

La Danza de Davide— The Dance of Davide Salvatore

by Ofilia Cinta

So many words and emotions crowd my mind as I try to express the excitement of watching Davide Salvatore and his intimate team work on the masterpieces that come from his studio. The shapes, the sizes are all larger than life! They burst with radiant color schemes that embody boldness and strength. How does a man create traditional art glass pieces of such delicate, thin, reticulate filigree that look like something ancient out of the Museo de Vetro in Murano and then turn around and create a contemporary, elaborately carved glass shield of bold, colored filigree of African influence that is over three feet in length?

Long-Standing Traditions

The glass bloodline in Davide flows long and deep. His family has been involved in the art glass industry of Murano since 1634. The earliest documented literature was included in Silvano Tagliapietra's book, *I muranesi nel Settecento*, published in 2002. It tells of Nicola "Trippa" Rossetto, a great-uncle of many previous generations on Davide's maternal side, who was working in art glass back in 1783. "Trippa," the handed-down, well-recognized nickname for his family, comes from a favorite food of furnace workers in Murano, *trippa*, or tripe as it would be known in English.

Another one of Davide's uncle on his mother's side, Cesare Mantoan, worked with Alfredo Barbini as his first assistant. Later his uncle moved to Caracas, Venezuela, and opened a successful glass factory there. His own father and another uncle also worked with Barbini and with other glass factories during their careers.

According to Davide, if you were not going to pursue a scholastic education, it was the norm for you to work in the glass factories. That was tradition. Davide started working in the glass factories at age ten as a *stisaor*, a Muranese word, cutting wood and feeding it into the stoves. Later he would carry finished glass pieces to the annealing furnaces. By age twelve, he began blowing glass. At age seventeen, he became a *maestrino* or "little maestro" working with the Frateli Nason, a furnace studio no longer in existence.

Davide has long been called a maestro, but he did not come to believe it himself until following an exhibition of his work in 1994. Present were Alfredo Barbini, Lino Tagliapietra, and Pino Signoretto, all congratulating him personally on his achievements and expressing sincere admiration of his work. Davide, humbled, was now standing proud among his peers.



Stability amidst Changes

With factory after factory closing in Murano due to changing economic times, I asked Davide what is the secret of his success. His response was his ability to work in a small, intimate studio. This studio, or *laboratorio*, has been his base since 1983, and his costs remain low and affordable.

The studio consists of two large annealing kilns, one furnace, and three glory holes, as well as a few hand torches. In addition to producing his own creations, Davide finds the time to teach others abroad in Turkey, Japan, and the U.S. for a total of about two to three months out of the year. The remainder of the year, he is working with his team in his studio.

Davide is capable of having up to eight assistants working simultaneously in two crews on given projects. For the most part, his crew consists of his partner Franco Marega with whom he has been working for twenty-three years, his two sons Mattia and Marco, and his technical assistant Alberto Spezamonte. His wife Felix is “the Boss.” She handles all business aspects, including shipping and handling, right alongside the studio artists.

Davide’s older son Mattia, twenty-seven, has been working with his dad for four years. Davide had initially sent him to study in college, but his son’s heart remained centered on working in the studio with his dad. Many of Mattia’s friends—the “next generation” who went to study in school to become lawyers, doctors, and architects—have found a tight job market. Mattia has found his place right next to his dad, being very much his right-hand man.

The tandem work in a furnace studio is no more perfectly evident than when watching Mattia make prepared gathers and pickups for Davide. He is always one step ahead of his dad, with barely a word needed between them as their actions maintain a unison. Davide’s other son Marco, twenty-two, also works at his dad’s side. Marco is growing quickly into the legacy of being an integral part of the “Trippa Group.”

I asked Davide what would be his dream for his career. His response, without hesitation, is that he wishes to live out his days working in his studio with his two sons at his side. The man’s soul is touching. He speaks from the heart always.



Reviving Traditions

Younger Murano natives see that there is a newfound respect toward art glass maestros and the national treasures they have created that is illuminating a path of rekindled respect for the roots of Muranese glass. The expansion of the glass movement abroad has opened new doors of opportunity to an international world of recognition and admiration, complete with actual stardom. According to Davide, today Bubacco, Tagliapietra, Toffolo, Signoretto, and Barbini are the current “Hollywood stars” of Murano. A younger generation watches these masters and sees once again the possibilities of a career in glass art. There is a rebirth in the curiosity of working in this old tradition.

When asked what he thought of “Murano secrets,” Davide laughed, replying that such are words of “urban legend!” Initially, if anything, making certain colors was guarded. Now “anyone makes any color.” The “secret” is gone. According to Davide, the main thing that distinguishes the masters is how they plan their own systems, not secrets. The trick is for them to be able to plan and make sense of their ideas.

In the communion of your creation and your spirit, there results a dance. This was well-illustrated in the words that one of Davide’s masters had told him: If there is pleasure and a rhythm in your creation process and there is happiness in the flow of your work, a dance ensues. The result will be satisfying and fulfilling. *La danza* of Davide Salvatore lives, vibrant and pulsing, through his modest studio in Murano, Venezia. A master among masters. A legacy for generations to come.

FLOW



Davide Salvatore will be conducting summer 2008 workshops in his private studio in Murano, Italy. Those in the U.S. and Canada who are interested should contact Davide Salvatore at glass@davidesalvatore.com or Domenico Cavallaro at glass@domenicocavallaro.com.

