtesy of Carlyn Ray Designs



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1. Gathering glass out of the 2,100-degree furnace.

2. *Shaping Our Path* at Café Momentum with Carlyn Ray, the artists, and Chef Chad Houser.

3. Making a paperweight for their art piece.

outlet and safe space for kids, especially young women."

The artist, who apprenticed under renowned glass artist Dale Chihuly (and even has a framed photo of the two hanging near the front door of her shop), says that people see the spirituality in glass; it's made from sand or dust, shaped with our breath, and is one of the only materials that holds light.

"People who are spiritual tend to resonate with that. We involve all of the elements: fire, water, air, earth," she says. "Creativity is both a sacred space and a link to a higher power—to God, a higher vibrational level—so it's our passion to share that."

To that end, she holds classes and workshops at her studio, Dallas Glass Art, where she invites people into the creative process. Ray says classes are perfect not only for aspiring artists, but also for clubs, parties or corporate teambuilding. Indeed, when a client commissions a custom piece from Carlyn Ray Designs, a private lesson is almost always includ-



Photograph by Holger Obenaus

ed. Ray likes her clients to feel that they had a hands-on role in the creation of their works of art.

She points out a wall sconce with a flower and leaf motif that's currently in production for a client. Ray says the husband, wife and daughter each made a flower while the son completed a leaf.

"When they look at it, I want them to consider it their own, and feel that they helped make that," Ray says. "It makes them feel happy."

Original pieces for both residential and corporate clients include champagne-speckled "glassicle" chandeliers, wall installations that look like rib-

bons dancing up a corridor, and woven bands of glass in vibrant colors backed by light.

For Ray, glass is more than just a medium for art. "Glass is a magical material. It entranced me when I was a little girl. I love sharing imagination and exploration though glass. The journey is limitless," she says. ♡

#### CARLYN RAY DESIGNS

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