



**MICHAEL MEILAHN**

American, b. 1945

**NICK NEBEL**

American, b. 1939

*Corn Zone*, 2007

Installation: Blown glass, polyester rope and (three) video projections with sound  
Anonymous Gift in Honor of Thomas Gildehaus, Figge Art Museum Supporter and  
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2009.3a-bb

## Corn Zone



**Michael Meilahn and Nick Nebel** (Meilahn b. 1945, Nebel b. 1939)

Midwest artist Michael Meilahn was raised in Wisconsin on a family farm. Although he discovered his interest in art while in high school, he started college in the agriculture program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. He later decided the business side of farming didn't interest him and switched his studies to art. In 1966, Meilahn learned how to blow glass and he was hooked; he went on to study abroad at glass studios in Germany and The Netherlands. On his return from Europe he took a hiatus from school and spent a year in South America working as a Peace Corps volunteer. After the Peace Corps, Meilahn resumed his college classes, earning his BS in 1971 followed by his MS in art from Illinois State University three years later. Meilahn currently balances art and agriculture by farming corn and other cash crops in the spring/summer and creating glass art during fall/winter.

### A product of its time

Meilahn's brilliantly colored, sparkling glass corn cobs are a feast for the eyes and represent an iconic universal foodstuff. The organic blown-glass forms that pierce the cobs are metaphors for the genetically altered seeds developed to grow disease-resistant corn and increase crop productivity. The giant size of the cobs promotes contemplation of the creative process Meilahn uses to create such large glass sculptures as well as what effects bio-engineering may have on agriculture.

### Take a closer look

Artist Nick Nebel created the audio/video background environment that completes Meilahn's installation. The immersive experience depicts verdant cornfields and succulent ears of corn amid the sounds of birds chirping and the wind rustling through the crops. This suggests a warm, peaceful scene of prosperity and plenty. Yet the harsh sounds of shattering glass heard throughout the video remind us of the fragile balance of life and our environment.

### Did you know?

Glass is an amorphous solid. It is rigid like a solid but it has a randomized molecular structure similar to a liquid. This noncrystalline molecular arrangement, also found in gels and plastics, makes it easy for light waves to pass through, thus giving glass its transparent qualities. A common form of glass called soda lime is used to make light bulbs, bottles, window panes and other ubiquitous everyday items. Soda lime glass is made by combining measured amounts of silica, sodium dioxide and lime in a batch. Other ingredients may also be added that give each batch the desired artistic or commercial properties required. The furnace in which the batch is heated reaches temperatures upwards of 2000 degrees Fahrenheit!

### On your own

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q9zm11vmx0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q9zm11vmx0)

<http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/arts/artwork/glassblowing2.htm>