



## *Il Percorso di Vetro, The Glass Path* 47th Annual GAS Conference Murano's Gift to the Glass World

by Tess McShane

What started as a simple conversation and a pie-in-the-sky idea nearly a decade ago finally became an amazing reality. Murano, an Italian island with a history of keeping its glass secrets well hidden, welcomed and willingly opened its doors to shine light into places very few outsiders ever get to see. This was truly a beautiful gift.

### A Dream Finally Coming True

*Il Percorso di Vetro, The Glass Path* will no doubt go down as the most challenging conference to plan and orchestrate, but possibly the greatest event in the nearly 50-year history of the Glass Art Society (GAS). The evening before the event, GAS staff and planning committee members watched with concern from their makeshift office window at San Pietro Church, first a torrential rain shower, then a hail storm. The Italian workers, who were still putting the finishing touches on the main stage and gathering space, stood huddled under the courtyard arches. There was no rain plan. How could there be? There was only so much space on the island to accommodate nearly 2,000 people.

The boats that were stacked high with the last of the equipment were still a block from the church. After the storm stopped, they had to be unloaded and transferred, mostly by hand, because the water rose so quickly that they couldn't fit under the bridge. Watching this, it was obvious that the Muranese seem to find a way to make things happen against all odds.

The next morning, the line of people waiting to enter the courtyard stretched for blocks. The sun began to shine and continued to do so for the rest of the event. "It's hard to put into words, all the big and small details that needed to come together to make this event possible," said Pamela Koss, GAS Executive Director. "It was like putting together a huge jigsaw puzzle from across an ocean. But seeing it all come together after years of dreaming about it and working—it was really wonderful to finally see the whole picture and such an honor to be a part of this beautiful event."

Cesare Toffolo  
at Fabbrica.



Claire Kelly at Effetre.



*The Lino Tagliapietra, Dino Rosin, and Stephen Powell demonstration at Rosin Studio.*

## Major Highlights

More than 1,800 GAS members from 50 countries around the world traveled to Murano to participate in over 100 tours, demos, lectures, and special events. Highlights included:

- **Opening Ceremony and Awards.** The Opening Ceremony gave GAS the chance to pay tribute to our Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award recipient Livio Seguso, Lifetime Achievement Technical Award recipient Pino Signoretto (presented posthumously), GAS Lifetime Membership honoree Durk Valkema, and a new award for the Glass Art Society, the Visionary Award, presented to Benjamin Moore. The Honorable Luigi Brugnaro, Mayor of Venice, greeted attendees with a warm welcome.
- **Heartfelt Memorial Demonstration by the Signoretto Family.** When Maestro Pino Signoretto died suddenly in December of 2017, it sent shock waves through the glass art community. He knew he was being honored with the Lifetime Technical Achievement Award and GAS wanted to make sure his presence was felt. It was a really touching and beautiful tribute to see members of Signoretto's family come together on the main stage to participate in a special demonstration honoring his name, his work, and the legacy he leaves.
- **Fascinating Venues, Astonishing Demos.** People and companies that rarely, if ever, work together joined forces for this special event. NasonMoretti, Effetre, Venini, Simone Cenedese Studio, Dino Rosin Studio, Berengo Studio 1989, Lino Tagliapietra Studio, Fabbrica, Fornace Mian, Abate Zanetti, and local community venues including Palestra "Leo Perziano," Palazzo da Mula, San Pietro, and Ex Chiesa di Santa Chiara welcomed GAS members and offered them a glimpse into both the past and the future of Murano glass.

More than 135 artists and academics presented at the conference, captivating attendees with technical demonstrations and inspiring them with historical and educational information about the glass arts. This experience was a rare chance for sharing and creating opportunities among many cultures. It provided the chance to witness collaboration during the event and hopefully spur new ones for the future.

- **Tours Led by 100 Local Teens and Parents.** More than 113 tours were scheduled in venues new and old, and locating enough volunteers to guide them wasn't an easy task. Fortunately for GAS, a group of local teens along with volunteers and friends from the community stepped up to help. For many of these young people, it was the first time entering places on Murano that they've only seen from the outside. GAS hopes that they, too, will carry this experience with them for a lifetime and perhaps inspire a new generation of glass lovers.
- **San Pietro Church Area.** The Muranese let us borrow the San Pietro Church and its grounds for four spectacular days. This area is truly the heart of their community, and it became ours too. Centrally located and close to all of the venues, what is usually a soccer field was transformed into the main stage and gathering space, with seats and a bar where people could come to congregate and a concessions area where a number of local restaurants served food and drinks. When the sun set in the evenings, the band would start to play and people could be heard dancing and laughing into the wee hours.
- **The Finale, the Glass Fashion Show, and Closing Night Ceremony.** Artist Laura Donefer really outdid herself with the Murano Glass Fashion Show. Watching the crowds of people, GAS members and Muranese locals, lining the canal to watch a parade of Carolina boats carrying models who were dancing to music and blowing bubbles, created one of the most spectacular of memories. Locals could be seen leaning against their shop doors and watching from their second story windows as the GAS boats slowly made their way through the canal to San Pietro with throngs of people cheering them on. It's hard to explain the energy of this scene, but absolute joy is what comes to mind.

"I will remember GAS in Murano as an incredible experience. I don't think any of the Muranese had ever seen our island so alive and in such a positive way as it was during this event," said Marina Tagliapietra, an organizer and Murano committee member. "Many people from the island, especially after watching the GAS Fashion Show, thought it was incredible that such an event could have happened on Murano. They thanked the committee for organizing it and asked when the next conference would happen."

- **Closing Night Ceremony.** The grand finale of the event was bittersweet. Pamela Koss, outgoing executive director of GAS, was celebrated for her many years of service and for organizing a grand exit. In return, both the board and Murano committee showed their appreciation with a gorgeous gift—a Veronese vase. In true GAS style, members and locals danced, sang, and celebrated their love of glass and the glass community well into the next morning.

## Murano, Still a Mecca for New Ideas

As glass art continues to grow, the Muranese continue to show the world that this small island is still fertile ground for this magical medium. Glass ideas and techniques continue to thrive here and those who are eager to learn from the masters continue to flock to its studios and furnaces.

People and places can try to imitate the talents and trade of Murano, but it will always remain the original Glass Island. The medium courses through the veins of almost every family on the island and is deeply engrained in the city's past, its present, and its future.

Cesare Toffolo, co-chair of the Murano committee, shared his thoughts on the event. "The days of the conference in Murano were special days for everyone. The inhabitants of Murano were able to enjoy an influx of people from various parts of the world who love glass as much as they love it, and the people of GAS found themselves on the Island of Glass, to breathe an atmosphere that only here you can breathe. Happiness and energy were in the air, and it was great to see people smiling as they strolled by the historic canal dedicated to glassmakers. Personally, this conference was an historic event for everyone and will remain with Murano and GAS forever. Above all, it will remain in the hearts of those who experienced this fantastic adventure."

Koss shared, "I cannot emphasize enough how amazing it was to work with the local Murano committee. Their dedication to giving something wonderful to their island and its future was remarkable."

The Glass Art Society and its members will be forever grateful to the people of Murano for generously sharing the gifts of their island. *Mille grazie*, Murano! **GA**

Visit [www.glassart.org](http://www.glassart.org) to learn more about the Glass Art Society and to view the Conference Program Book.

## 2018 GAS SAXE Emerging Artists

Simone Fezer

Meng Du

Gayle Forman

## Jurors

Corey Hampson

Einar and Jamex de la Torre

## 2018 GAS International Student Award Winners

1st, Tate Newfield, Rochester Institute of Technology, *Form\_Blue\_01*

2nd, Kristine Rumman, Tyler School of Art, *Making/Taking Ground*

3rd, Alexander Lozano, University of Texas at Arlington, *Untitled*

## Jurors

Jane Bruce

Silvia Levenson

Walter Zimmerman

Visit [www.glassart.org](http://www.glassart.org) to see a catalogue of the winning artwork.

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