

Tom Patti (American, born 1943)

## Clear Air-Frame with Pinstripes

Savoy, Mass., 1978

Blown laminated glass,  $4\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{4}$  in. (11.4 × 8.3 × 8.3 cm)

Mark: "Patti 1978 [in script]," engraved on side near base

Yale University Art Gallery, Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund, 2009.21.1

Tom Patti creates compact and meticulously considered objects that are quietly innovative. He views his work as a continuous investigation "of a process, of a way of thinking," an approach that is informed by his training as an industrial designer.<sup>1</sup> Patti received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn, and is equally interested in domestically scaled objects and architectural commissions. Unlike many contemporary glassworkers, Patti works alone, and as a consequence his nonarchitectural objects relate to the scale of his hand. They are also the result of copious planning; the objects are built up of many layers of glass that are fused together, injected with gas while still hot to create an inner cavity, and then manipulated by hand during subsequent firings. Patti calls this process "blown laminated glass."

*Clear Air-Frame with Pinstripes* is made from a range of architectural glass that Patti salvaged from construction sites near his studio in the Berkshires. Most pieces were clear when he collected them but changed color when they were reheated. Patti studied how differences in their chemical composition and environmental exposure caused their colors to change. He then plotted out these variations to create gradations of color and texture. The base section of the work is a stack of window glass from the General Electric plant in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Airborne pollutants coated what would have been the exterior surface of the panes; when the panes were fused together, their surfaces created veils of brown. A thin piece of manganese-rich window glass from the early twentieth century forms the pronounced purple line. Together, the brown and purple elements are the pinstripes referenced in the title. The cool-gray band in the



middle of the composition is solar glass, the green-tinted elements are from midcentury windows made with iron oxides, and the top element is a fragment of mirror glass (the silvering turned brown in the fusing process). In the midsection of the vessel, a layer was studded with small bubbles, and when gas was injected into the form, the glass was pushed downward, causing the air pockets to distort and resemble rows of rectangular scales. Patti employed this technique on only a few pieces. The overall structure of the vessel marks a transition in his work that took place in the late 1970s. The laminates on the lower half are obscured within a self-contained silhouette, whereas they separate and are articulated on the upper half. The projecting layers suggest eaves or a roofline, giving *Clear Air-Frame with Pinstripes* an architectonic appearance.

<sup>1</sup> The descriptions of materials and process are from Tom Patti, telephone conversation with the author, September 23, 2016.