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Deceased pets memorialized in art

Art from Ashes founders say there's a story behind each piece.

By **MELISSA KATZ**

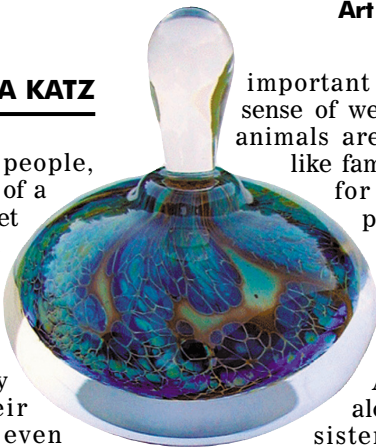
For many people, the death of a beloved pet represents a profound loss.

Yet until recently, pet owners had few ways to pay tribute to their late animals, even when they felt their pets had become part of their families.

Now a new business in Amherst is stepping forward to help fill that void by offering hand-crafted pet memorials that aim to artfully memorialize lost pets.

At Art from Ashes, a small amount of a pet's cremated remains is used in the creation of a glass memorial that can take the shape of something as discrete as a paperweight or as useful as a glass-topped walking stick.

"As a society, we're not too great about allowing people time to grieve even (the loss of) humans, and that's certainly the case with pets," says Jane Giat, of Pelham, a psychiatric social worker who is also a partner in Art from Ashes. "Pets are vitally



A silver veil-patterned perfume bottle from Art From Ashes.

important to people's sense of well-being, and animals are very much like family members for many people."

Art from Ashes was founded by Deb C. Brown, of Amherst, along with her sister Jennifer Bourgeois, of Wilbraham, and Giat, who is Brown's best friend.

Beginning this summer, the business will also add a jewelry line through Pelham artist Martha Proctor, of Liquid Sand Studio. Bourgeois says that glass pieces are particularly suited to this type of memorial because they offer a discrete way of honoring a pet.

"Urns are often kept in a closet," she said. "With a glass piece, if someone wants to showcase it they can, but if not, they can just have it there."

The idea first surfaced about 10 years ago, but Brown says it wasn't the best time to embark on a new career, so she and her sister tabled it.

Their grand-



An Autumn Square Phoenix Stone, similar to comfort or worry stones associated with several cultures, was created by Art From Ashes in Amherst.



Photo by Melissa Katz

Deb Brown, left, Jane Giat center, and Jennifer Bourgeois are founders of Art From Ashes, an Amherst-based business that offers handcrafted pet memorials.

mother had always collected glass paperweights, which made the two especially drawn to that medium. About two years ago they began canvassing arts festivals for an artist whose glasswork they particularly liked. Eventually they met with Robert Burch, a master glassblower from Putney, Vt.

"At first he looked at us kind of funny," Brown said, adding that it wasn't long before he came to understand what the partners were aiming for. "We were looking for an item you could hold in your hand."

The team, which now included Giat, experimented for about two months with ashes donated from a friend who had lost her dogs.

Art from Ashes, which is primarily an Internet-based business, has sold 33 commissioned pieces so far, four of which included human ashes. A few more people are considering items.

In one case, a woman's

father, a Navy man, had died, and to honor her father's love of the sea, she commissioned a piece in the shape of a glass wave.

In another case, a woman chose glassware in the shape of a purple dinosaur with a yellow razor back. It was a gift for her sister, whose recently deceased dog had been enamored of a stuffed dinosaur chew toy. Both the dog and his chew toy were cremated together and then preserved in the glass dinosaur.

"There's a wonderful story behind each piece," Brown said. "That's the part we didn't expect."

LEARN MORE

What: Art from Ashes

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