

The art of glassblowing heats up Killaloe

By Sarah Vance

It took effort to navigate a steady stream of cars lined up along Coll Street in Killaloe over the weekend, to attend Tanya Lyons's gallery.

Dubbed the Glass House, temperatures within Lyons's refurbished storage container are known to reach in excess of 510 Celsius (950 Fahrenheit) as she forges the ancient craft of glassblowing.

'My studio was once a refrigeration unit, so it is insulated,' said Lyons. 'It does become quite cold in the winter, but I get a little warmth from the flame.'

Lyons opened both her studio and her home for tourists who made the trek for the Fall Madawaska Valley Studio Tour.

Hundreds of miniature sculptures glisten in the long autumn shadows, hang ornamentally from spruce trees and are positioned within the gardens around her studio.

Kimonos on mesh frames stood on guard at the balcony and sagittal cuts of gowns were mounted flush with the walls of her home, for the occasion.

Lyons describes herself as a gatherer who collects and takes in objects, moments and memories.

'When I unexpectedly entered into glass I discovered a material that had a life of its own, rich with qualities and full of endless possibilities to experience,' said Lyons, who compares glass work to learning how to dance. 'I fell in love with clear glass and the strength it radiates.'

She added, 'I started to combine glass with natural objects to reflect moments and emotions. I used glass as a carrier or shell, placing natural objects within to add colour, texture and a sense of familiarity.'

Originally from Barry's Bay, Lyons has evolved into a world traveller, who settled in Quebec, before moving back to Ontario two years ago.

'I have a beautiful young daughter and we are very pleased to be able to raise her in Killaloe,' said Lyons who welcomed many young children into her studio, explaining her trade with patient enthusiasm.

Lyons completed graduate work at the Toyama Institute of Glass Art, in Japan.

She has also studied at the University of Art and Design Helsinki in Finland, and at Sheridan College in Ontario, where she apprenticed alongside Kevin Lockau.

Lyons's apprenticeships have paid off, as some notable accomplishments include a three year residency at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, as well as walking the red carpet to unveil her work at the Musee Des Beaux Arts, in Montreal.

Despite her credentials Lyons was approachable as she demonstrated her skills over the weekend.

Lyons presented as a teacher, who has honed her skills at the Haliburton School of Art and Design (formerly the Haliburton School of the Arts) and at Sheridan College, where she also instructs.

Birch bark dresses and kimonos are a theme for Lyons, whose Into the Forest installation was part of the opening exhibition at the New Pierre Lassonde Pavilion at the Quebec Museum of Fine Arts in Quebec City, in July.

'As I continue to work on the dresses, I want to look closely at the effects our clothes have on ourselves and those around us, using glass to reflect the multitude of styles and emotions clothing can project or create,' said Lyons. 'Looking at how our clothing can be a shell or a shield, drawing in or pushing away those who surround us.'

The culture of clothing is not the only expression to have captured Lyons's eye.

With her partner Tao Organ, she has launched a line of chandeliers, accented with glass sculpting.

'We buy existing units and add Tanya's glass sculptures to enhance the frame,' said Tao.

Lyons also creates essential oil diffusers which have an amphora form, resembling tiny wearable vases.

These have become popular pendants in necklaces.

Lyons's mixed media is on display at the South of 60 until October 30.

If you missed the studio tour it will be possible to meet Lyons on Oct. 26, when she will be hosting a workshop called Talking Traces, at the South of 60, at 7 p.m.