

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Dan Barnes
Interviewed by Matt Grimm
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. . . This symbol refers to an interruption to the speaker

Barnes: Hello, I'm Dan Barnes. I live in Lexington, Kentucky and this is in the living room of my home.

Grimm: Let's just start with your background. What is your background, where are you from? Are you a Kentucky native?

Barnes: Yes, grew up in western Kentucky in Henderson, right on the Ohio River. Skied many water ski trips up and down the Ohio growing up. Grew up in a family of builders and craftsmen. My family . . . my grandfather was an excellent craftsmen. Actually he built most of the cabinets for many years and even would install those. There was three other brothers involved in the family business, other than my dad and it was pretty much broken up into categories. My dad was the office guy, we had a construction crew that did the rough construction. We had a crew that did the interior part of the construction. And as I began to grow up, I began to work with the interior part of the construction work. So I actually cased windows and hung doors and laid down particle board and hung drywall, I did a little bit of all of it. So, I think a lot of what I have today that's technical skills, were learned even way back then as a child.

Grimm: Well, you look at the work of guys that hang drywall and mud those walls, or tile, or, you know, so much of it really is an art form. . .

Barnes: Sure.

Grimm: You know? And did that history of your family being in the craft trade influence you?

Barnes: Most definitely. And that even goes deeper with my mother. My mother had a great color sense. She worked with all the colors and the selection process, which I was a part of growing up. So inherently, I gained all those things from growing up and that was such an asset. Not that they taught me specifically, but you grew up with it. It was part of what you learned and experienced. So it came natural to me when I moved to Lexington.

Grimm: Yea. When did you discover art? When did you say, well maybe this is . . .

Barnes: Well, that's the strange thing. I think it even starts when I was six or eight years old. I would ask my father to take me to the carnival. Now this may sound strange, but I would go to the carnival and I would watch them set up the carnival. I didn't go ride the rides, I watched them set up the carnival and then I would go back to the shop, because I had all the basic tools already and I would mimic the ride that they had built. And so, that's, you know, in a lot of ways engineering of sorts, but I would. . . developed my skills as a child mimicking that sort of thing and learning how to paint and do all the things that I did to those Ferris wheels and all sorts of circus tents and I did all that as a child, just for the fun of it. I think my parents thought I was crazy, but it was fun for me. For whatever reason I enjoyed doing it. Of course, when I got in school, in high school I started with an art class and it was instantly I knew that I felt at home there. My professor there, or my teacher, her name was Nia Whitledge and I still talk to her to this day. It's a wonderful relationship, she's, I think, in her nineties now. I spoke with her just a few weeks ago and she said if you come to Henderson, make sure you stop by to visit. And I intend to do that.

Grimm: Yea, that's neat. Give me one second. . . So, to have that relationship with your high school art teacher. I mean, sort of as a mentor. She really encouraged you?

Barnes: Oh, a major influence. As a kid growing up, I really didn't know if I was coming or going, you know, I was trying to find myself and to have that encouragement from somebody that's your teacher, instantly I felt at home and welcome there and began to blossom. And when I graduated high school, which Henderson at the time, was one of the largest high schools in the state. I think they may still be, but I won the art award from my high school. And I was in band, as well, even received the silver award in music.

Grimm: Oh, yea?

Barnes: Yea.

Grimm: What instrument did you play?

Barnes: Trumpet.

Grimm: Oh, yea. Me too.

Barnes: So yea, that followed me for many years later too, which I can tell more about that later, but...

Grimm: So then you graduated from high school and went on to the University of Kentucky and . . .

Barnes: Well, how that came about was, we had a snow storm back in the seventies, it was, they, I think they even referred to it as a blizzard. We had like two feet of snow in Henderson. And I was at that point working for my dad, just out of high school. And I was outside putting cedar channel lock siding on a house in the snow and the bells went off. I started school the next semester. (Laughter, Barnes and Grimm) Smart. That was the best thing that ever could have happened to me.

Grimm: It's not about the long term, big picture here.

Barnes: All of a sudden, I was thinking there's a bigger picture here and I didn't necessarily want to be doing that kind of work my whole life. So, I started going to University of Kentucky in the interior design department, which my degree is actually human environmental design, where I began to grow and learn and meet professors and people that would follow me for the rest of my life. Didn't know that at the time either. I've had several professors, like Arturo Sandoval, a lighting professor, Joe Rayboro. One of my other professors, you're going to have to wait, but we'll pull up this name because it's important. (Laughter, Barnes)

Grimm: Well, Arturo () and has been a real influence for you. . .

Barnes: Yes.

Grimm: And encouragement. Do you remember some of those early... you know, when you were sitting in his class listening to his instruction, him coming alongside you, to sort of guide you. What, you know, how did he train you and how did he help you to develop?

Barnes: Well, he....It....it...First, I thought he was crazy. (Laughter, Barnes) Because here I am, this kid straight from Henderson, Kentucky. It was very, you know, I don't want to say backward, but, it's small town and of course Arturo had been around the world and I had to adjust to that,

but he was just... the main thing, I would say, well just encouraging. He constantly encouraged and would lead you down the road in the right direction. As I tell this story a lot, many years later, when I started creating my artwork to sell, I was making everything on a smaller scale and he continued to say, Dan, that looks great, but you need to make it bigger. And I'd say, well, I can't do that because of this and I had all these excuses why I couldn't make it bigger and he would still say, every time I'd see him he'd say, looks great, Dan, make it bigger. What can you do to make it bigger? And finally, one day I made it bigger and it was an instant stamp of approval. There was something about the credibility of making the larger work that opened a lot of doors. And that's about the time I applied to the Kentucky Guild for the first time. Don't think I would have gotten in, probably, if I hadn't or developed the work and expanded it and got to the scale that I was on. But that was all due to Arturo Sandoval.

Grimm: Yea. Well, describe your work a little bit, you know. What materials, what technique do you use?

Barnes: Well, I started out in the stained glass area. I took a stained glass class locally from Hollocks Stained Glass. A little off subject, but two years after that, the lady that actually taught me began to work for me. And never looked back from that. The stained glass evolved into doing three dimensional stained glass sculpture. Some mixed with metals, some mixed with wood. That morphed into doing a lot of fused glass work, where you take stained glass and melt it together. And really, I guess at this point, I would consider myself more of a mixed media artist, than just a so called glass artist. Because I'm mixing copper, brass, aluminum, with the metals, with the glass to create all sorts of wall pieces and sculptures. And I've continued to morph and grow and evolve and I think that's a direct result of the market and me creating new things and keeping people interested in what I'm doing. It's been crucial for me to keep buyers interested in what I'm doing. By continuing to evolve and create new work, which is inherently who I am anyway, I will always have that inner drive to grow and produce. Where that comes from, I don't know, but it's just there. But it also keeps the buyers interested in what I'm doing. Hopefully, keep the purchases happening. Because the reality is, this is a business, you know, I'm an artist, but yet, I'm also a businessman. So I want to make a living and eat. (Laughter, Barnes)

Grimm: And maybe that's partially why you did the upholstery early on.

Barnes: Oh, yea. Early on when I graduated from the University, I started doing custom upholstery work because it was an instant income for me. Didn't have any classes. I took a chair apart. I was working at a furniture store right out of college and was actually the warehouse manager. We had a chair that got damaged, it was in the front of the store and I took that chair apart and mechanically just reversed the process. And recovered that chair and never will forget, took the chair back into the office and it sat in the front, just inside the front door, and it sold the next week. And I instantly had a sideline. All the other designers that worked there, wanted me to do custom things like headboards and benches and beds and I started recovering furniture and it snowballed into a full time business. I walked out of Hellringer's on my own. Hellringer's Furniture store that was the store back in the day. And woke up about a week later, sweating, ringing wet with sweat, thinking what have I done? (Laughter, Barnes) But, went at it with that same tenacity that I grew up with and didn't look back. I've done a lot of work for the design community and high end design community for many years.

Grimm: Do you still continue the upholstery today? For special clients?

Barnes: For a very few. Special is the right word. I had a client call the other day while I was in Florida doing shows and she was calling about getting some work done and I said, well you're one of the special ones. And she said, well, what do you mean? And I said, well I really am not doing upholstery anymore. (Laughter, Barnes) But, she's a good friend and I've done work for her for years and I'm going to do hers, but the art has, by far, taken over. And to be quite honest, believe it or not, I actually make probably three times the money, doing art, than I did doing the upholstery. I don't think a lot of people would understand that or think that that would be possible, but it's true.

Grimm: Yea. Well, early on, did you apprentice or work with glass artists before you set out on your own? Or did you just, kind of, jump into it?

Barnes: Well, believe it or not, I didn't. I took a stained glass class locally, as I said. Learned the basics. I did go to Portland and took one class on fusing, because I wanted to know the basics, but I kind of felt like, I had a lot of people tell me that I ought to look up Tiffany and I ought to look up this person and I ought to go follow that person and I was like, I wanted to try to find my own way. To come up with my own ideas and see what I could come up with that made me stand out. Make myself unique. And I was afraid that if I went the other route, it might put blinders on, so I chose the route of just developing my own way.

Grimm: Yea. Well, why do you create? And, you know, does your work contain a message in it or is it just for a love of the process? Why do you do what you do?

Barnes: It's just, it comes from within, this drive to create. I've had it since I was a little kid, as I spoke of earlier, creating the little scale models and things. It was... I've always had this hands on feeling, I've always wanted to create and to grow that process. I don't,...there's something about, me creating something and having someone else want that piece. Want something that I've created with my own hands, that tangible part of that. I don't want to say that it's, what's the word I'm looking for? I don't have to have their approval, but when you get it, from what you're making, when you can make a living doing it, there's something very special and rewarding about having a person, like I said, you know I travel and do shows all over the country. For me to go to a show, say, in Atlanta, like this past weekend and have a man walk in and buy a very large piece. He doesn't know me from a load of coal. For him to be willing to purchase that piece and put it in his home, well that's huge for me. That's very gratifying and fulfilling. But I just have always had that drive, to create, it was what I was given. We're all given things and that's what I was given.

Grimm: Yea. Let's talk a little bit about how your work has evolved over the years. Some of the more recent things, the medallions and things, do they have a message or similar theme to them? Or how does that change, you know?

Barnes: Well, a lot of the work. I guess when I first really hit the scene, I had just went to Egypt. Took a trip to Egypt. And it was very eye opening. I saw a lot of symbolisms there, in the architecture and the sculptures and I came home and created the whole series of solar discs, is that kind of what you're talking about? And the solar discs, that was obviously a direct result of going to Egypt, but I tried to make that my own work in that I incorporated the earth and the sun in that same one piece of artwork. So the bottom part being solid, representing the earth and the upper part with the glass and the light representing the sun and submerging those two together. So there's some, I guess you'd say there's some symbolism going on there. But, to be honest, for the most part, my work is just whatever comes to my mind and a lot of times, it is travel. A lot of time it's things that I see along the way that spark an idea. But, you know, I have work now

that I refer to as my cosmos series, which is the fused glass, which I have order and chaos within that line of work, but to be honest, some of that is created because the clients want it. I think there's a need for them to have a title. For me personally, I'm not politically driven in that way, with my art. I just create things that I like and that I find appealing and interesting.

Grimm: Right. Yea.

Barnes: I mean some artists, obviously, do do that and that's...but I don't see myself as heading in that direction.

Grimm: So your process. You're in the studio, do you try certain things, experiment with fusing this color with this one and let's try to incorporate some wood or metal here and see how...I mean is it just a constant trying and retrying?

Barnes: Of course, it's a constant evolution. It's like right now, I'm working on creating a whole new line, where I'm going to start creating pieces that have less glass. They're going to be more structured with a small amount of glass as an accent, but they're going to have more of the copper and more brass and aluminum. And there's two or three reasons for that. The reality is, as I said earlier, this is a business. So, I'm working on...I have a lot of clients that come in my booth that can't afford the big pieces at the price point that they are. So I'm developing these other pieces that are going to have less glass, less involved work for me, but still have the look, so I'm targeting that direct from a business standpoint. But what's funny about that is, when you start doing that, then the creative process begins to unfold, because now I'm having to think about what I can do and I was sitting at the show this past weekend in Atlanta sketching out ideas for these new pieces that I'm going to create. And so, it's part of that part that keeps me going, keeps me excited. I think you can probably see it on my face right now, because I get excited about it.

Grimm: Yea. So you mentioned that you're a little bit of a frustrated potter, too you love that. You got a kiln for your fuse glasses. . .

Barnes: Yea. It's horrible. It's a horrible thing to... I have to make myself not use my kiln for pottery. I had a pottery class in college and I had a lot of fun doing it, but, you know, I told myself when I went down this road of where I was headed that I was not going to broach that subject, I wasn't going to cross that line. And so, to keep that from happening, as you view my home, you'll find pottery everywhere. (Laughter, Barnes) I've got pottery from all over the country. From Maine to Key West, I've bought pieces of pottery. And actually, a lot of local artists. And, you know, there's part of that, part of this whole business, I like talking about this part because it's me giving back. For instance, this weekend I was at a show and the guy beside me wasn't having a very good show and he's a potter. Got three kids. Drove all the way from Wisconsin or Michigan, I can't remember. No, Wisconsin or. . . doesn't matter. And, I liked his work and I had a good show, so I went over and bought two pieces of his pottery. So, I was giving back to him, but yet, getting something that I really wanted too. So, I like, I enjoy doing that sort of thing. So, yea, I've had a lot of fun, buying, collecting my pottery. And I have to to kind of control myself, because I could actually buy it every show, but I'm trying to keep it down to every other show. (Laughter, Barnes)

Grimm: Is your work just a display pieces or do some of them have a functional artwork part?

Barnes: For the most part, they're mostly display. I did a few functional things. Of course, when the bottom dropped out of the market, I began to worry and started developing a few pieces that

were more functional like a few little side tables and things that were mounted on the wall. I did a few water fountains, a few things like that. But, to be quite honest, I found that for me, they were still more drawn to my bigger wall pieces. And I think, you know, it has to do with the price point with what I've got, and if it's what people want, the people that have money still have it. And I've not really seen a downturn in my sales, during the slow economy. For the most part, for the most part, my work is strictly, I wouldn't say functional, it's more just aesthetic.

Grimm: Yea. And you have had several high end commissions. And you know, both office space and in private homes. You know, glass sculptures hanging in the lobbies or atriums. Talk a little bit about that and do you approach those big commissions differently?

Barnes: It is totally different, because when I'm creating here, I'm creating things from my own perspective and what I want to create. And when you're commissioned to do a piece for like, the Owensboro Convention Center, you're given a space, you're having to deal with architects, engineers, global spectrum, people that run the convention center, the city, you've got a whole lot more entities to mesh together and figure out what's going to work. And, so yea, it's a total different process. So, I'm considering all of those elements and the consideration of what I'm doing for the Owensboro Convention Center. And then on top of that, you've got the building itself. What's the architecture and what's the influence of that? And what am I putting in there and what impact is it going to have? They initially wanted me to do some of the current work that I'm doing and suspend it from the ceiling, these three dimensional stained glass sculptures that have thousands of little pieces of glass and I told them no. And they say, well what do you mean no? And I say, well, you've got a massive space here. Sixty feet tall, the building is 300 foot across the front. It's a huge space. That's not going to fill the space. And so, I had to come home and develop something that I felt that would fit the architecture, add something to the architecture and this particular case, the architecture is very contemporary, very clean lined, beautiful building and I added color and I added texture and visual movement, by bending the glass and so it, to me, I was adding those things to the space. That was perfect, because it draws your attention to that space.

Grimm: Was that Owensboro Convention Center the largest installation for you to date?

Barnes: It is. Yes, it hangs sixty feet, in a sixty foot space, sixty feet high. It hangs forty-five feet down. There's a 157 pieces of fused glass, anywhere from eighteen to thirty inches in length. It's suspended from fifteen stainless steel cables. And by having the fifteen cables like that I was able to spread all that out a little bit to fill a big volume of space, which I could have never done with the three or four pieces of stained glass that they wanted originally. So I ended up actually creating a scale model to present to them, because you know, how are they going to see what I'm envisioning? I couldn't draw it. Just lines on a paper, they weren't going to get it. So, I went back to my roots, to the design school and pulled out all my old drafting tables and all my pencils and erasures and right angles and triangles and created this scale model, so that they could visually see exactly what it was going to look like. I even did part of the architecture with the glass wall out front, so they could see exactly what it was going to look like. And it worked. It was instant. You could tell when I walked in the room, that they could...they got it.

Grimm: Yea. And was it special for you to come home, so to speak, western Kentucky. . .

Barnes: Yea!

Grimm: Have a big signature piece there, not far from where you grew up?

Barnes: You know, the first thing I did was call home and tell my dad about it. And the first thing he did was call the newspaper. (Laughter, Barnes) So, I ended up in the Henderson newspaper two or three times, over it. Which is, you know, that's cool. You know, I mean, that's my roots, to hear about it and I could remember as a child, going to Owensboro to shop and we would cross the Green River on a ferry. So I was familiar with the area. And I'm very proud for Owensboro. They've made a conscious decision to move their city forward, rather than sit there stagnate. So they've...they're doing a lot for their city, so I was glad to be a part of that and hopefully add to that.

Grimm: Yea. So that was obviously a very big commission, high profile. You've had some in private homes as well, but where do you exhibit most of the time? Fairs or shows?

Barnes: Well, believe it or not, I've done galleries and a few things like that, but to be honest. You know, the reality is, for me, at this point. I'm doing this for a living and my sales are far better at shows. So I travel and do art shows from, golly, from West Palm Beach, Florida to Chicago, Baltimore, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Indianapolis. But, and it's a lot of hard work, but you're not going to meet the CEO of IBM in Lexington on a regular basis. She has a condo in Merrett Island, I mean, I'm sorry, not Merrett, she has a condo on Bonita Springs, Florida. I was lucky enough to have her walk in my booth there. And so, that's helped me too, in a lot of ways, being, having access to all these different shows and cities, puts you in front of a lot more audience. A more diverse audience and to be quite honest, people that have money.

Grimm: Yea. So you do spend a lot of time outside the state. What have you found, how does the arts community compare, in Kentucky, to these other places?

Barnes: Well, there's a lot of artists from all over the country and I actually have a lot of friends now from doing these shows. We run into each other. They're all juried shows and you run into a lot of the same people from city to city. So I have a network of people, but you know, this is home. Lexington will always be my home. I have a, even though I have a condo in Florida, Lexington's home. And the connections I've made here with the artists and to to the Kentucky Arts Council, the Kentucky Guild, those are priceless. I don't think I would have made it to where I am today, without those. Because they offered a lot of things that help you get to where you're going. I mean, even though I have all the skills and had college behind me, when you apply to the Kentucky Guild, for instance, and you're instantly accepted and people begin to walk up and introduce themselves to you, because you're now a member. Well, for me, right out of the bag, I was accepted and like, two or three weeks later, the Artisan Center in Berea opened and I was able to have one of my large pieces of art on display during the grand opening of that event. That was huge for me. And that would have not happened, if it hadn't been for the Kentucky Guild.

Grimm: Do you think the arts traditions here in Kentucky are stronger than other places?

Barnes: In a lot of respects, yes. And I can attest to that, because I go to other places and I tell the stories of what we have here and a lot of the artists are jealous of that. They don't have that in their state. Like the Kentucky Arts Council Kentucky Crafted Market, for instance. When you apply to the Kentucky Craft Market and get accepted, you're given, you go through a seminar where you're taught about marketing and lighting and booth design and all the different aspects of doing a show. They even walked us through the show floor where we would get to see where and what we were going to be displaying. And for a first time person, who has never done a show before, it's a daunting task. You know, you don't have a clue where you're going, or what

you're doing and there's so much to learn. Even things like wholesale and retail, you know, how to deal with that at a show and marketing and all that. It was...they don't get that in other states. Very few other states do. So, what the state here has to offer with the Kentucky Arts Council and the Kentucky Guild. It's phenomenal and I'm very proud of it and I'm glad to be a part of it.

Grimm: Yea. So those groups are...like, you know, you mentioned the arts council, the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen and there's KCHEA. Those groups are really important to form and then bring together this sense of arts community. . .

Barnes: And I think the KCHEA group and them working to preserve the history, well that's just phenomenal. I think it's a great thing. Documenting it, all of that sort of stuff only makes the whole stronger. It cements it, so to speak.

Grimm: Yea. What a great network, then, to. . .

Barnes: Well, to fall back on and refer people to. I work very hard to help other artists and suggest ideas and especially to people that come to me to ask questions. I'm as free as I can be with information, because that's what I found when I went to the Kentucky Guild and to these organizations. They met me with open arms and so it's actually very family like in a lot of ways. We have a connection that a lot of other people don't have, because we're drawing from the same heartbeat, so to speak. We all have that same interest and desire inside and it's...I want to be able to give back as I've received coming in.

Grimm: Yea. To that point, you've got an intern. (Phone ringing) Do you want to get that?

Barnes: Sorry.

Grimm: We were just talking about the arts groups in the state and how that's such a great network. You can help one another, you can share ideas, you've taught some seminars for young, budding artists.

Barnes: Yea.

Grimm: Share about that.

Barnes: Well, the background that I have in design gave me access to lighting and booth design and all the things I needed for that, so...and actually, in developing my own ideas for my own booth, I went to the National Craft Show in Baltimore to visit it. Because everybody kept telling me I ought to do that show anyways, so I'm thinking, well, what is the ACC and what is the American Craft Council and this big show in Baltimore? So I packed up and went to the show and it was the, probably a very moving point in my life, I spent all day walking around the floor. There was seven hundred artists there from all over the country. Everything in there was top of the line and I thought to myself, can I even get in here? And the second half of that day, I spent looking at booth design and what other artists were doing there and tried to extract the good things from several of them and come home to develop my own booth. Well, I moved on to do the Kentucky Craft Market for the first time and won best new exhibitor and best new in state artist, I think, right off the bat. And one of the things they talked about was my booth and how the display worked and how it showed off my work. I was then asked by the Kentucky Arts Council to start giving lectures to other artists, which I was very open and free to do. So I have done that for several years for both the Kentucky Guild and the Indiana Artisans, I've actually done that for Kentucky Museum of Arts and Crafts in Louisville and the Indiana Artisans

Organizations in Indianapolis. So, that's part of that me giving back, trying to help people because little bitty things make a huge difference when it comes to your booth, I mean just little things as far as blocking off your booth. I mean I've seen artists where they have a table that sticks eight feet across the front of their booth leaving two feet to come in, well people aren't going to walk in there. The biggest thing I think that people misuse with booth design is lighting. The color of light that they use and how they light their work. You know, there's all these little elements that if you tweak all of them, doing everything you can, it's like, this is about sales. You can have the greatest work in the world and if it's not displayed properly you shoot yourself in the foot. So, I try to encourage those positive things for everybody.

Grimm: What about technology? Has, you know, technology has changed a whole lot since you started. Do you use that to help promote yourself or to showcase your work?

Barnes: I use it in a limited form. I have a website that I use. It's stagnate. I don't sell from it. Very early on, I discovered with that technology, people didn't buy pieces of art online. They'll go online and buy mugs and things like that and it's really great for a lot of artists, but I didn't find that it worked for me. But it's a great source, because I've had art buyers that have come in my booth, looked at my booth, went home and looked me up online and I know they've looked me up online because the next day they come back, they're mentioning things that they saw. So it's definitely a good tool to have. I use it to tout myself. I have all my works and things listed on there, so they can go there and see those. But, for the most part. . .and it's made it easier in some respects to apply to shows, because they have what's called zapplication now online, where you can... I upload images of my work and I can apply to any show across the country with a click of a button. When it works. (Laughter, Barnes) Sometimes I get very frustrated with a lot of this new technology. Seems like...if it works it's great, if it doesn't it's a pain in the tail.

Grimm: Yea. That's true. Back to your conversation about helping the next generation, you regularly have interns that work in your studio with you and that you, sort of, help to encourage. How do you use an intern? And what are you hoping to. . .

Barnes: Well, believe it or not, it starts with them coming to me. When I first started thinking about interns, I was actually going and trying to seek them out. That didn't work. The ones that have been successful for me, have been the ones that sought me out. And that means they're interested. And I've opened the door to any of those. I've had three now. It's a good thing for me because I utilize their help and preparing things and helping me get stuff made and they obviously get to learn all the processes and not just the art part of it. I teach them all of it. I make them aware of all the things that have to be done to be an artist. It's a multi-faceted business, I mean, I'm not just the artist. You know, it's important for me to pass those things on too, so that's it's not... uncovering the veil, (Laughter, Barnes) so to speak. Because not all of it's pretty. There's a lot of...the hard work part of it, the work ethic and the hauling and the setting up in the rain. Those aren't the pretty parts, but making them aware of all those things is part of it, I think.

Grimm: When you bring these young people into your studio, you have conversations with them, you work with them, does it excite you to see the energy that they bring?

Barnes: Sure it does.

Grimm: Do you think that...What are the...what excites you about that and what do you think the future holds for them in-regards-to the arts community here in the state?

Barnes: Well, you know, I hope it's positive. You know, the future of art is kind of on a downhill slide, I think, in a lot of respects and I think some of the technology is part of that. I think it's taking away from the personalization of art. I'm hoping that continues to come back, but yea, I'm hopeful for them and I try to push them in the right direction and help them move to the right place with that.

Grimm: Yea. And you don't just work them to the bone and then say, thanks, see you later. You may even pay them. . .

Barnes: I actually pay them. I don't pay them a whole lot, but I do pay them. I've not had an intern that I haven't done that with. It's important for me to not feel like I'm using somebody. So, yea, I pay the intern and, but, the knowledge that they're learning is much greater than the monetary part of it. And they need it. A lot of them need it. Because, you know, they don't have...I was very fortunate to grow up in a household where I was able to learn a lot of skills and all those things and a lot of these interns have the ideas, but not necessarily the skills, and I can actually help them in that area as well.

Grimm: Yea. So when you meet somebody for the first time at a party or at a meeting where they don't even see your work, it's not at a show where they can see it. How do you describe what you do?

Barnes: I just basically start out with mixed media, I work in mixed media with wood, metal and glass. It's that simple. And I'll talk about the fact that it's 3D. That I do fused work, that I mix the different materials together and then I will usually hand them a card and send them to my website. (Laughter, Barnes)

Grimm: Sorry, could you answer that again, I didn't have the camera on.

Barnes: What part?

Grimm: Just how he describes.... The whole last question. Yea, how do you describe your work?

Barnes: Well I see myself as a mixed media artist. Mixing wood, metal and glass together and I talk about it from that perspective. I talk about doing three dimensional stained glass, but basically end up handing them a card and sending them to my website, because it's really hard to describe what I do, verbally, I think it's very visual and I think you have to go that route with it.

Grimm: Yea. Well, you've received quite a few accolade for your work. What are some of the awards or mentions that you're most proud of?

Barnes: Well, you know, I think, of course being a Kentucky Guild member and a Kentucky Arts Council, the Kentucky Craft Market, I was very easily connected. Say the question again?

Grimm: Your accolades, what are you most proud of? All these awards that...

Barnes: One of the big things, for me, was being commissioned to do the Governor's Awards for the Arts for the state of Kentucky. That came along at a time when I...almost like it was handed to me. It was a great publicity thing. It was published in a lot of magazines and print. Of course, I actually got to meet a lot of the people that actually received the awards. The year I did the awards, Patricia Neal, the actress, was one of the recipients. I don't know if you remember her

or not, but she was in the movie Breakfast at Tiffany's. Got a wonderful letter back from her, with her signature on it. Told me where her piece was located in New York City on the upper west side looking out the window with the light shining through the piece. So yea, that was a huge moment. It was a major milestone, I think, because it gave me a credibility that I could talk about in my booth to buyers, being recognized by the state like that. And I was in good company, you know, with Arturo Sandoval and several other, only about ten or twelve I think at that time. Stephen Powell was another one that actually had that honor too, so it kind of lumped me in a nice little group of people, not knowing that I deserved it at the time, but it was a great thing. And of course I travel and do shows all over the country and I've won awards in Chicago, all over the country, but you know, to do to Chicago for instance (Phone rings). . .Chicago, I guess right?

Grimm: Yea.

Barnes: So, when you go to Chicago for the...one of the first times I went to Chicago and did a show with () Productions and you win best of show for a show and no one there knows who you are, that made me feel pretty good. Because, this world we're living in with the art, I mean, it's very political and there's a lot of strings that get pulled with things and I said, for me to go to Chicago and win first place at a show, meant a lot to me. So, yea, that was another neat award that I won. And of course, getting the commission pieces, like the Owensboro commission, I see that as a huge deal too. That's a major award for me. That piece is going to hang there for many, many years to come. At least I hope. Hopefully it will outlast me.

Grimm: Ok and then, what have you learned about yourself through your work and the art world?

Barnes: Well, I think, for me, the...Puff be gone. (Laughter, Barnes) What did I say, you know?

Grimm: You started out working with your dad in the craft trade. You had this realization that that wasn't what you wanted long term, you know, you went to UK. Your work has evolved. What have you learned through all these different steps and these processes about who you are?

Barnes: I think this speaks to the persistence. Have the will to keep pushing. Drive to not let someone say no. Not accepting that no. figuring out how to get around that no, to get what you need to do move forward. You know, applying to these shows is a lot of hard work and you get rejected sometimes and you can't figure out why, you know, and it has nothing to do with me, it's whose looking at the slides that day. And it would be easy to give up, but there is a persistence that I've got, that's allowed me to keep pushing and not let anything stand in my way. I would say that that's one of the major parts that's made me who I am today.

Grimm: Yea. So what excites you for the future? Do you think you're...Do you have any idea where you're going to end up?

Barnes: Well, I had somebody ask me the other day when I was going to retire. And I'm like, I have no intention of retiring. I will die making things. I'm just. . .That's just part of me. Why would I be here if I was just going to sit down? (Laughter, Barnes) My plan is to keep going. Continue to evolve. Come up with new ideas. Hopefully, it will come to a point where, some point where I can focus on creating some large three dimensional pieces that are just for the fun of it. Not necessarily with the monetary thought in mind, but you know, the reality is, it is a business and

I'm trying to make a living, so, but the goal would be to keep pushing, maybe scale back and do some more fun things that are just for the heck of it, to explore it.

Well, I think that. . .Is there anything that you'd like to share? I think part of the reason we're here today is to have a record of an artist who has been successful and that maybe younger folks can learn from. Is there something, you know, a message you have for them? Someone who's considering whether or not they want to go down this road as you did?

Well, it's a hard road, I'll tell you, to go down. And you're going to have to have all the different elements. You're going to figure out how to be the businessman and how to be the persistent person and how to be the creative person and deal with all the different aspects of being an artist. It takes a lot of drive, but I would say, if you love it. Do it. Because it's been very fulfilling for me.

Grimm: Yea. Great. Anything else you want to share?

Barnes: I'm done.

Grimm: Ok. Good. You've done a fine job. Thank you.

Barnes: Was that good?

Grimm: Yea. Great job.

END OF INTERVIEW