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Hank Murta Adams

Grotesque and fantastic heads that are portrait-like in their individuality are not uncommon in ceramics, but Hank Murta Adams's glass heads have few comparisons. Adams (b. 1956) was doing portraits and landscape paintings as a RISD student (BFA painting 1978) when he met Dale Chihuly and became involved in glass. After he discovered casting, cast-glass heads incorporating mixed mediums became his signature form. He studied further at Pilchuck and Penland and then at the Appalachian Center for Craft from 1981 to '84. In the early '80s he made bell-jar pieces such as *Forgetful* that seemed to be "signals of distress" and a "message of isolation and madness," creating a tone unfamiliar to glass.¹ In this work, a tall bell jar encloses a gold-color cutout mask that looks like a head drawn by a child; it appears just above a foggy area near the bottom. High overhead something deep red is wrapped in dark stiff wire by which it also hangs. In an artist's statement of the time, Adams wrote of such works: "The pieces have involved thoughts of self-purpose, sexuality, faith, and criticism and have almost all touched on an attitude of cynicism. Not an attitude of ruin but of a possible and oft times likely waste. Though the emotion is genuine, it is through a sarcasm, a bucking of belief that I am hoping to resurface with a transmittal of life and a positive humor." The glass material allowed the creation of distance while retaining visibility.

The humor has, however, remained tentative. Later works address such political themes as terrorism and the distancing of humanity from nature, and such personal issues as social alienation and the unpredictability of health. Among the project works that he does in guest-artist sessions are some focusing on linkages or the implications of social networks and

interdependence. The cast heads, presumably, are survivors, but they often look dazed. They have been described as heroic in scale but anti-heroic in character¹ and are of a piece with the whole of his work.