

Aggie Beynon

Aggie Beynon was a fine arts student with an idea many years ago. Inspired by a 17th century Japanese tradition of metal lamination, she wanted to take powdered metal and press it into sheets to use for her jewelry designs.

She was told it couldn't be done.

So Beynon, a mother of three young girls and a student at the University of Kansas at the time, went to a mechanical engineering professor who embraced the idea.

Four years later, what couldn't be done, was done.

And now Beynon, who eventually returned to Waterloo, is a renowned artist who is also managing partner of her own gallery – Harbinger Gallery – which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2007.

The gallery on the corner of Regina and Dupont streets has been a showplace for her own designs which range from perfume bottles in the shape of a giant slug to brooches, hair clips and jewelry that still employ the innovative materials she helped create back in her university days.

Her art and business have thrived in a society that doesn't always place a priority on visual art and crafts.

On her tenth anniversary, Beynon reflected, "It's not part of our way of life and it's not ingrained in our culture the way it is in countries that are older and have established how important the artistic and spiritual side of everybody's life is."

In her attempt to support the visual arts in Waterloo, Beynon used the same tenacity and intelligence that inspired her art to establish a fundraiser that has become a phenomenal success.

Brush With Art was founded in 1998 to raise money for local galleries and endow the first visual arts fund. Volunteers canvassed homes and offered useful house paint kits in exchange for a donation. The formula proved to be a remarkable success and the Brush With Art campaign has been gaining momentum ever since.

Beynon, who graduated with her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Waterloo in 1975, went on to get her fine arts degree while living in Kansas in the early 1980s. Her work has been shown and sold in more than 200 galleries, museums and shops around the world.

"Craft, often in the minds of people, is not very serious work and doesn't have a lot of depth, whereas fine art does. Well, we have crossed those boundaries here and will continue to do that because there isn't really a difference in my mind. They both often dip into the same well."



In 2005, Beynon was honoured with a 20-year retrospective of her art at Wilfrid Laurier University's Robert Langen Art Gallery. The exhibit – labeled *Wabi: Imperfect Beauty* was lauded by reviewers. “. . . she manipulates materials in an expressive way which is loose, gestural and intuitive. In marked contrast to conventional jewelry, Beynon's pieces are asymmetrical, roughly hewn and idiosyncratic.”

In 1999, she was named Oktoberfest Woman of the Year in the Literature/Art Category and in 2002 she was honoured with the prestigious John Mather Award from the Ontario Crafts Council.

She said once, “Arts is an intellectual pursuit – just like math . . . I believe an arts education helps us establish our values and further, helps us define ourselves culturally. The arts are part of the cornerstone of being educated.”

Photo courtesy of Harbinger Gallery