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# Lucent

RISD Museum

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Toots Zynsky

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My name is Sebastian Ruth. I'm the founder and artistic director of Community Music Works. I am a classical violinist and violist, passionate chamber musician, and educator.

We're looking at the glass piece called *Lucente* by Toots Zynsky, which is in the shape of a kind of whimsical vessel. I'm given the opportunity to respond to this work of glass, not being a glass artist.

What strikes me about this is the fact that this is a vessel composed of glass, and you can see this undulating an irregular shape to it saying nothing of the color. I think to myself how amazing it must be to have a sense of the material, that you can see this as molten, or maybe in a later stage semi-malleable, and then to try to let it take some kind of form which ultimately can stand on its own as a vessel. So there's something very beautiful in it of itself just to imagine the material, and I think as a musician, the material is clear.

You need to develop a tactile, athletic, and kinesthetic sense of the instrument, without which you would have no technique to play the music. I think for a glass artist, there must be a sort of felt sense of how this material will respond to you in various forms, and you must know collapse better than you know success because you may have an intention, but the material won't respond to that intention unless you have the right conditions. So to see a work like this, the more I look at it, the more I have a sense that it represents a mastery of this material, and that she's able to in some way dictate or – as I read the description – maybe allow the material to take a certain shape, while also controlling to some extent the beautiful mix of colors, where these fibers seem to be running in different directions, and different color strand within each.

I think something so relevant about seeing an object in a museum with your own eyes live that's different from seeing an object in a book or on a website, is that you are in close proximity to the thing that the artist also had his or her hand on. There's hopefully an experience of provocation or beauty that you have when you come upon on it. But then to have the opportunity to kind of look around, under, in, and to say, how was this made, and how was this process significant, and what kind of mastery must this person have had in order to create this, there's an inspiring effect it can have on you. To think, wow, what can I master, or what investigation am I making over the period of a long time that would result in my being able to produce something like this, whether it is in the realm of art making or otherwise?

My name is Toots Zynsky. I graduated from RISD in 1973 in the first group of glass majors. During that time, very quickly, we were able to experience almost every different method and kind of forming glass. The piece that you see in front of you, *Lucente*, is made with a very special technique, which I actually developed myself several years later. I began as a glassblower because that was the class that was offered, but I quickly wanted to do other things with it. Much later on, I began working with hand-pulled glass threads in a different way than the piece that you see here.

Because no one produces colored glass thread this fine, we have to produce it ourselves in my studio, but it's my raw material. So that's where I really start. I start with the raw material that's produced downstairs in my studio, and then like building up a drawing or painting, I start to lay out this piece flat.

When I'm working with the threads, the color is there and it's very stable, so I know what I'm going to have when the piece is complete. I know what colors are there with the colors that I'm working with.

After many layers and I have everything that I want laid down. As soon as the piece is fused and it's still soft, I actually go into the kiln and start transferring it to a series of different forms, making it deeper and rounder with each transfer. Then I can start to actually take it out of the basic form and start forming it by hand, giving it curls, squeezing it, stretching it, and pulling it, until I have it the way I want it to be. Then each piece has to go through a cooling-down process called annealing, which settles the molecules of the glass together in a stable way.

Probably the single most important inspiration for my work is actually music, and it was a long time before I understood that relationship. I just always listened to music when I was working. Then there was a period of time when I had been through something that took me away from my studio for a significant period of time, and when I came back to the studio, there was nothing that I wanted to listen to, there was no color I wanted to work with, and it was a pretty stunning experience.

It wasn't until I realized that it actually bothered me more that I couldn't listen to music, than how I didn't know what I wanted to make. I started to really understand the relationship between those two things, and how inextricably bound they were.