

Into the Looking Glass

Vortex marbles are so intriguing that you can't help but stare into them and wonder how they are made. Local artist, Alan Fullrich is the creator of the vortex marbles showcased at Beadazzled in Old Town Square. Like Alice falling down the Rabbit Hole, you can get lost in the depth of the swirling colors and reflections of light.



Photo by B.D. Tharp

“Are you really sure that a floor can't also be a ceiling?”

~M.C. Escher

“I start with a glass rod the diameter of a penny, gather color on the end, and twist it to make the vortex,” explains Alan. “When you burn off the rod that leaves you with the lens of the vortex.” But the process is anything but simple.

“The vortex is an illusion created during the shaping of the marble,” says Julie Freige, Beadazzled owner. “The marbles are made of Borosilicate glass, which is like Pyrex. It's stiffer and harder, plus more difficult to work with, but as you work it, you get gorgeous colors.”


Alan, a commercial property manager by day, had seen the marbles elsewhere and decided to try his hand at making them. “A lot of it is trial and error,” he says. He also makes pendants and hearts using a process he describes as an “implosion.” He heats the outside of the glass to make it slump and swallow the object, encasing it. “I like to make big focal type beads, and I did some jelly fish in the marbles, too.”

He's been working with glass for six or seven

years and enjoys the creative outlet. “I started blowing glass at City Arts,” he says. “Now I have the equipment at home. It's quite an investment to purchase a torch, kiln, oxygen and propane.”

Every Saturday evening is Open Torch Night at Beadazzled, so the experienced craftsperson can create works of art at an hourly rate. Julie also offers beginning lamp work (glass bead making) classes periodically.

The shop displays the vortex marbles as well as a plethora of distinctive handmade glass beads and artwork. “Organic beads are inspired by nature,” Julie says. “It's more of a free form design and one of my favorite mediums.” The important thing to remember, she warns the consumer, is to use kiln-annealed glass to prevent cracking or breaking, especially when using soft glass like that which is used to make jewelry beads.

Those interested in glass art – artists, students, educators, collectors or gallery personnel – can find encouragement and support with The Glass Art Society (GAS). The Wichita Art Museum is a member and has a substantial collection of glass artwork on display. 

~BD THARP



Photo by M. Fletcher