



Media only: Amy Hutchins (202) 633-8497
Laura Baptiste (202) 633-8494

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Renwick Gallery Hosts First Major Retrospective of Works by Master Glass Artist Lino Tagliapietra

“Lino Tagliapietra in Retrospect: A Modern Renaissance in Glass,” on view at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum from Oct. 3 through Jan. 11, 2009, is the first exhibition to thoroughly examine the art of Lino Tagliapietra, widely revered as a master of glass blowing. The exhibition explores the evolution of Tagliapietra’s work and documents his unparalleled contributions to the studio glass movement through his teaching, which fostered a new generation of artists.

Tagliapietra, who was trained in traditional Venetian glass-blowing techniques, traveled between the glass centers of Venice, Italy, and the Pacific Northwest and brought with him the closely guarded techniques of the Murano glassworks. In 1979, he was invited by Dale Chihuly and Benjamin Moore to teach at the recently established Pilchuck Glass School near Seattle. Tagliapietra is widely credited with changing the course of contemporary studio glass through his teaching.

“The Smithsonian American Art Museum is delighted to host the first retrospective of Lino Tagliapietra’s work at its Renwick Gallery,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “Tagliapietra’s enormous influence on studio glass can be seen in the work of several artists represented in the museum’s collection, including Dale Chihuly, Dan Dailey and Dante Marioni, who also are now masters of their craft.”

The exhibition will feature 140 works from Tagliapietra’s 40-year career, including pivotal works from the artist’s own collection and collections around the world, as well as designs made for industry and objects that have never been exhibited. “Lino Tagliapietra in Retrospect: A Modern Renaissance in Glass” was organized by the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Wash. The exhibition curator is Susanne Frantz, former curator of 20th-century glass at the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, N.Y.; the coordinator in Washington is Robyn Kennedy, chief of the Renwick Gallery.

“This exhibition is a wonderful chance to highlight the work of one of the elder statesmen of glass,” said Kennedy. “Lino is not only an educator and exquisite craftsman but one of the most innovative glass artists today. His work continues to develop and push the boundaries of the medium.”

The exhibition at the Renwick will include Tagliapietra’s impressive “Endeavor” series inspired by designs from Viking boats and Amazon canoes; groupings of his masterful goblets; a selection of rare bonboniere, tiny glass replicas of some of his favorite works given as party favors to friends; a series of bowed vessels he calls “Batman”; and his signature “Dinosaur” forms, a series of perfectly balanced abstract vessels with swooping necks that combine color, form and texture.

About the Artist

Born in 1934 on Murano, a small island in the Venetian lagoon, Tagliapietra has been surrounded by glass workshops his entire life. He left school at 10 and began working in the glassmaking industry, mastering the age-old techniques and working his way up to maestro by the time he was 22. Tagliapietra was developing his own designs by the late 1960s and early 1970s, which were put into production or limited production. In 1977, he became head glass blower, designer and overseer of production at a new company, Effetre International, where he made unique pieces and limited series.

In 1979, at the age of 45, Tagliapietra traveled for the first time to the United States to teach at the new Pilchuck Glass School near Seattle. He spoke no English at the time, but Tagliapietra wanted to explore the artistic opportunities available in America, and American studio glass artists were eager to expand their technical knowledge and skill. Tagliapietra disregarded the Murano glass industry’s notorious secrecy and widely shared his extensive knowledge, returning each summer to the school.

Tagliapietra continued to collaborate with various artists and designers until the mid-1990s, when he decided to concentrate on his own work. He developed a visual language and took bold risks in color and form. At 74, Tagliapietra continues to influence studio glass artists around the world through teaching and exhibitions of his work.

Public Programs

Several free public programs are planned in conjunction with the exhibition, including an artist talk and book signing Friday, Oct. 3, at noon; a talk by exhibition curator Frantz Thursday, Oct. 23, at noon.; and an Italian cultural festival Sunday, Nov. 9, from 1 to 4 p.m. Details and complete program descriptions are available online at americanart.si.edu.

Publication

The catalog, co-published by the Museum of Glass and the University of Washington Press, features essays by Frantz; Helmut Ricke, scholar and glass historian at the Museum Kunst Palast in Düsseldorf, Germany; and Dante Marioni, an early Tagliapietra student and currently a leading glass artist in the United States. Also included are a detailed chronology and a DVD of Tagliapietra demonstrating his signature glassmaking techniques. It is available for \$50 in the museum store.

Tour

Following its presentation at the Renwick Gallery, the exhibition will travel to the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Va. (April 19, 2009–July 19, 2009), the Palm Springs Art Museum (Sept. 26, 2009–Dec. 27, 2009) and the Museum of Arts + Design in New York City (Feb. 1, 2010–May 31, 2010).

Credit

“Lino Tagliapietra in Retrospect: A Modern Renaissance in Glass” has been organized by the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Wash. The exhibition is sponsored by Rebecca and Jack Benaroya, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Russell Investments, Windgate Charitable Foundation, Heritage Bank and the Boeing Company.

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About the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,500 works of art in all media spanning more than three centuries. The museum’s branch for craft and decorative arts, the Renwick Gallery, is located on Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street N.W. It is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Metrorail station: Farragut North (Red line) and Farragut West (Blue and Orange lines). Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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Note to editors: Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from <ftp://saam-press@ftp.si.edu>. Call (202) 633-8530 for the password. Additional information about the exhibition, including a complete checklist, is available from the museum’s online pressroom at americanart.si.edu/press.