

## TALKING TO THE ARTIST

### Robert Dane



Turnbull/Boudreau

“Glass is such a seductive material,” says Robert Dane, who dates his own seduction back to the late 1970s. Dane was teaching ceramics in Massachusetts, but glass soon won him over.

“One reason glass appeals to me is that the tools and the processes we’re using basically haven’t changed over the last thousand years. We’re living in a techno-industrial society, but we’re carrying on this tradition, perpetuating the culture of

handmade things. A glass blower from a thousand years ago could sit at my bench today and know exactly what to do.”

Dane’s earliest sculptures took the form of blown glass eggs, which were divided by a cut plate of glass. Over the years his sculpture grew taller and more complex, culminating in the skyscraping *Timbertotem* series and his most recent work, which combines wood and stone with blown and solid glass. His functional works, from candelabra to goblets, have also evolved in color and form.

The artist’s own evolution spans years of working in the studio and learning from colleagues. Another source of inspiration is music. His wife, Jayne, directed a high school music program until 1996, when the couple opened an art gallery on Nantucket. (The Dane Gallery shows ceramics, jewelry, fiber and glass.) And Robert has been studying Afro-Cuban percussion for more than seven years now.

“The music of the community is reflected in my pieces,” says Dane, who explains that traditional, folkloric Afro-Cuban music—though not as extreme as freewheeling modern jazz—shares the same spirit of improvisation as glassblowing. “When I’m playing in a group, I respond to what the other musicians are doing to create a whole. Something of that improvisation is found in my hot shop, where I work with three assistants. We all have to respond to each other’s movements, timing and actions to create the finished piece.”

—Jori Finkel