

(Un)Settled Podcast Episode 2: Dan Friday Transcript

Drew: The (Un)Settled Podcast is a presentation of the American South Consortium, a multi-year partnership of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the Columbia Museum of Art, Mobile Museum of Art, and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts as part of the Art Bridges Cohort program. This innovative cross-regional partnership explores new ways of interpreting art and the American experience through dynamic exhibitions and an array of complementary public programs.

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Drew: Welcome back to episode two of The (Un)Settled podcast. The show where we explore the rich, complicated and evolving topic of what the American landscape represents through the lens of American art. Produced in conjunction with the exhibition (Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art, on view now through September 8th at the Columbia Museum of Art. I'm your host and the Columbia Museum of Art's executive producer and content strategist, Drew Baron.

And today on the program, we'll be speaking with glass artist Dan Friday, whose work Aunt Fran's Basket is on view in the exhibition. He'll be joining us shortly. But first, I'd like to welcome back to the program, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Kriebler Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture, Erin Monroe. Erin, welcome back to the show.

Erin: Thank you Drew. Happy to be here.

Drew: Happy to have you. Welcome to Columbia.

Erin: Here I am. Here the show is. It's amazing to think we're at our second venue, and having a chance to just keep the podcast episodes going as the show changes shape at each museum.

Drew: Yeah. Well, it's exciting, you know, the show's been open here for about a week, and the response has been great so far. I've heard a lot of really awesome feedback from visitors, and my coworkers who all seem to love it. So, like, this has been really wonderful to have here. And it's cool to see it evolve, right? Because, it feels a little different from Montgomery. I bet it's going to feel a little different when it goes to Mobile. And just seeing those, little nuance changes, keeps it fresh and exciting and it's different perspectives. So the piece in the show, Aunt Fran's Basket is part of the Wadsworth collection, correct?

Erin: Yes It is.

Drew: And when did you acquire that?

Erin: It's, fairly recent acquisition, honestly. And, came about as a result of an exhibition we presented on contemporary glass art. And so Dan's pieces, he had several pieces in that exhibition. But Aunt Fran's Basket was one that really sung to us and thought would be a great fit for the Wadsworth's collections.

Drew: Yeah. So, what made you decide to put it in (Un)Settled?

Erin: Well, the idea of landscape, has been somewhat, sort of birthed out of a more narrow representation, mostly oil paintings, beginning in the 19th century. But we wanted to really expand that concept. And when you think about the materiality of Earth nature as an element that is within landscape. But what about objects made from the earth? Is how we got to baskets specifically. So in the exhibition you'll see there's a 19th century early 20th century Coast Salish basket, which is a kind of jumping off point for Friday's works. And the idea that he's taking a very traditional long standing art form. And then in terms of basketry and, reimagining it in glass was exactly what we wanted to do, was really defy our understanding of landscape.

Drew: Yeah. So one of the really cool things about (Un)Settled is really like, looks at a lot of different perspectives, and this isn't just a monolithic idea of what the American landscape really means, right? So, tell me about why Dan Friday's perspective was such a great one to have in the show?

Erin: Certainly. The idea of landscape seen through, multiple lenses really spoke to the shaping of the exhibition. And as a contemporary indigenous glass artist, there's a tremendous amount of history, both within the medium and then within his own personal ancestry, that spoke to kind of a counterpoint to so many of the more traditional landscapes depicted in the show.

Drew: Yeah, you mentioned a moment ago, that y'all acquired this piece, through a glass art show. can you tell me a little bit about that and kind of how y'all were introduced to Dan to begin with?

Erin: Sure. I really have to credit, my colleague Brandy Culp, who at the time was our curator of American Decorative Arts and really was, at the starting point at kind of ground zero of the Art Bridges project with me. So when we were considering objects, many, many years ago and what this topic that we for museums could cover, we didn't know it would be landscape, and we didn't know that the Wadsworth would do a show on contemporary glass. But through the evolution of the project and Brandy really going almost on tour across the country and meeting glass artists. The Pacific Northwest is such a hub. And so she first met Dan Friday and identified, really a selection of objects that would be great for our exhibition. And so, Aunt Fran's Basket was purchased shortly after that exhibition,

because it just spoke so beautifully to our own holdings. And it was really among his work in general, was among the kind of crowd favorites.

Drew: Yeah. Well, speaking of the Northwest, let's go ahead and make her way over there. Where Dan is joining us remotely from. Dale Chihuly's Boathouse Studio.

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Drew: Hey, welcome back to the program. Up next, we have Dan Friday. He's a glass artist hailing from the Puget Sound region of the northwestern portion of the United States. He's a part of the Lummi Nation and is currently living in Seattle, where he maintains an independent glass studio. Since starting his career in 1997, Friday has worked with some of the biggest names in the medium, including Paul Marioni, Preston Singletary, and since 2000, has worked at Dale Chihuly's renowned studio The Boathouse.

He's taught at the University of Washington, Pilchuck Glass School, and the Haystack Craft Center in Maine. Friday was also featured as a contestant on season three of Netflix's hit glass art competition show *Blown Away*. His work, fuses glass with inspiration from his Coast Salish cultural heritage, utilizing forms such as bears, salmon, totems and baskets. His work on Aunt Fran's Basket is part of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's collection and is on view now at the Columbia Museum of Art as part of (Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art. And now that I've said art three times in one sentence. Dan, welcome to the show.

Dan: Thanks Drew. Nice to, nice to be here with you.

Drew: Yeah. Thank you so much for taking the time and joining us today. We're really excited to have you. I. Let's just kind of dive into it. I've been doing quite a bit of research on you just, you know, diving all over Google, anything Dan Friday clicking on every link. Luckily, I still have a working computer after that.

Dan: Yeah you can't believe any of that stuff you hear, it's not true. [laughs]

Drew: Well, one of the things I heard a little birdie told me that your grandfather was a totem carver and that your grandmother was a basket weaver. Is that correct?

Dan: My grandmother was an artist. My aunt, Aunt Fran was not typically my auntie. But in our community, everybody that's older than you and related to you is kind of our, you know, your teachers. Aunt Fran is kind of the venerable auntie of the Lummi people.

Drew: Yeah. So I, I take it you worked with your hands a lot growing up?

Dan: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. That was just kind of something that was just the way we did it. We didn't have a TV growing up, and at the time that you would of, I would have told you how my mom had failed us. And it sucked being poor. But now, in retrospect, I'm really grateful for having a hands on childhood now that I'm raising, you know, consequently raising kids myself. And we don't have a TV. And I mean, it's you just go outside and play. You know, we're from the Northwest where everybody's like, it rains all the time. And yeah, it does. And then once you're wet, you're wet, and then you're not wet or worried about it. So. And in fact, I'd say now, you know, working with my hands is a great way for me to just kind of turn off.

And now I do a lot of interviews or talking or traveling. I've been on just a wicked tear of traveling, which is awesome because that's the business of being an artist is returning emails and showing up to things and doing a lot of these other things that I really just am happy, when I don't make something with my hands for a couple of days, I get a little like, I need to break a sweat, You know, I get a little cagey.

Drew: Yeah. And you, you started out in a different career path, right? But you still working with your hands? Yeah. Didn't you start in kind of in a role as sort of an auto mechanic? Tell me kind of how you got how you made that transition then? Because, I mean, those are both jobs where you're working with your hands, but they're pretty different.

Dan: Yeah, Well, you know, and I wasn't all the way into it. I mean, I guess I grew up pretty quick, quick in some respects, but I also, you know, I went to instead of high school, I went to a community college trade school, was, you know, got worked in auto shop, auto Vo-tech or whatever. And I had a tow truck when I was 16. And I kind of thought my path was kind of set for me. My dad was a mechanic in the military and, you know, when he was killed, I inherited all his tools and I kind of just felt like it was like cut in stone for me that this is the next thing that you do.

You know, I went to alternative schooling growing up because of this, the ones I seemed that, you know, I was I would have had a hard time in school growing up. So those were the ones that kind of accepted me, the ones with more art leaning and hands on. And I got into ceramics and, you know, like I said, a lot of my family had been artists, but it didn't seem pragmatic because I was not completely taking care of myself when I was 16. But I was like, If you want shoes, you better get a job. So I had a job working since I was about 13. And you know, the path and working for cars just did. You know, I just pretty much enter the workforce pretty early and by the sort of I had been working, but I was still pretty young when I saw glass, I was about 20 years old. I was stopped by a glass factory and I'm like, you guys make a living doing this.

And it was such an industrial setting, you know, that I was familiar with shops and stuff like that. It just I knew right away I'm like, drop everything, course change and, you know, I just had I was going to do whatever it took to get into that, you know, working at this factory. And, you know, when I was training to be a repo man, I just had this like, premonition of like

the guys I was working with that were these 50 year old miserable bastards. I was like, I'm going to become one of you guys. This is horrible. And, you know, I just that creativity of just making stuff with your hands for a positive, you know, you know, being productive. What I didn't like about working on cars is like you're just dealing with people on their worst day of their week. Or if you show up in the tow truck, nobody's like, Hey, the tow truck guys here, they're like, Yeah, that's it was a big it was really illuminating. I knew right away when I got into it that it was for me.

Drew: Yeah. So how did you make that transition then? Like, what was it, what was the like, the first step in that direction?

Dan: Well, like I said, I don't know if it's PC for the thing or whatever. I was stopping by at the, at the factory. I was selling a bag of weed or something like that, and I showed up and I'm like, I'll do whatever. I got a job sweeping floors and building the equipment. I, I started in the tech room and working on the furnaces because it's I mean, a combustion system of a furnace is really simple compared to like a car. It's a two inch pipe, and a venturi. And so I built a couple furnaces and then I would on my lunch break, in the 15 minute break go out and just start blowing glass. In about six months they gave me a job on the floor because I knew that's what I wanted to do, but I was pretty content even to just like, so it was a factory, and so we made like gift store items and paperweights and Christmas ornaments and not high end art, but still cool, just like working with your hands in this positive way.

The owner at the time, Rob Adamson, gave his friend Paul Marioni a phone call and he goes, "Hey, I've got this kid. He's chomping at the bit. You got to get him into Pilchuck." And with a phone call, they kind of got me in a week later to an opening in Paul Cunningham's class at the Pilchuck Glass School. And I'd say that was one of those really pivotal moments in my life. And I got to see other artists working in this medium. Like, I mean, you have a career as an artist and, you know, a lot of people, especially in the glass art world, have gone this other academic, institutional, you know, accredited path into art. And I just was happy to, you know, like I got, you know, just by proxy of being in Seattle, there's obviously the history of the studio art class movement, which is not huge, but definitely centered in the United States. And a big hub of that is that northwest continuum sort of thing.

Drew: Yeah. I mean, it sounds like judging by what you've said so far, that it didn't even seem feasible that there could be careers in glass prior to this experience. Was there any times like afterwards we sort of second guessed that or after you kind of started to dive in, or did it just sort of the ball just keep rolling?

Dan: Well, it wasn't it's not you know, the path isn't clear because you really have to just spend the 10,000 hours thing doing it. You can't read a book about doing this. It's not like, you know, playing a violin. It's like playing a violin. You can't just you know, it's not a theory thing. You have to get the chops or the hand skills to do it. And the only way to do it is to do it. You can't fake it.

And yeah, How was there a career? I had these great role models. You know, I very shortly after starting at the factory, I got a I switched from the factory and I ended up working at the Chihuly Boathouse after about. So I must have been blowing glass two years. I think I started actually in 99, but like December of '99. So it must have been I must have been blowing glass for about two and a half years already when I started here. And again, that's just something that you can't I mean you can't learn a lot of this stuff in the university, especially working with somebody like Dale, who's like, I mean, he really is a figurehead in the medium.

And in Coast Salish art forms are anything where you have this all world like apprentice and master sort of thing. Like, I mean, you need to like you can't fake the hours you got to put in the time. And then the things you learn from somebody we call in Coast Salish community, we call it like a "sit beside art", like you work with your elders. You learn from your elders this thing. And the only way to do it is to sit down next to him and kind of go through the motions of their process and assist and assist and, you know, a lot of the things, you know, one, I picked up a lot of technical skill here, but Dale has been really generous and supportive of my career. You know, when I have questions, I mean, there's just a lot of things that I can I mean, again, and just kind of, you know, kind of stumbled into it just being in Seattle by proxy of being here.

Some of the best in the world are right here. Paul Marioni is another person that kind of told me what I needed to hear when I needed to hear it and when he could have turned his back on me. And it would have been prudent because I was still a little wild. And gamey, when I came into the glass world and, you know, it's like it's show biz. If you show up on time, you're 15 minutes late. So it's really competitive industry. And, you know, for people like Paul, when I wasn't really sure that I fit in with this odd group already to give me a home, you know what I mean? To give me a place where I felt at home in this community was I needed that.

Drew: Yeah. I mean, it sounds like I based on not only what you're saying now, but a few things I've read that you've been quoted saying, one of which is that the glass community is a small, tight knit worldwide community. Yeah. It seems like even though our global perspective is very large, like there's only so many people really working in this field and it does seem like there's a bit of camaraderie around that.

I was creeping on your Instagram and saw that you were just down the street from me over at the Penland School of Craft very recently. I also saw that you were in Japan very recently. Have you noticed any cultural differences in the way that people approach glass art, like in different regions? And are there any around where you are that you think you incorporate into the work that you do?

Dan: Oh, absolutely. You know, and you know, I think, yeah, it is a global tight knit community and that's great for a lot of reasons. I mean, if I don't know you directly, it's like

this one degree of separation. I can just make a phone call, I'm like who is this person and, you know, somebody you work with. I always tell the young bucks coming up, I'm like, listen, I've made all the mistakes and don't burn any bridges in this industry because it's like I said, you don't your word is bond. You don't get away from that.

But again, it's the really supportive community. You know, I can get a couch to sleep on or a bed, you know, anywhere, you know, like, hey, I'm going to be prepared, you know, and yeah, boom. And like I said, it goes a long way in this industry. I definitely I'd say, you know, I've definitely come up with some of my own approaches to it, you know, But we're all kind of standing on the shoulders of these Venetian techniques that, you know, were transferred over to the studio art class movement, which is these freewheelin' hippie, cowboy gunslinger, just all these different types of, you know, no technique. No. And, you know, there's different spectrums of glass that you can go heavy technique, less conceptual, more conceptual, less technique. But, you know, there's there's definitely like a Seattle style of like hot glass blowing that has, you know, it kind of that I think is become a global style. But there's, you know, definitely Eastern European influences.

But yeah, the global community, you know, art is a pretty supportive community, but glass, I find it to be just the nature of working with glass is a it's a team sport in a lot of ways. I tell people like these programs that I've started or work with, like Hilltop or, you know, I started the Native Outreach program at Pilchuck. Glass has this unique ability to keep you in the moment like not a lot of other things do. If you are not paying attention, you get burned or it breaks. It kind of commands your respect that way.

And then you have to work with a team which, as I'd say in my previous artistic experience in ceramics, painting or drawing or whatever, you just don't really you don't really communicate with other people about what you're about to do next. Whereas like glass, there's this dialog with the team. It's not a collaboration, but it's like it's a culmination of this group effort that is just a magical thing that a lot of times people see this finished product of studio made glass on a pedestal in the museum, but a lot of times the people that make it are just attached to it from the process. Like it's such a satisfaction. Like the analogy I use a lot of like being in a band. Like we just had an awesome set, man high five and that feeling that, that people don't see that.

And I think that there's so many people that have worked for Dale, people I know that are just pillars in the industry in my mind. And no one knows this guy's name, but is just like best punty ever, rock solid assistant, rock solid person, just maybe doesn't have an artistic vision. And our industry is just filled with those people. And I think that's what a lot of people just love. You know, it just they find a home here doing that.

Drew: So to switch gears a little bit, I want to kind of talk about the work that's in the show in the (Un)Settled exhibition that we have on view right now, though it's not actually right now because I'm recording this ahead of time, but it will be on view by the time you're

watching at home. And the piece in the show is called Aunt Fran's Basket. Are you an aunt guy or an aunt guy?

Dan: I'm an aunt guy, you know. I speak. I mean, I think we call them aunties where I'm from, but, you know.

Drew: You mentioned earlier it's in reference to Fran James. Can you tell me a little bit more about like kind of who she was? And I know you said she was sort of a pillar in the Lummi community, so can you just kind of give me a little bit of background about that?

Dan: Yeah. Aunt Fran, she, Che top ie was her name. Her government name was an Fran or Fran James. Fran James is her official name, not Aunt Fran, but she kind of as she was like the venerable auntie of the tribe, her son was the hereditary chief of the tribe. And we have a council on a chairman and a, you know, on a board. We have a tribal government.

But she was a huge culture bearer. And her son also Bill James, Tsi'li'xw, he passed away about two years ago. They were Oksales, or teachers for me and big again, people like Paul Marioni, you know that, right? Said the right thing at the right time for me and Fran James was, you know, one of those little old ladies who, you know, against the wishes of the establishment, you know, kept the language alive. You know, I don't know if there's any pictures in my presentation. I have these pictures and she's just a tiny little, little old lady and she's weaving and but that's like, what a rebel looks like. That's what a freedom fighter looks like in some. You know, you wouldn't we might not have a language today.

Our language is really complicated. Xwlemi Chosen, or Coast Salish or Strait Salish is really hard to speak. And it's one of those dying languages, like a lot of indigenous people. And I mean, just around the globe, we're all speaking English and that there is a lot of utility to that. But these things, when you're trying to hold on to your culture, having a language is a big part of that.

And as a I mean, I call her like a freedom fighter, you know, when when speaking the language was, you know, illegal for them, their ceremonies, their prayers, a lot of their traditions were made illegal and against persecution, just risking keeping these languages alive, these little old weaving, these circles of little old ladies, kind of like bucking the trend. Going against the the man and like we're going to speak our language. And they are kind of what held that candle in the dark for a lot of us. You know, I mean, I we we we teach Xwlemi Chosen in the schools to our kids, to, you know, to our kids today. And that just wouldn't that we just wouldn't be here without them.

You know, my great uncle and people, you know, it's I got to be careful. People don't like to get too dark in my slide show. I show a lot of like levity and I've got some you know you know but the candor and just being that I mean these stories can be dark, you know, like my great uncle, Aunt Fran's uh, my actual uncle, Uncle Reuben was like, yeah, we would we would have the language just beaten out of us. And when he would hear it spoken, they would get

like physically nauseous, like sick to his stomach because it was just, you know, when we are now acknowledging, like, what has happened in Canada with residential schools and they're finding the bodies of kids, well, guess what? It didn't just happen in Canada. And these are stories that we grew up with. I remember hearing these are the earliest stories. I remember hearing that they came and took us as kids or took all of our kids. My dad was removed and he was in foster care. And that's just in my generation.

But he to hear, you know, it's like it's great now that in the media, you know, like at least we're talking about it. At least it's like, you know, when you go have a history, Washington state history, I mean, they don't mention this. And I'm like, well, I guess I grew up with a different Washington state history according to my family, you know? So, yeah, interesting times. And people like Fran, you know, we're really kept that kept our flame alive in a lot of ways.

Drew: Yeah. I mean, you know, the show itself (Un)Settled is really kind of about these histories that haven't been told. So I think this is like quite very appropriate, maybe a really appropriate time to kind of just talk about thematically what the show is about. It's, we, the reason it was titled (Un)Settled is it's sort of a play on words, right? Like the kind of the concept of like a settlement. And really, I think my understanding from the curators has really been that that name was chosen as a way to really question the idea of like a settled American landscape, because I think that can take on so many different meanings to so many different people. And what living in America, quote unquote, means is really so subjective to your own experience.

I'm curious if you have any thoughts on that title and just like what it might mean to you when you hear that, when you hear the phrase (Un)Settled?

Dan: I've got lots of thoughts, I'll try and put it in a cohesive thing here.

Drew: Take your time where I'm not in a rush.

Dan: Well, (Un)Settled, you know, and that's great name for the show. You know, what we say around here is they call it unceded, you know, because these lot of these lands weren't just you know, because it's I mean, we could debate whether or not they're settled or not, but things have changed, you know, since my great grandfather's time, my great, great grandfather's time, my great, great grandfather Haeteluk. O'siem. He's a you know, we come from like the house of Haeteluk, and that's where our family is in Lummi or Lhaq'temish people.

You know, we're Xwlemi people before these treaties. Before there was a Lummi people, there was no Lummi people before, much like Navajo or, you know, the Diné, any of these these names that are pretty household names now for tribes, a lot of times these weren't real. You know, they were they were just congregations of, of people. And so when you say, you know, the Lhaq'temish people, the people of the sea or the Mish people, the Cha Shesh

Qaqwaletsen, the survivors of this flood, that's what we call ourselves, the people of America in our tribe that, you know, we're survivors of the flood. And the Mish people would go into different groups and they've kind of gathered us into one. And when my great, great grandfather was at the signing of the Point Elliott Treaty, you could argue that they ceded their land, that they, you know, put an X on a piece of paper.

Yeah, like a lot a lot of places were completely unceded, you know, And I mean, like uh, Vancouver. I mean, they just I mean, there's I think there's it's in the courts today in Vancouver. These lands were not given up, you know, And a lot of times, I mean, I think the crass way I've heard the trolls online say "to the victors go the spoils." And I'm like, I mean, I guess that's one way to look at it. If you're saying we're defeated people, but we're still here, you know, and we still remember the names of these places before, you know, before.

You know, who can't speak to it are the people of California. You know, that was like a state sanctioned by this American government, never mind Manifest Destiny, that like they just there was bounties on the natives in California. Do you think that there was really only 150 tribes in the most fertile livable where everybody wants to live? They were just absolutely executed and pushed out of their place, you know, And that was by decree of the government that still rules today. I mean, not that long.

You know, you want to say that's not long ago, my great grandfather, who I bear the name Kwul-kwul'tw or Spirit of the War club, is he was the son of Haeteluk, and he died six years before I was born. But his life, I mean, when you think about great, I mean, there's it's not that long ago, you know, 100 years. I mean, a lot has changed. We live, you and I are from the generation and this advent of the Internet where, you know, I don't know if you had an answering machine at your house when you're grown up to fast forward to where we you know, if somebody doesn't text me back by the end of the day I'm like huh? I wonder why they don't like me anymore?

Drew: And it's amazing how quickly that changed to right. Like within five years.

Dan: And so but, you know, these are these are heavy stories. And, you know, and I mean, I'm like I said, I'm never going to speak for anyone, but I'm not afraid to talk about them. And, you know, we could take it deeper. But as I guess back to bring it back because I'll just keep wandering in my words. But the yeah, the show on (Un)Settled, you know, I yeah, I understand the sentiment there and you know we call it the unceded lands, you know, it wasn't really given up. It was pretty much taken, you know, But yeah, yeah.

Drew: I mean I think that's, I mean, I think that's a powerful and important point. You know, I did want to kind of come back to the idea of the fact that you made this form into a basket. So in the exhibition, they actually have it installed next to a Coast Salish weaved basket that is part of the Wadsworth Collection, which is it's really cool to see them side by side by like that. And I know that you had an exhibition in Future Artifacts where you actually curated a group of Coast Salish weavers as well. Can you tell me a little bit about the

tradition and just your experience with it? And was this something I mean, it sounds like you kind of grew up knowing this pretty well, So yeah, kind of, from your perspective, what can you tell me about it?

Dan: ell, I guess I have gotten a lot of inspiration from the leaders, Aunt Fran, the weavers, like I said, they they're largely these these little old, these, we have a you know, they say we have a matriarchal society or community, and that is really true. A lot of people are raised by their grandmas. A lot of people are, you know, and it was not really uncommon to be raised by your grandparents in our community and particularly your grandmother. And, you know, these these little old ladies, these freedom fighters, you know, these unassuming warriors.

You know, I'm super inspired by the weavers. I do a little bit of weaving it's nothing to write home about my sister's a great weaver and her glasswork is amazing too, and her artwork, she's actually kind of doing something new where she's combining weaving and glassblowing together. And so, what is it in the show? It's yeah, The Weavers are a big part of my Coast Salish influence.

Drew: Yeah. I mean, it seems obviously Lummi culture is like pretty, pretty heavily referenced in a lot of your work. Aside from the baskets. I mean, I mentioned at the top of this, you use a lot of forms of like salmon, bears, totems. I did find an artist statement that you wrote for Full Circle Totem where you said, "My work is a contemporary representation of my culture." Is there something to the idea of that, like kind of breaking from tradition and is also a way to kind of help preserve it, you know? And so I'm just curious, like if you could kind of unpack your statement about it being a contemporary representation and if you had any thoughts on that.

Dan: Well, yeah, I mean, yeah, sort of Full Circle Totem, you know, totem poles, Totem is just kind of this blanket term. What we do, what we call it, we call them story poles. But the more well-known name is Totem. A lot of times there's a story behind it and you know, there's 4000 years of glass history and there's thousands of years of native art, but it's made in this natural materials.

I think the new part is the Coast Salish stories in this really historic medium, because, you know, that's the intersection, I think of my work is, you know, I've got this 4000 years of, you know, glass history versus, you know, there's thousands of years of Coast Salish tradition that are not documented. You know, a lot of what we have was, we come from an oral tradition and a lot of things weren't written down. A lot of what we've learned about ourselves as a community has been written down by people that were, you know, documentarians or, you know, these these first accounts. And so being able to tell my family's stories, a Coast Salish history of the weavers of the reef net, of the totems and, you know, like kind of some of our stories that brings me I mean, I feel like that's my that's where I vibe.

Drew: Yeah, I know you've been doing a lot of you mentioned earlier actually even been doing these indigenous student workshops at Pilchuck. Yeah. Does it kind of feel like you're sort of starting like a new set of traditions, like in terms of like inspiring that next generation to kind of take on this art form?

Dan: Yeah, I mean, yeah, you know, that is, you know, a lot of people I mean, I didn't get here, but, you know, we've spoken about the team sport aspect of glassblowing. You know, every piece that's made in the office, you know, there's the name attached to it and then there's like the 4 to 5 other people that help make it.

And then just as an artist like I said, I've referenced I mean, I'm just so in my I'm just a little short sighted to just mention Dale and Paul and Preston, you know, there's untold amount of people that have helped me get here because it's such a, you know, you don't get here by yourself. I didn't get here by myself. You know, at the lot of people, like said held the door for me, you know, and I just am trying to do the same.

You know, these kids. I'm trying to find out what is the perfect balance for that, working with these kid programs. You know, I've worked for a couple. We were just at the Evergreen Longhouse this last weekend and, you know, the first one, it was it was really tricky when I first wrote this stuff and kind of got like, I'm like, hey, look, literally, I'm your cousin. end me your kids will take them up to this camp. And now we we feed them and they have a place to stay. And it's like what the you know, it just was really kind of foreign and now but it is taking off and Native people just historically have kind of used whatever is available to them for their work, like the jingle dresses are made from like tobacco lids. You know, there's a pretty whatever's been made available to them, but I think glass is one of those things. It just has a high cost of entry. It's really difficult and expensive and time consuming, and it takes a huge investment in the front while like playing a, you know, instrument. Like I said, the violin, it's like, you know, maybe after five years, are you going to somebody's recital and like, taking the earplugs out your like "ah okay," you know, and like, glass is a lot, it just takes a long time to where you can ring the bell. And that's what I found, is that can be tricky.

It's kind of an odd carrot to dangle. The first year, I couldn't get as many students as we just filled up 24 students in the last Pilchuck class, which is amazing. I think it's in its sixth year. The first year I brought, you know, kids from the my reservation, Lummi, you know, before I reached out to everyone, no one called me back. I'm like well, I could at least get kids from Lummi. And that wasn't easy either. I'm like a cousin. Come on, dude. And I got you know, we brought kids in from the Lummi Youth Academy, which is the nice way to say the foster program. And then some kids from the high school.

So we got probably ten kids maybe give or take. And, you know, some of the kids like came up there for the week or four days with just one change of clothes or no coat. And I was like god, this is kind of, pardon me, F'd a little bit because it's just not it's just a weird carrot to dangle, you know, like, Lummi want to go see a third world country? You don't have to travel

overseas somewhere. Like Lummi Reservation sits across Bellingham Bay from Bellingham, the city, which is like, I mean, try getting a place there. Good luck. And, you know, I've seen things that would just make you **** cry. They're like, you know, an extension cord running through three lots and people using a bucket for the bathroom. No water. Raising kids like this. And in living like a lot full of cars and trying to keep your kid in school and you can't keep them, you know, it just so there's you know and last for three about a month and a half ago now, probably, you know, we lost seven kids in one day. And in a community of 3500 people that like, you know, I mean, I'm sure seven kids die in New York regularly. But it was just and it's to drugs, you know, it's like the fentanyl we're having just a massive, you know, we're the first tribe south of the Canadian border. I don't know if that has anything to do with that, but, you know, it's it's had a lot of drug problems. It's, you know, pretty impoverished area. And so anyway, you know, like working with all these these other things that we're trying to combat when I'm trying to spread the word of glass is, you know, we're talking about I mean, there's a lot of things and, you know, I don't know, I just keep putting one foot in front of the other.

The program is going great. We've incorporated the Northwest Indian College and the Evergreen State College, and we're taking older native kids like that are enrolled in college into this program. And, you know, it was it's kind of tricky dragging these kids. The kids I want to try it out like I needed help. I've been in recovery for 15 years. I you know, if you would have met me, you know, I think I until I was about 33, I lived every day like I might die tomorrow and till I got clean and my rough, I had a you know, I had a loving home growing up, but I was on the street early and I had a lot of, uh. I mean, I just had a lot of these same hang ups that these kids are dealing with. And, you know, a lot of ways art and glass have saved me. And I mean, I know it sounds corny. It's you know, you don't know if you're saving the world, but it definitely helped. It was something for me to hold on to when I needed that, to figure out how to have esteem and do like esteem-ful things.

And so, you know, long term goals, I'm hoping to open glass fusing because that's a lot more approachable as an entryway to glass or lamp working kind of thing up at my place. The school has been super great and supportive, but sometimes I also think that it's nice to have the freedom to do it on my own terms a little bit. And I'm not definitely I'm not as organized as, you know, my cousin said I should open a nonprofit or a 501C3. You know, I'm like, I'm not that kind of person, but I'm hoping that the right person, you know, I'm just hoping things work out. I got a couple ovens up there and I'd like to open up a small studio that I can apprentice some kids up at Lummi with. So that's kind of what I'm doing.

Drew: So you've been in Washington pretty much your whole life, right? Yeah.

Dan: Yeah. I regret not having like, there was a time in my life, like, you know, if I had gone to Hawaii in my twenties, I would have totally, like, F'd off and flip flop life and done something different, probably. But I. I have traveled quite a bit at this point. And every time I come home, I just am grateful to be from here. And, you know, I've got connection this my roots are here and it's pretty, pretty great place.

Drew: Yeah. I was just curious because I know I heard you mention on a different podcast because I did listen to a ton of podcasts where you that you're a pretty avid fisherman and that you also really enjoy foraging. Yeah. And so I figured you probably have a pretty, pretty intimate relationship with like that the wilderness of Washington. Have you has it changed in the in your life? Have you and like, what are what are kind of some of the big changes that you've noticed like of the physical landscape?

Dan: I mean, there's just so many more people. You know, I'm actually a Seattleite, like born and raised here which is so few and not that that's a thing. It's just it's a beautiful city still. One of the coolest things about it is that you can in 45 minutes, be out of it and be into, you know, it's kind of between two mountain ranges in like an interior, like the Salish Sea, the Puget Sound. There's rivers and it's you know, when you're talking about treaties earlier, it's like it's just one of the last settled places. It's the West. And I grew up with loggers before. While there used to be trees here, none of those trees are still here, really. I mean, there's a few old growth forests left, but there's still is, you know, trees and the air quality. You drink the tap water, you can taste the difference. You know, it's there's as far as the city goes.

But the area you know, I was a fisherman and, you know, all my cousins still fish. You know if I'm lucky, I'll get out recreational fishing, but I make glass fish now, that's kind of the it's consumes my life a little bit, but, you know. In my lifetime and who knows I know the the planet, they say historically it gets hotter and colder. And I think a lot of the marketing or what you're being told to think about it is you know, I'm always when they tell you to think anything about anything, you know, was going to take a second to like, give me a week and let me get back to you about what I think about that. But I still am undecided. But I can tell you this, there's just less fish. You don't see them. I mean, I don't know, is it pollution? Is it poison? Is it overfishing? Probably all of these things. The amount of just trash, you know? I was just in Japan god I found, I saw one cigarette butt and one, you know, one I saw two pieces of trash the whole time I was there.

And the city I live in now has just gone through some massive growing pains. And so now I, I do still have a studio here in Seattle, but I've moved out to Skagit Valley, closer to I'm actually between the Upper Skagit Reservation and Lummi Reservation. I have a lot of family at Upper Skagit, actually a quarter Swinomish and a quarter Lummi, and a lot of those that triangle right there. So I'm kind of right in the in the middle of that triangle. And it's nicer to be closer to the communities. You know, Seattle is will always be my home, you know, or where I'm from. And I'm grateful for that.

You know, I feel like a lot of what tribal youth could have that they need to learn how to make glass. You know what I mean? Like it part of me it's like that weird carrot to dangle. I'm like, Welcome to Pilchuck. Do you even? You know? I mean, kind of work on some one kid ate 17 bowls of Lucky Charms in one day and got sick. It's like it's just kind of culture shock and what I want for kids in the tribes and it happens now more with the internet but I just I

mean it's such an I've been fortunate enough to travel, you know, and just to see other people and, you know, and just to know, too, that the the plight of indigenous people is like it's kind of ubiquitous. Like just look around the world. Tibet, like, I mean, indigenous people are people that are, you know, I mean, there's there's an agenda wherever you're let's just hope they don't find any great natural resources on your land, you know, and they'll come you know, this is it's not unique. It's very recent, you know, and we see it still.

We on the West Coast we said the Point Elliott Treaty was the last treaties, one of the last treaties signed. And right about that, 1855 and they had seen, you know, like what happened to the natives on the on the East Coast. And they're just when I travel through North Carolina and New York, the names of all the streets are just like names of ghosts. Like these people are gone. You just don't see these people. I feel really fortunate to be from an area where there still are. You know, we represent less than 1% of the U.S. population. I love the Pueblo South. Santa Fe is another place I'm really I really love just because you can interact with Native people everywhere and it's in every aspect of the community or society there. Yeah, You know, have I seen a change? I think we've all seen it changed, you know, like it you know, when you say native communities, native it odd factoid per capita, Native Americans, you know, have the largest representation in the United States Army, and that's kind of counterintuitive, you know, and they're less than 1% of the population. And then some 2% of the native population is in the armed forces at some level. You know, they believe in what it means to be American and fight for each other. I think America's having a little bit of an identity crisis right now. If you want to be honest.

You know, am I proud to be American? I am. But I'm also, you know, I'm a Lummi nation tribal member first, I'm also before I'm that I'm a human too. Native people don't get a pass in my world. Native people have you know, I don't think anybody gets a pass. You know, that's the community I represent. But I think that we're all responsible for our individual actions. And, you know, I think this this division that they're trying to sow that's really popular, I think that it's a common theme. And the I just I'm going to go out here on a limb. I'm not trying to gossip, but sometimes I feel like the media feel I don't know that there's an agenda of division, but I just feel like I just see it everywhere, you know, and, and and and like the things that I hold, you know, because it'd be really easy for me to be like I, you know, F America, everybody's colonizers. I think that ship has sailed, you know, And now all my nieces and nephews have an iPhone and you're not going to get it out of their hand. But I figure out when we're trying to, like, learn how to live with each other, like, you're right, we need this needs this is our shared history now. And I think some of the wisdom of what native cultures have had that sustainability that is just not you know, it's just not part of the conversation. I mean, it is it's a great marketing tool and we're just put a little green leaf on the corner of whatever we're selling, and somehow that's green. But, you know, I mean, I don't feel like turning my back on my countrymen either, you know? And I mean, like, I just I feel like we're in this together, you know what I mean? And if we're going to get through this, I'm a human before I'm anything, and I'm what I am as a I'm a father to my kids. That's who I am before I'm even tribal member. So and then my responsibilities to those kids and then from those kids, it's on to these kids around.

You know, I feel like with Open Heart, we call it when we raise our hands. You'll see me do this a lot. It's Coast Salish. It's uh, tsyet. It's like with Open heart, a thank you, or I hear you, or like, Yes, I hear you. You know, with a open heart. And it's a I'm a big advocate of it because, you know, I love a thunderous applause, too, but it's just quiet and it's quick. And you can do it without interruption.



Drew: And that just about wraps things up for today's episode. I'd like to thank our guests, Erin Monroe and Dan Friday, for joining us on the podcast. If you'd like to learn more about Dan Friday's work, you can check out his website fridayglass.com. And don't miss (Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art, now on view through September 8th at the Columbia Museum of Art.

I'm your host, Drew Baron. And until we meet again, tsyet.