

| KATHLEEN ELLIOT



ARTIST MASTERS Reinvention by Amanda Bjerke

California's Kathleen Elliot's rapidly developing artistic career is sure to inspire anyone contemplating a new path in life. This is a woman adept at reinventing herself.

An inveterate creative-type, Elliot has long been prone to stretch beyond the expected.

While working as a hairstylist and makeup artist, she studied philosophy. That interest spring-boarded into six years of managing and designing adult education and linguistics courses. In the 1990s, those skills, in turn, led her to a position in organizational development and training in the Silicon Valley's booming semiconductor industry.

While there she became friends with a co-worker who did scientific glassblowing. "He loved it and tried to share it with everybody he knew. I spent some time in his garage poking around with flames and torches and I really took to it," Elliot explained. "Bead making was just becoming popular in the U.S. I bought a little bead making set up, some glass and a book and I just followed the diagrams until I taught myself how to make glass beads."

Before long people were asking to buy her jewelry. Then the semi-conductor industry experienced dramatic changes. The company Elliot worked for was sold. "I was not inspired to stay there after that." Instead, when her husband suggested she "become a full-time artist," Elliot made the leap. "My naiveté about what that really meant helped me make that jump," she said. "I knew I loved the art. That's the easy part; building a career, running a business, figuring out how to make a living at it was hard."

In typical fashion, Elliot determined that she would give the new pursuit her best effort. She applied to Dale Chihuly's noted Pilchuck Glass School and was immediately accepted. "I spent three summers immersed in glass, working from

nine in the morning until one the next morning. It gave me time to experiment and work out the details. Finally, after three years, I could say 'yes, I'm satisfied; this is good.'"

Elliot's delicate botanical pieces are inspired by a life-long love of plants. To get the intricate detail, she uses a lamp working technique also known as flame working. "The glass is worked in the flame of a torch mounted on my work bench," she explained. "It's a more intimate way to work with the glass than the big blow pipes and spinning methods." Elliot spent another year refining the techniques she developed at Pilchuck. Then, to jumpstart her visibility, she began to donate her work to art auctions throughout the nation. "It was a good way to get my name out there to people who collect art."

She sold her first piece in June 2005. From there her work attracted the attention of a bevy of galleries. Her home studio has grown to keep pace with the demand for the graceful artistry of real or imagined flora. "When I started I worked from a corner of a back room, then I moved into a dining room we never used and I was spilling out of that. My husband said 'why don't you just take the family room?' So, I'm there now. It's a big space with a giant work table and lots of room to invent." There she finds her greatest joy is uncovering the unexpected in her own work. "The process of discovery is the greatest joy," she said. Kathleen Elliott is represented by Pismo Fine Art Glass, www.pismoglass.com. ■



Tiny Plum Cluster



To view more of Elliot's work visit www.skywestmagazine.com.