

Murano: Glass from the Olnick Spanu Collection

The exhibition features nearly 300 pieces of twentieth-century glass, while also extending into glass made in the twenty-first century. Each piece was chosen exclusively from the more than 500 pieces making up the prestigious collection of Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu of New York.

Curated by Venetian-born glass scholar and historian Marino Barovier, all the pieces in the exhibit were made on the island of Murano near Venice, and all were hand-blown with the exception of one piece that was shaped while hot (cat. 133). Celebrated from the Middle Ages until the eighteenth century, the Murano glass industry declined at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the fall of the Serenissima Republic of Venice. There was a revival of historically based models after 1860, but it was in the early twentieth century that Murano again assumed world leadership in glassmaking.

Manufacturers such as Artisti Barovier, Barovier & Toso, Maestri Vetrai Muranesi Cappellin & Co., Aureliano Toso Vetri Decorativi, Seguso Vetri d'Arte, Vetreria Archimede Seguso, and Zecchin-Martinuzzi Vetri Artistici e Moasaici, along with the legendary Venini & Co., found ways to ally the age-old traditions of the Murano glass masters with the contemporary style of internationally recognized designers such as Alfredo Barbini, Ercole Barovier, Tomaso Buzzi, Fulvio Bianconi, Dino Martens, Napoleone Martinuzzi, Flavio Poli, Gio Ponti, Giulio Radi, Carlo Scarpa, Archimede Seguso, Ettore Sottsass, Massimo Vignelli, Tapio Wirkkala, Vittorio Zecchin. This collaboration between maestri and artists/designers produced a simplicity of design and beauty never experienced before this time.

Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu discovered the attraction of Murano glass by chance when they acquired their first piece from an auction house in New York. It was a clessidra designed by Paolo Venini for Venini & Co., ca. 1955. This half-cobalt blue, half-emerald green hourglass appears in the exhibition (cat. 136, third from the right).

Among the earliest pieces in the exhibition are the astonishing A murrine vases created by Artisti Barovier (cat. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7). From the 1920s come the extremely rare Primavera works by Ercole Barovier (cat. 10 and 11) and the superb sculpted glass Pulegosi by Napoleone Martinuzzi (cat. 20, 21, and 23).

Venetian-born architect Carlo Scarpa occupies a central place in the story of Murano glass, and he is represented accordingly (cat. 30 through 53 for M.V.M. Cappellin & Co. and cat. 66 through 113 for Venini & Co.). During the late 1920s through the '40s, the simplicity of his Trasparenti, the traditional Fenici, Mezza Filigrana and Millefiori, the Oriental-inspired Lattimi and Cinesi, the technical innovations of his A bollicine, Corrosi, Murrine Romane, and Battuti, and the complexity of his Murrine Opache, Granulari, and A pennellate all brought to Murano a modern elegance that would change the history of glass.

The collection also contains various works from the 1950s: the Morandiane and A canne by Gio Ponti (cat. 114 and 115), the bright polychrome Pezzati (cat. 122, 123, and 124) and A fasce designed by Fulvio Bianconi for Venini & Co. (cat. 126, 127, 28, 129, and 130), the rare Vetro & Argento (cat. 141) and celebrated Sigaro, Fungo, A fasce verticali, and Bicchieri e Brocca (cat. 138, 139, 140, and 142) by Massimo Vignelli. Also included in this segment of the exhibition are the African-inspired Oriente and Eldorado series by Dino Martens for Aureliano Toso (cat. 147 and 148), the ethereally elegant Merletti of Archimede Seguso (cat. 154 and 155), and the sculptural Vetro pesante by Alfredo Barbini (cat. 168), among others.

Advanced experimental work by the Americans Thomas Stearns, Benjamin Moore, and James Carpenter represents the 1960s and 1970s. Thomas Stearns, in his unique sculptural style, designed the rare pieces La Sentinella di Venezia, of which only two examples are known (cat. 177), and the one-of-a-kind Il vaso per le lacrime del Doge and Reliquiario del Doge (cat. 179 and 174). Benjamin Moore, still working in glass in the United States, www.benjaminmooreglass.com, is represented by his elegant and extremely rare prototype, Tessuto ad incalmo (cat. 186), executed in collaboration with legendary maestro Checco Ongaro. The polychrome Calabash (cat. 185, 186, 187, and 188) designed by New York-based architect James Carpenter are still in production at Venini today.

The collection includes works from the twentieth century as well as pieces that continue to be designed and produced in Murano by contemporary artists such as Cristiano Bianchin (cat. 199), Yoichi Ohira (cat. 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, and 207), Laura de Santillana (cat. 208, 209, and 210), Lino Tagliapietra (cat. 200) and Giorgio Vigna (cat. 211).

The present exhibition, Murano: Glass from the Olnick Spanu Collection, is a perfect resumé of two collectors personal odyssey and their graciousness in sharing their passion with the public.

A version of this exhibition, titled Carlo Scarpa a Murano, Création en verre d'un architecte was on view at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Montreal from May 27 to October 3, 1999.

Venetian Glass, also another version, was exhibited in New York at the Museum of Arts and Design in the fall of the year 2000. In the fall of 2001 Murano: Vetri dalla Collezione Olnick Spanu was presented at Spazio Oberdan in Milan.

Murano: Glass from the Olnick Spanu Collection has been documented with rigor and richness in a catalogue designed by Massimo Vignelli and photographed by Luca Vignelli. Of the 635 images and illustrations, 429 are in color. Published by Millennium Pictures, New York the catalogue is available in paperbound for \$45 and hardbound for \$55.

In addition to the catalogue a 20 minutes film by Anton Giulio and Siretta Onofrix with music by Ludovico Einaudi and narration by Ferruccio Franzoia, architect and Carlo Scarpa scholar is also available from Millennium Pictures, New York for \$25.

Source: <http://www.italian-glass.net/>