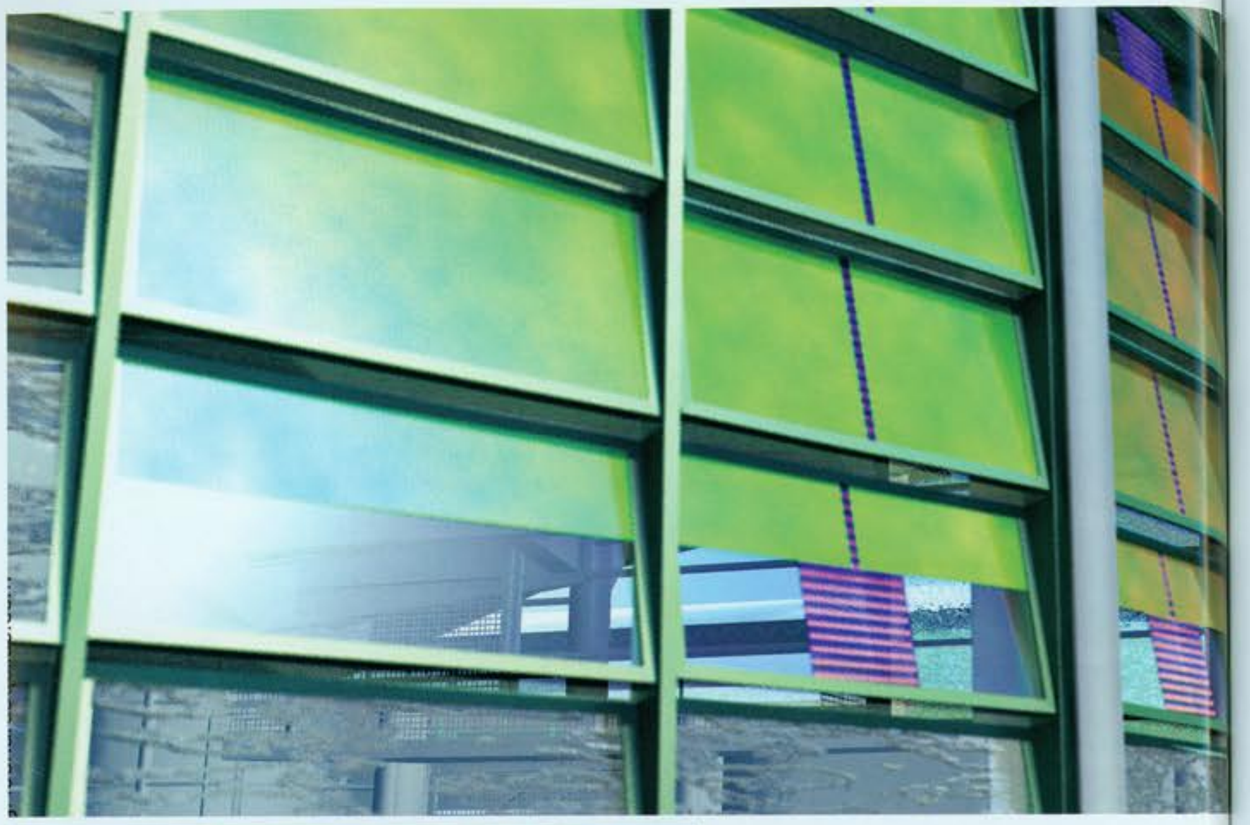

ABOVE AND LEFT **Tom Patti,** *Victor Moore Headhouse, Roosevelt Intermodal Station, Queens, New York, MTA Arts in Transit*, **2002–2004. High-performance glass. H 12, L 60 ft.**
PHOTO: LEONARDO QUILES

them on widely divergent paths in their art. Chihuly, who found that the lack of depth perception made it increasingly difficult for him to blow the intricate glass objects that he designed, embraced the team system that has come to define his style. Patti, on the other hand, curious about his limited depth awareness, began to create objects that were studies in perception. He created objects that could be held in the hand at arm's length, easily moved and rotated before his eye as he investigated ever more subtle optical effects. The scale fit the project: his intent was not to make a massive telescope for studying the universe, but to devise an intricate microscope for exploring inner space.

An Architectural Art

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked the end of Patti's use of the vessel form as a vehicle for the investigation of light and space. What has followed is concerned purely with light, color, and structure, as interpreted though a series of virtual horizons. Patti has observed about this more recent work, "Vertical

RIGHT **Tom Patti,** *Leadership Office Wall, Owens-Corning New World Headquarters, Toledo, Ohio,* **1993–96. Laminated glass and glass fiber. H 12, W 28 ft.**
PHOTO: MARCO LORENZETTI

work struggles upward against gravity. In a horizontal plane, everything appears at rest. It's easier to travel through a horizontal. I took the object and made the viewer move through the planes that are within the object, instead of around the object itself. I made them do things they don't necessarily do when they look at sculpture."

Drilling through the horizons of Patti's work from the 1990s are interior structures, some of which look like hollow rings or bands. Sometimes they sparkle with a silvery sheen or, like *Solarized Ringed Lumina with Orange and Green* (1993), evoke the rippling of water in a pond when a stone is tossed onto the surface. Other structures, including *Clear Lumina Echo with Green and Blue* (1993), resemble dissected technological forms or exploded architectural drawings. Patti says that he was "trying to give the core a greater physical presence than the glass that it was embedded within." He has moved from his original minimalist preoccupation with the fusion of industrial glass. The hollow core is now achieving ascendancy over the sculptural block.

In 1980, General Electric commissioned Patti to create a large sculpture for its plastics research facility in Pittsfield. GE gave him access to some of its high-technology fabrication facilities, and Patti incorporated these new processes into the sculpture, which he made largely of laminated plastics. Patti views the central oculus of the work *Genic Doran Divider Sentinel* (1980) as symbolic of the eye of GE—or the eye of the CEO of GE. More importantly for the artist, the change in materials and scale, and the access to new technological possibilities, encouraged him to begin pursuing architectural-scale projects. The layers became larger and the colors complex. Patti created an architectural window element unlike anything seen before—impact resistant art glass free of the lead line.

From 1993 to 1996, Patti was engaged in a project to incorporate his work directly into the structure of a building at the Owens-Corning corporate headquarters in Toledo, Ohio. Expanding on the work begun at GE, he created a 300-foot frieze and a wall that was 28 feet long and 12 feet tall: "I was interested in work that was integrated rather than hung on the wall like a painting or set on a pedestal. This wall is a physical, interlocking element of the building." As in the GE project, Patti received access to Owens-Corning's facilities and machinery, allowing him to investigate glass

Patti's architectural work, made primarily from flat sheets of laminated glass, seems to have evolved from his sculptural blocks.

fiber materials and new manufacturing processes for use in creating the installation.

Twenty years of development laid the groundwork for this pioneering work of providing security art glass for public and private space. Patti's industrial design and fine art background had fully merged. Other projects followed, including windows for a synagogue in the Chicago area (1998), the entrance to the upstairs main gallery of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2000), a wall for the Mint Museum of Craft and Design in Charlotte, North Carolina (1999), and two projects scheduled for installation in 2004 in New York, one at Morton Square, a full city block luxury residential structure in Greenwich Village, and another at the Roosevelt and 74th Street Intermodal subway station in Queens.

Patti's architectural work, made primarily from flat sheets of laminated glass, seems to have evolved from his sculptural blocks, if now on a massive scale. It's as if he took a steamroller and flattened the dense blocks of his '80s work into thin sheets that contain within them an ephemeral, ghostlike embodiment of all the inner structures of the sculptures. After two decades of creating sculptures that were in some ways like miniature buildings that viewers could hold in one hand and peer into, Patti effectively decided to explode those forms wide open so that he could literally walk inside his own work and take a look around.

Appraiser and independent curator William Warmus is author of 10 books and more than 100 essays.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
This article is adapted from the forthcoming book, *Tom Potti: Illuminating the Invisible* (University of Washington Press), the exhibition catalogue for a retrospective at the Tacoma Museum of Glass. The exhibition, "Illuminating the Invisible," runs from November 20, 2004 – June 12, 2005.