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WEED WEEK

These Bongs Are High Art in More Than One Way

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An exhibition examines the fancy pipes and bongs of Bob Snodgrass, the "Godfather of Glass," and the legions of artists he inspired.

[Editor's note: David Bienenstock is a longtime cannabis journalist, author of the book [How to Smoke Pot \(Property\)](#), and an occasional VICE contributor. The following is a modified and edited version of the introduction Bienenstock wrote for [Outlaw Glass](#), an exhibition he curated on the history and evolution of glass pipes and bongs currently on view in New York City.]

As cannabis legalization takes root and spreads, much of the media discussion surrounding this societal sea-change has focused on the [economics](#) or the [politics](#) involved. But how will ending the War on Weed transform us culturally?

The hottest hot take seems to be "marijuana is going mainstream"—an analysis that rather snobbishly presumes this cultural exchange will be a one-way street, with kids in garish tie-dyes taking a back seat to make way for the more refined tastes of Wall Street weed CEO's and [stiletto stoners](#).

So to better understand what gifts underground cannabis culture has to bestow, [I curated an exhibition called Outlaw Glass](#), open now through May 27 at New York City's apexart gallery. The show examines work from leading "functional" glass artists (i.e. makers of really fancy pipes and bongs) and traces the history of this legally grey art form through its birth, the [coordinated arrests](#) of some of its leading practitioners, and on into a new golden age of increasing acceptance of the art form and incredibly advanced technical achievement. For just as author Michael Pollan [once described](#) black market cannabis growers as "the best gardeners of my generation," the most innovative movement in art glass today comes from those creating high-end artifacts that happen to double as tools for getting high.

Outlaw Glass honors the life and work of Bob Snodgrass—the widely acknowledged "Godfather of Glass"—showcasing his pipes alongside the incredible achievements of the generations of glass artists who've followed the path he blazed.

At the show's opening reception on March 29, many of these "flameworkers" showed up to mix and mingle with the downtown art scene's black turtleneck set, leading to much mutual enlightenment, and a few trips around the corner to share some weed. This kind of cultural exchange comes a long way from the Grateful Dead parking lot scene of yore, where Bob Snodgrass first pioneered the craft by selling his one-of-a-kind hand-made "functional glass art" to Deadheads as the band endlessly toured the country. One signature piece, which recalled the band's own iconography of a skull in a top hat, became so synonymous with its creator that those lucky enough to acquire one would refer to it, reverentially, as a Snoddy.

Much of the more contemporary work in the show doesn't even look like a pipe, which is part of the fun. Designed for "[dabbing](#)," *Outlaw Glass*'s stand-outs come in the shape of a monster truck, Bigfoot, dragons, octopus, steampunk machinery, pickle jars, molecules and other fantastical designs. In total, the exhibit features works representing fifty different artists with a wide ranging set of styles, techniques and influences.

Outlaw Glass is at apexart till May 27, 2017. See more photos from the show [here](#).

Jeff Newman and Chandler Ellis, *Balancing Act*, 2014

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