Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

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Glass Museum Murano

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THE BUILDING

The building in which we find ourselves was once an aristocratic house built in the Gothic style, some traces of which still survive in the windows of the side overlooking the courtyard. It subsequently became the seat of the bishops of Torcello and acquired its current appearance at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when it was modified by the then bishop, Marco Giustinian. On this occasion it was radically restructured to a design by Antonio Gaspari. The ceiling of the central drawing room on the first piano nobile, frescoed by Francesco Zugno and Francesco Zanchi, depicting the Triumph of San Lorenzo Giustiniani, the family's forebear and first patriarch of Venice, dates from this period.
The palace remained the seat of the diocese of Torcello until this was suppressed in 1805; then it passed to the Patriarchate of Venice, which sold it in 1840 to the Municipality of Murano, of which it became the seat.
In 1861 the first nucleus of the museum and archive of the island was housed here, in the central hall, then extending, little by little, to the whole building.
In 1923 Murano became part of the Municipality of Venice, which has since then acquired the palace and the museum.

The spaces on the ground floor
From here you can go to the connected temporary exhibitions space, hosted in a former conterie – beads factory next door to the museum.
If the weather is good, do not miss a visit to the garden. You will be able to observe from there the Gothic windows of the palace, which on this side of the building have retained their original form and enjoy a splendid view of the nearby Basilica of Santi Maria e Donato.

LAYOUT

Mezzanine floor

- Room 9 / Contemporary glass: the donations

Floor 1

- Room 1 / The origins
- Room 2 / The Golden Age
- Room 3 / The pleasure of imitation. Chalcedony and “lattimo” in the eighteenth and nineteenth century
- Room 4 / The eighteenth century: fashion and creativity
- Room 5 / Venetian beads
- Room 6 / From mosaic glass to “millefiori”: murrine in the nineteenth century.
- Room 7 / The revival
- Room 8 / Glass and design

Floor 0

- Spazio Conterie

First of all...What is glass?

It is a solid material that is obtained by blending silica sand with oxides or carbonates at very high temperature, to obtain a fluid mass that can be worked and shaped, and which becomes solid only at the end of a delicate and skillful cooling process.
As we all know, not all glass is the same: the differences arise from the composition of the raw materials and the processing.
In Murano, glass is worked BY HAND. And in this way it has been worked for a thousand years.
Take a look at the installation on the wall to the right of the museum entrance, before going up the stairs that will take you to the exhibition rooms.
The very simple wood and iron objects in the display are some of the tools of the Murano master glassmaker, used to shape and process the incandescent mass of molten glass with incredible skill. The installation was created in 2010 by artist Eraldo Mauro using real nineteenth and twentieth-century tools. It has an evocative title: "The opaque roots of transparency". And these roots are still those of today, since, the tools are basically the same as a thousand years ago .

Who invented glass?

A thousand years is a long time but... glass has an even longer history, and its origins are lost in legend. Pliny the Elder, the famous Roman writer and naturalist of the first century ad, writes in his Naturalis Historia that glass was born by chance two thousand years before his time (so about four thousand years ago) on the sandy banks of the river Belus, in Syria. Here, some Phoenician merchants prepared camp for the night using blocks of nitre or saltpetre from their ship to make a hearth for their fire, and these, melted by heat and mixed with sand from the river, gave rise to this new material.
In actual fact, the hypotheses as to the origin of glass are numerous but not sufficiently substantiated by evidence, but the most ancient archaeological finds of vitreous pastes indeed date back to the fourth millennium bc, and were found in a geographical area between Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and Egypt.
From the tenth century bc glass began to spread through the Balkans and southern Europe, until it gradually reached the whole of the Mediterranean. But it was the Romans who gave glass production a new impetus and wider distribution, inventing new techniques to model it, and creating works for decoration and jewellery, refined furnishings, but also everyday objects, including the first window panes. A particularly important development was the invention of blowing glass in the first century bc, made in Palestine, which was then a Roman territory .

Contemporary glass: the donations

The appeal of glass as an expressive medium, aside from any specific functionality, has been one of the main avenues of research and artistic experimentation, especially since the 1980s. On the one side, among the master glassmakers, the need emerged to go beyond their perceived role as executors of others people's designs or as producers of serial works; the aim instead was to try their own creations. And on the other, for many artists, glass – with its infinite possibilities – has become a source of inspiration and a favourite means of expression, either directly or through a close collaboration with master glassmakers and glass factories.
It is therefore essential, for our museum too, to maintain and strengthen the connection with glass production in Murano, exactly as occurred following its foundation in 1861, made possible thanks to the active participation of those who lived and worked in Murano. So this room, dedicated to the memory of Marie Brandolini d'Adda, a passionate scholar and connoisseur of Murano glass, has been set aside to hold donations to the museum, as a sign and testimony of the vitality and dynamism of this millenary yet always new art. It displays about fifty works, almost all very recent, or dating back to the 2000s, although there are also some "historical" works that date back twenty or even fifty years. By observing them with your now expert eye, you will be able to recognise the techniques and the way in which they have been reinterpreted, adopting a creative process that is always extremely varied and changing.

The origins

Our museum is dedicated to the glass art of Murano, but has the good fortune also of having a collection of antique glass. This room presents a selection of objects dating from the first to the fourth century ad, almost all of which found in a Roman archaeological site in the coastal area that is now part of Croatia, near the town of Zàdar .
The objects come from the necropolises of this area (that is, from the burial places of the dead).
The large round blown-glass vases that seem to emerge from the darkness, high up along the perimeter of the room, were for example made to store an individual's ashes after cremation, while the various objects we see in the display cases were generally personal belongings of the deceased. These object were placed in the tomb to accompany him on his "journey" in the afterlife.
These surprising ancient finds interest us a great deal, because they give us examples of forms and techniques of glass production, from which the Murano craftsmen later drew inspiration.

Showcases wall A
Among the objects displayed here, we invite you to observe, in the cabinet to the left, the large drinking cup, called kantharos. It is made of amber-coloured blown glass and decorated with white filaments applied hot. In the same showcase you can see some beautiful coloured cups, also blown but with the help of a mould. This is a very common technique in Roman glass production: we find it also in the small objects on display in the penultimate case on the wall.
Finally, note the "modern" and essential taste of the jewels in the showcase on the right.

Showcases wall B
The many different little bottles on display here are mostly "unguentària" – containers for ointments, oils or perfumes – and cups. They are interesting both for the really modern-day taste of the forms (they look like designer objects!), and because they are made using different techniques: in addition to free-hand or mould blown, we also find glass decorated with engraving, But above all, in the central showcases, we can see objects made using glass rods in various ways. These examples are particularly significant for us, because the Venetian glassmakers studied, imitated and reinterpreted these techniques as well .

Showcases wall C

In the far-right cabinet, it is worth noting the green and blue glasses made by blowing in a mould, with decoration in the form of large drops applied in relief. This is a typical production of the Roman imperial age in the first century AD.

The Golden Age

In this large and light-filled salon we now begin to know some Murano glass! Its "golden" period lasted between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The works displayed will accompany us along this fascinating path: showcases 1, 2 and 3 will lead us from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance; we will then witness the creative explosion of the sixteenth century, observing the works in showcases 4 to 7; then we will be able to note the changes and the events of the seventeenth century, mainly in showcase 8.

Our history begins in the Middle Ages, around the year one thousand. Venice was becoming an increasingly important centre of trade and commerce with the Middle East and, in particular, with Syria, which, as we have seen, has been one of the main centres of glass production since the dawn of time. The first Venetian glass-makers imitated the refined Syrian glass and imported some raw materials from that area, to produce their glassworks. Nevertheless, at the outset, Venetian glass consisted mostly of simple everyday objects, but glassmaking was growing rapidly as a sector; so much so that in 1291 the government of Venice decided to move all the production to the island of Murano to limit the risks of fire, resulting from the fiery heat of the furnaces. But it was only from the middle of the fifteenth century that Venice acquired an unchallenged leadership in the art of glassmaking, as we will see from the precious items displayed here. The turning point came in particular with by the extraordinary invention of Angelo Barovièr, born in Murano in 1405. It was he who discovered the revolutionary invention of crystal glass: for the first time in history, glass could be completely transparent and very pure, similar to rock crystal. For Barovièr and for Murano, the discovery led to instant fame. The transparent glass, decorated with enamel and gold, was much in demand from great families, doges, and even the pope.

In the sixteenth century, Murano's production took on aspects of real virtuosity, with complex "flying hand" procedures: free-hand, in other words, a technique that still distinguishes the master glassmakers of Murano today. At this time, the use of pure and transparent crystal was much favoured, used to make chalices of great harmony and elegance. Crystal also provided the base for new decorative techniques to be tested, including diamond-point engraving and cold painting. The sixteenth century also saw the invention of new types of glass, of which numerous and precious examples are displayed here: ice glass, with its rough and translucent outer surface and, above all, the filigree, one of the most fascinating and complex Murano creations. In the following century, the taste of Murano's glassmakers shifted towards bizarre or very decorated shapes.

The seventeenth was also the century of the diaspora of Murano glassmakers, who went to make glass abroad "in the Venetian style".

Showcase 1
The items shown here help us to understand the evolution of Murano glass art between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century. In their simplicity, the two glasses and bottle, which you see on the short side of the showcase as soon as you leave the archaeological room, are highly precious, because they were found during some excavations in the Malamocco area on the Lido island offshore from Venice, which was the first seat of the city government.The bottle, called inghistèra, has a long neck and onion-shaped body; it is made of a thin yellow mould-blown glass, like the two glasses.These are still simple, everyday objects. Next to them and just behind, you can see a jug and the fragment of a crystal goblet carefully decorated in colour with painted enamel .
Here, therefore, we already see a refined and expensive production. The same can be said of the object shown hanging. This is a cesendello, an elongated oil lamp. The fuel was poured into the cylindrical body of the lamp, and, thanks to a wick, slowly fed the flame that produced the light. The origin of these lamps is oriental (they are still found in mosques). The Venetians copied the model with great success. This one, for example, was commissioned by the noble Tiepolo family, whose coat of arms, surmounted by the ducal hat, stands out in the centre.
Also on display are various examples of objects in transparent Venetian crystal glass, including cups, goblets and reliquaries: the purity of Venetian crystal glass was considered worthy and suitable to contain sacred items and those associated with religious ritual.

Showcases 2 e 3
Isolated in a dedicated showcase, here is one of the most important items in the museum. This is the famous Barovièr cup, datable to 1460/70, made of very pure, intense blue blown glass, and painted with polychrome enamel and gold.
The Renaissance-style decoration covering the entire surface is of great quality and refinement. Two portraits are shown in profile, of a man and a woman, enclosed in medallions and, between them, we see a procession of young girls on horseback and bathing in the fountain of youth (or love).
The cup is an absolute masterpiece.
In the next showcase on the right, there are other examples of splendid sixteenth-century blown crystal cups, enriched with various decorations in dotted enamel and gold leaf.

Showcase 4
The crystal chalices in this showcase offer an important example of sixteenth-century Murano glass production and of the incredible technical expertise achieved by the craftsmen. They present harmonious and essential lines forming balanced proportions. The different parts of each chalice – that is, the cup, the stem and the foot – were blown separately and then hot-bonded. Often, rings or blobs were inserted (called “gropi”, the word for knots in Venetian) between the cup and the stem. The stems sometimes have a sinuous shape that resembles that of the balustrades of the balconies of the time, whereas in other cases they

are helical or are made in a contrasting colour to the rest of the object. We find glasses like these depicted in paintings by great Venetian artists of the time, such as Veronese, Titian and Tintoretto.

Showcase 5
A Murano invention of this era (still of the sixteenth century) is "ice glass" or "craquelè glass", which produces a wrinkled surface. The effect is obtained by immersing the half-finished, incandescent object in cold water. The thermal shock produces a network of surface cracks and the object is carefully heated once more to ensure the glass structure remains intact while maintaining the ice-like effect. The complex "texture" of ice glass is generally used for objects with simple shapes, such as buckets and the stand shown here. The showcase also offers examples of crystalware decorated with cold enamelling, applied on the reverse side of the objects, without requiring the smelting of the enamel: this technique is as a result less stable over time..

Showcases 6 e 7
In the creative explosion of the sixteenth century, old techniques were experimented, such as diamond-point engraving, which produces refined lace-like textures on the glass. You can observe numerous splendid examples in showcase 6. Among the innovations on this period, the invention of the filigree is one of the most fascinating and complex of Murano's creations. Invented around 1527, it is obtained by incorporating glass rods in various ways, and which in turn contain thin threads of white or colored glass in parallel or intertwined bands. It is a difficult technique, and one that still enjoys great success today. In showcase 7 above all, you can see some extraordinary and different examples of this technique. The "a retortoli " or twisted filigree is made using intertwined glass rods.
The "a reticello" filigree presents a dense interweaving of threads giving a "net" effect, obtained via a process that is, if possible, even more complicated and demands an exceptional technical ability.
The same showcase presents another Murano revival of an ancient technique, which began to develop on the island at the end of the sixteen century and above all in the following one: this was the so-called a penne or "feather" decoration, obtained by wrapping white milk glass threads around the blown object. These are "combed" using a sort of metal comb called manareta, forming a zig-zag, wavy or feather decoration: you can try to recognise these objects in the window. Have you succeeded? We think so: you are familiarising yourself with the different

Showcase 8
With this showcase we conclude our overview of the three golden centuries of Venetian glass production. We have arrived in the seventeenth century; the mastery of Murano glassmakers is oriented towards extravagant forms, such as those we see displayed here: animal-shaped lamps, flower-shaped vases and chalices, and a taste for complicated shapes, with wings, crests, scalloping, fretwork and threads.

Despite the intense activity of the kilns, this is also the century in which the Murano glassmakers began to emigrate, regardless of the prohibitions and heavy penalties that the Republic of Venice decreed against this “brain drain”. The migration was brought about both by the fame of the craftsmen, and by the serious economic crisis that hit the city in the wake of wars and outbreaks of plague. This showcase therefore displays several eloquent examples of glass produced outside Venice, often by artisans from Murano, working à la façon de Venise, that is, in the Venetian style.

The pleasure of imitation. Chalcedony and “lattimo” in the eighteenth and nineteenth century

In the eighteenth century, various types of “mimetic” glass were particularly successful in Murano, made to simulate other materials. This room is dedicated to two of the most significant productions of this kind, lattimo or milk glass that imitates porcelain, and chalcedony glass, which imitates quartz of the same name and semiprecious stones.

Showcase 1
A fine selection of milk glass objects are presented here. The name, lattimo, derives from the word latte, which means milk, and obviously here refers to its white colour.
It was already known to the Romans, but obtained with different production techniques, and was produced in Venice from the late fifteenth century, in imitation of the first porcelain that was arriving at the time from China. When porcelain began to be manufactured in Europe in the eighteenth century, the Venetian articles of milk glass also enjoyed growing success. Let’s look at the various examples on display: they are decorated with enamels and gold and reveal a taste that is completely identical to that in vogue at the same time for “real” porcelain. We find figurines, saucers and cups for coffee or chocolate decorated with genre scenes, vases with chinoiserie, mythological subjects and rococo motifs. In Murano there were two specialized kilns working in this field. One was that of the Miotti family, who sometimes signed his own articles, as the makers of porcelain used to do, and in contrast with Murano, where no-one signed his work. The decoration was carried out by specialised painters both for blown and mould-pressed articles. Another kiln, that of the Bertolini brothers, held the exclusive for gold decoration in the first half of the eighteenth century. Therefore, some objects, such as the large white vase decorated with gold in the centre of the case, are attributed to both factories, and are in fact the result of a collaborative effort.

Showcases 2 e 3
Chalcedony glass was known in Roman times, and appears in Murano in the Renaissance. As you can clearly see in the exhibits, it is a variegated opaque

glass, red in transparency, with polychrome veining reminiscent of quartz and semiprecious stones. It is obtained by mixing scraps of white, coloured and crystal opal glass and adding, after the fusion, mixtures of substances such as copper, silver, cobalt and others, from which derive the polychrome veining.
The recipe for chalcedony glass is, however, extremely complex and was jealously guarded: so much so that, at the end of the eighteenth century, the “secret” was lost! It was recovered only sixty years later, thanks to the research undertaken by Murano-born Lorenzo Radi, who rediscovered it and made objects of simple and linear shapes. What made these objects astonishing at the time was not their form but the wide colour range of the veining. In 1861, Radi donated a large number of these objects to our museum, which was founded in that year. The works shown here come largely from this donation.

The eighteenth century: fashion and creativity

In this room we can see how glass adapts to some particular expressions of eighteenth-century taste in decoration.
Giuseppe Briati, born in Murano in 1686, was one of the most enterprising and brilliant figures of this period. To him we owe, among other things, the invention of sumptuous centrepieces, like the one on view in the large central showcase, and many other fashionable objects, including furniture inlaid with glass, like the splendid armchair on display here. Briati also produced particularly rich mirrors, but his fame is mainly linked to the invention of the famous crystal chandeliers with multiple arms and festoons, of which you can observe three monumental examples hanging in the salon we recently left, but which you can admire even from this room.

Central showcase
The centrepiece or "Deser" (from the French word dessert) is an elaborate composition that was used as a decoration on important tables. What we have here depicts a miniature Italian garden.
It is made of crystal, milk and coloured glass and mirror panes. It dates to about 1760 and comes from the palace of one of the most important Venetian patrician families, the Morosini. Observe the fine details, such as the small white milk glass vases filled with coloured flowers, the fountains and the architectural features. The attribution to the Briati manufacture is not certain, but it is certainly an article of great quality.

Walls
Murano mirrors were luxury objects, much appreciated and exported throughout Europe. Those you see on the wall are eighteenth-century. The process used to make them was very complex. They were made from a blown glass cylinder, cut lengthwise and then stretched out and polished. The surface thus obtained was then silvered to become mirrored, but was also sometimes engraved for decorative purposes, as you can see in the examples in the room. Even the frames, as you can see, were very important from this point of view: they were made with crystal elements and polychrome glass, carved and engraved, gilded and enameled, with effects of great refinement.
On the other long wall we can see further evidence of the taste of the era, the fixés sous verre. These were paintings or – in our case – etchings that were coloured and then glued on glass, with gallant scenes inspired by the contemporary works of the Venetian painter Pietro Longhi.

The chandeliers in the salon

We only mention these extraordinary decorative items now, because their invention dates back to the eighteenth century and to the brilliant inventiveness of Giuseppe Briati, and so they now appear “in the right place” in our story. Glance back at the salon just next door, which we left recently: of the three chandeliers hunged there, the two smaller ones are attributed to the Briati manufactory. The largest dates back to a later date, 1860, and is impressive in size, with its sixty arms in full glass on four superimposed levels; it comprises 356 elements and is almost four metres in height.

The skeleton holding together these chandeliers is made of metal and consists of a central supporting column and several rows of arms, but the whole is entirely covered with blown tubular crystal elements, on which are grafted decorations of flowers and leaves, pendants, glass bows and colourless or polychrome crystals. Hundreds of individually blown elements made with absolute mastery, which combine to form a monumental work but one which is at the same time of an airy and light appearance. The most important genuine chandelier by Briati to have survived intact to this day is now exhibited in Venice, at Ca’ Rezzonico, Museum of the eighteenth-century Venice. The genre, however, continues to this day and chandeliers are still made in Murano’s kilns in infinite variations.

Venetian beads

This room is dedicated to a very characteristic Venetian work, that of beads, of which there are a number of different types, and of which the museum has a very rich collection.
Although the production of beads has been known in Venice since earliest times, the examples shown here date back to the nineteenth century. This was a very difficult period for Murano's glass production, which was experiencing a crisis both because of the competition from Bohemian glass, produced in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and favoured by the fashion of the time, and because of the fall of the Republic of Venice, which ceased to exist in 1797.
In this difficult phase, it was precisely the production of beads that continued to flourish in Murano, with factories, sales networks, (several very interesting set of samples of those times are exhibited in the room) and a significant female presence both among the workers and also as designers of the most successful creations .

Showcases
We can look at the pieces displayed in these cases as models, in order to learn how to recognise the different types of Venetian beads.
Depending on the production technique, we have conteria or seed beads, rosetta or chevron beads and a lume or lamp-worked beads. To make any of these, the starting point is the use of glass rods, which in turn can be more or less thin, monochromatic or composed of concentric elements of different colours, solid or perforated.
The conteria beads, documented in Murano from the fourteenth century, are monochromatic, very small, made "industrially" from thin perforated glass rods. They can be used for embroideries and various compositions.
According to tradition, the chevron pearls were invented in the fifteenth century by Marietta Barovièr, daughter of the famous Angelo (inventor of Murano crystal). They come from much larger perforated rods made up of several polychrome layers, each of them with a star-shaped cross-section. The rods are cut into small cylinders and then rounded using a grinding wheel to "reveal" the star pattern. They are large and oval, and made mostly in the classic colours of white, red and blue.
Lamp-worked beads can be traced back to the seventeenth century. They are obtained from a solid rod, one that is not perforated, heated by flame and poured on a metal wire held manually and constant rotated, with infinite variations of possible additions, effects and colours.

Having acquired this basic knowledge, we suggest you continue observing the pieces on display in the showcases of the room, trying to test your ability to distinguish the various types of beads: have fun!

Design by
Augusto Pani ni

From mosaic glass to “millefiori”: murrine in the nineteenth century

As we have said, with the fall of the Republic of Venice in 1797, there was also a serious decline in blown glass: all the mechanisms of control and protection hitherto in force to safeguard the local productions collapsed; the guilds and trade associations were abolished and then, from 1815, with the Austrian domination, Bohemian products spread through all the markets. At the same time, in Murano, the duties on raw materials that had to be imported, and on finished products were increased. Moreover, many skilled craftsmen left and many “recipes” and skills seemed lost for ever, while kilns began to close down: in 1820, there were sixteen left, only five of which were producing blown glass. As we have seen, the production of beads bucked this dismal trend, while the remaining artisans tried to react, rediscovering ancient techniques and adapting them to the tastes of the time. This room is dedicated to one of these techniques, the production of murrino or mosaic glass. As we saw in the first room, this was already being made in Roman times and used by the Venetians as early as the fifteenth century, but it was now revived and brought up to date. In this case too, the artisans of Murano distinguished themselves for the virtuosity of their achievements, which led them not only to create beautiful objects, but also to produce extraordinary portraits and other miniature designs, achieved via a complex process along the entire length of glass rods just a few millimetres thick.

Showcases 1 and 2

The “Murrino” or Mosaic glass is obtained by combining small tesserae and/or cross-sections of glass rods of different shapes and colours to form the desired design; this is made compact by heating, creating a polychrome mosaic effect. All this, on a reduced scale, can be done with glass rods. Once the hot layers have been compacted, the rod is stretched with such skill as not to deform the created design, which remains throughout its entire length. Once cold, the rod can then be cut into “slices”, the murrine, which in section all reveal the same pattern. These murrine can then be incorporated into the items made of blown glass, or juxtaposed like mosaic tesserae in flat creations.

In the revival of this technique, the nineteenth-century masters also included the use of millefiori rods, formed by concentric layers of glass of different colours, of which the inner ones are in the shape of a star thanks to the use of special moulds.

The panel halfway down the room on the right provides an illustrated explanation of the various process of working the rods, if you wish to learn more.
The left side of showcase 1 presents a nineteenth-century sampler of glass rods and examples of inlay made in the way we have just described, produced by one of the best specialists of the time, Domenico Bussolìn, who was also responsible, among other things, for the reintroduction of the millefiori rods in the work of Murano glassmakers in 1838. His sampler offers a very useful tool for us to understand where this complex technique begins. Showcase 2 above presents a number of "missions impossible": Giovanni Battista Franchini, a bead-maker, invented ever thinner and more complex millefiori rods, with patterns differing from the traditional star, and his son Giacomo used these to specialise in making amazing miniaturised portraits, mostly dedicated to famous people of the time (Garibaldi, Pope Pius IX, Emperor Franz Joseph, and so on). This virtuoso and exhausting work eventually drove Giacomo mad: in 1869, his father was given an award in Murano, almost to compensate for the fact "that the wonderful invention of portraits in glass rods has led to the almost irreparable loss of a son...".

Showcases 3, 4, 5
The rediscovery of the ancient art of mosaic glass also led to the creation of objects of great aesthetic value, of which these showcases offer some significant examples. These developed especially in the second half of the century. In showcase 3 there is a wonderful dish that shows us how much perfection in design and execution can be achieved by working mosaic glass. In this case, the work is by Vincenzo Moretti, who made a thorough study of the Roman archaeological glassware to learn its secrets and bring them back to life with a new taste. Look at the decoration made with the murrine tesserae: this great variety of perfectly rendered floral motifs recalls, in pattern, the texture of a precious oriental rug.
The plates and bowls of showcases 4 and 5 are by the same craftsman. Here too, we see a rich floral decoration, in which the murrine lend themselves to essential, almost geometric shapes.

Showcase 6
The portrait miniatures displayed here are by Luigi Moretti, Vincenzo's son, who at the end of the century tried to imitate the virtuoso work of Giacomo Franchini, but without succeeding in attaining the same level. Other interesting miniature works, made by Giovanni Barovièr, are also displayed in this showcase.
Take a look at the cockerel (the symbol of Murano) and the splendid, refined pane depicting a peacock.

The revival

This room is dedicated to the works of master glassmakers and entrepreneurs who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, managed to react to the crisis and bring about the revival of Murano glass. On the one hand they worked to order for antique dealers, reproducing classic models, and on the other strove to recover the secrets of some types of precious glass that are difficult to make and so had fallen into disuse. In this regard, we have already seen the research carried out in these years by Lorenzo Radi on chalcedony glass, and by Vincenzo Moretti on mosaic glass. Filigree glass was also rediscovered at this time, as we can see in the works shown here.
From the 1860s onwards, the Murano artisans began experimenting with increasingly complex works, attesting to their newfound, incredible ability.
This is particularly evident in the articles made for two new kilns: Fratelli Toso, specialising in "old-fashioned" glass and Salviati & C., which was able to address foreign markets, especially British, and to offer the most beautiful, lightest, coloured and virtuoso glass articles ever to have appeared on the market, presenting them at the world exhibitions and achieving unprecedented success.
It was in those same years that our museum opened, immediately establishing a fruitful collaboration with the kilns in Murano and setting up a school in the museum spaces to support their activities .
After almost a century of oblivion, Murano returned to the centre of European glass production.

Showcase 1
In this showcase there are important examples of the monumental and virtuoso production of the Fratelli Toso and Salviati kilns. Take a look at the tallest chalice: in addition to the purity of the blown crystal and the delicate lid decorated with a tulip, the feature that perhaps catches the eye first is the decoration of the stem. Here, you see, a bouquet of flowers has been inserted, enclosed within a circle decorated a morise (small undulations obtained by applying a thread of hot glass to a surface and "pinching" it). Everything has been done "a mano volante", that is, freehand. Another test of skill is the crystal chalice on the right: the thick net that surrounds it , has been made by hand, with the insertion at the bottom of small arches from which extraordinary little geese of opaline glass peer out.

Wall cabinets
Here, we invite you to observe objects with essential and sober shapes, presented on the lower shelf of the first cabinet on the right; they reveal a taste that is very

different to those we saw in the previous showcase. Here we see bottles, but also glasses and plates made of “filigree” glass. As we have already seen, this is a very complex technique that had fallen into disuse during the crisis between the end of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. It was the bead-maker Domenico Bussolìn who rediscovered it in 1838, copied a few years later by Pietro Bigaglia, who made the objects we see here. He managed to ‘weave’ a vitreous fabric that is perfect from the technical point of view and characterised by a range of bright colours, in which rods of each colour intertwine. His creations include avventurina, a very unusual and glossy glass paste incorporating tiny copper crystals. It is called avventurina because it is so hard to make (making each project an “adventure”) and makes use of a “recipe” invented in the seventeenth century and then lost. After its rediscovery by Bigaglia, it was also used by Salviati for some extremely elaborate works, some of which are also displayed in these showcases.

Glass and design

What about glassmaking in Murano at the end of the nineteenth century? We may summarise by saying that is was perfect in manufacture, opulent, virtuoso, but that stylistically it still looked to the past.
The objects displayed in this room illustrate instead how Murano glass turned to innovation in the twentieth century, thanks to the collaboration between the most reactive companies and artists or designers. In the first twenty years of the century, these collaborative projects were episodic, but in 1921, a newly-founded glass factory, Cappellìn & Venìni, included an "artistic director" in its staff, entrusting the post to the Muranese painter Vittorio Zecchìn. This was an absolute turning point for Murano: the example was soon followed by other companies, making the combination of art, design and the incredible possibilities offered by Murano's technical expertise systematic. The contributions made by artists to glass production became more frequent over time, as did participation in the Biennale and various international exhibitions, resulting in the reaping of prizes and awards. Production ground to a sudden halt in the Second World War, but from the end of the 1940s various new trends developed in Murano, leading to works of the highest quality. Experiments with new techniques were made and glass was adopted as a sculptural medium. Moreover, traditional techniques were revived in a contemporary key, turning out design objects of timeless success. Quality, the care adopted in the researching and experimenting with a variety of new techniques, the fragility and the expressive power of glass objects, make these Murano productions of the twentieth century cult objects for the collectors of the sector.

Showcase 1
First of all, come and take a look at this showcase, which you will find to the left as you enter the room. The works displayed document the first steps taken to introduce innovation into the making of Murano glass. You have certainly noticed, for example, the crystal cup with spiral stem located in front and slightly to the right of you. It was made by the "Artisti Barovièr" kiln in 1895, on the occasion of a collateral exhibition at the first edition of the Venice Biennale. The simple and very essential structure demonstrates a taste projected towards innovative solutions. By Zecchin are the crystal goblets you see immediately behind the spiral cup, all characterised by purity, transparency and lightness of matter and form, dating from the 1920s and '30s.

Showcase 2

The showcase contains some works produced by the glass factory "Carlo Moretti". Carlo Moretti was founded over fifty years ago, on 30 October 1958, by Carlo and Giovanni Moretti, two young Muranese people belonging to a family of glass entrepreneurs.

Showcase 3

This showcase is dedicated to another great Muranese master, Alfredo Barbini, born in 1912. In his long career, he was particularly attracted to solid glass, to be used with effects typical of real sculpture. For example, let's take a look at the beautiful coot (or duck). It was made in hot-worked grey-green solid glass in 1938; note also the stylised shapes of the large oval "fishes" in transparent or amber version, dating from the 1960s. His creativity is expressed also through articles of sommerso or "submerged" glass, obtained by immersing the glass being worked into crucibles with different colours. The object is thus made of several transparent layers, which can be quite thick, and each marked by a different colour. We can see the effect this gives in the two oval vases with darker drop insert.

Niche 4 and showcase 5

The protagonist of these two spaces – a niche and a showcase at the opposite side of the room – is Napoleone Martinuzzi,
a sculptor and designer born in Murano in 1892 and particularly active in the 1930s and '40s. He was also director of our museum and then artistic director of Venini until 1932. The niche presents a series of cups and vases dating back to 1925-30, revealing elegant, classically-inspired forms, reinterpreted with a particularly careful research into the composition of the glass.
Let's pass now at the showcase. On the right, as you look at it with your back to the niche, you can see one of the most typical of Martinuzzi's works. There is a series of fruit and vegetables in veiled, iridescent and coloured glass made in the late 1920s, but above all we would like to show you the large green vase with nine mouths made in 1930.
The glass used to make this article was invented by Martinuzzi. It is called pulegoso, from pulega, which means "bubble" in the jargon of the glassmakers, and is obtained by introducing bubbles of air into the incandescent mass.
The result is a pitted, thick and opaque surface that brings the "matter" of the glass to the fore. And indeed, we should not overlook the fact that Martinuzzi was also a successful sculptor.
On the left side of the showcase, there are works by other artists and designers made at different times for Venini. Among these, on the left, it is worth noting the beautiful blown glass vases in two contrasting colours. Designed by the Finnish Tapio Wirkkala in 1970, they are made using the difficult technique of incalmo, in which the two parts are blown separately and then joined together while incandescent.