

MADE
IN ITALY

BY CECILIA BARBIERI

THE ART OF MURANO GLASS

Murano, the island north-east of Venice, in the Venetian lagoon, is well-known across the world for its traditional art of glass-making whose origins stretch back centuries.

the 16th century. Faced with emerging competition from Bohemian crystal, probably inspired by Murano itself, in the 15th century, Murano glassmakers began producing large-scale chandeliers, which today remain their best-known products.

In the 18th century, "Rezzonico" blown glass chandeliers decorated with ornamental flowers became the benchmark for Murano chandeliers. The name Rezzonico comes from the family who first ordered a chandelier that was particularly rich in detail and design.

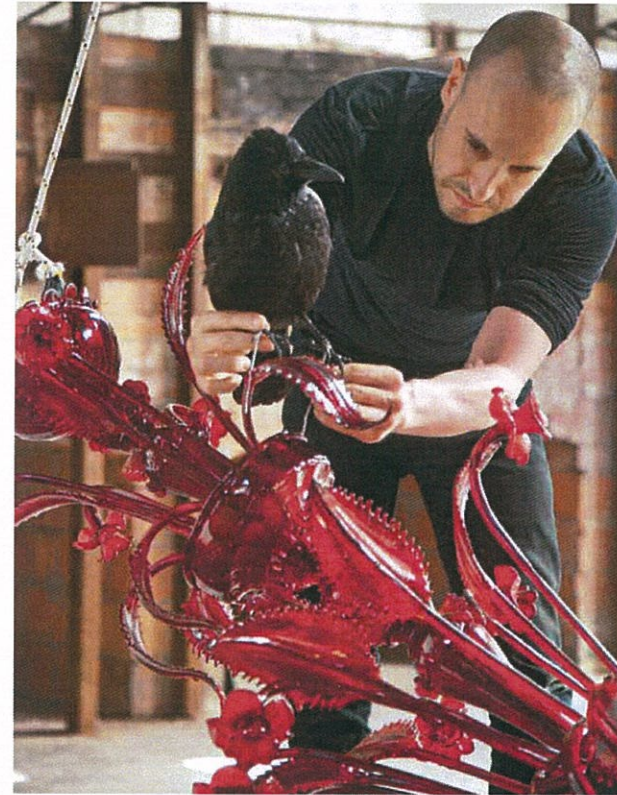
Murano glassmakers had to face many other challenges in the past, and having such a prestigious background, it becomes easier to understand how great the challenge is for the contemporary masters to interpret current styles and designs in the modern world. In this context it is essential to reference Berengo Studio, one of the most innovative today to use glass as a medium for contemporary artistic expression.

In the 1980s and 1990s, founder Adriano Berengo invited artists to use glass in their artistic experiments. As a result of their collaborations with master glassmakers, many artists began to translate their generally pictorial works into glass sculptures. Over the past almost 20 years, more than 140 international

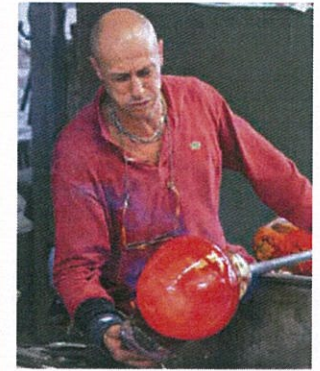
It was Venice's strong relations established with the Phoenician civilisation that led the Italian city to discover the fascinating and complex asset of glass. A combination of soda and silicone, glass has continued to be a messenger of beauty through the centuries, for decorative or practical uses, to embellish houses, buildings, churches.

In 1295 a decree was issued declaring Murano as the key centre for glassmakers, transferring all the foundries to the island through fear of fire and the destruction of the city's mostly wooden buildings.

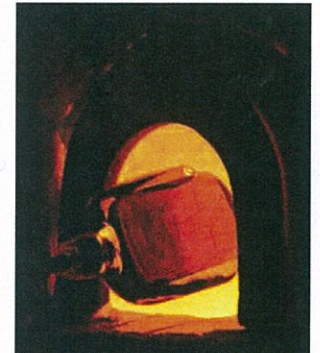
For many centuries Murano was considered the leader in terms of the artistic quality of its glassware, and became an exporter of this highly esteemed art. During this era master glassmakers developed complex techniques to obtain glass transparent as crystal and with superb artistry, thus taking their workmanship to the pinnacle of quality and value in



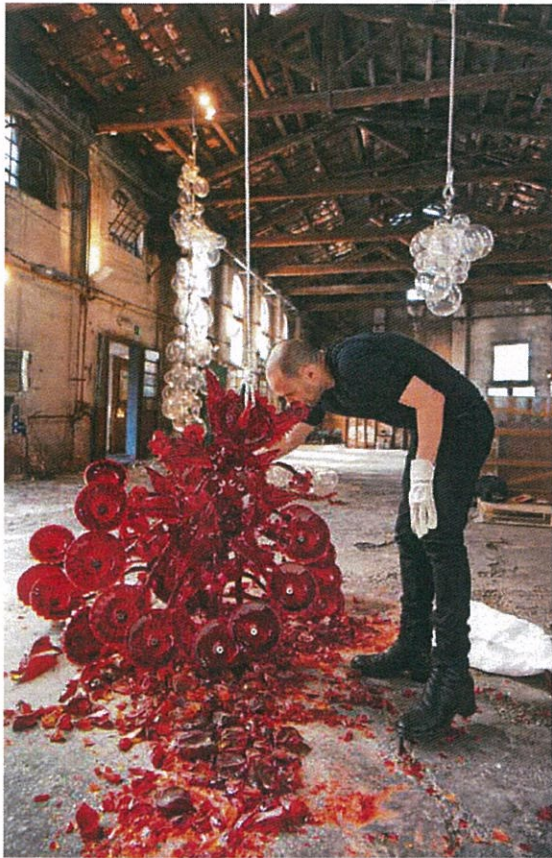
> Adriano Berengo has invited over 140 artists to come experiment with the medium of glass at his glassblowing studio. Photo: Francesco Allegretto, Courtesy of Venice Projects, Venice



> Glass blowing is a tradition that goes back centuries. Photos: Fabio Currieri



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In 2009 Adriano Berengo once again challenged the modern art world with Glasstress, offering official side events for the International Exhibition of Art at Venice's Biennale. Though different, each event shared the same goal: to demonstrate how glass continues to increasingly prove itself as a material capable of expressing the artistic needs of contemporary art and design. Also in 2009, Berengo set up Venice Projects out of the need for a space in which to exhibit and promote some of the works created in the workshops, with a particular focus on developments in contemporary art.

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> artists have come to the Berengo furnace to create glass sculptures and have contributed to making this ambitious project a reality.

The work of Spanish artist Javier Pérez is permeated with a strong symbolism and accompanied by an intense use of metaphor. The artist's favourite subjects for addressing the impermanence and cyclic nature of life are the body and time. Benzoni's work – both pictorial and sculptural – is characterised mainly by his experimentation with the human face. His "glass faces" – immobile hieratic icons – are related to the drawings and paintings he creates using various techniques. His painting production – with stern, elemental faces – becomes almost monochromatic. Benzoni's glass heads – made of glass paste with an image in gold-leaf inside – represent a veritable human likeness.

Recently, an old, early 20th-century glass furnace on Murano regained importance after many years of disuse; the structure was transformed into an exhibition space to display all the prototypes carried out by Berengo Studio over the years as well as glass works created in other parts of the world.

With galleries in Venice, Murano and Tokyo, Berengo Studio today can boast having its work in numerous public and private collections throughout the world. Berengo Studio's project is striving to free glass from both its perception as simply a functional material and from the prevalently decorative tradition of Murano to render it a vibrant medium for contemporary art. In this sense glass creations will be able to transmit a universal message, to go beyond the limits of matter, time, culture, and geography to open up new horizons. —