

## Peter Bott



Peter Bott is a very new member of the Shelburne Arts Coop, being accepted into the fold early last fall (2017). Peter lives in South Hadley but comes in to Shelburne Flals to work his shift and recently he also came out to Turners Falls to talk with me and give me his life's story.

Peter's journey is the kind that many artists fantasize about. This is a broad smoothing of the life line of Peter Bott, glass blower: graduation from an art school, success of one kind or another while working within a cool scene in a major city somewhere, followed by disillusionment followed by change of scene and occupation, leading to finding one's true love partner, leading to more winnowing of desire leading to the revelation of the authentic artistic self — just in time for retirement! Of course, it's not that simple! Peter's rich life experience makes for an engrossing story, which I will try to pass on here.

This is Peter's first gallery shop. He started blowing glass about two and a half years ago after a hiatus of about 38 years. He worked with glass when he was finishing his art degree at Alfred University in western New York state. "My sculptural glass was cast glass, I made these bridges with planks of glass on granite blocks with steel rods...minimalism was very 'in' then. My functional glass was pretty funky, and I also made these precious little perfume bottles. Alfred had this amazing facility with funding from Corning Glass," Peter explained. After he graduated, he basically "said good-bye to glass. I had no access to facilities. To have your own studio, you have to run the

furnace 24/7 and I knew that wasn't going to happen for me.”



Peter rented a farmhouse in New Hampshire for several years. There, he returned to weaving, doing assorted odd jobs to make money. He became fascinated with some of the old, dilapidated barns covered with tar paper around where he lived. “At that time, I had gone to a show in Salem that had kimonos, and I was inspired by the way they hang, floating like angels. I was struck by their shape, and also I was inspired by Amish quilts, the mark making of the stitching. So I started taking this tar paper, ripping it and doing patchwork stitches and a spool of plastic cord, using an awl and stitching it. I did a whole series of tar paper fans, and kimonos.”

The work was shown in a Boston gallery and was in Fiber Arts Magazine. Then, he got an itch to go to a more urban place, and enrolled at the Claremont Graduate University outside of Los Angeles in 1980. Said Peter, “I went with a sculpture idea and ended doing something with found materials again. I found a lumber yard that had all this old, painted wood, 2 by 10's, big planks, really cheap... I ended up making boats, life sized boats. I even sold one. I used a method of boat building from my head, from growing up in Gloucester.”



After graduation, Peter realized one of his fantasies by moving to LA with friends and renovating a loft. “Having a loft was my dream,” he recalled. But life after grad school was not all it was cracked up to be. “I got sort of glazed by that professionalism at grad school: you get a gallery or you get a job at a college, you get in Art Forum magazine, blah blah. I lost sight of myself. The boats were neat, but then it was ‘now I got to get out and get a...’and it wasn’t realistic.”

Whenever he needed to make some money, he fell back on restaurant work, so Peter began working for a caterer who got Hollywood movie industry business doing premier parties and such. “Somehow it came out that I was an artist, so I started getting asked to design the looks of the parties, with money beyond imagining...it was so decadent, the amount of money. I was working with styrofoam, neon; I had budgets to hire photographers. It was awesome and the money was not bad. I did that for about five years.” Because he lived right near the wholesale flower market, he also began to make these big flower arrangements for the parties as well. “I knew form, color, texture—I



really love flowers!”

The down side of these activities was the fact that the work was fairly anonymous and he didn't feel like he owned what he did. "It was like, I was doing this to get someone else fame," he explained. So he went back to New Hampshire in '87, returning to LA during the winters to his loft. But the huge disparity between parties in Beverly Hills and the cardboard jungle of skid row that he passed on the way back home got to him more and more and he ended up living full time in New Hampshire after 1990.

He thought he might teach art in the public schools, but the system was not a good match for him. An ad for a "creative person" led to a job working with people with intellectual disabilities, helping them transition into the community after living under institutional care. It was the kind of work that fed something in him, and satisfied him for ten years, leading him to his masters in social work at Springfield College and a relocation to the Connecticut River valley. By 2003 he was working at ServiceNet, providing mental health counseling to people with intellectual disabilities. Now 63, he figures he will be retiring from there in a few years.

During the early 2000s he turned back to fiber for his creative outlet, doing something that his grandmother was known for: hooking rugs. He even inherited her vintage woolen scraps to work with. Completing a piece in his off hours sometimes took years, and he has learned to complete smaller pieces if he wants to work on ideas more quickly. A three by four foot piece took him five years to complete, but the smaller ones he is now doing at the rate of three a year.



Peter and his husband Donny still have a home in New Hampshire that they rent out. It was on a trip to their property two and a half years ago that they passed the Hot Glass Art Center in Marlboro, NH. Here was the way back in to glass for Peter: anyone can rent studio time at the glass shop by the hour. He signed up for a weekend workshop and found that his skills, 38 years dormant, came back to him in muscle memory by the second day. And he found the owner to be an incredible teacher and studio assistant as well. Technology has changed since the 1970s when Peter was at Alfred University, and there are many new innovative techniques for him to explore. Peter loves to make vases, and recently he is exploring roundels of colored glass as an art form. He also will do functional items like glasses. He feels it is an excellent form of therapy for his mental health and happiness, but it has also resulted in an overflow of material goods, hence his desire to join the Coop and sell some of his wares. Interestingly, Peter has one craft that he can take anywhere to do (rug hooking) yet it takes "forever" and then his other craft must be done in a certain place and glass blowing takes only a little time — several pieces can be made in a few hours. Variety is the spice of life!

