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THE CAUSE

Jewel purpose

After 30 years in jewellery design, Fabio Salini is auctioning the bulk of his archives for charity. By Jessica Beresford

What role does art play in times of crisis? It's a question Roman jeweller Fabio Salini has asked a lot in recent years, as he seeks to find new purpose after a three-decade career in precious gems and materials. The answer he has arrived at is to auction a large chunk of his archive – 55 unique creations – and donate the proceeds to charity. “If we think of art now, it's a less urgent thing,” says Salini, “so why don't we use it to help people?”

Salini began his career in the design rooms at Cartier and Bulgari



“MY PRIORITY IS TO EXPRESS MYSELF IN A MORE HUMAN WAY”

before launching his own collection in 1999 through Petoche, the historic Italian jewellery house patronised by European nobility. Enraptured by the technological advances that came with the turn

of the millennium, he became known for using innovative materials.

His designs have maintained this aesthetic, mixing diamonds, rock crystals, coral and straw with carbon fibre, titanium and leather. “To be an artist now, you have to introduce new concepts. This is a way for me to elevate jewellery to be recognised as a form of major art, not a form of decorative art.”

The designs to be auctioned through Sotheby's in September represent snapshots of Salini's career: earrings with flowers made from opals, diamonds and fancy sapphires that sprout from carbon fibre and titanium branches; and a green-tourmaline ring ensconced in a cage of pavé diamonds. All proceeds will go to The Art of Wishes, set up by art collector and philanthropist Batia Ofer in 2017 to raise funds for the children's charity Make-A-Wish UK, an initiative that has raised more than £8.3mn to date. “For someone of Fabio's eminence to donate so many of his signature creations makes this collaboration so special for us,” says Ofer. “Art is never going to stop famine or war, but it can enrich, and give hope.”

“I think the priority of this moment in my career, my evolution, it's not the priority of myself, or my success, but to express myself in a more human way,” Salini adds. “I don't have any children, but I want a legacy. So maybe it is stronger to find a way to give to others.” ■HTSI Salini's jewellery will be on display at Sotheby's Bond Street from 2 September and will be auctioned on 7 September

From top: Fabio Salini white-gold, diamond and rubellite ring. White-gold, diamond and green-tourmaline ring. Titanium, diamond, opal and fancy-sapphire flower earrings with carbon fibre branches. White-gold, carbon fibre, diamond and South Sea-pearl necklace

ever made in Murano glass, constructed of more than 2,000 bone-like components – will be shown on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore from 27 August. “Our drive and desire is to show people that great and unexpected things can be done with this material,” adds Berengo.

Right now, the Venice Biennale is upping the ante on the “glass as art” debate. At the Biennale's Central Pavilion, curator Cecilia Alemani has included the candy-coloured cast-glass sculptures of Romania-born, New York-based Andra Ursuța in her *Milk of Dreams* exhibition (ahead of Ursuța's solo show at David Zwirner in London next month). And in Chiesa di Santa Maria della Visitazione, a lavishly painted Renaissance church, Czech artist Rony Plesl has created the site-specific installation *Trees Grow from the Sky*, in which glass sculptures are cast from tree trunks, standing at more than 2m high and refracting light through textured and opaque surfaces.

Plesl's pieces were created in the glassmaking town of Bělá pod Bezdězem in the Czech Republic, using the new glass-casting technology of Vitrum Vivum – a process developed by Czech glass master Jiří Šín. “It's like a revolution in glass; it allows you to cast it as you would bronze,” explains Plesl, who has worked in glass for more than four decades but recently adopted a more conceptual, fine-art approach. “We are buying a property in the Czech countryside that will house a 5m-long furnace and we have big plans to invite international artists to collaborate.”

“OUR DESIRE IS TO SHOW PEOPLE THAT UNEXPECTED THINGS CAN BE DONE WITH GLASS”

At Lalique's 100-year-old factory in Alsace, a collaboration with Damien Hirst led to the artist commissioning a crystal version of his intricate *The Severed Head of Medusa* sculpture. And the factory itself is moving with the

times: the new furnace installed 12 years ago is powered by electricity instead of gas. Earlier this year, soaring gas prices caused Murano furnaces to shut down production. But in some cases this is proving a catalyst for change towards more sustainable production methods. “Small ateliers, really small production, small electric furnaces – this is the future of Murano,” says Brandolini d'Adda. And at iDOGI, significant change is afoot: “We are working to create one of Venice's first hybrid hydrogen-gas-powered furnaces,” says president Domenico Caminiti. The Murano maker is behind some of the world's most extravagant chandeliers, as well as the modern outdoor *Tree of Light* installation that can be seen by those travelling from the airport by boat. During Venice Glass Week it will be fully illuminated – a beacon of the new Murano. ■HTSI

TREES GROW FROM THE SKY, 2022, BY RONY PLESL, POA



Top: *Blackbird*, 2022, by Rose Wylie, £25,000. Above: *Benzene 3*, 2022, by Monira Al Qadiri, £10,995, both in the *Glasstress 2022* show, *State of Mind*, at the Fondazione Berengo Art Space



Third from top, second from top and above: *Mille Balle*, from \$4,250, *Pezzi*, \$2,900, and *Onde*, \$5,500, all by Dana Arbib, from tiwa-select.com

hit is something that feels old-world but modern.” It wasn't an easy balance to achieve, working with a furnace that Arbib describes as “very old-school; full of gruff Italian men, sweating and chain smoking... But I wanted to work with the masters. It took about a year and a half of me nudging gently, sometimes pushing a little harder, to get them to do what I wanted to do.”

“It's not an easy world to break into – especially for a woman,” agrees 34-year-old Alice Diaz de Santillana. She started working in Murano four years ago and currently has an exhibition in Venice's Palazzo Barbaro. “I also bring a last name that has some weight, so that has created a bit of weirdness.” Diaz de Santillana is a descendant of the Venini glassware dynasty: her great-grandfather founded the brand that was later passed on to her grandfather, Ludovico Diaz de Santillana, while her father and her aunt – Alessandro Diaz de Santillana and Laura de Santillana – both worked as glass artists.

“MY DREAM IS TO DO AN EXHIBITION of the four generations,” continues Diaz de Santillana, a former fashion designer whose first glass experiments were based around the idea of a clutch bag. “I've played around with colour and pattern, but recently my work has become more raw.” Some of her newer tabletop pieces are dotted with coloured glass powders, others have a “bubble situation” or are hand-carved. A series of larger floor-standing pieces, inspired by Roman archaeological columns, doubles as stools and side tables. “I can't tell you how much the glassblowers hated me when I did those,” she says, grimacing. “They weigh about 20kg each and are free-hand blown... It's really hard work.”

The person most often credited with bringing contemporary artists to Murano is Adriano Berengo, who opened a furnace and workshop there in 1989. *Glasstress*, his exhibition at the Fondazione Berengo Art Space on Murano, includes works by Rose Wylie, Laure Prouvost, Sean Scully and Judy Chicago. Meanwhile, Ai Weiwei's monumental glass work *The Human Comedy* – the largest hanging sculpture