



Carlyn Ray

RADIANT SPACES

With a new flagship studio in Brook Hollow, artist Carlyn Ray is bringing the wonder of glass to a wider audience

by LESLIE J. THOMPSON / *photography by* HOLGER OBENAU

EVERY PIECE OF ART IS MEANT TO EVOKE EMOTION. Whether created with paint on canvas or molded from metal or clay, art exists to engage the senses. Yet there is something uniquely captivating about glass. Even after a piece of glass art is finished, it is continually changing, reflecting shifting patterns of light and revealing hidden textures and prisms of color. Glasswork interacts not only with the viewer but with the environment in which it lives.



“Glass as a material, to me, is spiritual. It’s scientific. It’s a wonder,” says artist Carlyn Ray, owner of Dallas Glass Art and Carlyn Ray Designs. Tall and slender, with brunette hair reaching to the middle of her back, Ray’s lean, athletic form mirrors the qualities of her preferred medium, at once delicate and strong, supple and sure. She fell in love with glasswork at a young age and later pursued a degree in art, honing her skill as a glassblower during a semester abroad at the University College of Learning in Wanganui, New Zealand. After graduation, she trained under master glass artists around the world and worked for renowned artist and entrepreneur Dale Chihuly, who became her mentor.

Following in his footsteps, Ray focused on designing large-scale projects for private collectors and public installations. In 2013, she opened her first gallery and public studio, Dallas Glass Art, in a 6,000-square-foot building in the Dallas Design District. The one-time welding warehouse became a vibrant creative space where Ray not only crafted custom pieces but assembled a talented team to create a community hub through classes and events.

Now, the accomplished artist is celebrating the launch of a new flagship location for Carlyn Ray Designs in the northwest Dallas neighborhood of Brook Hollow, a stone’s throw from Dallas Love Field Airport. “We’re able to work on larger projects here,” says Ray, standing in the airy reception area of the 12,000-square-foot

building she purchased last year. “This studio allows us to mock-up and prep and install and work on multiple pieces,” Ray notes. It also provides space for VIP parties and community outreach events.

The Brook Hollow location was the fulfillment of a promise Ray made to herself after launching Art Reaching Out (ARO) in 2017. The nonprofit introduces students in underserved communities to the beauty and creativity of glass art through STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) lessons and hands-on learning. As her business grew, Ray wanted to dedicate the Design District studio to community engagement through both ARO and Dallas Glass Art and open up more studio time by moving Carlyn Ray Designs elsewhere.

The new studio is a dream come true for Ray, with separate areas dedicated to the hot shop, cold shop, metalwork, design and assembly. Sketches of custom pieces adorn the walls next to long bands and ribbons of colored glass carefully arrayed on metal tables. In another area, the lid stands open on a sprawling table-top oven, revealing molten glass fragments fused into iridescent panels that combine color, texture and light.

“I love doing weavings,” says Ray of her signature pieces, which she describes as having “organic order.” Her fusing and ribbon work were born out of the woven designs as she experimented



with the fluidity of glass, while the crystalline columns of her majestic chandeliers capture elements of nature. “They look like they’re dripping, like stalactites,” Ray says.

Ray engages clients in the design process, helping them choose colors, metals and lighting elements for their custom piece. “Not only are they creating energy that is fueling my vision, but they might send me in a direction I wouldn’t normally go,” she says. She likewise is mindful to build trust, so clients feel safe with the creative process. “I think glass is a metaphor for understanding the value of life and others,” muses Ray. “The transparency, the vulnerability—there’s a lot you can explore.”

In addition to private commissions, the artist is known for her large-scale public displays. Currently, her team is working on an outdoor installation for the Crescent Hotel in Downtown Dallas, to be unveiled before the end of the year. Illuminated glass spires emerging from the earth will traverse the landscape, bringing a little bit of magic to the outside space, Ray says.

She also recently completed a towering Tree of Life for the entryway of the American Cancer Society’s Hope Lodge. Having lost her sister to cancer, the installation has deep personal significance for the artist. The masterpiece features long metal branches, shimmering glass leaves and sparkling butterflies.

As with all her installations, Ray hopes viewers will connect with the work both visually and experientially. “It’s a healing art, creating pieces and seeing how glass can transform an environment,” she says, adding, “We invite light and inspiration and happiness and joy into people’s lives.” *

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