



PHOTOS COURTESY ARTISTIC OUTLET MEDIA

PIPE DREAMS

Degenerate Flame Off brings functional glass art above ground BY ALEX NOTMAN

ABOVE: GLASS ARTIST MARCEL BRAUN

A revolution is brewing in the Whiteaker — again. Not an *Anarchist Cookbook*, WTO riots kind of revolution, or even a foodie revolution, but an underground art explosion that has found a nucleus at Cornerstone Glass, a glass art studio, gallery and shop. The muse? Functional glass art, or in its most recognizable form, the pipe.

“Pipes will be seen as a massive movement of Americana and will be valued by the Smithsonian and all these museums around the world,” Eugene glassblower Jason Lee says in the documentary *Degenerate Art: The Art and Culture of Glass Pipes*. “I refuse to stop until it happens.” The film, an official selection of South by Southwest 2012, follows the hidden and somewhat controversial art form, from its beginnings with local “godfather” of functional glass art Bob Snodgrass (creator of the first Grateful Dead skull piece) to Operation Pipe Dreams — a 2003 Department of Justice-led, marijuana-hysteria-flamed investigation that targeted Eugeneans Jason Harris and Saeed Mohtadi for distributing drug paraphernalia — to the current tension between classical glass artists and “pipe” artists. Pipe artists are ready for a sea change.

Justin Sheppard is one of the figures at the forefront of that change. The CEO and founder of Cornerstone Glass (which appeared in *Degenerate Art*), Sheppard, along with a crew of employees, is hosting the 5th annual Degenerate Flame Off May 31 to June 2, one of only a handful of competitions of the like in the U.S., on its campus in the Whiteaker to show that pipes are not just paraphernalia, they are works of art that should be in galleries.

The Flame Off will feature a ten-hour competition with 16 of the world’s best functional glass artists, glass blowing demonstrations (Snodgrass will be leading one), a screening of a the new glass art documentary *1050 Toronto*, live music with Reeble Jar, Marv Ellis and Vokab Company, fire dancers and jugglers and food vendors.

Cornerstone Glass Executive Director Ashley Tulare says they are modeling the event after the “festival experience.” They expect about 1,500 people throughout the weekend.

“We want to get the rest of the city of Eugene and Springfield more involved,” Sheppard says, adding that Eugene “really is the mecca, and this is thought of where it really started for our industry.”

A major player in the industry is Daniel Coyle (known just as Coyle in the scene), a Philadelphia-based glass artist who started when he was 19 (he’s now 28), who will be traveling to Eugene to compete in this year’s Flame Off. Flip through the portfolio for his company, Ice Cold Glass, and you’ll find a collection of snarling monkeys, googly-eyed aliens and even Mr. Peanut, crafted with astonishing detail that rivals the Baroque sculptures of Bernini.

On Saturday, June 2, Coyle and company will be crafting one piece, in front of an audience, during a ten-hour stint to be judged in three categories: technical skill, creativity and people’s choice. Thirty-one judges will score the pieces in the first two categories on Sunday, and Flame Off attendees will be able to cast their vote for their favorite functional glass art on Sunday as well. Past winners are not what you would expect; the 2012 People’s Choice Award went to Robin Hood, a glass artist from Washington, who created a functional, elegant green and blue bow and arrow.

“Right now, it’s underground,” says Lace Face, who will be competing this year, in *Degenerate Art*. “But they’re going to be in a museum some day. They’re going to be part of American history.” *Degenerate Art*’s producer, Max Tubman, will be making a documentary about this year’s Flame Off, to capture history in the making. The Whiteaker has front-row seats to that history, and you’re invited. ■

The Degenerate Flame Off runs Friday, May 31, to Sunday, June 2, at Cornerstone Glass, 1068 W. 2nd Ave.; \$32-\$35 for three-day pass, \$12 for Friday music only, \$15 for Saturday music only. For more information, visit cornerstoneglass.com.

BELOW: GLASS HEADPHONES BY AUSTIN-BASED ARTIST JOE BLOW FOR 2012’S DEGENERATE FLAME OFF

