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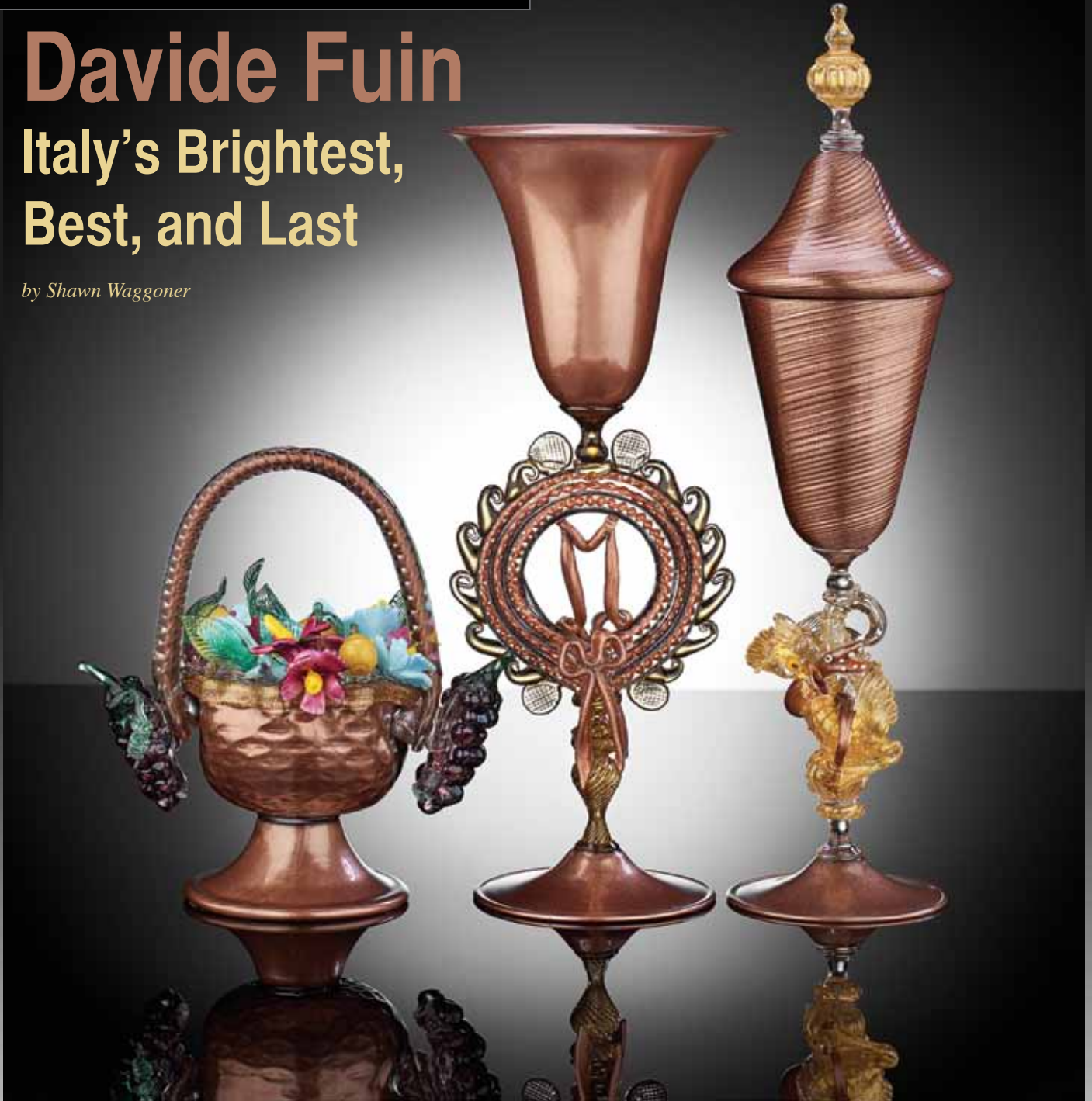


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Davide Fuin

Italy's Brightest, Best, and Last

by Shawn Waggoner



Davide Fuin, (left to right) Basket with Flowers, 21 cm x 20 cm; Cup with Letter, 36 cm x 15 cm; and Lidded Vase with Dragon and Serpent, 42 cm x 13 cm, 2014. Photo by Norbert Heil.

It is impossible to find another object that represents the centuries-old history of Venetian glass better than the goblet. It would be equally challenging to find a *gottieri*, a master glassmaker who specializes in the blowing of goblets, more respected and revered than Italy's Davide Fuin.

On September 15, 2015, at Palazzo Franchetti on the Grand Canal in Venice, the Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti honored glass master Fuin for excelling in his ability to make blown work according to Murano tradition, highlighting especially the techniques of reticello and retortoli filigree, incalmo, and avventurina.

Gherardo Ortalli, president of the Istituto; Gabriella Belli, director of the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia; Georg J. Riedel, president of Riedel Crystal; and Rosa Barovier, glass historian, selected the award recipients and were in attendance. William Gudenrath, resident advisor for The Studio at the Corning Museum of Glass (CMOG), Corning, New York, was also present at the ceremony.

"Fuin's work was selected because he is the most visible, arguably the best, and some would say the last practitioner of the tradition of goblet makers on Murano, who are said to date from the Renaissance. The goblet tradition in both Murano and Venice is in

considerable peril,” says Gudenrath, who himself teaches advanced courses in Venetian techniques and ensures excellence in the CMOG studio facility and its programs.

Born in 1962 on Murano, Fuin still lives and works on the island. Considered one of the most skilled masters of the last 30 years, he has collaborated with Italy’s famous glass houses including Venini, Toso, Pauly, Salviati, Elite, and De Majo, as well as with many international artists and designers. Every year Fuin spends several weeks teaching at art schools and studios around the world, including The Studio at CMOG. His work can be found in major galleries as well as private and museum collections in Europe, the United States, Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia, EAU, and Australia.

Known widely as the *crème de la crème*, Fuin’s work defines classic Venetian glass. In 2000, he began producing a collection of goblets, vessels, and traditional Venetian baskets in *avventurina* glass. His goal was to open new markets and appeal to a more exclusive clientele. The number of pieces and the preciousness of the sparkling, seemingly copper-infused glass elevates this body of work beyond the functional. Fuin’s *avventurina* collection makes an artistic statement about traditional technique and the unimaginable beauty possible only at the hand of a true maestro.

Davide Fuin, (left to right) Cup with Dragon, 16 cm x 14 cm; Coppa Tipo, 54 cm tall on display at The Guggenheim; and Incalmo Cup with Snake, 26 cm x 18 cm, 2007.
Photo by Norbert Heil.



Early History

Fuin grew up around glass on Murano, often accompanying his father, Michele Fuin, to his job at Barovier & Toso. Too young to blow glass at that time, he watched, fascinated by the activity and the interactions between the glassblowers.

When he was 15, Fuin left high school and went to work at a glass factory. What was generally considered a punishment for less than stellar academic performance was for him a revelation. He found his calling. "I was lucky because on Murano I could practice everyday. And for the work that I do, that is very important."

In 1978, Fuin began working at Venini. In 1980, a number of masters including Fuin's father left Barovier & Toso to open their own factory called Toso Vetri D'arte. Fuin joined his father and began working with Carlo Tosi Carama, the most celebrated goblet maestro of the second half of the 20th century. Carama's nickname came from the dialect form of the word "caramella," which means candy and references his goblets, which were said to be as delicate as the light itself.

By the late 1980s, after 10 years with Carama, Fuin was considered a young maestro, and a new factory, Elite Murano, offered him the position of first master, with his father as the principle assistant and support. "These were very long days working side by side with my father," jokes Fuin. "He never told me something good, but I think he was very proud of me. He was a good glassblower, but a great organizer, responsible for making the team work well together, focusing on timing and precision."

D.F. Glassworks

In 1999, Fuin founded D.F. Glassworks with two assistants, Francesco "Ciccio" Zaffalon and Roberto "Bobo" Olivio. His new assistant is Marco "Maccana" Camozzo. The studio primarily produces glasses and stemware, together with museum reproductions in Venetian style. Although Fuin doesn't consider himself an artist, he takes great pride in his abilities to carry on the specific craft and language of forms developed in the furnaces of Murano over the last thousand years. Drinking from a Fuin glass or goblet will convince you his work goes beyond production into the realm of art.

When Fuin says he has been blowing glass for nearly four decades, he means 12 hours a day, nearly every day of the calendar year, from age 15 to 53—not just when the mood strikes him or when a specific project or series is in the works. "The basis for my abilities as a glassblower is 37 years of hard work."

There are a few small technical differences between glassblowing in the United States and in Italy. American glassblowers use the glory hole frequently, but on Murano it would mainly be used for larger work. Also, Italians use a fork-like tool to place work in the annealer versus the big silver astronaut-like gloves we see stateside. But the primary difference is philosophical, not technical. "On Murano glassblowing is work. It's not thought of as something one does exclusively for fun or artistic expression."



Davide Fuin, Glassware Set in various sizes, 2000. Photo by Ditre.

In addition to the unrelenting schedule, Fuin faces many challenges to keep his studio running smoothly and profitably on Murano. These include the high cost of energy and intensive government regulation in Italy. "The challenge of running a hot shop in Murano is the same challenge any Italian business faces. We have many rules, a huge tax pressure, and exorbitant energy expenses. For my kind of production, competition is not the problem. I am the only one right now in Murano, and probably the world, to make what I do."

The Aventurina Collection

Aventurine glass or the original Italian spelling *avventurina* (from "adventure" or "chance") is also sometimes called *stellaria*, monk's gold, monkstone, or goldstone. Made in a low-oxygen reducing atmosphere, this glittering glass can take a smooth polish and be carved into beads, figurines, or other artifacts suitable for semiprecious stones. In fact, *avventurina* is often mistaken for or misrepresented as a natural material.

The original manufacturing process for *avventurina* was invented in 17th-century Venice by the Miotti family, which was granted an exclusive license by the Doge. Urban legend says *avventurina* was an accidental discovery by unspecified Italian monks or the product of alchemy, but there is no pre-Miotti documentation to confirm this.

Fortunately, the secret of making the *avventurina* was eventually revealed. Glass was combined with copper or copper salts and, when melted and cooled, these mineral deposits would clump together to create a gold-flecked and shiny appearance in the glass. The glass itself had no color, but the additional minerals added created a variety of hues such as green and blue, although the most common *avventurina* color looks like copper.

But how does one blow *avventurina* glass? Even well-known, older glass maestros from Murano have asked Fuin in vain to share his methods. “I am sorry, but I can’t say much about my sources or the process for blowing *avventurina* glass. I have spent many years experimenting and testing various methods before arriving at the current results, and therefore consider this information proprietary and confidential, my hard-earned trade secrets.”

Since 2000, Fuin has created over 65 pieces for his *avventurina* collection. He hopes to one day sell the collection as a whole to an art collector or museum.



Davide Fuin, Cup Tipo on display at The Guggenheim, 54 cm, 2000. Photo by Ditre.

L' estraneo (The Outsider)

In addition to feeling like one of the last men standing as Murano’s premier goblet maker and glassblower, Fuin is one of few maestros who have taught glassblowing in the United States and abroad. “Davide has been very generous in sharing his secrets and techniques with students worldwide,” says Gudenrath. In fact, Fuin is slated to return to The Studio at CMOG in June 2016 prior to the Glass Art Society Conference to be held in Corning, New York, to teach a course in Venetian techniques.

He is also making plans for an unprecedented July 2016 workshop at his studio on Murano. Never before on the island has traditional glassblowing been taught to outsiders by a Muranese maestro like Fuin. Six advanced glassblowers will experience this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn traditional Venetian techniques while taking in the history and beauty of glass on the islands.

Un Pezzo Unico (A Unique Piece)

Charging his furnace once a week from traditional Muranese recipes, Fuin loves making new colors and experimenting with the timing and precision of his process. Exploring the role of his objects in the art world and U.S. market is much less comfortable.

Artists who have successfully bridged the gap between production work and Studio Glass collectors include Lino Tagliapietra, Dante Marioni, and Jeff Mack, all of whom turned the functionality of goblets into a personal artistic statement, with multiples becoming the artistic event. “Davide is seeing that’s an excellent way to go. He has a vision of tens of *avventurina* goblets on a black table as an object. This has a lot of impact in an exotic material that’s very eye-catching,” says Gudenrath, who met the young Fuin when he was still a teenager working as second assistant for Caramèa.

You can’t look at a Davide Fuin goblet and not see the history of Venice. Fuin is highly regarded by glass artists and glassblowers and considered the gold standard for traditional goblet makers in the United States. Though he’s held in the highest regard, that is a separate issue from selling a lot of work in the U.S. Says Gudenrath, “He can sell everything he makes to stores on Venice and Murano, making single goblets. But he’s pushing beyond that. It’s a difficult field he ploughs, because he’s very committed to the tradition, but sees all of these other artists who have a much easier time selling work that is free and creative.”

Luckily, Fuin has a big enough vantage point that he can see what’s possible. And what lies ahead is really exciting. Says Fuin, “The market, not the work, dictates who is an artist.”

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