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September/October
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Mark Leputa

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The Dynamic World of Trish Duggan

by Kathleen Elliot
Photos courtesy of the artist

While talking with Trish Duggan, I was reminded of a line from the song “Maria” in *The Sound of Music*: “How do you keep a wave upon the sand?” Duggan is a dynamic force of energy, inspiration, and productivity across all areas of her life.

Raised in Guam as the daughter of a military officer, Duggan grew up in a tin Quonset hut with her four siblings.

Whenever she said she was bored, her mother would direct her to the ever-present stack of paper, pencils, and crayons on the table and encourage her to draw. She spent her childhood imagining, creating, and playing in the ocean.

At a young age, she came to the realization that one cannot count the stars in the sky or the bubbles in the sea. This led her to adopt a belief in abundance, a mindset she maintains to this day and seeks to communicate through her art. Although the family had limited financial resources, Duggan grew up with an abundance mindset, which she considers foundational to her personal and artistic philosophy.

Discovering a World of Creativity

Duggan’s mother instilled in her the belief that with hard work and education, one could participate in the American Dream. She recalls, “I just studied. We had dinner at five o’clock, and then I studied. Mom had dictionaries and encyclopedias. If I didn’t know the meaning of a word, she’d have me look it up. I studied every night.

“When I was fifteen or sixteen, I read that alcohol was a neurotoxin, and I thought, why would I ever want to damage my brain cells? I need them all. I never drank, so I didn’t get invited to parties. I thought, those kids are all getting drunk, they’re going down. I’m going up! I’m studying.

“From a very young age, as far back as my first memories, I remember just sitting and drawing, feeling happy because I was creating. I think being creative is one of the best things a *Homo sapiens* does. When we’re in that zone of creativity, it’s such a happy space for all of us.”

Exit Portal Planet Earth,
etched mirror, 2024.



Star Being, 20" x 20", blown and sand-carved glass, 2024.



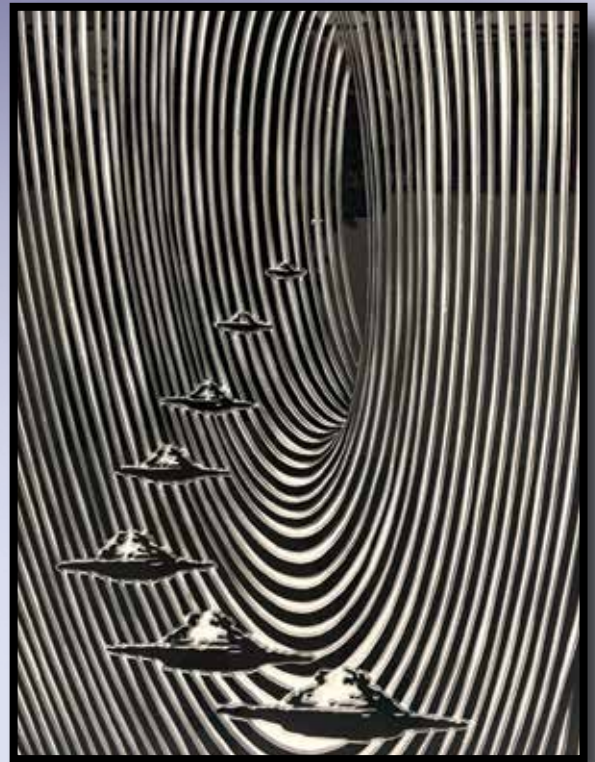
(Above) The Golden Age of Exploration, cast glass with silver leaf, 2019.

(Right) Goddess of Compassion Series, cast glass, 2023.



(Top right) Visiting in Peace.
Both are fused and sand-carved glass, 2022.

(Above) Tranquility Arising, 72" tall,
mixed media mannequin with neon, 2022.



Building a Career through the Power of Encouragement

While studying art as a teenager, Duggan was introduced to woodblock printing and discovered what she describes as a life-changing experience—the power of individual encouragement. At sixteen, she had a Japanese art teacher, Mr. Nakamura, who consistently praised her work, awarding her a blue ribbon or top mark for every piece. “You could be famous. Your woodblocks are amazing, and your art is amazing,” he told her. That validation inspired her to continue creating, eventually producing thousands of pieces and founding an art museum. To this day, Duggan remains in contact with her former teacher, and his early encouragement fuels her ongoing efforts to support and uplift other artists. She also studied printmaking at the University of California and then at Nanzan University in Japan.

Duggan went on to study political science in college, taking at least one art class each semester to “keep my sanity,” as she puts it. She later married and had two children. The couple suffered the tragic loss of their adult son at the age of twenty-six. The night before his passing, he told them, “Beat the loss and adopt.” They went on to adopt and raise six children from foster care. Duggan also became president of the Santa Barbara adoption support group. Alongside raising a large family, she and her husband built and managed a successful investment firm, achieving many of their shared goals.

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A Revelation in Glass

Duggan's journey into glass art began during a visit to John Travolta's home, where she encountered a piece by Marlene Rose. With sunlight streaming through it, the sculpture appeared almost alive. She was captivated and asked Rose if she could observe her creative process.

"It was so fantastic! I absolutely fell in love with watching the process. It is hot, fiery, thrilling. Seeing the pouring of that hot glass was an adventure. I got bitten by the bug, and I wanted to keep creating," Duggan recalls. That initial visit evolved into a weekly studio practice. She speaks with gratitude about Chuck Boux, the owner of the Sigma Studio, who welcomed her into the space and continues to support her work today.

Her passion for both creating and collecting glass art quickly deepened. Eventually, her house became filled with works of glass, prompting her children to say, "There's too much glass, and we're scared of breaking something!" In response, Duggan said, "I think I'll have a museum," a notion that her children found humorous.

A Museum Is Born

Just two weeks later, Duggan noticed that a local charter school had closed. She purchased the building and began work on what would become the Imagine Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. "I'm lucky in my life," she says with a smile.

Duggan's success, however, is far from accidental. It is built on a sustained pursuit of imagination, curiosity, and personal growth. "I was always interested in the *Homo sapiens* mindset. I read *The Wisdom of Insecurity* when I was fifteen and studied all sorts of different things about the mind. I wanted to understand how the mind works, because it has so much to do with who you are and what you do in life. If you have a negative viewpoint, it's tough. Think big. Expand your mind. Think about the effects you can have to help the world and the planet."

The artist's favorite word is *imagine*. She keeps a list of her goals and looks at them every day. "You can imagine doing anything you want to do. You think up what you want to do and put it in writing. I have a list of things I want to do. They're not all done yet, but I look at them every day. Can you imagine? You have to say yes! Nothing substitutes for positiveness. There's no substitute for being positive. Your mindset is all-important. It is what creates your life."

This philosophy is embedded in every corner of the Imagine Museum. Duggan wants visitors to leave feeling peaceful, inspired, and motivated to live differently. Quotes cover the walls of the museum to spark reflection and imagination. One of her favorites, which is attributed to Benjamin Franklin, reads: "What good shall I do today?"

Exceptional Galleries

The museum features a "Wall of Serenity," comprised of twenty-four vases inscribed with the word *serenity* in different languages. A parallel wall displays vases that represent the concept of beauty. Duggan believes that in every family, in every language, in every country, each person can experience beauty and serenity.

Duggan has also collaborated with Austrian artist Gottfried Helnwein to create a gallery dedicated to mothers around the world. The exhibit includes photorealistic images of the Madonna and several Madonna faces cast in glass from a mold of Michelangelo's *Pietà*.

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balance of
heart and mind."
-Harold W. Becker

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Another gallery is devoted to women in the arts, with etched glass portraits of notable women alongside inspiring quotes. A station invites visitors to suggest additional figures. One recommendation, written in a child's handwriting, simply says, "My Mom."

Duggan envisions the museum as both a cultural center and a community gathering space. It hosts programs for schools and children, scavenger hunts, drawing areas for visitors, jazz nights, and even car shows. These events are designed to foster creativity and a sense of belonging. "I'm trying to inspire the younger generation," she explains. "Kids need to learn culture, become educated, become inspired, become creative. Creative thinking brings us to the future. That's the job of artists. We all come from different backgrounds, different parents, siblings, schools, sports, communities, states, countries, but we all need to get along. I think art does that."

Accomplishments in the Arts

In addition to founding and running the museum, Duggan is an accomplished artist. She has created thousands of works, primarily using etched or sand-cast glass and woodblock printing techniques. One of her early projects was an installation of 1,000 lavender glass sculptures of Guan Yin, the bodhisattva (enlightened being) associated with compassion. Duggan has also pioneered a technique that involves pressing a carved woodblock into sand and pouring molten glass into the imprint. Each block yields four paper prints and a single glass piece—five works of art from one carving.

Duggan's series of seventy works on the themes of flight featuring birds, planes, and optical illusions was on display at the Tampa airport. She also collaborated with Swedish artist Bertil Vallien on a wall dedicated to human rights, which was selected by the United Nations for its 75th anniversary celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In addition, Duggan was recently appointed to the Board of Trustees of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts—our nation's most iconic cultural center.

Despite her prolific output, Duggan sees her own art as secondary to her broader mission. "My art is not the important thing. That's my joy! My museum is the important thing. I'm trying to help other artists. I'm trying to create a refuge from all the wild things that people get into in their lives so they can come in and breathe. The whole purpose of my museum is to uplift, inspire, and educate."

Imagine Museum was voted Best Museum of Tampa Bay for 2024 and 2025. With her enduring belief in abundance, Trish Duggan's contributions to art and culture will no doubt continue to grow in meaning and reach. The full scope of her artistic output and influence cannot be captured in a single article. Be sure to visit www.trishduggan.com, her personal website, to find more extensive documentation of her work.

G/A



Goddess of Compassion, 41.5" x 14" x 11", cast glass, 2018.
Photo of Trish Duggan with the piece shown to indicate scale.

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