



Fire and Water bath. Picture: Aoiheann Hopkins

A touch of glass

When is a bath not a bath? When it is made by Chichester artist Mel Howse discovers **Laura Cartledge**.

Chichester based Mel Howse not only uses enamels, glass and metal to make art – she uses it to travel through time.

“The key thing, if you are a contemporary designer, is to create something which works today, will interest the people of tomorrow and responds to the past. It’s about the longevity you would like it to have,” she explains.

“I think you have to be a time traveller. It’s a lot to think about – you never have to just design.”

The majority of Mel’s work can be found in public places, with those in Sussex ranging from a window at Lancing College to a font in St Leonards’.

“Most of my work is created for a space,” she adds. “So you learn to reflect the environment and work closely with people.”

One such project saw Mel create a “spiritual doorway” at Arundel’s St Nicholas Church which went on to receive the Sussex Heritage Trusts Building Craft Award in 2010 - Highly Commended.

“It works really well in that location,” says Mel. “Adding an extra dimension which I feel was unexpected.”

“I do a lot of spiritual work – glass does lend itself to it,” she explains. “The wonderful thing about glass is it has so many ways it can be used, from the traditional to the very, very contemporary.”

It would seem Mel is just as talented with both, creating everything from stunning stained glass to a bright, bold, “art bath”.

“The bath is part art, part function,” she smiles. “It asks a big question. It could be in a gallery or it could be in your home or garden.”

Thought provoking and, quite simply, beautiful, wherever it is put there is no doubt it will create a stir.

Pushing the boundaries is clearly something Mel has fun with and she is not afraid of a challenge either.

Take her touring sculpture for Christian Aid’s ‘Poverty Over’ Campaign for example. Made from enamelled steel the work uses two huge spun steel vessels, representing society’s conscious and poverty, which has been exhibited at cathedrals across the country.

With such a variety to Mel’s creations, how would she sum up her style? “I am sure I do have a style,” she pauses. “This is the way I have always worked. I guess highly patterned and textured.”

“Playing is really important – people don’t give enough credit to it,” adds Mel. “Work should combine the experience of every technique you have ever used. It is important to me that I take traditional skills and some of my contemporary skills and mix them together.”

By doing this the art form can use its roots in the past to inform and assist its future.

“Materials are changing, the way we can work with them is changing so our skills need to change,” agrees Mel.

Having now worked professionally for 20 years it seems hard to imagine her doing anything else.



Mel Howse with her Fire and Water bath. Picture: Aiobheann Hopkins



The Font in St Leonards' Church. Picture: Mel Howse



Watching Bowls. Picture: Mel Howse

"Originally I wanted to study fashion," she reveals. "Then somebody had a look at my work and mentioned I might suit the fine arts more."

"I went and looked at an art course in Swansea and I fell in love with that they were doing. It really has been my life and it still is, which is nice."

Mel clearly invests a lot of herself and her time in her work.

"It is always hard when something leaves me but its life is somewhere else. The best way to cope is to go and start making the next piece of work," she says. "There are lots of good bits. When I have started to work on something and am totally creating I am the most content person in the world."

■ **To find out more about Mel and her work, visit www.melhowse.co.uk**

Places to see Mel's work in Sussex

St Paul's, West Street, Brighton
 Hurstpierpoint College Chapel
 St Leonards' Font
 St Margaret's Angmering
 St Mary's Church, Chidham
 St Mary's Church, Lavant
 Boxgrove Priory, Boxgrove
 Lancing College Chapel
 St Nicholas Church, Arundel
 St Mary's House Chapel, Brighton

And in Hampshire:
 Winchester University College
 Chapel, Winchester