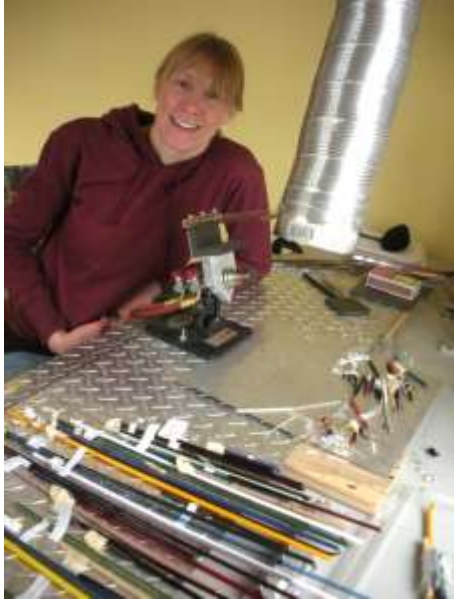


Bonnie Poole



Bonnie Poole grew up in the rural central Massachusetts town of Warren and the make it-do-it-fix-it ethic of country life. She's a welder, a farmer, a gardener, a crafter, an engineer and now, a glass artist. Surely she is also a carpenter and construction worker since she and her husband are still working on building their home in Colrain. Her studio is presently in the unfinished upstairs there, pending the completion of a workshop/garage where she can set up her welding equipment as well as the glass studio.

Poole has been creating glass jewelry items for less than a year. It began with the gift of classes at Snow Farm in glass blowing. She went back to take a workshop in lamp work and realized that she could buy the equipment for about the same cost as paying for further classes in this medium. Lamp work utilizes rods of colored and other glass, shaped and formed in the heat of a workbench-mounted torch, and allowed to cool in a small kiln. Compared to what is necessary to blow glass, it is



a small investment and can be done at home.

"My work has evolved. To me, my first work looks laughable now, but I am still experimenting, just kind of playing around, and it's fun," said Poole, bringing out some cases of beads and jewelry for me to examine. The beads are fairly large, and are created by melting glass around a steel mandrel

that is coated with a slip that both helps the glass cling to the mandrel and slip off without sticking afterwards. Many different colors swirl around the middle, and a layer of clear glass creates a pleasing and brilliant optical effect.

She will sell the beads online and at a local bead store in Greenfield, but enjoys creating one of a kind jewelry with findings that she sources from USA manufacturers, or when that isn't possible, from economic project industries that support local entrepreneurship in other countries.



Occasionally, people seek her out to create pet memorial beads for them. She will create beads that incorporate the cremated remains of people's pets. There are several online companies providing this service for upwards of a hundred dollars; Poole doesn't believe in charging such a high price for what she feels is not that much extra work. The name of her business is the Steel Pit and Glass Bull, in reference to her interest in fostering pit bulls for a rescue organization specializing in the breed.

Although she has an engineering degree, she doesn't anticipate returning to that type of career at the moment. She works with people to establish permaculture landscapes and works on her glass and potentially her steel when the workshop is complete. She had a career at Warren Pump after graduation and stayed there for a decade. When she broke away from the company, she felt it almost required a breakdown to accomplish this transition, recognizing that she no longer identified with her role there and was ready to renew herself. "It was good money, I bought a nice house, but time just went by and I knew I was going to break some day, it just wasn't me, so I saved money and



saved money in that event," explained Poole.

Another craft she is engaged in is gourd growing and decorating, but she doesn't think it is economically feasible to market her elaborate creations. "Can I sell one of these for 500 dollars? Probably not, but that's what I would have to charge for all the effort I put into it," said Poole, showing me a gourd covered in an abstract and intricate design that makes it into a chicken sculpture. She is working on incorporating glass, macrame, and natural materials like river stones into decorative items. When the welding shop is complete, she would like to make garden sculptures using steel and glass, as well as steam punk style jewelry constructions.

Poole was familiar with the Shelburne Arts cooperative from visiting the area over the years and shopping there. When she began making the jewelry, it was the first place she thought to approach. She is one of the newest working members. "And it sells," she added, "which is encouraging! There's

interest in it; it helps so much to know other people are interested in my work, and its not just in my head! There are a great bunch of artists in there, there is so much time in that room. It's amazing to think about. Can you imagine the hours, the sweat and tears and everything in that shop?"