

Leadlighting is Suzi's artwork 'soulmate'



JUDITH LACY Last updated 13:51 11/07/2012

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COMMITTED: Palmerston North leadlighter Suzi Brown with a copper foiled lamp. "I've totally found my passion, what I want do and where I want to go."

Suzi Brown has been creative all her life, trying her hand at most crafts. But she was always searching for "the one".

When she tried leadlighting six years ago it was like finding her "soulmate thing to do".

"I just love working with glass as a medium, the colours and textures and range of combinations is just amazing."

Slowly, Ms Brown had built her hobby into a business, Aurora Leadlighting, making and repairing leadlight windows. She also makes lamps, clocks, wall hangings, sun catchers, necklaces and ornaments.

She was taken with leadlighting after visiting her sister who was doing copper foiling, but her foray into leadlighting was inauspicious - the course she was booked into was cancelled.

So she started reading books and internet articles to teach herself.

Then she did another course and continued to read, watch videos and practise the craft - learning everything she could from everyone and anyone.

"I see a piece of glass and I'm like, 'ooh'."

She has discovered glass is a lot stronger than she thought but cutting inside curves continues to be tricky. "Glass has a mind of its own. Sometimes there are days when I just have to walk away."

One of her early jobs was making leadlights for a front door in an old house.

It was a tricky commission as none of the existing holes were square.

Another job was fixing a cabinet others thought could not be fixed.

"They built it in the first place so at the very least it can be rebuilt."

With Acorn Furniture, she offers a complete cabinet restoration service - Acorn the wood, Aurora the leadlight panels. One of her most memorable jobs was building a window from three pieces of stained glass from a 17th century church. The client bought them from a London shop that sells items from deconsecrated churches.

"It was just so amazing working on a piece of work someone else had worked on all those hundreds of years ago." As she worked she wondered what sort of tools the craftsman had used.

"It was a real honour to work with. I was terrified of having anything go wrong 'cause it's just not replaceable." Ms Brown said leadlighting is an art that is being lost.

"Pretend" leadlighting does not last.

Stick-on lead comes off and painted glass fades.

Her goal is to have enough work to earn a living.

She is a trained IT technician, but a back injury meant she could no longer lift computers or spend time bending. She has also worked in offices and brought up two daughters.

Ms Brown recently did a glass casting course and would like to do more of that.

"[Glass is] something that can just expand and expand, really, but I love the process and the leadlights - from making the design to seeing them finished. The way the sun comes through them and different colours through the house."

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