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DON'T TOUCH

For Japanese artist Kazuo Kadonaga, "Glass likes to be molten, so he's part the process is letting essentially letting the materials the glass sculpt itself be the materials."

SCOTT LAWRIMORE gallery manager and curator Greg Kucera gallery

BY JEN GRAVES

The News Tribune - Tacoma, WA

Human hands do not touch Kazuo Kadonaga's dripped-glass sculptures as they're being made. For these green-tinted, glowing mounds that freeze the material's molten memory, glass itself is the artist.

The Japanese artist is in residence at Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood this summer, and he'll demonstrate his techniques at the Museum of Glass: International Center for Contemporary Art from Wednesday to July 11. He is one of several artists-in-residence from Pilchuck at the museum this summer.



PHOTO COURTESY **KAZUO KADONAGA**

In 2003, Kadonaga checks the temperature on the furnace full of glass while it drips down into a kiln below in his studio.

But he could not differ more from Pilchuck-based Northwest studio glass, with its roots in Italian traditions that prize daring, skill, brilliant color and beauty. Since his start in glass in 1990, Kadonaga has used only colorless industrial window glass. Whereas blown pieces require rapid, balletic teats, Kadonaga's piles of glass accrue on their own, requiring only minimal observation. And whereas traditional glass masters pursue perfection in form and push the material to a precarious thinness, every one of Kadonaga's piles is different from the last, and many of them, weighing more than a ton, splinter and crack in the making.

Here's Kadonaga's automated setup: A furnace full of

hot glass is set 10 feet above a computer-controlled cooling kiln. Over 48 hours, the furnace pours a continuous string of the glass into the kiln through an opening in the kiln's top, onto a steel plate inside. Then, to avoid excessive cracking, the enormous pile spends the next 100 days cooling. Kadonaga can make only three pieces per year.

The variations result from the studio's air temperature, humidity and airborne pollutants acting on the glass's flow. Kadonaga values the random elements. More than half his pieces have significant cracks. To him, those are still complete, but they're not seen often because they're not transportable to far-flung exhibitions. Outside his native Japan, he has shown all over the United States, in Mexico and throughout Western Europe.

Kadonaga's, 58, will not be showing finished works at the Museum of Glass, but instead will be creating pieces in the hot shop using a modified version of his furnace system. He'll also demonstrate a new bubble-based blowing process he developed at Pilchuck this summer.

The bubble technique is his first deviation from the pouring process he invented after experimenting with glass for years.

"He did many, many experiments, none of which interested him, until he hit on the glassness of glass - how glass is different from other materials," said

Josine Ianco Starrels, who first showed Kadonaga's works in wood when she was director of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in the 1980s.

Kadonaga works with one material at a time. Before glass, he used wood, paper, bamboo and silk. For each material, his purpose is simple: to let it speak in its own natural language, not to use it as his megaphone. The impulse falls into the 1970s Japanese art movement mono-ha, or school of things, which used naturally occurring or found materials to explore the human relation to the material world. Kadonaga, speaking recently by phone through a translator, said he is also influenced by American minimalists Carl Andre and Donald Judd and the process-oriented artist Sol Lewitt. If the sculptures hold interest, Kadonaga says, it is only

because the material of glass itself is interesting. He is the director, not the actor.

"Glass likes to be molten, so he's essentially letting the materials be the materials," said Scott Lawrimore, gallery manager and curator at Greg Kucera Gallery, which showed Kadonaga's sculptures in January 2003.

Kucera broke his own rules to accommodate the conceptual glass, Lawrimore said.

"We don't show glass here," Lawrimore said. "Because Kazuo's work transcended what we thought of as studio glass - that's why we showed it."

Ianco Starrels curated the exhibition of his glass that made several American stops in 2002, including at the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University in Ashland. She admires the way his haphazard glass piles evoke the material's ancient origins. According to an account by the Roman historian Pliny, Phoenician sailors built a beach fire using alkali blocks they were carrying

as cargo, fell asleep when the fire was still burning and found the next morning a solid substance that looked liquid: glass.

The sculptures have been compared to taffy, stalagmites and swirls of ice cream. Ianco Starrels calls them "fat and juicy-looking ... Sumo wrestlers." But what they look like above all, she says, is glass. "He was able to show vs the natural identity of glass," Starrels said.

And "glass," Kadonaga said "has a mind of its own."



This 2002 sculpture by Kazuo Kadonaga, which weighs more than a ton when it is finished, is pictured in the process of dripping down from a furnace above into a heated kiln.

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What : Artists in residence

When : Wednesday through Sept. 5; Monday to Saturday 10a.m. to 5p.m., Sunday noon to 5 p.m., Third Thursdays 10a.m. to 8p.m.

Where : Museum of Glass: International Center for Contemporary Art, 1801 Dock St., Tacoma

Admission : \$10 general, 8\$ seniors/military/students, 4\$ ages 6-12, free 5-8p.m. Thursdays Information: 253-284-4750