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### **Arts**

## **Art of glass in Fells Point**

By Glenn McNatt

Sun art critic

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For a brief, shining moment in the 1960s, Washington stood on the cutting-edge of contemporary American art. The painters of the so-called Washington Color School - Gene Davis, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, among others - created brilliant canvases that startled the eye and braced the spirit.

But Washington Color School painting isn't the only native style to emerge from the nation's capital. A more recent group of artists, working in the medium of blown, fused, slumped, cast and cold-worked glass, can also lay claim to that distinction.

In 2001, glass artist Tim Tate founded the Washington Glass School, a cooperative workshop where artists could learn the techniques and collectively develop the aesthetics uniquely suited to glass as an expressive medium.

Today, the school offers instruction, well-equipped studio space and encouragement to people throughout the region who want to explore the glassmaker's art.

Some of the fruits of their efforts are on view in *Moving Beyond Craft: Artists of the Washington Glass School*, a fine small-scale exhibition at Touchet Gallery in Fells Point. The show presents works by Tate and eight other artists who teach at the school and whose example has been an inspiration.

Though the Washington Glass School is not, strictly speaking, a "school" in the same sense as the Washington Color School was - that is, a distinct group of artists whose work is related by period, style and place - many of Tate's instructors share certain critical attitudes and assumptions regarding glass-making as art.

Perhaps the most important is their utter devotion to the idea of experimentation as a creative method. For them, any technique, imagery or material is a potentially viable approach if it enlarges the possibilities of expressive freedom.

Tate's conceptual glass works, for example, often take the form of sacred vessels or reliquaries fashioned to contain various symbols of the body's mortality.

Tate, who tested positive for HIV more than 20 years ago, created his first signature glass vessel to hold his own ashes after his death, which he expected to occur within months.

The development of effective anti-viral drug therapies, however, ultimately prolonged his life beyond anything he could have imagined at the time.

The glass vessel thus became a symbol of continuity and hope rather than death and despair; one of the pieces in the show takes the form of a human heart - an emblem of both life and the courage needed to live it well.

The show also presents works by Michael Janis, Syl Mathis, Evan Morgan, Cheryl Patrice Derricotte, Erwin

Timmers, Alison Sigethy, Sean Hennessey and Deb Conti.

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"Moving Beyond Craft: Artists of the Washington Glass School" runs through Sept. 8 at Touchet Gallery, 536 S. Ann St. Call 410-522-2280 or go to [touchetgallery.com](http://touchetgallery.com).