

John Kiley: Evenfall Sculpture along the Interurban



A fourth-generation native of Seattle, John Kiley has been working with glass for almost 25 years. Educated at Pilchuck Glass School, he began blowing glass professionally in 1992 and at 21, became a gaffer for Dale Chihuly's chandelier team before eventually joining Venetian maestro Lino Tagliapietra's team, who helped him emerge as a supremely skilled artist in his own right in 2008. In 2011, Kiley managed the design, construction, and operation of the Schack Art Center in Everett, an 18,000 square-foot, community-based, non-profit devoted to the arts.

Kiley's work is immediately recognizable for its elegant, lens-like spheres that lure the eye inward, drawing attention to luminous, architecturally – informed, interior chambers. Inside these apertures and ocular hollows, Kiley places membranes that divide the spheres into various halves. Thus the incalmo technique of joining two bubbles became one of his core areas of exploration, as did the long cold-working process of cutting into the sphere to expose the interior and polish the surfaces to such a high degree that light captured inside almost defies our effort to locate a focal point.

The two large-scale forms in Shoreline City Hall are evidence of Kiley's continually evolving practice. Without the characteristic membrane in the middle, and composed of aerospace industry foam and a fiberglass coating rather than hot-blown, they nevertheless evince many of the aesthetic qualities of the smaller work in glass, including the extreme polish – here due to finishing with multiple coats of automotive body paint – that can be difficult to focus on because the eye has difficulty differentiating between reflected surface and actual surface. Kiley compares the bright red to his 1965 Ford Falcon, while associating the deep purple to Chrysler's Plumb Crazy, but with a custom tint.

Tilted at angles, almost precarious in their positioning on the pedestals, Kiley's Evenfall sculptures also evoke a contrasting sense of delicacy and airy hollowness, recognizing that aesthetic beauty is achieved through a sense of absence as well as presence, of an emptiness as well as a solid.