

INTERVIEW: TRISTANO DI ROBILANT

James Barron: When did you first start working in glass?

Tristano Di Robilant: I started in 1997, when I did a show at Gladstone Gallery. Then, around 2000, I started working with blown glass in Murano and Burano.

JB: Then you did a trade with Sol LeWitt.

TR: I did. Sol's Estate still has four or five of my works.

JB: Can you explain the title of *1600 (with raindrops)*, and the significance to you?

TR: There is a very interesting statue in Campo dei Fiori, done in the late 19th century, to honor the free spirit of [Italian philosopher] Giordano Bruno. In 2000, on the 400th anniversary of his death, there was a sudden surge of interest in Bruno, and visitors from all over the world paying homage to this man who died from religious intolerance. Bruno and the sculpture were in my mind, and *1600 (with raindrops)* echoes the shape of the hooded monk. The idea of the flames going down and the spirit going up is central to my work.

JB: You once told me, "You can kill a man, as they did with Bruno, but you cannot kill his ideas. The ideas emanate outward."

TR: Yes, exactly. Ideas remain with us forever. They reemerge.

JB: Let's talk about *Inheritance*, the clear glass piece. It feels almost like a bird house, like something could flit in and out, and something could perch on the little stoops that you have folded down with glass.

TR: Yes. I also like the idea of that place can be inhabited and then become inhabited again, which is like our place in the world. There is a sense of emptiness but at the same time, a sense of being.

JB: Resonance?

TR: Yes, resonance.

JB: What is it like to work in the Murano studio?

TR: Murano is very interesting because the history of glassblowers is deeply interwoven with the history of Murano, and it goes back centuries. My personal familial relationship with Murano makes me feel closer to the material. At the studio, I work with a specific master. I have developed a deep understanding with Andrea. It's a small workshop, family run. He comes from a background in furniture

and got into glass blowing in his 20's which is rare, and he has Japanese heritage. He has this aesthetic sensibility.

JB: It's the sense of zen perfection.

TR: Yes, he knows how to be minimal. I avoid the tendency in Murano to go for the decorative effect.

JB: I've seen photos of Andrea using wooden tongs to help shape the glass.

TR: Exactly, and also metal tongs. *1600* was blown and the surface is very uneven. I like to make it as uneven as possible and that is done with wooden planks.

JB: What does it mean to you to see your work in the Meditation Hut, surrounded by nature and natural light, with no electricity.

TR: I think it's a very interesting idea, like spontaneous beauty, which is lacking these days in the white cubes. Everything seems very flattened out in these similar spaces. To be able to see things in other contexts is important.

JB: They feel to me like natural forms that happened to end up in the woods.

TR: Exactly.

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