

How To Spice Up Your Dichroic Glass Jewelry

It is said that “variety is the spice of life!” and when it comes to glass art, variety is what makes an artist's work desirable, even collectible. Just look at well-known glass artists like Louis Comfort Tiffany, Dale Chihuly or Josh Simpson. It is their unusual style and technique that became the hallmark of their work.

When we teach our two-day dichroic jewelry-making course, we emphasize the need to create unusual pieces by using a multitude of different colors, patterns and textures of glass, so that indeed, no two are ever alike. Yet I could retire a millionaire if I had a nickel for each time I am asked to examine a piece of glass jewelry in order to figure out the exact composition of the piece so that it can be “re-created” (which is really a nice word for “copied”).

The truth is that when it comes to fusing dichroic glass, no matter how hard we might try, it is almost impossible to turn out exact duplicates because the glass always seems to have other plans (this statement assumes you have used MORE than one repeating pattern on the same base glass). As glass is heated in the kiln and begins to move, the metal oxides and quartz crystals that create the fabulous colors in the glass begin to shift, textures soften, and patterns can sometimes appear to re-arrange themselves magically. We can only control so much, the rest, we must surrender to the serendipitous nature of the dichroic glass and the kiln firing process.

I have done the "art show circuit" and so I am intimately acquainted with the buyer who falls in love with one of your pendant pieces and immediately wants to know if you have another one “just like this” or who wants “matching earrings”. Don’t be shy about educating your buyer. Give them a brief overview of the process involved in creating piece of kiln formed glass and by all means remind them that your glass jewelry is a piece of art and thus you have gone to great lengths to ensure that each piece is one-of-a-kind. As an artist, you should take comfort in the knowledge that most discerning buyers love to know that the piece they buy from you is, in fact, an "original work of art" and that they won't find their best friend wearing the same piece at the next social gathering! Remember, you are an artist not a copy machine!

Here’s another little tip from the word of craft shows ... if you did not create a "set" when you designed and fashioned the original piece, DON'T offer or attempt to try and copy your own work. It is an exercise in futility and frustration (trust me, I’ve been there and done that)!

If you are a real glass aficionado, you have probably seen a lot of dichroic glass jewelry. When I began working with dichroic glass, it was still rather new and exciting and one could actually expect to be well compensated for the cost of materials and the effort involved in turning out a well finished piece of jewelry. It now seems as though the vast majority of jewelry is poorly designed and totally uninspired (some artists seem to rely solely on their ability to slap one patterned piece on a base color, fuse it, and pass it off as “art”) and often there is very little or no attention to finishing techniques. Therefore if you intend to create a niche for your dichroic jewelry piece, you need to aspire to originality in design and excellence in craftsmanship. Don’t be afraid to charge a fair price for your work. In truth, you will never be adequately compensated for your time, so why are you underpricing your art to compete with items that are made overseas??

Yes, variety IS the spice of life. Apply it liberally in your art and you will create a feast for the eyes!