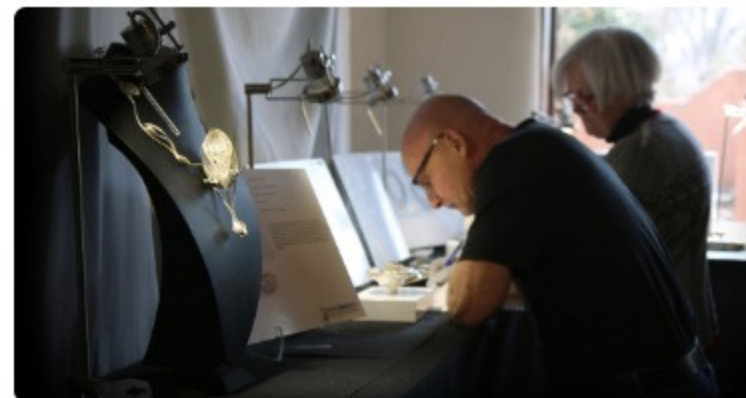


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Creating Statues for the 2020 Saul Bell Design Award

Meet Lisa Chernoff, the glass artist behind the one-of-a-kind statues for the 2020 Saul Bell Design Award.

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Award Statues That Celebrate Creativity

Entries for the [Saul Bell Design Award](#) offer a glimpse into each designer's deepest dreams. So, it's fitting that the 2020 recipients will take home glass sculptures as singular as their winning pieces—created by an artist who knew the award's namesake.

Like her designs, Lisa Chernoff's living space and studio are pulsing with color and alive with form, yet serene. A paint-daubed, 7-foot statue rises from a mosaic base, her branches-as-arms embracing the sunlit room. A classic wingchair has been re-upholstered in a crazy quilt of reclaimed vinyl. Red pom-poms prevent the dog from poking her eye on the antlers protruding from re-purposed picnic seating.

But back to the glass. There's an abundance of that, too. Suspended from the kitchen ceiling. Splashed amidst the white tiles in the shower. Serving as colorful drawer pulls and doorknobs. Lining the walls of her gallery and studio.

Lisa says that she's "always been crafty." She was born in Alamogordo, New Mexico, and remembers, "my father was very creative with electronics, and today he's an expert clock fixer." Her lack of formal art education has been liberating rather than limiting. She says, "I never felt like I couldn't combine colors, or try certain techniques."

She first experimented with glass by incorporating it into her ceramic designs. She remembers, "I'd bring home bottle glass from my hikes, break and mix it, and include it in my pottery. It was very intriguing to see what it would do." Undeterred by the pieces that didn't quite work out, she kept at it. Then she took a glass jewelry class and learned about fusing compatible glass, or glass that has the same coefficient of expansion. The bottle glass she'd used in her clay creations wasn't compatible, which explained the mixed results she'd experienced.



A Saul Bell Design Award statue in progress.



A fused glass wall sculpture that reflects Lisa's love of asymmetry.

Today, her creative process mixes spontaneity with science. She says, "I like fusing because you can overlay glass. It's more random than stained glass." Lisa starts with sheets of glass that arrive in wood crates. She scores organic shapes into the sheets and snaps the pieces apart with silicone-covered pliers. Miniscule shards tend to sift through the grid on her worktop. And while accidental breakage is rare, cut fingers are a daily reality. She smiles and says, "Sometimes a tiny bit will catch my eye, and I'll reach down and place it into the piece I'm working on."

Lisa begins each piece by "thinking backwards." She says, "I envision how something will look on the wall and work in reverse." Glittery snow swirls outside her studio window as she begins construction of one of the award statues. First, she lays a fiber paper "blanket" on her worktop, to create the indentations that add texture and encourage the subtle play of light in each piece. She follows with dichroic glass, a clear glass blank and colored glass. Sometimes glass will change color during firing. Lisa says, "Once I started thinking of fusing as an experiment, everything changed."

The piece will be fired in a custom 6' x 3' kiln. After the first full fuse in the kiln, she'll slump it using molds that are sculptures unto themselves. And like many jewelers, she has to think about annealing after every step. For example, after the first full fuse at 1,500°, she'll cool the kiln down to 950°. A large piece can take days to anneal.

Large pieces are Lisa's passion—her colossal kiln was funded by a 13' x 5.5' x 1' commission comprising more than 1,000 glass "ribbons." (She made 100 extra ribbons "just in case" and amazingly only broke two during the entire process.) She says, "I like to work on organic, asymmetrical pieces that have a lot of depth."

Although the Saul Bell Design Award statues are smaller than many of her creations, she counts them as among her most intimate and special. Lisa knew the Bell family while she worked as "runner" in the Gold Department of what was then Rio Grande Albuquerque. (A sculpture on her kitchen wall includes spray-painted cardboard tubes that date back to her time there.) She says that Saul was "quiet and industrious. He was always physically doing the things that needed to be done." Lisa says, "It was a pleasant surprise to hear from Molly (Executive Vice President, and Saul's daughter). I wanted these statues to be

different and express what I do."

Learn more about Lisa's paradoxically named business, [Pompous Glass](#), and see her work. Learn more about the [Saul Bell Design Award](#).

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