



## Episode Transcription: "Utopian Futures, Healing Energy, & Piano-Playing Cats: A Conversation with Tim Tate"

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

From Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Washington, this is *Frit City*. I'm your host, Jabari Owens-Bailey. Today we are joined by Tim Tate. Tim is one of the co-founders of Washington Glass School, as well as the group 21st Century Glass, or Glass Secessionism. He received a Fulbright Award to research at the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom in 2012. In 2018, he was invited to speak at Yale University's *Craft and Conflict*, where his lecture represented the queer community and its history of art activism. His work is included in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and has recently been featured in exhibitions at the Venice Biennale, Boca Raton Museum Glasstress 2021, and the Hermitage State Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Alright, Tim.

Tim Tate:

Hi, Jabari.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Yeah. I just wanted to start off this interview by asking you about your background. Particularly, how did you come to glass?

Tim Tate:

Well, when I was eight years old, my mother dragged me to Corning Museum. I have the actual photograph of us standing in front of the Corning sign with me and my mom. In my yellow plaid shirt, my black plaid jeans. I'm just going to say, I was smoking even then. And so, I was so hooked on it that I wanted desperately to do that. But then I became a therapist, did a lot of other stuff. And one day I got a terminal diagnosis, and they said I had one year to live.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Wow.

Tim Tate:

And I was young. I was really young. And when you're faced with that young, you decide that you better do what you wanted to do when you retired, because there's no extra time. And so, I'd always wanted... So, I went down to Penland, because for ten years they said I had one year to live. It was a crazy time. I was just a young kid. So, I went to Penland for the first time just to try to have this dream of mine, not telling anyone – I became HIV positive then. That was almost 40





years ago, so no one knew what this was, this was my huge secret. But I went down to see if maybe I could find something I wanted to do, and there it is. It was a magical class, one of those rare ones where everybody knows each other forever, and I still am talking to people I met in that class. So, it found me. It found me and dragged me in, and I haven't looked back.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

That's amazing. And because of that experience, does it occupy a specific place in your life because of that?

Tim Tate:

I would almost say it's a magical place, right? Everything good that's happened in my life since then has been because of glass. It's taken me around the world at almost no energy on my part. I don't really seek out too many things. They just kind of happen and I'm never quite sure why, but I feel like these are just messages from the universe that they weren't quite ready to take me then, and they were, for some reason, allowing all these successes. So, we'll see. I have no idea what caused it. I don't know why people pull me into these ones. I mean, I love my work, but I'm always surprised when other people do. I know I shouldn't be, but I don't allow myself to think my work is so great, because I think if I thought that way about myself, my work would cease to be great.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Yeah, well, I think you're saying a lot of very important things with your work as, you alluded to it before, but particularly thinking about the fact that the AIDS pandemic has been so prominent in your work. I guess, can you talk about why that's so prominent in your work and how that has been received and all of your experiences making work around that subject matter?

Tim Tate:

Definitely. What I realized for that first time I went to Penland was that the creation of art was a healing act, totally healing act, and I actually truly believe that glass saved my life. In my mind, I thought, as long as I have a plan on what I'm doing with my glass, as long as I have a plan on what I'm going to be making next, as long as I trusted myself to make work, that I was going to stay alive. I just talked to myself that way. Plus, after ten years of a blowtorch behind me saying, "You're going to die in a year," my speed of making things was quite fast, because I was going to be dead in a year. So, I had to make things as quick as I could.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

You're working against the clock.

Tim Tate:





I was working against the clock. So, I made a lot of work. I made it quickly. I sacrificed, probably, my whole personal life for it because I was going to be dead in a year, so what did I need a relationship for? I just needed to finish this work. And that kept going. So the relationship, that magic relationship between me and HIV will always be there, right? Always. I think it's what staves off my death. I almost feel like I will live forever, if I can find just the next big enough project, that will do it. So that's my hope. And I have not admitted that out loud. This is just weird in my head, thoughts that that's what's kept me on this course, this total course, where I look only at what I want to say with my work, and I don't think of anything else but what I want to say and how I'm going to make it happen. I don't think where it's going to go, I don't think where it's going to sell – even though, by the way, glass is commerce, no matter what anyone says – but I just want to make sure that it sends the right message. And even lately I readjusted that to make sure that that was happening. Sometimes you stray from that path of what you want to create and what you want to say, and then you find yourself kind of being altered by your galleries and stuff. And I found a path back and I was really happy to do that.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

That's so interesting that you're talking about the relationship of commerce to your work, because when I think about your work, it just seems like so much of it has to do with the fact that you are a queer artist, that you're making work about the AIDS pandemic, and all of those things seem more paramount to me. I guess, can you speak to the importance of those things, and how does that actually compete against the side that is centered on commerce?

Tim Tate:

As I said, I haven't really centered on it, but it's just part of glass. Part of glass is we watch the auctions, we know everybody's value of their work beforehand. The galleries are centered around it. However, no one's making – well, I don't know if no one – I think it would defeat my purpose if I was making things to sell. If I was making things to sell, I would make a lot more blue cobalt faces, you know, if that's what I was trying to do. I never am sure if I'm going to sell something or own it forever. I'm never positive. But for some reason, almost everything I've ever made sells within two years, my whole career.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

That's a beautiful problem.

Tim Tate:

It's not a problem. So, I don't really think about it. I know it's going to happen somehow, right? Because my work is usually about touching someone in some way and showing how I've been touched by the universe or God, whatever you want to call it. And I think when people feel that





solidarity, they feel the loss that I felt, or they felt, then they're drawn to the work and they want to get it for that reason. And I think anyone thinking about making work should not make what they believe will sell. Because if you make work that you believe will sell, you will own it for eternity because no one's going – you can't make work that way, I don't think. I couldn't anyway.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Your work seems to be as meaningful about your personal identity.

Tim Tate:

Yes. This is a time when everybody is speaking about their own culture. We have finally had a curtain lifted and said, "Describe your culture." But I will say almost nowhere is queer culture being celebrated that much. Right? It's like, they will let queer people occasionally make work. But unfortunately, shows about queer culture are very limited. There's not many of them around. And I would think that – I'm not trying to be offensive to anyone listening – but you get really tired of asking straight people for permission to make work about your own culture. All the gatekeepers are still straight white males. Now, as a white male. I got around that. But unfortunately, the one thing white males hate is I would give up my masculinity to be gay. That is so offensive that I have some difficulty getting around. But, you know, this is the time, and I'm going to keep trying. And whether I get there or not, I don't know. I'm hoping that Katie [Buckingham] likes the show I'm putting together. And I'm working hard to make sure that that is an important part of what I'm doing. Because, with any culture, if we don't speak up for ourselves, then nobody's going to speak up for us. If we don't do it, then why should anyone else do it for us? I mean, really, why should anyone else if we ourselves... In fact, as the daughter of Malcolm X once said to me – and that's not a lie – if we don't take ourselves seriously, how can we expect others to? And that's the absolute truth. She was dead serious when she said it to me. I was like, "Yes, ma'am. Fuck yes. I listen." And I heard it that day, and I've heard it ever since that day.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

It's powerful.

Tim Tate:

It's powerful. And she had done it. She and I were both getting *Out Magazine* awards for Persons of the Year and there were people there at this award ceremony, just partying and stuff, and finally she gets to the mic, and she says, "What is wrong with you? Honestly, if we don't take ourselves seriously, why should anyone else?" And I heard that ringing like a bell, and I'll always hear it till the day I die. Why should anyone take us seriously? And while I can, as you know, I can joke around, in my work, I never joke around. My work is always deadly serious about what I intend. It might be semi-funny about it, but really, there's not a lot of humor in my work. It's really





just an awareness in the work. So, I can be funny, but my work is not allowed that. Although, I've done a few.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Getting to know you as a person as I have over the last, say, year and a half since we've known each other, you are a very fun-loving and gregarious human being, but I would say a lot of your work has to do with grief.

Tim Tate:

Yes. And loss.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

And loss. Yeah.

Tim Tate:

Yeah. Lots.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Yeah.

Tim Tate:

There's one bowl that people always like, and it's a blue kind of white-veined bowl with nine angels on it. And that's because, in one year, I lost nine friends in one year. That's a lot. It was nine souls, nine angels. That was what it was there for. So, what I try to do when I have these losses, I try not to have a piece that you start crying at. I mean, I don't want that, and I'll put it in the most beautiful terms, but I am expressing that loss on every single piece. Now, there's also a lot of hope, right? Not just that. My whole new focus is a utopian queer futurism. That is my entire new thing because I want to imagine what may or may not ever happen. I don't know. But if I can't imagine it, then neither can anyone else, so I'm going to help people imagine it.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

That's a beautiful sentiment, to imagine the future and to think about the future looking like you. That's a very intentional way of approaching the idea of the future.

Tim Tate:

Imagine it looking like us. Imagine it looking like there aren't barriers that exist now to people moving forward. Imagine if it was a queer-accepting, racial-accepting, women-accepting culture in the United States, where that was never a barrier. Well, if we don't imagine it, if we don't show





it, maybe it won't ever happen. And maybe it won't ever happen now, but I'd hate to sink into the cynicism of a romantic who's failed. I tend to be romantic in the way I look at the world. I think that we can look at that and we can get past this time. I don't think it's better now than it used to be. I think it's worse now for queer people. Trans African American women... God help. God help them right now. They're like target practice. And it's frightening. And the thought that this is happening and nobody's stopping this... At this moment, there are politicians right now who say it's "the biggest threat in the United States" and that kind of thing... There's going to be huge violence. There already has been. Pulse and Club Q and all these different violent acts that have occurred. There's going to be more. And the more of those that happen, the more polarized we'll be, and the more that, hopefully, other queer people will say, "E-fucking-nough." I mean, I'm hoping and I'm doing my little, tiny part, right? I'm making artwork just to bring awareness. That's all I'm doing. And the artwork looks like a nice piece of art, too, but I'm just doing this to bring awareness, and, hopefully, that just one person will think about something at some point and maybe we'll get to that utopian queer future, I'm hoping. And not just utopian queer future. Utopian racial future. I mean, all these utopian futures where the United States is, for once, accepting of everybody. It's probably not in my lifetime, but I'm going to just say it is and go forward.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

I think that's a brilliant sentiment. I guess one thing that I appreciate about you –

Tim Tate:

Is I'm unfiltered, right?

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Well, I appreciate that too. I think that there's so much of what you do that is aligned with protest, and that's not only in your work, but also getting into your Glass Secessionism, which is kind of a protest against the old guard of glass as well.

Tim Tate:

It's interesting. People saw it as a protest. People saw it as us declaring that everybody in Studio Glass was gone. People saw it as an attack on Studio Glass. It was an amazing thing. It wasn't at all... And of course, mostly people questioned my knowledge of history, forgetting that I co-wrote the entire thing with William Warmus, one of the curators who wrote all the history books. But he's not an easy target. I am an easy target. So, the world decided to go after me. And the death threats – I kept all those. They're on my Facebook page, if you want to listen to them. I just think that's the way of the world, and I have accepted that. None of it was meant to be controversial. All of it that we said... You know, the problem is, I wrote a 13-page warrant to show why we wrote





that, and nobody, nobody read 13 pages. If you wrote a paragraph, it was a miracle – nobody bothered reading it. They just reacted to the word “secession.” And we were going, you know, like Albert Stieglitz, who seceded from photography. He thought photography should be more than mimicking painting and doing landscapes and portraits, that it had a duty to do more. Well, we thought the same thing. And Bill Warmus wrote it with me. So, I thought, *Well, this is no problem.*

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

There is an element of subversion to it.

Tim Tate:

I think being provocative with the title of it and actually doing it historically, we were actually tying to photo secessionism. I mean, that's what we were tying it to.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Right, I get that.

Tim Tate:

So, it wasn't like out of left field, just “Let's fuck with people.” It was vaguely provocative, but only to start dialogue because... What happens? He and I met on a bus trip in Chicago to a collector's house and, all of a sudden, we realized who each other was, and we each knew each other, and we started talking. And this was early... This is in the mid-2000s. And we said, “Something has changed. Something is different now than it was during the Studio Glass test.” But we couldn't figure out what it was. So, he said, “Why don't we start this Facebook page and just start putting images and talking about what is different now in the 21st Century? And we'll just put up pictures from them and we'll only talk about that topic, just so that we can get handle on what is changing.” And of course, everything changed. Everything changed. Even now, that is not admitted by a lot of people. They go, “Nothing's changed. It's all about Studio Glass.” Well, no, it isn't anymore. It's so much broader than that. Who makes the glass, where they make it, where you sell it, who represents people. Everything has changed. How you show the glass, how much glass you see in a year. There is so much difference now. The Internet changed the world, and Studio Glass was before the Internet, and then into it as it came in. So, it has changed.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

How would you feel about this?

Tim Tate:

Let me listen.





Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Studio Glass is to Glass Secessionism as modernism is to postmodernity.

Tim Tate:

Okay, that's good. I think it is a predecessor, if that's what you're saying. I think that's certainly what it is. We acknowledge that we are standing on the shoulders of giants and that we revere all those names, but that was never heard. It was only heard as this lack of respect. And the thing I heard the most is, "Who does Tim Tate think he is, writing this?" Right? Well, again, they forget that Bill Warmus wrote part of it. So, we got to the point where it was getting dangerous. People were so angry, and it was getting to be a bit much. But then the editor of *American Craft* magazine called and said, "Oh my God, this is crazy. You're getting the worst attacks we've ever seen. We have to print one of the letters, just because someone sent one, but I'm choosing one that's not as horrible as the others." – and let me tell you, it was horrible, so I didn't want to know what the others were. And she said, "I've got to print it," but she goes, "I haven't seen a hatchet job on a craftsman like this for 30 years." They went after me and they always made it a personal thing, right? I mean, when they went to a glass magazine, it was all about what an asshole Tim Tate was. It wasn't about Glass Secessionism history. It was always what an asshole Tim Tate was. It got old, but we just kept plugging. She goes, "Just hang in there, and pretty soon it'll be norm and then it'll be just accepted" – which, it'll never be accepted in Seattle, but, for the rest of the world, it's already history. It all happened exactly as we said it would, and if anyone goes back and reads the 13-page warrant, they will see that everything in there, even the people we predicted would be famous. We didn't get all of them, but we got a lot.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

I mean, it's great to be that much in the current of things that you are kind of setting it. You are kind of establishing the zeitgeist.

Tim Tate:

With Bill Warmus. But that's an important, that's an important point. When they agree with it, they mention Bill. When they disagree with it, they mention me. I'm a really easy target. I understand that. I'm open, and I'm outspoken, and I'm the big queer guy, and that's fine. I'm used to having potshots. That's okay.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Well, I think so much of who you are is about the work that you do, and that work isn't only Glass Secessionism, it isn't only your work. You're also someone who runs a studio, also someone who is an educator because you have Washington Glass School.







Tim Tate:

With over 6,000 students already going through, a lot of people going through. We're doing public art, we're doing a lot of work over there, a lot of work, and we have a huge community that surrounds us.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

How did that start? What was the impetus for creating this place that would house future generations of glassmakers?

Tim Tate:

You know, it was odd. It was the mid-Atlantic, which was the one place you had to drive 8 hours to get to glass. No glassblowing, really, per se, at that time in the Washington area, and there are millions of people. I had to drive to Penland 8 hours, and I got tired of driving. So, a friend of mine had this – in fact, he somehow got control from the city over the Marvin Gaines old junior high school. 150,000 square feet. He got ahold of this building, which now houses the Rebel Collection, but at that time it was just an abandoned building. I mean, you could barely have toilets, none of them working, hardly. So, we moved in. He really wanted a glassblowing studio, and he'd been trying for years to get a glassblowing studio, but he never put no money in it. So, I said, "Listen, I'll go ahead and start a warm glass school, and that'll give you the impetus for finding people. They'll see you can do that, and then you can bring in money for the glass, the hot glass." And, ludicrously, in that bizarre space, he would write grants, but he'd write grants for, like, glassblowing for children. I said, "You do realize we have adult-only classes and they're casting. There is no glassblowing, and there are no children playing in our broken glass." But he would just write these grants and get them and just keep the money. It was so odd. And then one day he believed that I had a secret deal with the Corcoran. David Levy had called me because of some article that he put in the paper, some crazy article, and David Levy, the director of Corcoran, wanted to find out what it was about. And I said, "Honestly, I have no friggin' clue. I'm a pawn in this. I don't know what anyone's talking about. I don't know what it is."

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

This is history I didn't know – that's where I went to undergrad.

Tim Tate:

Well, there you go. Well, David Levy is the one who called. You know David Levy. So, they freaked out. They kept saying I had a secret deal. And I kept saying, "Please tell me, what kind of deal could I make with David Levy that would affect any human being other than myself?" And I didn't have a deal with – I wish I did have a deal with David Levy, but I had none. So, when that occurred, we had to move quickly, and then we moved to our next place. And that was right





between second and third base in the new Nats stadium. Right across from the sex clubs. We thought, "Who's going to want this?" And I thought, "Wow, if I'd been a developer..." I realized, yeah, exactly. Right.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

That's in southwest, right?

Tim Tate:

That's in southwest. No, no, southeast, and right on this side of south. It's right near what we call Blowjob Alley and near the drag bar. I don't call it that – it was called that before we got there. People would just disappear down there and come out zipping up. Anyway. There's a bathhouse on the next corner. One day, the daytime towel attendant came to tell me what a fan of my work he was. And I said, "Brother, there are no jobs below yours on Earth. You have got to do better. You've got to do better than this. You owe it to yourself to do more. Do more with your life." Sorry, that was a little too graphic. But I'm saying that we tried very hard, and we got knocked about several times. Then Eminent Domain got called and that actually put us into a really great spot. And now we're one of the micro communities around this country, because MFA programs have gatekeepers that are frequently not letting in alternative people whatsoever.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Right.

Tim Tate:

But we can, in our micro community of Washington Glass School, and there's 50 other artists, not just glass artists, in our compound. We can do whatever we want. We are a micro community that puts gatekeepers out of the way. In our world, either talent or enthusiasm are equal. So, what you're hearing on that is, even if you're not super talented, if you're enthusiastic, you'll get more talented. And so that's what that's about. That's why they're equal. Because the love of creation and the competency in making something are equal in our eyes. And we have a covenant there, which – I don't think you know about our covenant, but our covenant is – anyone who teaches there, all the partners, if you have a table there, if you're one of our students, everybody who comes in there has to sign a document, okay? And that document says, "No one's success in this building is at your expense." That success is every person who succeeds. We are going to be happy for that person because no one took anything from you. But that person may be helping you later. So, if you have an interview with a newspaper, mention that to someone about someone else in this compound. For instance, I had a huge show at MAD, the Museum of Art and Design. Huge show. 300,000 people came and saw my work. 300,000. I called the director, and I said, "Can I do it with my buddy?" He said, "Sure, no problem." I was already in. Now he was in,





and I didn't lose anything, but my buddy had a show at MAD. I included him. It was that simple. So, that was the covenant. And then everyone started to get more and more successful because everyone was watching out for everybody else.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Yeah. Kind of like an intentional community.

Tim Tate:

It was very intentional, although the beginning was unintentional. All of this happened because I put a video on my Facebook page of a cat playing the piano. I'm not proud, but I'm not ashamed either. It was a cute goddamn cat. Her name was Nora, and she played the piano. Someone in Germany had taken all the YouTube videos of Nora – because her mom was a piano teacher, she would mimic her mom – and wrote a concerto to go with it, and they projected the YouTube videos behind them as the entire orchestra was in front of them. I said, "That is so cool." I put it on my Facebook page, and a guy pops up and goes, "That is so cool. I should have them here at my museum." I said, "Museum? What museum?" And that guy turned out to be the director of the Museum of Art and Design in Manhattan on Columbus Circle.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Whoa.

Tim Tate:

He just happened to see this door. I didn't know him at all. I go, "Well, what are you doing? I got stuff for you." He goes, "Well, we're doing a show called *Dead or Alive*." I got something for that, and so, I pitched an idea to him. He said, "Draw it up for me later. I'll let you know tomorrow. I'll talk with the curators." And then he called and said, "You're in." And that was with Damien Hirst. That was with Sanford Biggers. That was 300-some-plus thousand people. Still to this day, one of the most successful shows that MAD has had.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Wow.

Tim Tate:

All from putting on social media a piano-playing cat. And that is where I learned the power of social media, and I've never forgotten that lesson. Never.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Yeah, you have a pretty robust social media presence.





Tim Tate:

I do, because I figure the harder I work, the luckier I get. I'm going to keep getting lucky. There you go.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Yeah. I've learned a lot from following you on Facebook.

Tim Tate:

Oh my God. Is that the sex tip one? Oh, no, you don't follow that. You're on 21st Century Glass. Okay, I got it.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

No, I didn't know about the other one.

Tim Tate:

Oh, that's probably best. No one does, right?

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

That's great. Tim.

Tim Tate:

Yes. Jabari.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Indeed. You are here right now interviewing with me because you're currently doing a residency at our museum, and I know –

Tim Tate:

Another very unexpected event in my life. So magnificent. It feels surreal to me. I'm there, but I'm out of my body while I'm there. Honestly, I feel like I'm looking at someone else doing this. Isn't that weird?

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

So much serendipity has led to this. I mean, from us meeting when I interviewed you for the interview series I did with the *Transparency* exhibition.





Tim Tate:

Oh, that's right. That's where it was from. Right from the beginning, I knew you were cool. Right from the very first day, I knew what it was. You had something about you.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Well, I appreciate that. And then the fact that you have a relationship with Katie, our curator at Museum of Glass, and now you're here doing this residency. Right now, you're still in the middle of it, and by the time this podcast is released, you'll be done, but what do you hope to get out of the remainder of your residency?

Tim Tate:

I'm working on a show called *The Journey to A Queer Utopian Future*. So, I'm making work for that show, but, also, I want to solidify a relationship with Katie and the Museum. Anyone out there who's thinking of making art, I would say to them, I don't know that you have to put so much energy into it. I think that it's this huge, turbulent river, and it sweeps you to places you never thought you'd be. All of a sudden, you get a call. If you just do a year of yes – a year of yes, that was one of my things. You've heard that before from other people? – I did a year of yes, and it took me all around the world. As we get older, we're prone to saying no. I thought before I got too old – which I may be – I did a year of yes, and it took me all over the world. The art world is unexpected, unexplainable. I couldn't sit down and tell anybody what the contemporary art world is about. It's different than the Studio Glass world, very different than the glass world. It's so much faster, so much more turbulent, so much more overwhelming. It just sweeps me away. I still come back with a love of Studio Glass. It's why I'm here. But forever, I'm the person who's thinking everybody thinks I'm here to gun for Studio Glass when the exact opposite is the real truth. I love Studio Glass. I'm a product of Studio Glass. I came up through Studio Glass and never intended, by the way, to get known.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

So, do you find yourself being someone who is an artist who serves two masters, both the contemporary art world and also the glass world?

Tim Tate:

Not now. I'm now almost totally art world only. I did a long stint in the glass world, and then I decided maybe it wasn't the right thing. It was more of the tail wagging the dog, a little bit, because the glass world has confines on what they're expecting from you. It's different than the fine art world, which is expecting nothing. You just do the best you can and hope you find the right source where people also love it. It's a different world out there. It's much less constraining and you can do almost anything, as long as you can figure out where your market is, where are





your people that you want to be interested in it, where who wants to see it, at what museum. You can do almost anything. And if you are passionate about it, if you really feel it inside of you, someone else will too. That's a guarantee. If you make work with passion and you make work with your heart and you make work with your soul, other people will see it through your eyes. If you're making work just to make off work, another goblet or whatever it is, if you're just not paying attention, no one's going to feel that energy from the piece. And I really do believe I put huge amount of healing energy, memory energy – I put a huge amount of energy into every piece I do. And I think most people who have one of my works feel that same energy coming from that piece. I hope they do.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Just thinking about conversations that you and I have had, you're so passionate about your work. And definitely the conversation we had in the car on the way over here, you're passionate about your working methods, too.

Tim Tate:

So, what working methods are you talking about?

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Now, Tim.

Tim Tate:

I forgot which one we were talking about.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

We were talking about kiln-cast glass.

Tim Tate:

Oh, okay. So yes, I am very passionate about kiln-cast glass. Mostly because I lived in the one area of the country, there was no blowing studio. So, it made no sense for me to go off to Penland and Pilchuck, et cetera, and Haystack and Corning and everywhere else. I went 26 times because what good was it if I came back to nothing, right? And I did do it for a long time. I would come back, and I'd blow blanks while I was at Penland and have a trunk-load of blanks, and I'd paint that, reverse paint them, when I got back for the next eleven months because that was all I could afford at the time. And all of my vacation was taken to going away to these schools, all of it. I didn't have any other vacation because, remember, I was going to die in a year. So, there was no such thing as vacation. It was create work. So, ultimately, I found that I could control kiln casting, that I didn't need anyone else, that it wasn't prohibitively expensive, and I could start my





own school and not have to drive 8 hours everywhere, or not have to worry about ungodly gas bills. So, we started up, and we started up on 9/13/2001. I want you to think what that date is. That is two days after 9/11. So, we couldn't even believe we were starting. We had our classes, we had okay sign ups, but nothing a lot. And then 9/11 happened and every class filled for the next six months because, while the sale of art died at 9/11 – no one was purchasing luxury items or art or anything. Everybody kind of went to ground in this country, right? – the creation of art went through the roof. Everybody wanted that healing energy I talk about, of creating something. That healing energy everybody wanted a piece of, so everyone came and made work about it. That's the best part about it. That's why, when I talk about – like, when I have my talk on Sunday at the museum – I'm talking about my work, I tend to make work about the troubles that I've had. If it's been a good year, I'm making work. I'm just dancing around. But I've had some really challenging things occur, and so, the way I work through those, the way I heal myself, is to make work about that.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Almost like visual blues.

Tim Tate:

Almost like visual blues. You almost have to, don't you? My mother was an artist. She never didn't have something in her hand. She was knitting, or she was sewing, or she was doing something, or macrame. I don't care what it was. She was always using her hands, and I inherited that, and that is a healing moment. So, when I do it, I'm channeling my mom. I'm feeling like I'm creating something. And remember, I believe that the creation of art saved my life. So, I can't stop making, because if I do, I die. That's the way I feel in my head. I know this was a mental trick I played on myself 40 years ago, but it's there now. I can't get rid of it. Now it feels as real as anything else that I have to keep making that work. It's an odd thing, I know. You have to think you're dying in a year for ten years to really get the gist of why you feel that, but that's the way it is. So I went to kiln casting. I found a group of other people that wanted to do it. We started the micro community out there. I went and gathered people that I thought were amazing, and the more people that came, the more amazing work they came out of our studio. And we purposely set it up – not to be offensive to anyone – as a non-Studio Glass glass studio. It was intentionally mixed media, video, no blowing at all, no vessels, everything sculptural. It was purposely non-Studio Glass because we wanted to do an experiment, and the experiment was: what happens with people raised in Studio Glass, what happens if they have a studio where they don't do that, and they go and break every rule ever done? Right? You're doing mixed media, you're putting video, is this plastic, whatever that is? And what happens? And what happened to us is we got really successful. It worked out really well because we all felt such passion, and we knew there was not a limit for us because we were in the – I mean, my very first gallery was not a glass





gallery. My very first gallery was this wonderful gallery in DC that, God bless them, sold 185 pieces in two years. God bless them. I could love them forever. And then a glass gallery saw a postcard I sent and kind of picked me up, and then I went to the glass world. In the early days, when you're first making work, the glass world is a jump up in price, but over time, it becomes a ceiling that you can't get past. The fine art world goes well above the Studio Glass world ceiling.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Would you say there was a glass ceiling?

Tim Tate:

I knew that was coming.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

The pun was sitting right there. I had to take it. So, Tim, before we go, I just wanted to ask you one final question. Well, two final questions. I'm going to ask you what exhibitions you have coming up, but first I want to ask, what would you like someone who sees work by Tim Tate to take away from the experience?

Tim Tate:

I hope they take away that purchasing this work or owning this work is equally healing as my making it was. That by having it there, they're feeling that same healing energy. That's what I'd like. In my mind, I've imbued every piece I make with something magical. If I feel like there's bad mojo, like, if I feel like someone helping in the shop wasn't a good thing or whatever, I destroy the work. I can't have bad mojo in my work. But if I feel like it's a good group of people and we're all working together, or that the content is really strong or whatever that is, if the person who buys it realizes the content and feels like they, too, need healing – I mean, the best thing I ever see is if someone cries before they buy a piece of my work, because then I know that they've accessed that. So, I would love every person to find healing through any of the work of mine they have, and hopefully they live with that work and feel that healing energy every day.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

That's a beautiful thing.

Tim Tate:

I did a piece called *The Healing Polyoptagon*, which was a five-foot-wide circle with 15 video cameras in it and black roses, all black, and black frames around the eyeball videos. There were 15 different eyeballs – I had an eyeball casting call – and there are 15 different eyeballs blinking at you as you watched it. The intent of that was, I want you to walk up and find someone that you







loved and lost recognizable in one of those eyes – because I did different races, ages, sexes – I want you to think of that person watching down over you and sending you healing energy and keeping an eye over you. The whole purpose, you were to stand in front of it, kind of feel that, right? I mean, in the same way when someone comes up and they say, “Oh, I lost my mother,” and people reach over and they touch your elbow or your shoulder and they go, “She’s still with you.” Right? At that second, we can’t help it. We feel that spark. Every single person feels that spark, that moment where it’s almost like proof that that person is there watching. Standing in front of that *Healing Polyoptagon*, you got that same feeling, right? There they are. You’re in that moment where you’re getting that feeling of *someone’s watching over me and I’m keeping you safe, I’m keeping you whole*. That ended up on *Quantum of the Seas*. Don’t even ask why it’s there.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Well, I think that’s kind of a good place to end this, because that was a touching thing. Is there any exhibition that you want to talk about that’s coming up or anything before we go?

Tim Tate:

Well, I’ve been working really hard. I just finished a seven-month project with Joyce Scott, who is an old friend and a total joy, and it reconnected me to my own soul. I felt like I had pulled away from myself. And after that, I’ve been working on a whole utopian queer future show called *The Journey to A Utopian Queer Future*. And that show, what I’m hoping is that by next June – because God knows that’s the only month they ever have anyone one queer in museums – but by next June, I have that show ready to go, and travel that show so that it gets past June somewhere. That’s the hope. So that’s what I’m working on. I’m working hard towards that. If it happens, it happens. If it doesn’t, I still make work that I love. I’m not making work I hate. I’m not making work I think I’ll sell, which never works. I make work I love, so if I had to own it forever, I would be thrilled to own that work. I’d be thrilled to have that up.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Yeah, that sounds like an amazing idea, and I really want that to happen.

Tim Tate:

It’s a little scary because I put so much energy into making this be healing that I’m worried that this is my swan song. The universe will say, “Okay, we’ve done enough of him. Now we’re going to pluck him, but first let him get this big thing out.” Who knows? But I’m hoping that I can get this to travel for a while. There’s an excellent professor of queer studies in Exeter who’s helping me. He’s going to help curate it. I’m really hoping it gets out. We’ll know the next time we talk. If it happens, you’ll be the first to know. I’ll let you in on it.





Jabari Owens-Bailey:

All right, that sounds good. Maybe the next show could be *I Hope This Makes It Past June*.

Tim Tate:

Hopefully.

Jabari Owens-Bailey:

Indeed. Well, thank you so much, Tim, for joining me on *Frit City*. Thank you for listening. This has been *Frit City*, a production of Museum of Glass. Hosted by Jabari Owens Bailey. Produced by Susan Warner, Elisabeth Emerson, and Jabari Owens Bailey.

