

A Glass Act

Teresa Seaton is a stained glass artist who solders her way to beautiful creations

Teresa Seaton says her DNA is on every piece she builds. The Ontario-based artist isn't being metaphorical; working with glass lends itself to cuts.

"I do have a personal rule that I stop working after three cuts in one day," she said. "[It] usually means I am tired or not paying attention."

The work hazard is worth it for Seaton, who finds glass to be a beautiful medium to work with.

"It is very unforgiving, and you often have to coax the glass to give you what you want, but the colors and the textures available are endless, giving you a vast palette to work with," she explained. "From the very beginning, I fell in love with the process and the endless design possibilities."

Seaton started working with stained glass in 2000 and has been a full-time artist since 2010. Her works comprise colorful mosaics of glass panels soldered with spun wire. Most recently, her piece *Garden Hearts IV* (Fig. 1) was commissioned for the Dan Lawrie International Sculpture Collection in the Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington, Ontario, Canada, and is awaiting installation. Many of her other pieces can also be seen in public spaces and galleries around Ontario.

Read on to learn about her process and how she teaches students to solder and work with glass.

How did you get into soldering stained glass?

I had been working in advertising for over 20 years and needed a break. I took a summer off and, during that time, took a stained glass course at Abbey Stained Glass in Burlington. I never looked back. I hobbyed for about ten years while freelancing in graphic design before deciding to become a full-time artist in 2010. I opened my studio gallery [Teresa Seaton Stained Glass Studio] in 2013 and would host other artists as well as showcase my own work. During those years, I picked up a few public art commissions and managed to obtain a few contracts for awards that have proven to be the bread and butter of my business, my proudest being the *Key to the City* for Burlington — Fig. 2.

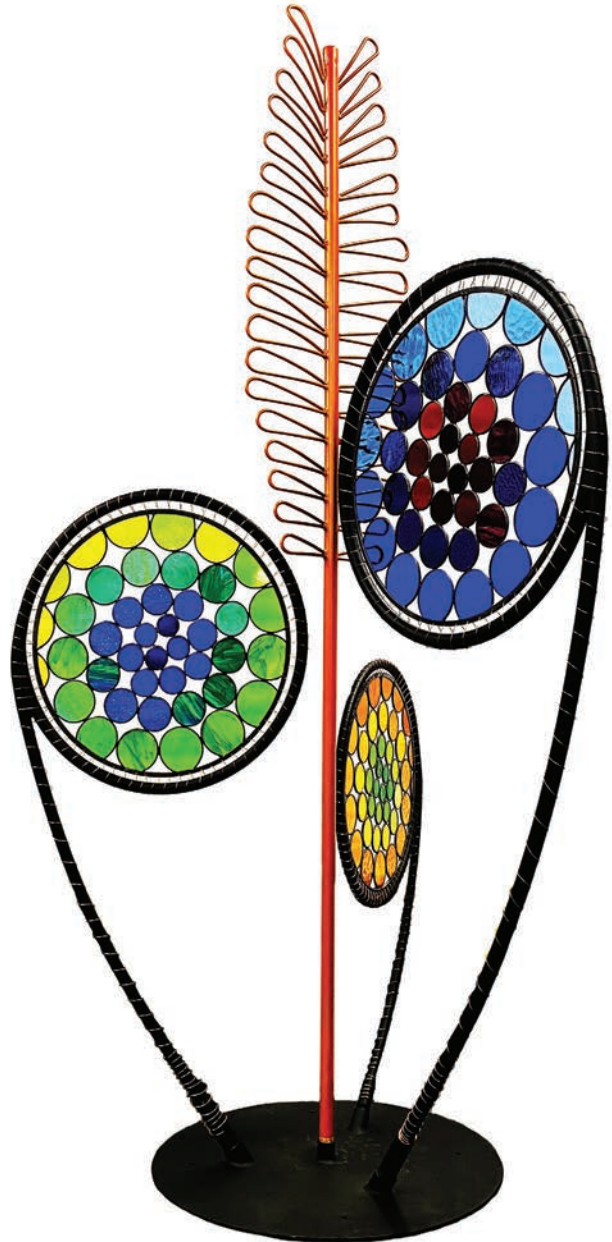


Fig. 1 — The 7 x 6-ft Garden Hearts IV features glass work with copper wire sewn in by Seaton as well as metal fabrication by Bob Young from Ancaster, Ontario, and powder coating by Metal Works Powder Coating, Ancaster, Ontario. The colors for the stained glass were inspired by the growth cycle of the Ostrich Fern, native to eastern Ontario.



Fig. 2 — Seaton's Key to the City for Burlington is part of a program to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the community.

What type of wire do you typically use?

I use wire in multiple ways. I use anything from 14- to 20-gauge pretinned copper wire. I was spinning it by hand for a long time until I had John MacDonald from Macs Metal Works [Ontario, Canada] fabricate a wire spinner for me [Fig. 3]. It was overdesigned for what I needed but allows me the option of going bigger if I so choose. I was fabricating an old-growth olive tree for a window once and have perhaps 15 strands that I then folded three times for a wire count of 45 [Fig. 4]. I certainly needed the wire spinner for that. Otherwise, I use wire for creative adornment and sometimes for structural support [Fig. 5].

To operate the soldering iron, how much heat and what wattage do you typically use?

I use a 100-W Weller soldering iron with a 900-deg fine solder tip. This allows for quick warming up and gives me a nice mound of solder on my copper seams. If I am teaching, I generally give the students a 700-deg-wide tip iron as there is a chance they could create a heat fracture by holding it too long on the glass. My solder is solid core wire solder that is 60% tin and 40% lead alloy. The lead content allows for a nice fluidity and less flaws in the final joint. I apply a gel flux to the copper foil before soldering.

How do you break up the glass?

I use a carbide wheel glass cutter to score the glass, using either grozing or running pliers to break the score. But my main approach is snapping it with my hands. It is very easy to cut glass; it is harder to cut the glass exactly where you want it to break. For more difficult cuts I might use a ring saw, but I find them slow, and you can create undue stress on the piece with a complicated cut. The last thing you want is to have a stress fracture after you have completed your window.

Is there anything unique about your process?

One thing I do that is different from most glass artists is I work many designs into a 3D pattern or sculptural artwork. Because of this, I have been able to secure a few public art contracts, many of which involve a very good ironworker named Bob Young from Ancaster, Ontario. He has been very patient interpreting my creative ramblings. I am very proud to say that he was an integral part to my latest public art piece (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 3 – Wire spinner fabricated by John MacDonald for Seaton.

Can you explain how you made your glass bird (Fig. 6) from start to end?

This particular piece is part of a larger 22-in. square panel. It is the beginning of a new series I am calling *Visual Echoes*. I am trying in my own style to capture the essence of movement of certain birds that I have had the pleasure to find in my own backyard or across the street. There is a beautiful

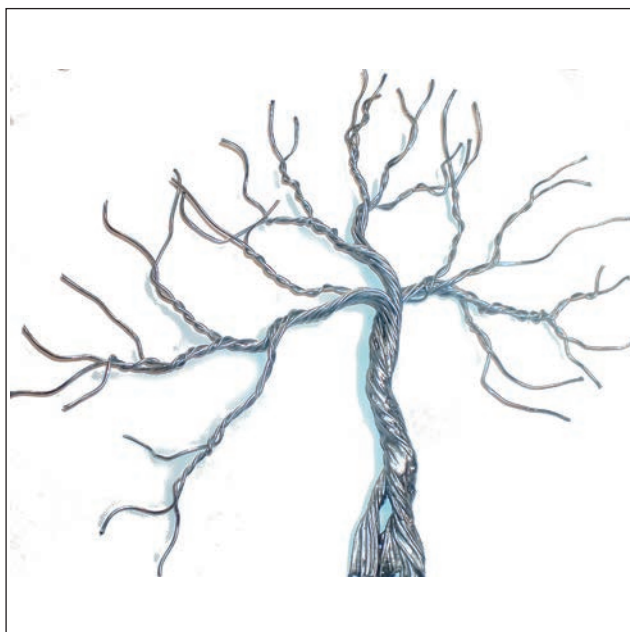


Fig. 4 – Olive grove tree only with multiple folded wires.



Fig. 5 – Amiens Cathedral, south transept rose window replica.

cemetery with many old-growth trees that provide them with the protection, rest, and the sustenance they need as they make their journeys back home.

I began by making the center of this window. That is not always the case. If it was a landscape, I would probably start at the bottom as it is the closest thing to you perspective. Once the bird is done, I will start with the sky around it. If I had decided on the glass being used for the border, I may have started with that, but I am of two minds there and wish to see which glass will look better once I have a bit more of the panel built. Once everything has been cut, the pieces will be foiled. I am using $\frac{3}{16}$ -in. black back copper foil for this panel as I want the solder lines as thin as possible. Copper foil comes in many thicknesses depending on the use. In my 3D work, I will use a thicker foil for stability, but this being



Fig. 6 – The glass bird (left) before it was placed in a larger panel (right).

a flat panel, I didn't think it necessary. Once everything is foiled, I will completely solder one side of the panel. I will then place a zinc frame around it, flip it over, and then solder the complete back. After soldering, you need to give the panel a really good clean with a flux remover. Once dry, I use a black patina for both the solder and the frame. Lastly comes the polish. This gives the final piece a nice luster and protects it from collecting dust on the surface.

When you teach how to solder stained glass, what's your process so students can understand what to do?

Soldering is only a portion of what students learn in my class. They first learn to cut, fit, and foil before soldering. I have found the one thing that seems to hold many students back when soldering is fear (for example, they will burn themselves or damage their glass by touching the iron to the glass or foil). I often find them trying to drop the solder onto the joints, which ends up very lumpy. Once I explain to them that you need to hold the iron next to the fluxed foil and run the solder and iron along the joint in a slow motion, their soldering immediately looks better. They often say to me that I make it look easy, but as I explain to them, I have been doing this a long time and know the melting rate of the solder on the foil. You definitely get a feel for it after so many years.

My only tip would be to not be afraid. It would take a very long time for you to give your glass a heat fracture. Having said that, I have unfortunately seen a few of them do it by fuss-

ing too long on a certain seam. Either the solder is bleeding through, or they may have forgotten to flux. My second tip would be to learn to walk away from a joint if it is not working well. You can come back to it after it has cooled down.

What inspires you?

I am easily inspired. I look at everything around me with the eye of a glass artist and how I could interpret it. Recently, my interest is in the birds around me as I am prepping for an exhibition next spring titled *Suserrations*. Myself and four other wonderful and talented artists are interpreting our lives with birds. I am very lucky to be living along the migratory path of many species of birds as they travel north to south and back again. I have an endless supply of research material right outside my front door.

My many years of working in graphic design has proven to be a real asset when it comes to designing my own panels. I use Adobe InDesign for most designs. I still do a bit of drawing to express the concept but then generally go to the computer to finalize the designs. I have a book filled with thoughts that may never get realized in final art works. But that's okay. I would rather have too many than not enough. [WJ](#)

To learn more about Seaton's artwork, visit teresaseaton.ca.

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