Dazzling Murano Glass at the Italian Consulate

Joelle Grosso (December 13, 2016)

i-Italy spoke with Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu as part of their beautiful exhibition that is currently on display at the Italian Consulate in New York honoring the wonderful city of Venice entitled “Murano: Glass from the Olnick Spanu Collection.”

Murano [2] is composed of a group of tiny islands linked together in the Venetian Lagoon and despite being home to just a few thousand people, it is a place that is known all around the world for their glass. Murano’s reputation as a center for glassmaking can be traced all the way back to the Venetian Republic. They are famous for the impeccable quality of their glass as well as the sophisticated techniques involved in making such fine works of artistry.

When deciding to bring a taste of Carnegie Hall's La Serenissima city-wide festival to the Consulate, the Italian Consul General of New York Francesco Genuardi [3] thought it was best to bring a selection of Murano glass from the Olnick Spanu Collection [4]. This grand collection belongs to Nancy and Giorgio, a couple who fell in love with Venice and its glass by happenstance. After coming across one hourglass and finding out that it was made on the islands of Murano, their passion grew to the point where they now own over five hundred exquisite pieces.

While Nancy was born in Manhattan and Giorgio was born in Sardinia, they both discovered their love for Murano glass together and ended up creating a living out of it. Nancy comments on this organic relationship and says that “as exciting as it was to find the pieces and put them in the collection, the most wonderful thing about this journey has definitely been the people we met along the way. Not only have they educated us about the art but many have also became friends.”

The exhibition will be open for the next few months and features works that date back from 1914 to

1933. The selection includes earlier pieces that are reminiscent of the older style of Murano as well as more modernized pieces that demonstrate the evolution of the glassmaking process over time. The showcases were originally designed by Massimo Vignelli [5] (1931, Milan – 2014, NewYork) who was an innovative Italian designer but also a dear friend of the couple. Vignelli had a huge influence on their life and Giorgio says that "at every chance I get, I always try to work and think in the way that Massimo taught us." Vignelli also happened to design the brochure that advertises the exhibition at the Consulate.

Consul Genuardi hopes that this show will strengthen the cultural bonds between Italy and New York. He also believes that this collection of Murano glass is a testimony to the idea that “Italy is and always has been a shining example of how artisanal technique and craftsmanship along with artistic creativity made up of inventiveness and fantasy can be combined.”

Speaking of Genuardi, Giorgio adds that the Consul “perfectly understood how important it was to make contemporary Italian art known to New York.” Given all the time and effort that was put into growing this collection, Giorgio hopes that “this display serves as a way to let Americans and Italians living in New York get better acquainted with the city of Venice.”

Come out to celebrate the marvelous city of Venice and to appreciate all the precious treasures Venetians have gifted to the world by visiting the "Murano: Glass from the Olnick Spanu Collection" at the Italian Consulate [6] in New York. You won't regret it!

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