

A Glass MENAGERIE

FOR THIS DAMASCUS ARTIST, KALEIDOSCOPIES
ARE HARDLY CHILD'S PLAY

Story by David Driver | Photography by Cory Donovan



A defining moment came for Charles Karadimos in the late 1970s after he graduated with a degree in economics from the University of Maryland: He was offered a job at the World Bank.

He turned it down.

"I had not cut my hair since high school. I was offered a job to do research, but I opted out since I didn't want to cut my hair and wear a suit and tie to work every day," says Karadimos, still sporting a ponytail.

"I can't look back now and say I would change that decision. The irony is that now I play golf on a course owned by the World Bank."

Karadimos, who enjoyed math and building projects as a teen, began working with glass in 1975; four years later, the self-taught artist started exclusively building high-quality glass kaleidoscopes. Today, he is one of only about 25 people in the United States who makes his living solely via that art form.

The Rockville native has been featured on the *CBS Morning News* and in several books and magazines, and won the Brewster Award for Creative Ingenuity. He is now

one of the directors of the Brewster Kaleidoscope Society, the international organization of kaleidoscope enthusiasts.

"I am not wealthy and probably never will be. But I love what I do and I have control of my life," says Karadimos, who is single.

Early in his career, Karadimos drove a school bus to help supplement his income. That is no longer needed, as he is



In the hands of Charles Karadimos, kaleidoscopes are works of art.

considered one of the best in the world at his craft, according to Joe Egerton, owner of Arts Afire Glass Gallery in Alexandria, Virginia, who has been displaying Karadimos' work for 15 years.

"Not all artists are good businesspeople. He is an excellent businessperson," says Egerton. "His work is very precise. His images are just superb. Charles makes every piece on his own. Nothing is bought."

The price of his intricate creations—which boast handmade beads, pressed glass, and dry-filled ampules—ranges from \$260 to \$6,000. In recent years, he has shipped many pieces to customers in Japan; several of that country's kaleidoscope



artists have attended the annual Brewster convention in the U.S.

"My economics background helped me with supply and demand," says Karadimos. "It was a great learning process."

The artist's studio, built roughly 20 years ago, sits adjacent to his home on several acres in Damascus, with a view of beautiful foliage in the fall. Deer come to within a few feet of the back window of the studio, which includes a workbench, drawing table, neatly stacked supplies, and a kiln which can reach more than 1,000 degrees in just a few minutes.

Karadimos spent many years attending arts-and-crafts shows and selling through galleries, eventually getting burned out.

"I used to sit down and make glass scopes one after another," he says. "After you do too much of anything, you lose that passion. So I decided to cut back on production."

But the quality remains high, as his customers can surely attest.

"We all remember having kaleidoscopes as a kid," says Karadimos. "In the last 30 years, there has been a renaissance with kaleidoscopes as an art form.

"There is a group of us who are creating kaleidoscopes out of wood, glass, or metal. We are turning this into more of an adult toy and trying to capture adults' attention." ✨

For more information on Charles Karadimos' kaleidoscopes, visit www.karascopes.com.