

Glass Glows in a Garden

By Sharon Zweigbaum

“Let there be light.” God’s mandate in Genesis has entered glassmaker Shoshana England’s creative spirit. Inspired as a child by her grandparents’ Bavarian cut-crystal, the glass artist recalls its bold colors, liquidity and intricate beveling. The Bronx-born former ophthalmologist currently exhibits an array of her radiant fused, woven, and blown-glass objects in a superbly lit showroom at Minneapolis’s Northrup-King Building.

This summer England is one of ten Minnesota Jewish artists invited to showcase their works outdoors at “An Afternoon of Art in the Garden,” a Benefit for *Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council* and The Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. The unique event will be held Sunday, July 18, 4-7 p.m., in the captivating private garden of JHSUM Executive Director Katherine Tane and her husband, Jeff. Tane’s St. Paul gardens feature sweeping views, unusual plants, splendid stonework, and lovely curved paths. The art show will be accompanied by wine and Minnesota’s seasonal bounty prepared by local chefs. Tickets are \$72 apiece and can be reserved by contacting *Rimon* Executive Director David Jordan Harris at 952-381-3449 or rimon@sabesjcc.org.

Besides England, participating artists who will be present for the occasion include glass artist Peter Zelle, painters Paula Pergament, Leslie Gerstman, and David Rich, textile artist Robin Getsug, master woodworker Allan Schultz, ceramicist Suzanna Schlesinger Altman, doll-maker Sandra Self, and photographer Leighton Siegel. All of their work will be for sale. A portion of the transactions will benefit *Rimon* and JHSUM.

England’s creative work is a fascinating synthesis of science and art. She graduated from medical school in 1978 and studied stained glass design during a year off between her internship and residency. She worked in stained glass until her first child was born. England took an 18-year hiatus from art-making after re-locating to Minnesota and while practicing ophthalmology in St. Paul and Buffalo. Then in 2005 England reduced her practice to one day a week and began taking glass-fusing classes, where she felt an “immediate love for the intense sparkle and playful variability” of dichroic glass. Due to the mineral oxide coating, this material continually changes appearance

according to the angle of light and the observer's position. A viewer may find herself moving back-and-forth or side-to-side to appreciate its dynamic iridescent effects.

“As a chemistry major and an eye surgeon, this chameleon-like glass and the fusing technique I use are the perfect combination of my artistic sensibilities, scientific interests and surgical skills,” she stated.

In her spacious, high-ceilinged Minneapolis gallery, Englard offers dazzling vases, trays, plates, light fixtures, Judaica, and jewelry. They are fabricated by experimental processes that she finds “very visually stimulating.” The artist continues with classes that help spur innovation. Lately she has been partnering with a glass blower to create breakthrough fused/blown combinations. One tall, ovoid vase features multi-colored rows of vertical stripes. The effect results from the “roll-up” technique, where a fused panel is rolled and blown. Other vessels are patterned with geometric, fragmentary, or biomorphic shapes in opalescent pastels or gem-like hues.

“I hope to evoke a feeling in people in reaction to color and shape,” Englard said. “If they smile, I aim to recapture that response in future pieces.” Born into an observant family, Englard feels particularly spiritual and close to God in a very Jewish way when she is in her studio. She elaborated, “That is the space where I communicate with my creative angels.” Englard exhibits her work nationwide and has received awards at the Minnesota State Fair, Excelsior's Art on the Lake, and the Dichroic by Design International contest.

Englard looks forward to placing her glass objects in relationship to the garden plantings.

“The . . . vibrant dichroic glass in some examples represents the ever-shifting character of our lives and reflects the natural world. My works present themselves anew as the light varies throughout the day and night.” Englard stated that her blown pieces are very organic and should play off well against flowers and shrubs.

To learn more about *Rimon* or JHSUM, visit their respective web sites: www.RimonMN.org and www.jhsum.org. *Rimon* is an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation.