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## Plumbing the Depth (Forms)

Jeff Goodman, Galerie Elena Lee Verre d'art, Montréal, October 9<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>th</sup>, 1990

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## PLUMBING THE DEPTH (FORMS)

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**T**HE FIERY SO-CALLED STUDIO GLASS MOVEMENT that originated in the 1960s has notably cooled. Fanned by medium-oriented technological innovations of its birth-decade and by the counter-culture of the 1970s, proponents of studio glass thought at long last their opportunity had come. Further encouraged by an age of pluralism, that is, a North American, fin-de-millennium culture that seemed abundantly prepared to accept heterogeneity without hierarchy, glass makers held out high hopes for finally breaking down the almost archaic distinctions that separated fine art from craft. Such, however, was not to be the case. In 1991, the Studio Glass Movement must be considered, at best, an incomplete project.

Jeff Goodman may well be the victim of the circumstances of that failed agenda or of what has emerged as its inherent polemics. Consider, for example, the artist's most recent body of sculptural work – a series of symmetrical, totemic, mold-blown and “chiselled” compositions – presented in solo exhibition at Galerie Elena Lee. On the one hand, the works can be likened to the once much-lauded “academic machine” and its attendant “demonstration pieces” which set forth declarations of technical proficiency or virtuosity (read: “high” art as formula). On the other hand, the works allude to a revelling in medium that threatens to reduce production to fetishism (read: craft's serial production as a manifestation of obsessive devotion). Despite certain obvious shared concerns for the quality of making, academic principles and craft production were never adequately reconciled in their time. By today's concept-based standards, skill of execution is rendered one of the least of all issues. Thus, within a contemporary context, Goodman's expertise is largely gratuitous.

There has also been a change in the artist's aesthetic concerns. Gone, in Goodman's most recent series, is the dynamic interaction with other materials (thinking here of the artist's 1988-89 “weather-beaten” but nonetheless functional lamps that brought the weight and opacity of concrete and metal into play with the some-



Jeff Goodman, *Depth Form VII*, 1990.  
Sandcast glass; 66 cm x 28 cm x 28 cm. Galerie Elena Verre d'Art.

times ethereal qualities of glass and light), the seductive organic shapes of earlier mold-blown “vessels” (dating from the mid-80s), as well as the resplendent orchestration of tache, mark and plane that typified the artist's “production lines” (i.e., works conceived purposefully as craft or decorative art objects ... mostly vases). In their stead, the viewer is confronted by the now familiar aspect of obdurate materiality – evidence that glass can carry with it the various traces, scars and imperfections deposited by process – in this instance, sandcasting.

The residue of sand, the repetition and banding of naïve, abstract geometric motifs, and the upright columnar or “ceremonial vessel” forms suggest primitive Eastern cultures or glass's ancient, desert (Egyptian) origins. Regrettably, such a predilection to imply vestige, artifact or source, while convincingly evoking a nostalgic reflection of time past, also offers a demonstration of the power of time to negate the present. The Studio Glass Movement has not been successful either in integrating itself into the “high” art program or in arguing its case for a privileged autonomy. Goodman's safe retreat to a state of a primitive consciousness fails to address either circumstance and consequently evades the very issue of studio glass's continued worth except as a vehicle of a troubling, almost happenstance, beauty.

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