

Sowing the Seeds for Québec Studio Glass

Susan Edgerley and the Founding of Fusion

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In 1988, Susan Edgerley returned to Montréal with a degree in glass and a promising artistic career. Along with several colleagues from the glass arts community, and close friend François Houdé, she was instrumental in founding the Centre des métiers du verre du Québec, today known as Espace VERRE.

From the centre's humble beginnings, Edgerley contributed to the favourable conditions in which the many glass art techniques could be discovered and practised.¹ In the glass art "studio school" (*école-atelier*), Edgerley held the position of general and pedagogical director from 1988 to 1990, and was a member of the teaching faculty from 1989 to 2006.

As a teacher, Edgerley began sharing her experience and knowledge of glass art techniques, while helping students develop concise artist statements, guiding them in careful planning of their artistic projects, and ensuring they maintained a realistic outlook on their budding careers.

Even in the early stages of teaching, Edgerley was acutely aware of the fact that new graduates do not have access to an affordable hot glass furnace, or the specialized equipment required to produce and develop artistic works. Thus it was as a board member of the Centre des métiers du verre that Edgerley instigated what could be deemed her legacy for the fine craft community of Canada.

In 1993, against formidable odds, Edgerley established Fusion, a transitional hot glass studio available to the glass art program's graduates. Greatly inspired by what she had witnessed at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, Edgerley was convinced that, first and foremost, access to a hot glass furnace was a dire necessity for recent graduates. Even with strict budgetary restrictions, she was able to convince the board of directors of the feasibility of setting up a workshop dedicated to blown, sandcasted and hot-sculpted glass works. Enabling emerging glass artists to begin their careers in a stimulating environment at reduced studio rental fees, Fusion would soon become a true business incubator.

Over the years, the material conditions of Fusion have greatly improved in thanks to the financial support of public sponsors. In the fall of 2018, Espace VERRE celebrated Fusion's 25th anniversary with a major two-part exhibition, featuring the works of 58 of the 95 glass artists who began their glass art careers as members of the transitional studio. Guest curated by Edgerley, the exhibition showcased one-of-a-kind works as well as iconic designs and whimsical objects, each pictured in the catalogue. Moreover, Edgerley's curatorial vision highlighted the core values of the programme—originality, and excellence of craftsmanship.

In retrospect, it becomes clear that Edgerley had extraordinary foresight when she founded Fusion. Over half of past members are still creating glass art today. These active glass artists are indebted to her for their successful business endeavours, international careers, and the many possibilities that led to their glass works being acquired for private and public collections.

Fully dedicated to her craft and its community, Susan Edgerley was the seed sower whose pilot project yielded the still-flourishing success of many emerging glass artists of Québec. ■

(Endnotes)

1. The *Techniques de métiers d'art - option verre* program is offered in collaboration with the Cégep du Vieux Montréal since 1989.

Fusion Studio. COURTESY OF ESPACE VERRE. PHOTO: MICHEL DUBREUIL.

