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Creativity displayed in Camano studio tour

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Herald Writer

Ray Fossum may be an excellent glass artist, but what makes him unique is not what he makes, but what he teaches.

The former military helicopter pilot and retired Boeing compliance auditor teaches the theory behind fused glass, insisting his students learn what happens to glass when someone turns the heat up.

He wants budding artists to know the mechanisms that are triggered when glass melts to a full fuse, creating a smooth surface on a plate.

Or the particulars behind a tack fuse, the kind that creates sharp contrasts, such as the one on Fossum's whimsical glass platter called "My Red Rooster," where the bird's feathers are raised so much that you just want to touch them to make sure they're not real.

Fossum wants his students to truly learn the fundamentals of glass art. Because without those, you are creating crafts, not art.

"Unless you know those details of what's behind the glass, you are not going to go beyond making little jewelry or trivets," Fossum said.

Fossum's own stunning glass pieces are a testament to how far this teacher has come as an artist.

Fossum's glass art is among the many treasures visitors will find when the enclave of Camano Island artists reveal their secrets and share their passions with the public this Mother's Day weekend during the free 12th Annual Camano Island Studio Tour starting at 10 a.m. today

Fossum's collection runs the glass gamut from jewelry to glass plates, bowls and wind chimes to glass panels, wall hangings and stepping stones.

Though he focuses on the complex science of changing molecules from a solid to a liquid, Fossum said the toughest part comes when he has to fill in the price tag.

"I have typically been accused of underselling myself," Fossum said with a sly smile, standing beside a hanging wind chime that goes for \$10.

Fossum's glass themes generally fall into the "F" categories: fish, fowl or flowers.

And he likes to give each piece a funny name.

A white candy tray with purple slugs is called "Slugs in the Snow." A serving platter with a raised grape design is called "Grape Expectations." A bucolic forest scene glass panel with alder trees made from frit or crushed glass he called "Forest Through the Trees."

For 29 years, Fossum has been a glass hobbyist, making stained glass pieces mostly. In 2001, he discovered kiln-produced fused glass and was hooked.

For the past four years, Fossum, 73, has been the primary instructor at Cascade Glass Art Center in Redmond,

teaching the introductory fused glass.

He'll also take private students at his Camano studio. Some have come as far as Illinois and Alaska to learn the fine art of fusing.

"I get enough notoriety that it keeps me busy at the pace that I want, because I want to do my golfing and my gardening too, and I don't want this to get in the way of my fun," Fossum joked. "But it's all fun."

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