

## Saluti dal West

In the late 1960s, the magnetic effect of Murano also became increasingly felt in the United States. Dale Chihuly (\*1941), who originally studied as an interior designer, first began to work with glassblowing in 1965. In 1968 he received a scholarship at Venini & C. in Venice, where he gained his first experiences in a well-attuned team of glassblowers. After his return to America, Chihuly continued his intensive studies in glassmaking.

To date, as a designer and glassblower he has produced more than a dozen spectacular series in which he explores various aspects of the material of glass. His Baskets from the 1970s were inspired by woven baskets made by North American Indians, both in regard to the shape of individual baskets, whose side walls always show a slight curvature, as well as their ability to be stacked. His *Seaforms* from the 1980s, on the other hand, show a breathtaking coloration like nothing that came before them. In size they approach the maximum of what is possible in glass. Today Dale Chihuly reaches an enormous audience with his architectural installations. He created the installation at the Museum Bellerive in 1972 in collaboration with James Carpenter (\*1948). *Glass Forest* offers proof of the great master’s unique technique and is once again on view after a long break.

The artist Mary Ann “Toots” Zynsky (\*1951) traveled to Venice in 1983 at the encouragement of Gianni Toso in search of colored rods for her glass works, which she had worked with since the early 1970s. There Zynsky met Alessandro Diaz de Santillana from the Venini family, who quickly commissioned her to create a work. Ultimately she spent three months in Venice.

To create her vessels, Zynsky arranges numerous colored glass threads on a round, heat-resistant plate in a process reminiscent of painting. Then the thin rods are melted to create a pane of glass that is gradually rounded in the heat in concave metal molds of increasing depth. In 1982 Zynsky gave this captivating technique the evocative name *filet de verre*. Her vessels are enormously popular and give the fragility of the material an entirely new form in the delicate density of the threads. The unexpected color combinations make her works like three-dimensional paintings.

Dale Chihuly and Toots Zynsky have both made it their mission to pass on their fascination for the material of glass to younger generations. Zynsky assisted Dale Chihuly in founding the Pilchuck Glass Center in the state of Washington in 1971. The two glass artists send their creative greetings from North America.

# Cose fragili – Muranoglas

8 May to 13 September 2015

## La Passerella dei Sospiri

The “Catwalk of Sighs” shows a selection of glass beauties from Murano. The perfection of the *cose fragili* (fragile things) on display here is ultimately due to the strong formal tradition that developed over generations as well as a wealth of experience with glass, to which several families devoted themselves. This explains the recurrence of legendary names such as Barovier, Cappellin, Venini, Toso, Ferro, Seguso, Cenedese, Vistosi ...

The crisis in the glass industry that began after the fall of the Republic of Venice in 1797 was overcome thanks to the efforts of the abbot Vincenzo Zanetti (1824–1883), who founded the Murano Glass Museum in 1861, which continues to exist to this day, and the associated school of design and glassmaking in order to promote the study of historical examples. Antonio Salviati (1816–1890) laid an additional cornerstone for the success of glass art by founding the manufacturer Salviati & C. in 1866. He required all the employees to study the collection of example works and attracted masters such as the brothers Giovanni and Antonio Barovier, whose works won prizes at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867. After this first blossoming, the innovative energy in glass production declined markedly. The industry’s strong attachment to tradition proved to be a hindrance. Only after glassmakers turned away from decorative flourishes and concentrated on the form itself were new models developed. In 1939, for instance, the ceramicist Flavio Poli (1900–1984) presented a surprising group of broad vases in blue tones whose strong physical effect was due to their uneven *corroso* surface. The two-tone, ring-shaped decoration of Poli’s *Siderale*, by contrast, calls to mind forces of galactic scale.

The bold primary colors in Ercole Barovier’s (1889–1974) *Diamantati* are emphasized by alternating purple bands bordered with white. Anzolo Fuga (1914–1998) used a similar contrasting effect in his vases, which are structured with broad sections of Lattimo frosted glass. Fuga also attracted attention with the unusual shapes of his pieces. The young Giorgio Ferro (\*1931) surprised audiences with his whimsical, sculptural *Anse Volante* series, which was influenced by Henry Moore. In 1952 Ferro joined the manufacturer Arte Vetraria Muranese, which grew out of a partnership between the brothers Antonio and Egidio Ferro, Giulio Radi, and Emilio Nason.

In order to maintain the closest possible contact with the glass during the manufacturing process, the designer and master glassblower Alfredo Barbini (1912–2007) invented the *quanto di carta bagnata*, a glove made of wet cardboard. Barbini’s broad *Sassi* (stones) attest to his hands-on approach.

The most recognizable feature of the works of Corrado “Dino” Martens (1894–1970) is their black-and-white striped star-shaped *murrine*. First shown at the Biennale in 1948, his asymmetrical *Oriente* and *Eldorado* series show astonishing

painterly effects in vibrant colors, which Martens achieved by fusing pulverized glass and specks of goldstone. His attractive pair of vases *Olaf* and *Geltrude* greet visitors to the exhibition with a mischievous smile.

## Omaggio a Carlo Scarpa

The Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa (1906–1978), who studied and reinterpreted the material of glass in color and form over the course of twenty years with an inexhaustible, innovative energy, played an especially important role in the modernization of the production of Murano glass.

As a young man, Scarpa initially worked for a short time alongside the artistic director Vittorio Zecchin (1878–1947) at the Maestri Vetrai Muranesi Cappellin & C factory. From 1926 on Scarpa took on the position of artistic director himself and amassed a great deal of technical expertise, which he applied in collaboration with the masters in innumerable glass works. For instance, he created thin-walled, spherical vases in the *soffiato* technique resting on striking, conical bases. This focus on the base was almost a leitmotif of Scarpa’s early vases. When the factory went into bankruptcy in 1932, Scarpa was hired by Venini & C., where he served as artistic director until 1947.

In his new position, Scarpa once again took up the subject of the base. Inspired by tapered vases by Asian masters, he created modern forms with an Eastern appearance. However, while Japanese and Chinese vases always rested on a foot rim made of wood whose height was accounted for in the vase’s proportions, Scarpa placed his vases directly on the ground. In this way, he lent his graceful pieces a slightly unexpected note.

In his long involvement with glass, Scarpa almost without exception developed solutions in opaque glass. In other cases, he disguised the transparent surface with grindings in the elaborate and long-forgotten *battuto* method. The structure of this treatment is reminiscent of hammered metal surfaces. With this matte effect, Scarpa skillfully emphasized the sculptural appearance of the external form. He was the first to apply this technique, which was common in the nineteenth century in France, to transparent colored glass.

Additional technical processes were the result of intensive partnerships with the masters Fei Toso, Arturo Biasutto, Raffaele Ferro, and Narciso Campanella, whom Scarpa continually encouraged to try new experiments. The early series of *corrosi* with irregular surface structures dates from 1936 to 1938. The glass blower scattered a layer of acid-soaked sawdust on the cooled surface of the glass to corrode it. The metallicly shiny spherical vase with lugs pulled directly out of the still hot glass is from this series. The Mina vase with applied glass spheres, on the other hand, which was created around the same time, owes its sheen to applied gold leaf. In 1940 Carlo Scarpa developed the *a pennellate* technique: while still on the blowpipe, the object is decorated with

spheres of colored glass in a paintbrush-like effect. Scarpa realized these artistic pearls in harmonious colors under the difficult conditions of the war. The same goes for the coralred pieces from the *Murrine Opache* series, which were composed in a concave mold and melted into a single piece. Only by grinding the cooled glass was the perfect appearance achieved. Venini & C. continued to produce glassware until 1943, after which its regular production was interrupted and the company was forced to focus on manufacturing light-bulbs. Not until 1948 did the Biennale take place again as a showcase for production.

Carlo Scarpa established himself as a central figure of the *stile Novecento*, as the style of the 1930s and 1940s is called. At the same time, his pieces point far beyond this period and already show elements of the *forme nuove* of the 1950s. Without a doubt, with the immense variety of his creations, he made a vital contribution to the renown of Venini & C.

### La sala della murrina

The *murrine* technique can be traced back to Roman finds, but later slipped into obscurity until its rediscovery in the mid-19th century. Especially in the 1940s and 1950s, glass manufacturers Artisti Barovier, Fratelli Toso, and Venini & C. used this technique in their products. First, glass rods in various colors are produced, combined, and fused so that they create patterns when cut in cross section. After cooling, the rods are cut into slices, arranged as desired on a metal plate, and combined by heating. Once they are applied to a glass body attached to a blowpipe and overlaid with transparent glass, the workpiece can then be blown into shape and further refined.

Ercole Barovier (1889–1974) proved to be a master of the *murrine* technique: his *Caccia*, *Dorico*, and *Athena Cattedrale* series are fascinating for their delicacy and the use of colored *murrine* in large amounts of transparent glass. The limited-edition *Athena Cattedrale* pieces, for instance, feature darkly bordered opaline windows with contrasting diamond-shaped *murrine* that form blue crosses. Such elaborate pieces demand the utmost attention from the glassblower.

Fratelli Toso created pieces with very different variations on the theme of *murrine*. The walls of the *Kiku Murrina* series are completely composed of *murrine*. These upright oval or cylindrical vases with outward-curving rims are based on traditional Japanese vases, as underscored by the name *Kiku*, which means chrysanthemum in Japanese. The *Nerox Murrine* series, whose metallicly gleaming surfaces consist of colorless glass fused with densely scattered, dark gray metal oxides, is singular in appearance. The sculptural form of these pieces is further underscored by the matte surface, which makes the applied dabs of color and the stripes of the *murrine* all the more striking in appearance. The *Stellato* vases with star-shaped patterns are further telling examples of successful collaboration between designers and masters.

Aldo Nason (\*1920) was one of the co-founders of Arte Vetraria Muranese, where he also worked as the group’s designer from 1934 to 1967. After the death of the master glassblower Giulio Radi, with whom he had previously worked, in 1952 Nason took over his duties. For the most part he also adopted Radi’s traditional formal style, but increasingly he also created asymmetrical pieces. The *Yokohama* series is captivating for its gleaming surfaces created by metallic pig-

ments and inclusions of finely scattered melted silver leaf in a middle layer. The use of eye-shaped *murrine* lends these pearls of glass art a highly organic appearance.

### Molto oggi

Glass manufacturers from Murano were of course among the exhibitors in 1895 at the first Venice Biennale, which continues to take place today. Alongside the Triennale in Milan, the Biennale remained one of the most important international showcases for glass production until 1972. Then glass art was barred from the Biennale, which forced manufacturers to rely entirely on their own marketing and sales channels. Some companies could no longer compete in the market, while others attracted attention with exciting new designs.

In the 1960s the architect Sergio Asti (\*1926) created a remarkable series for Vetreria Vistosi. In a varied combination of blood-red transparent glass, frosted glass, as well as *filigrana* and *zanfirico* glass, he developed pioneering sculptural pieces that proved compatible with the tendencies of modern art. Asti thus also paved the way for Peter Shire (\*1947) and Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007), who came from ceramic design. Sottsass’s works for the Memphis Milano group, which he founded in 1981 with several friends, were inspired by ancient examples and resulted from a collaboration with the Murano master Gigi Toso. The resulting works were towering assemblages of variously structured “building blocks” in bold plain colors fastened with glue. Sottsass describes this stock of basic forms as an eye-catching material with which he can portray innumerable sensory adventures.

As a descendent of the legendary Venini dynasty of glassmakers, Laura Diaz de Santillana (\*1955) continued her family’s legacy in the workshop in the 1970s. She focuses on economy and purity of color and form. With her mysterious *Incalmo* pieces, she has proved to be an extraordinary innovator of glass art.

Lino Tagliapietra (\*1934) is among the few living legends of glass art. For many years Tagliapietra executed others’ designs before setting out on his own in 1986 in order to realize his own ideas in glass. Tagliapietra is remarkable for his enormous creative freedom combined with an absolute mastery of his craft.

In the early 1960s, the painter Riccardo Licata (1929–2014) received a private commission to illustrate the nativity story in eight pictures. In this series, the individual figures suspended in industrial glass gain an almost otherworldly presence. This extremely sophisticated technique remains unparalleled to this day.

Since the 1970s, artists in independent studios have also become influential in glass art. For nearly thirty years, Yoichi Ohira (\*1946) has worked closely with the master *soffiatore* (glassblower) Livio “Maisasio” Serena and the *moltore* (grinder) Giacomo Barbini. His harmoniously balanced vessels combine Japanese aesthetics with traditional Italian craftsmanship. Using glass rods and powder, Ohira achieves a great visual density in his painterly treatment of the surface.

The American-Swiss artist duo Philip Baldwin (\*1947) and Monica Guggisberg (\*1955) began their career in Sweden, and around fifteen years ago they turned to the Venetian *battuto* technique, which allowed them to express them-

selves in entirely new ways: using incisions in colored layers of glass, they create fascinating perspectives. The Swiss glassblower Thomas Blank (\*1973), by contrast, uses this technique to create faceted objects with a magical aura.

### Vecchio e sexy

While all over Europe art nouveau – *stile Liberty* in Italian – was on the rise, in Murano the forms of the Baroque remained dominant. The Norwegian ceramicist Hans Stoltenberg Lerche (1867–1920) depicted subjects taken from nature in thick-walled glass in his unique pieces and was thus among the few representatives of modern glass design in Venice. Then, with the rise of modernism in the 1920s, a fresh wind blew through the narrow streets of Murano. In 1921 Vittorio Zecchin (1878–1947) created his *Libellula* series of light-footed, dynamic vases for V.S.M. Cappellin Venini & C. At Pauly & Cohe, Umberto Bellotto (1882–1940), an ornamental blacksmith by training, designed clever compositions made of schematic transparent glass forms combined with dark decorative elements whose shapes were inspired by the French art déco.

In 1925 Paolo Venini (1895–1959) founded the glass manufacturer Soffiati Muranesi Venini & C. – later Venini & C. – and hired as his artistic director the Murano native Napoleone Martinuzzi (1892–1977), a sculptor who at the time served as director of the Murano Glass Museum. With this first of many further partnerships with artists and architects, Venini established an attitude of openness that became a trademark of the company. In the late 1920s Martinuzzi experimented with new formulas and developed his so-called *pulegoso* glass, which is speckled with innumerable miniature bubbles. The opaque surface was perfectly suited to the dominant *Novecento* style of the time, but also apparently sparked a heated debate. Critics complained of the lack of the typical transparency and lightness as fundamental qualities of glass.

The Milan-based architect Tommaso Buzzi (1900–1981) impressed audiences in 1932 with unadorned pieces in the *laguna* glass technique, which produced a strong sense of depth thanks to an opaque white layer of glass between two pastel-colored layers of colored glass.

The Barovier family in Murano ran one of the oldest factories, whose origins trace back to the 14th century. As artistic director, in the 1920s Ercole Barovier (1889–1974) developed several manufacturing processes that fundamentally changed glass art. Both a designer and a glass technician, he presented the limited-edition *Primavera (Spring)* series in the 1930s, which proved to be an extremely successful invention. He combined the crazed, paper-thin frosted glass with dark opaque glass. For these pieces, the specific mixture of the glass was arrived at by chance without recording the formula, which made it impossible to reproduce. In the mid-1930s, with his *Crepuscolo (Dawn)* series, Barovier developed an effect with steel wool that was burned in the molten glass and left behind traces of smoke. Like various later series, it was produced with the *colorazione a caldo senza fusione* technique, which was patented by Ercole Barovier in 1937. The addition of metal oxide and lumps of metal to the molten glass – without melting the inclusions – made it possible to create unusual mother-of-pearl and jade glass with iridescent surfaces, as in his *Eugenei* series from 1951. The *Barbarici* from the same year, by contrast, were covered with

metal oxides that melted into an irregular layer on the surface. Finally, with the *Aborigeni* series, Ercole Barovier resurrected supposedly primitive forms. The shapes of these impressive – and at the time very popular – pieces were inspired by archaeological finds.

### La laguna

The magical lagoon landscape of Venice forms the geographic setting for the successful collaboration between artists and the craftsmen who execute their designs – the most important prerequisite for extraordinary glass objects.

In past centuries, glassworks owners and highly paid master glassblowers worked together in production. Artisanal perfection was the greatest goal, while artistic innovation was generally of secondary importance in Venice, where historical traditions were paramount. Only after artistically trained designers became involved in glassmaking in the 1920s was it possible for the three parties to realize new ideas. Teams worked with ballet-like coordination to create sublime pieces in the hot furnaces of the often cramped factories. According to the traditional protocol, the participants always assist the experienced master at a special workbench. First the molten glass is prepared. Then the workpiece is transferred to the blowpipe, whereupon the glassblower is assisted with the repeated heating of the workpiece. After the piece is formed, it is brought to the annealing oven with special tools. This process of controlled cooling prevents stress cracks from forming. Artists step into this spectacle with sketches, models, and suggestions in order to help develop prototypes for series production.

Especially during the boom after the Second World War, the presence of designers brought a new energy into production in Murano. For instance, Flavio Poli (1900–1984), a ceramicist by training, was known for his strictly stylized, clear shapes for the company Seguso Vetri D’Arte and created thin layers of colored glass under thick-walled crystal. His successful *Valva* and *Conchiglie* pieces were based on models from nature.

The graphic artist, caricaturist, and illustrator Fulvio Bianconi (1915–1996) first came in contact with glass through a temporary job in 1946 and quickly became one of the medium’s most influential figures. In collaboration with the legendary Arturo “Boboli” Biasutto at Venini & C., in the 1950s he made a name for himself with his *Pezzato* and *Scozzese* vases. For the *Pezzati*, colored pieces of glass are arranged on a metal plate according to the desired pattern, and the plate is then heated. Then the molten glass is fused to a red-hot glass body. This basic shape is then modeled and touched up. The *scozzese* technique allows a large number of artistic variations. Lumps of glass pulled into long *canne* (sticks) are applied to transparent glass bodies. By combining various colors and thicknesses, plaid patterns reminiscent of Scottish tartan fabrics can be created.

Also in the 1950s, Archimede Seguso (1909–1999), a master of the technique of using glass threads, amazed enthusiasts with his refined series of *Merletto* glasses, which are among the key works of Murano glass art of the decade. His method of stretching a net of glass rods cut lengthwise over the walls of the vase long proved enigmatic to experts. Seguso’s sculptural moon now smiles radiantly over the lagoon ...