




JAHDAY FORD AT WORK

A glassblower is working in a furnace. The background is a dark, textured stone wall. In the foreground, a large, glowing red glass piece is being shaped on a lathe. The glass is bright orange-red and has several small, clear glass pieces attached to it. The lathe is made of metal and has a large, circular, light-colored wheel. The scene is lit with warm, orange light from the furnace.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL BUT THINK **BIG!**

Catherine Rose explores ways of innovating and growing your business.

BY CATHERINE ROSE

Glass and multi-media artist Jahday Ford has described contemporary glassmaking as “shockingly challenging” with its high cost of materials, hot shop/studio hire, equipment, travel and shipping. So how can artists find a foothold when climbing such rocky terrain?

Innovation

As a post-graduate, Jahday had access to studio space and storage at Manchester University. However, as a freelance glass artist he has found it a challenge, having to venture further for his practice.

“It’s hard to find affordable studio space,” he explains. “And there are no other glass facilities in Manchester. The cost of materials and overheads make it very daunting. You have to cover your energy bills and rent so you can’t put yourself in debt. Glassmaking isn’t accessible and it’s a tricky process.”

Sharon agrees. “Glass is expensive, so are clay and mosaic making. To work with them takes space and material,” she acknowledges.

Sharon’s first book, *Living and Sustaining a Creative Life: Essays by 40 Working Artists* was conceived from her desire to make space for other artists to share their lives in a transparent way in order to ‘start a conversation’ – something she didn’t see happening. She has negotiated her way through substantial debt in the past and wanted to shine a light on the reality of how to juggle a creative life with the everyday needs of making a living.

Prerana believes that innovation is often misunderstood. “It’s not just for large organisations,” she explains. “In fact, small businesses have an advantage because they are more flexible.” She thinks that many young artists don’t ask enough money for their work, pointing out that “underselling doesn’t help anyone”.

To reduce production costs, she advises being resourceful. “You don’t always have to buy the most expensive materials. Mosaic artist Francesca Busca is passionate about recycling so she uses rubbish to make her mosaics and they’re beautiful.”

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Prerana suggests applying the Ansoff Matrix, which is a strategic tool that can help entrepreneurs to grow their businesses. It asserts that, once you’ve penetrated and saturated your chosen market, you can either look at branching into other markets (market development), make new products for the same

market (product development), or diversify (develop a new product for a new market). Any size business can apply this matrix to increase profit.

Because she can approach ideas from a creative perspective, Prerana has been able to successfully transfer her skills in art and design to problem solving within business. “People don’t realise that artists are great thinkers,” says Sharon. “There is a field called ‘design thinking’ where companies hire artists to lend a creative voice, giving product insight and different ways to be objective.”

Diversification

Despite it being a lifelong passion, Jahday has found he can’t solely rely on glass for all of his income,

THE BARRIERS
BY SHARON LOUDEN
(2021)



so he diversifies to “keep his creative journey intact”. Between glass commissions, he works on other creative projects to boost both his finances and portfolio.

Keen to dispel the belief that there is only one way to chart a path into a sustainable life as an artist, Sharon doesn't define art by media. Her forthcoming book *Last Artist Standing*, which is due to be published next year, focuses on older artists from minority groups and features a glass and ceramic artist. However, it is “less about the work and more about the person and their journey”.

“In my mind, an artist isn't wedded to their media. It simply assists with the artist's language,” says Sharon.

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Prerana believes that seeing how your skills might fit into another sector can foster personal growth. Her authorship has added what she describes as all-important credibility for her “brand”. Sometimes adverse circumstances can be the springboard to creativity and change. Prerana cites the example that during the pandemic, people had

ABOUT JAHDAY FORD

Jahday Ford is an award-winning glass and multimedia artist originally from Bermuda. Now based in the UK, he graduated from the Manchester School of Art in 2017, following which he completed a post-graduate programme in glass-making. Exhibited internationally, he was the recipient of the Jerwood Arts Makers Open competition award in 2022. He received a Manchester Artist Residency for Emerging Artists in 2020-2021.

to rethink their skills and many artists began online workshops to generate increased income.

“The biggest magic is that we, as artists, can pivot very easily because we're used to taking risks,” adds Sharon.

Differentiation

Jahday focuses on experimenting with different forces to shape molten glass beyond what he calls “its decorative normality”. First featured in *New Glass Now* at the Corning Museum of Glass, his collection *Breathe* is a set of conceptual pieces exploring how glass is affected by digital sound waves.

“I wanted to fuse the digital world with the physical; it was well-received,” he says. For *Breathe*, Jahday worked with digital designer Joseph Hilary. “It brought our practices together in a unique fashion and boosted my career,” he says. *Breathe* has since been showcased around the world and has set Jahday apart as a name to watch out for.

The term USP (unique selling point) is often talked about in business and artists should embrace it. “Whichever market you're in, it's important to find your niche,” advises Prerana. “It must be something you're really passionate about. From there, you can brainstorm to develop a compelling story for your brand – very important when you are in front of a client. Differentiation puts you ahead of the competition.”

Prerana's passion is for community projects and she is currently in discussions with the NHS on how to use mosaic in therapy. Meanwhile, Sharon's second book *The Artist as Culture Producer: Living and Sustaining a Creative Life* explores how artists extend their practices outside the studio for impactful change within their communities.

“Whenever there are economic



shifts, artists are affected. We are small businesses,” says Sharon. “But what I love about glass artists is that there are so many ways for them to use glass within different economies and situations. I find this very optimistic.”

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Collaboration

Hoping to collaborate in the near future with well-known Swedish glass artist Lena Bergstrom whom he describes as a “big inspiration”, Jahday sees working with other artists as an affordable way to investigate, design and create in unique environments.

Likewise, Prerana believes that collaboration and teamwork enable emerging artists to maximise their potential while minimising their costs by breaking out of the “small sphere”. “There are lots of people out there with complementary skills to yours,” she says. “You don't have to let being small stop you from working on a large project.”

Jahday has found that undertaking commissions alongside other



LUSTRE BY JAHDAY FORD

artists, or through different platforms that have budget access, is an even better alternative when peer-led collaborations can have tight margins.

Finding organisations and outreach programmes that offer financial backing, or applying for placements and arts residencies, provide invaluable opportunities for young artists. The Jerwood Arts Fund has given Jahday support with travel, accommodation and transporting his work. Through them, he was able to create highly technical pieces working alongside other professionals in larger facilities: an experience which he found incredibly rewarding.



ABOUT PRERANA PHADNIS

Creative business development consultant and mosaic artist Prerana Phadnis chairs the Board of Trustees at the London School of Mosaic. She is a former architect and industrial product designer with longstanding design, branding and marketing experience. She has just published a book on creative thinking entitled *A Different Life, Piece by Piece*.

“Often, you may not want to focus on massive pieces or master-level techniques – this spurs exciting room for collaboration or working with more experienced makers in other mediums. If I didn’t jump to investigate my practice or challenge my knowledge by working with other like-minded creatives, I never would have discovered the areas of glass I work in: designing moulds, creating digital methods and using unusual techniques,” explains Jahday.

Sharon believes that it’s easy for glass artists to become insular, but that connecting with other artists and organisations is very important for development. “It’s much more freeing when artists can meet others. I feel privileged to be a part of my artistic community. Being an artist has a common thread.”

Community Building

Jahday started networking early in his post-graduate year. “I looked at placements, open calls and available facilities, so that I had ideas before I jumped in,” he says.

“There are programmes out there, you just have to be relentless [in applying].”

This summer, he’s working with the Newlyn Exchange programme in Penzance exhibiting his digitally and hand-sculpted works *Axle* and *Axle 2.0*, which explore how engineered manufacturing processes can create colourful rotational forms in glass. “There are programmes out there,” says Jahday. “You just have to be relentless [in applying].”

Sharon was able to start working in glass when she received a residency at Urban Glass in Brooklyn in 2004. She was also a recipient of the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program Award, which gave her a year’s rent-free studio space in Dumbo, Brooklyn, New York, where she welcomed and collaborated with

ABOUT SHARON LOUDEN

Based in New York, Sharon Louden is a multimedia artist, educator, artist advocate, and artistic director of the Chautauqua Visual Arts at Chautauqua Institution. Widely exhibited, her most recent glass sculptures were shown at Chicago's Engage-Projects Gallery in Autumn 2021. Sharon uses her entrepreneurial teaching skills to serve on boards and committees of various art organisations and volunteers her time to further artists' careers. She is editor of the *Living and Sustaining a Creative Life* book series that addresses real life experiences of artists succeeding in today's world.



other artists. Sharon's current studio is part of Two Trees' Cultural Space Subsidy Program.

Signing up to newsletters and

magazines is an invaluable way to keep abreast of opportunities. Jahday has three subscriptions with monthly listings of paid commissions, competitions and open calls.

"I think 60% of my recent opportunities have come from applications I found in newsletter applications," he says.

Although he has had to scale down when financing his own work, such as projects for the London Design Junction and Islington's Business Design Centre, they have provided him with valuable sales and networking opportunities.

Outsourcing

Prerana believes investing in a well-designed website with effective SEO is worth its weight in gold as it can do a lot of the hard work in your absence. "I've seen company exports increase just by having a good website," she says.

Jahday also exploits free social media platforms like Instagram to promote himself and he believes they're important vehicles through

which to view your work critically, make sales and survive. To free up more creative time, Prerana recommends delegating. "You can outsource online product sales, for example, as you don't necessarily have to be present once you've finished designing," she says.

"Small is beautiful but think big!"

Despite the difficulties, Jahday remains positive. "It's been a great journey so far – scary, but great. In a creative industry, you are your own maker. It's easy to lose your passion so patience and determination are essential – it takes a while to gain momentum. You have to do your research. Trust yourself."

"Be mindful of goals," Sharon advises. "The bravery of making art in a studio should be applied outside the studio too."

"If you find yourself stuck, step back to move forward," says Prerana. "Small is beautiful but think big!"

AXLE SMALL BY JAHDAY FORD.
PHOTO BY SIMON BRUNTNELL



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