



ART IS LIFE

The works of Carlyn Ray at Legacy Midtown Park

by LIESEL SCHMIDT / *photography by* HOLGER OBENAU

ART AND LIFE ARE PERENNIALY LINKED. For cultures all over the world, art is used to tell a story, to evoke emotion, to worship. In Jewish culture, especially, art has always been a way to commune with God—it is outlined in Exodus when God commands the building of the Tabernacle, the creation of the Ark of the Covenant, and the furniture of the Tabernacle to be designed by an artisan named Bezalel and others gifted with art: “And I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you.” (Exodus 31:6).



“Bezalel possessed *Chochmat Lev*, or wisdom of the heart, which made him emotionally intelligent, artistically gifted, and able to see and design the Tabernacle and its sacred vessels as works of beauty made from the riches of the Israelites,” explains Rabbi Michael Cohen, who serves as the pastor of rabbinic services and pastoral care for Legacy Senior Communities. “What art does spiritually is that it transports us, and artists have that gift to open up worlds. Art is not something we *must* do—it’s something we *can* do, but it comes from a willingness to create and to give. At its core, art really reflects creation in Genesis.”

For all that it evokes, art is indeed powerful. It has the ability to edify, to lift up, to transform. And for its spiritual connection, it has become a cornerstone of the community at Legacy Midtown Park. So much so, in fact, that the community reached out to renowned glass artist Carlyn Ray to commission two

pieces that would be placed throughout the campus for residents and visitors to appreciate.

Using her talents with glass, Ray created *Innermost Essence* and *Pathways*, each of which was executed with a great deal of spiritual significance in mind. “As the sun passes through the glass pieces of *Innermost Essence*, the colors dance below in beautiful reflections,” says Ray, explaining how her work is so much more than simple pieces of glass. “The essence of each piece is illuminated with light from within and from the sun shining through the transparent colors. Three of the forms are mirrored, reflecting the colors and environment around them, and the shape of these cloudlike forms gives viewers a glimpse of the beautiful, organic process that creates them. The glass is inflated with breath, *neshama*, traveling as wind, *ruach*, down the blowpipe and into the glass form to rest, *menucha*, inside the form. Glass is one of the few materials

that we shape with our breath; in this way, glass holds life like each of us.”

Likewise, *Pathways* evokes thought and reflection, using woven glass to create a metaphor. “Our lives, beliefs and passions are woven together into a colorful pathway,” Ray says. “As we thread our way forward, we are leaving a colorful trail of colors, light, memories and happiness. In a community, these threads weave together into a great work as people meet, interact and connect with one another. Together we are greater with one another, sharing life, memories and the happiness of each day. Each glass thread is hand-colored with several layers of color and then stretched out like taffy. The glass weavings provide a beautiful and colorful screen to bring romantic intimacy and calming energy into the space.”

As a child, Ray was captivated by art, going on to graduate as a 3-D art major with a minor in psychology. After graduating, she turned her focus to glass,

Artist Carlyn Ray (standing) and Dallas interior designer and Legacy Midtown resident Marilyn Rolnick.



attending the Penland School of Craft while she studied and apprenticed. She then apprenticed and assisted the youngest glass master coming out of Europe for a few years before she attended Dale Chihuly's Pilchuck Glass School. Little more than a year later, she tried out and joined Chihuly's team at Chihuly, Inc., to become one of the few full-time employees working for Chihuly in Seattle. After a few years, she left to work for The Corning Museum of Glass, providing educational entertainment while blowing glass on Celebrity Cruises.

Naturally, her incredible drive led her to open her own studio, Carlyn Ray Designs, so that she could share creativity—something that she views as a spiritual connection—with others. That spiritual connection is deeply important to Ray, and she feels it is forged through site-specific installations like those created for Legacy.

"The Legacy committees wanted to work with Carlyn to provide accent artwork to complement the architecture of the project, and her glass installations provide a spark of color, texture and movement to the spaces where they reside," says Bruce Bernbaum, co-chair of the building committee and partner at Bernbaum-Magadini Architects.

"Carlyn's art is so inspirational, and it evokes the idea that a spirit can soar in a new place," adds Cohen.

"Art is the purest, oldest version of self-expression," explains

Legacy's director of lifestyles, Meghan Belfield. "It allows people to experience themselves, each other and their communities in a personal and unique way. Not only is viewing and appreciating art important but creating it is as well. We participate in so many forms of art here at The Legacy Midtown Park, and it allows residents to discover something new about themselves, which is so incredibly rewarding. We also have beautiful art all over campus, like Carlyn's pieces."

For those viewing Ray's glass art, there is little doubt that life is full of wonder, spiritual moments and—of course—beauty. *

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