

***The
Artisans
of
Las Vegas***

by: Patrick M. Kennedy

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Las Vegas, known by many as the *visual capital of the world*, is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country. The art community is keeping pace with the city's growth hand-in-hand and in leaps and bounds. The art patrons and readers of the city, state and country should have a book that explores this new art community.

Most observers, when thinking of the word *visual*, envision the four-mile strip of neon and blinking glitter that attract most of the visitors to the city. It is an important and very publicized component of the *visual*, but not the focus of this overview. Surrounding *The Strip* is a developing and rapidly growing population, and a vital and significant segment of that population is a vibrant entity – that is, the community of talented, trained, tested and prolific fine artists and artisan craftspeople who have been living and developing in the area for years.

The artisan is the focus in this overview. What is an artisan as compared to a fine artist? By all standard research methods and references, that is a hard definition to pin down. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that an artisan is a 'skilled worker who makes things by hand'. The American College Dictionary defines artisan as 'one skilled in the industrial arts'. Both of these definitions create such a wide span of interpretation that it could include anyone who can lift a tool. For the purposes of this overview, a caveat or expansion must be considered to update the definition: 'A skilled worker who applies artistic talent and training to produce one-of-a-kind creative pieces of art by means of contemporary craft processes using glass, clay, fiber, metal, wood, sand, and in some cases, air or gas.' That is the definition to be used.

The people who comprise this vibrant entity of artisans is a living and breathing collage of personal profiles that are as entertaining and esthetic as their artwork. They immigrate from all over the country and the world. The stories and experiences they tell reveal the building blocks of their talent, and are as various as their styles. They come to

this city because it is a new frontier and projects, no demands, a sense of exploration and innovation. It is the challenge.

The methods and processes used to create the pieces of art are as varied and ingenious as the people using them. The art of altering and shaping the earth's natural elements is as varied as the elements themselves. Each element possesses picky properties that require specific treatment to bend, carve, mold, weave or position it. To be creative to the extreme requires creative tools. Off-the-shelf material and equipment can only carry the artist's imagination so far, and then the artisan's ingenuity must develop new materials and tools to create the picture projected by her imagination.

This overview of *The Artisans of Las Vegas* will explore the personal profiles and training of the artisans, and the processes and methodology, and sometimes philosophies, they use to create their artwork. It will explain in layman's terms the definition and process involved in producing the creative pieces. High-quality photos of their work will accompany each artisan's profile. It will also delve into the sometimes exasperating and tedious marketing and exhibition methods needed to expose and sell their art pieces. Several of the artisans are associated with studios and schools that teach and support their craft to aspiring artisans.

The art pieces of these Las Vegas artisans decorate and are displayed throughout the city and the world. Through their work and energy, they have contributed a great deal to the *visual capital of the world's* reputation. Some of the artisans discussed are already successful and renowned; others are struggling artisans who have settled in the *visual capital of the world* for inspiration as well as exposure. It has been said that doing artwork in a studio or even in a small town has minimal risk...no one is looking. But in a city like Las Vegas someone is always looking over the artisans shoulder with a critical eye and a quick critique. It only makes the final work better.

Book Format:

The book overview, after the introduction, will be broken into 7 artisan sections loosely defined by the material the artisan is using. Each section can have 2 or 3 artisans with 2 or 3 photos per artisan. A detailed description of each craft, its processes and particular qualities, will be presented as an introduction to each section. A separate section will be written to describe the studios, groups and schools existing in Las Vegas that support and develop these artisan's crafts. A brief summary of these sections is as follows:

- **Glass –**

Glass artisans produce their creative pieces using several techniques. Glass tubes are bent and filled with neon gas; liquid glass is heated, twisted and blown into various shapes; sand and glass are arranged in designs and heated in a kiln, and pieces of cut colored glass are used to create designs and illustrations for windows and walls.

- **Wood –**

Wood, chosen from a countless number of available trees on earth, is whittled, carved, chiseled, sawed, planed, turned on a lathe, routed, sand blasted, drilled, ground, sometimes chain sawed, or several other acts of deformation. Then it is sanded, burned, stained, painted, sealed, puttied, polished, waxed, sometimes accessorized with another elements such as metal, glass, or clay, and finished to the artisan's whim. And finally, it is glued, nailed, screwed, clamped, assembled, mounted, framed, or positioned into the artisan's final vision.

- **Clay –**

Clay is it is an earthy material that is plastic when moist but hard when fired...that is used for brick, tile, and pottery. The clay is chosen from a wide selection of colors. The artisan throws clay on a spinning wheel, molds it by hand, trims it, then forms it into a vision; casts it into a bowl, pot, wall

hanging, or forms it into tiles to make ceramics; adds color, stains, chemicals, glaze, patterns, handles, metals, etc.... then fires it in a kiln.

- **Metal –**

Steel, tin, copper, bronze, aluminum, lead, and pewter are pound, ground, bent, twisted, trimmed, filed, hack sawed, welded, molded, cast, glued, buffed, polished, painted, rusted, oxidized, or flushed in acid. The artisan uses these delicate techniques, often combined with one of the other craft techniques and materials, to create a range of visions, including, jewelry, framed art, wall sculptures, gates, furniture (indoor and lawn), figurines, door knobs, mosaics, wind chimes, mobiles, and the list goes on.

- **Fiber –**

Baskets, tapestry and wall hangings, embroidery, quilts, clothing and accessories, created by weaving, looming, spinning, knitting, crocheting, dying, hand painting, and tie-dying; using cotton, silk, wool, linen, rayon, yarn, and maybe grass or reeds...so many materials and methods, and so many results.

- **Sand –**

Sand can be blasted against metal, glass or wood to gouge out patterns, it can be used to make glass, or choosing from a rainbow of colors, it can be delicately distributed and adhered to a flat plane to create intricate sand paintings.

- **Air –**

Compressed air infiltrated with any-color paint or dye, shot from a gun in the hands of an artisan, and aimed at a canvass, wall, T-shirt, vehicle, window, or any flat or round surface creates visions that range from futuristic nightmares to babies in a mother's arms.

- **Las Vegas Studios, Organizations and Schools –**

Artisan studios, organizations and schools for potential artisans are scattered throughout the city. Each has an independent purpose and unique goals. Some examples are the Domsy Glass Studio, Aardvark Clay and Modeling Supplies and Studio with a variety of training classes, Vision Gallery of Stained Glass, Hot Glass Works with training classes, and many more. Some of the minor organizations are the Contemporary Arts Collective, Art in Las Vegas, and The Las Vegas Artist Guild, to name just a few.

A description and pertinent information about these organizations would be enlightening and useful to most readers of the book. These organizations would also be helpful and supportive in producing the input for this overview of the artisan community

Sample Artisan Profiles:

Following are drafted samples of two artisan personal profiles of the many in Las Vegas area. Printed copies of some of their work are enclosed, and when available, web site addresses are given for further examples of their work.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Domsky Glass Profile</i> <i>(Barbara and Larry Domsky)</i></p>
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Hot glass fusion and sculpted metal forms and frames, combined with the enthusiasm and creativity of Barbara and Larry Domsky, are used to create vibrant sculptures and paintings that paint all the edges of their visionary imagination. The descriptive titles of their images amplify the complexity and attention to detail of their work: glass fusion wall painting such as, *River of Dreams*, *Zulu Blanket #1*, and *Love's Enlightenment*; sculptures such as, *Midnight*, *Compassion*, and *Dawn*.

When you talk to Barbara and Larry and visit their studio, the enthusiasm is contagious. You can immediately see where the energy that inspires their creations comes from.

Larry Domsky is considered a visionary of glass art. He is continually introducing additional forms of glass to the pallet of objects he melds into each work of art. His signature work has sold through galleries across the United States. The success of Larry's art and his love for working with glass found him by way of another art form, metal fabrication, and he now combines the two of them to create his visions. Larry's attitude is, if he can't find the tool that will produce his vision, he will built it...and he has designed and built complex and functional custom tools, and is still in the process of building more, that fill their 5000 square foot studio in Las Vegas.

Larry would be considered an old timer in Las Vegas as compared to some. "*I grew up in Philadelphia, and in high school I was involved in the arts,*" said Larry Domsky. "*Right after I graduated high school I moved to Vegas and got a job as an apprentice stage hand.*" His long standing professional career as an artist began with his very first job as a crew member building the Las Vegas stage set for the production show "*Jubilee*". As Las Vegas was being rebuilt to don the title Entertainment Capital of the

World, Larry fabricated projects and designs out of metal for some of the city's and entertainment's memorable experiences, MGM Hotel's life size recreation of the *Emerald City from The Wizard of Oz*, the closing ceremony's stage for Los Angeles' *1984 Summer Olympics*, a set design for Sylvester Stallone's action movie *Over the Top*, Bellagio Hotel's 20 by 15 foot *Fall Cornucopia* for the atrium at the opening of the property, *Nike's One-of-a-Kind* benches for their Forum Shop Niketown, inside Caesar's Palace, and the *Memorial to James C. Brown for The United States Post Office's Sunset location* in Las Vegas, just to name a few. His artistic talents with metal have left a fingerprint of his work throughout the city of Las Vegas.

"I have always had a wild imagination and an excessive amount of energy. Since childhood I've known that I was destined to create and would become an accomplished artist. After finishing school, I followed the path that led me in that direction and here I am today. I feel extremely blessed that each day I face another opportunity to create something that did not exist the day before. Each project brings a new challenge, different from the one before. It is this energy that charges my imagination and fuels my excitement to create."

Barbara's glass paintings have often been referred to as glass textiles. Her artistic background is filled with creativity in several learned mediums, but it is her passion for glass that has been her only focus for the past 15 years. When starting out in the craft of glass fusion, there was very little information available on the topic of large-scale fusion. Knowing that she would have to learn through experience, Barbara and her husband and business partner Larry moved into a 5000 square foot studio and purchased eight large kilns and dove into the experience of learning glass. This is not to say that Barbara's training in the field of art has not helped to identify her unique style. Since the age of nine she has taken private art lessons, and to complete her high school education she enrolled in a four-year art program, which included studies of Interior Design, Art History and Practical Art and Ceramics.

In her childhood she traveled throughout South America and South Africa, eventually residing in Springs, South Africa until her mid twenties before she came to Las Vegas. It is easy to see in her glass paintings the influence of the eclectic colors and patterns of these countries have taken in her design. Each original piece of art she creates encompasses shades of her past and elements of her vision for the future. This artist's work is an understandable expression of her life and background.

“I have always had such love and respect for art itself. To be able to evoke emotion in others through my artwork is the ultimate goal. I found my voice through glass. In its heated state glass has a life of its own. It is such an exciting medium to work with. Here is this solid liquid form that when exposed to heat can change in color and shape. I am always an eager participant to its final outcome.”

Together, Barbara and Larry have combined glass and metal to please clients and admirers throughout the country. Their large glass paintings and beautiful glass sculptures, and a collection of unique tables and chandeliers, are on display in places such as the *Bellagio*, *Niketown* in the Forum Shops and *Mandalay Bay*, where they have an entire window display as well as an original metal design that is one of the striking props of Storm. They also have a display at the new location of the *Markman Gallery* inside the *Rio*.

But creating fabulous glasswork is only one facet of the Domskeys. They believe in the importance of giving back to their community. In 1996 they created a foundation, called the *Giggle Factory*, to support local children’s charities. The foundation has developed and maintained an art program at *Sunrise Children’s Hospital*, called *The Artcart Program*, that allows children recovering from various illnesses the opportunity to create their own masterpieces with arts and crafts. They also formed the *Giggle Factory Club* to assist the *Candlelighters of Southern Nevada*, an organization devoted to helping families of children with cancer. The club hosts art parties and helps raise funds for the organization’s needs.

It all goes back to the contagious enthusiasm the Domskeys reflect in all their glass visions. It is expressed in their artwork as well as their community involvement in Las Vegas.

Web Site: www.domskyglass.com

***Domsky Glass Artwork
(Barbara and Larry Domsky)***



Ocean Dance



Midnight



Dawn



Coral Garden Display

Visions Stained Glass Gallery Profile***(Carolyn Insler)***

Carolyn Insler, the owner and designer at Visions Stained Glass, has been creating stained art pieces over a period of 30 years. She was introduced to Stained Glass in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1974, and was taught the craft by an artist who owned a studio on State Street. She later opened her own studio in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where she worked for 6 years, just before moving to Las Vegas. She is now part of the *visual* community of the city.

She has been in Las Vegas, working in her 1200 square foot studio on North Rancho Drive, for over 5 years. As she progressively expands her talent in the art and craft of stained glass, she never loses the thrill of beginning with a concept, gathering and choosing the raw materials, and creating functional lamps, windows, and wall hangings, and miscellaneous gifts such as tables and candleholders. She enjoys the entire process...from creating a design to the physical labor of cutting and leading each piece. Her studio is filled with an array of glass cutters, grinders, saws and polishers she uses to develop the perfect shape. She works alone on her visions and only coordinates with associates when the piece requires a wood or metal frame; or with a small crew if she is requested to install a window, or a complicated wall or door piece. She also takes a lot of pleasure in working with the client to evaluate his or her style, and then incorporating her own design ideas into the final piece.

*“There is always a driving force to come up with unique pieces,” she says
“...things that haven't been done before, especially 3 dimensional pieces.”*

Her background is varied. She has a BBA in marketing and some interior design course work, as well as an associate degree in Surgical Technology. But regardless of the other paths she has explored, she has always returned to the craft of working with glass.

When touring her studio, or browsing her web site at www.visionsgallery.com, you find hundreds of stained glass windows, lamps, wall art, and leaded glass gift items that are available for sale or custom ordered and built. Most are *one of-a-kind visions* and

show a style that is unique to this artisan's talent. Carolyn works with stained glass as an art form combined with the craft, and is committed to producing nothing but quality stained glass art that will add a special touch to the interior design of any home or business. Although the greater part of her work is for home owners and small business, such as restaurants, she has been displayed in places like the New Century Art Gallery. She also, in the spirit of community participation, often donates pieces to be auctioned at several charitable events, and is a regular participant in the March of Dimes events.

Her clients are local as well as from all over the country, and she has shipped finished pieces to over fourteen states, as far as Alaska, New York, and Florida, to name a few. They are always appreciative of her work and telling her so speaks for itself:

“WOW!!! The glass arrived today. It is exactly like I had in mind. You do great work! It is hard to find quality craftsmanship in the area of stained glass...”

“It came today! It is so wonderful and absolutely perfect! Even my husband likes it and wishes I'd gotten a bigger one. The colors are perfect, the flowers, everything. I am so happy with it you wouldn't believe it. Thank you so much for making such a lovely piece for me!”

Carolyn has another side that keeps her well balanced. *“When I'm not working with glass, I enjoy playing flute...classical when I'm in need of structure and improvising and jazz when I feel creative.”* This same structure and creativity is reflected in her visions and artwork.

***Visions Stained Glass Artwork
(Carolyn Insler)***



Iris Window



The Lady



Tropical Fish



Wine Cellar Door

Audience and Market:

The expanding art community in Las Vegas is in itself a built-in component of the audience for this publication. The art community is rapidly growing, but while interviewing artists and artisans throughout the city, it was found that it is very fragmented. This publication would be a tool useful to help the artisans become aware of others in their field, and related fields. I have been told by some leaders in the various craft schools in the city that the students would welcome such a book to investigate their chosen craft, as well as others.

The population of Las Vegas is growing at approximately 6,000 people per month. Each new resident is curious about the city's social assets, and art is one of the best assets of Las Vegas. Just note the major art showings in the city. Each new resident must also decorate his or her new home and/or business, and this publication would be a helpful tool to explore the available artisan crafts that can beautify that home or new business. Interior designers, architects and contractors could also use this publication as a reference book for design.

The entertainment and aesthetic value of the book would speak to the casually curious as well as the trained artist. The available photos used in the book are the results of artisans at their best and samples of their most imaginative creations. Each photo reflects talent, training and creative determination, and for everyone would be worth the price of the book for the visual tour.

The interest in Las Vegas is growing throughout the country, and world for that matter, and this publication could be marketed in national sales promotions. Many visitors would be encouraged to visit the showings of the artisans after seeing samples of their work in print.

Aside from the usual bookstore sales, this book would be an excellent addition to sales counters at the many museums, galleries, gift shops, and souvenir stores in the Las Vegas area. It would also be a welcome addition to the libraries of the area, as a coffee table book at luxury hotels and restaurants, as a gift to special visitors to the city, and as a general promotion piece for the city itself.

The competition for this type of book in the city is almost non-existent because the art community is as new as the growth. There are some books available that emphasize a particular craft or artisan, but none that consolidate so many in one book.

The Author's Qualifications:

Patrick M. Kennedy has been making a living as a writer, editor and graphic artist for over 25 years. He graduated with a BA in English Writing from the University of Washington, obtained a diploma in Graphic Arts from the Washington Technical Institute, and has taken classes in Art Direction, Creative Direction and Illustration from the School of Visual Concepts. He has worked in advertising as a copywriter, graphic artist, media purchaser, art director, and in management. He has worked for major corporations as a technical writer, editor and artist, and has worked independently for dozens of clients of both major companies and small businesses. He has been a publisher and editor for small literary magazines.

He has worked with artists for years as an art director, and owned and operated a custom picture framing shop and gallery where he worked with artists framing individual artwork and entire shows. He knows the language of artists and is familiar with many of their techniques.

Locally, in Las Vegas, he has visited with and interviewed many artists. He is a member of the Las Vegas Contemporary Arts Collective, the Henderson Writing Group, and the Las Vegas Valley Writers Group. In the past he has been an active member of the Pacific Northwest Writers Association and the Society of Technical Communication. He has published one novel, 'Toy Shadows' and several short stories and poems. He is presently working on a second novel, a book of poetry and haiku, and writing magazine articles.

His web site at: www.abetterword.com has a complete resume of work activities and training, and a collection of writing samples. He is presently working full time as an independent writer, thus allowing time to complete this project, and for related book promotion activities.
