

LE STANZE DEL VETRO  
*A project of Fondazione Giorgio Cini and Pentagram Stiftung*

Venice, Island di San Giorgio Maggiore  
9 September 2019 – 5 January 2020

## **Thomas Stearns at Venini**

**curated by Marino Barovier**

***The autumn exhibition at LE STANZE DEL VETRO will be dedicated to the American artist, who collaborated with the Venini glassworks in the early 1960s***

*For the first time the entire Stearns production, created between 1961 and 1962, will be exhibited, consisting of unique pieces and small series designed as sculptures.*

**Thomas Stearns at Venini**, curated by **Marino Barovier** and devoted to the American artist who worked with the Murano glassworks in the early 1960s, is the next exhibition at LE STANZE DEL VETRO. It will be open to the public on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore from **9 September 2019 to 5 January 2020**.

The exhibition will retrace for the first time the entire glasswork output of the young Thomas Stearns (1936-2006) who arrived in Murano in 1960 thanks to a postgraduate scholarship awarded by the Italian government for research activity in glass.

Born in Oklahoma City, Stearns started his training at the Memphis College of Art, continuing at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where, between 1957 and 1959, he concentrated on painting and textile art. In the same period the artist started experimenting with plate glass, developing an interest in this material, which in 1960 brought him to the Venini firm, where he remained until 1962.

Stearns arrived in Murano at a time of significant change because, following the early death of Paolo Venini, the management of the company had been taken over by Venini's son-in-law, the architect Ludovico de Santillana, who showed great openness in his regard. After the initial period during which Stearns familiarised himself with local techniques, helped by the glassmaster "Checco" Ongaro, the only one among the masters to make himself available for the American's experiments, Stearns started to create works of an extremely original and unusual kind in the context of Murano production.

**Thomas Stearns at Venini will thus present for the first time all the unique pieces and small series of glass items created between 1961 and 1962 and designed as sculptures**, often characterised by asymmetric shapes and striking glass texture, realised in novel chromatic combinations evoking the reality of Venice, often with recourse to the *incalmo* technique but also to cold-finishing techniques.

The 80 pieces exhibited show the high quality and refinement of Thomas Stearns's work, who at the end of 1961 was taken on by the Venini firm as a guest designer with the task also of developing projects for serial production.

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In 1962, on the occasion of the 31st Biennale, the Venini firm chose to exhibit **six extraordinary pieces** by the American artist, and these were judged to be deserving of the gold medal; this, however, was not awarded when it became known that the author was not Italian.

On exhibition at the event were works such as the *Facciate di Venezia* 'vases', with the characteristic title and the novel use of glass canes, together with the ***Cappello del Doge*** [Doge's Hat] and its variants, obtained by combining opaque colours such as anthracite-black (black with metallic reflections), ochre, red or grey interspersed with transparent glass, also featured in the show.

The exhibition, bringing together works of exceptional rarity, will highlight the extraordinary results of Stearns's experiments with Murano glass: from the small series of vases and lamps to unique pieces, from trial works to prototypes and up to the ***Sentinella di Venezia***, an entirely original sculpture in glass close to abstract expressionism, which is his glass masterpiece. Produced at the end of his time at the furnace, the work, a sort of tribute to Venice, came into being at the same time as Stearns's research on the use of textile fibres which led to original sculptures - some of them on display in the exhibition - to the production of which he continued to devote his energy on his return to the United States.

The **catalogue** *Thomas Stearns at Venini*, edited by Marino Barovier and Carla Sonogo and **published by Skira**, gives an account of this exceptional production, documenting for the first time Thomas Stearns's activity in Murano through the use of unpublished documents from the Venini archives and the artist's personal archives and through the research that made it possible to identify works in private and institutional collections.

*Thomas Stearns at Venini* is also part of the third ***Venice Glass Week***, the **international festival devoted to art glass**, with particular attention to Murano glass, which will take place in Venice, Murano and Mestre **from 7 to 15 September 2019**. The initiative is supported by the Municipality of Venice, the Fondazione Musei Civici, the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti and by the most important association in the sector, the Consorzio Promovetro Murano. There are more than 150 entities participating, for a total of over **180 events with exhibitions, conferences, seminars, educational activities and furnace open-days**, which will ensure the vibrancy of *The Venice Glass Week* ([www.theveniceglassweek.com](http://www.theveniceglassweek.com)).

### Useful information:

Production:	Fondazione Giorgio Cini and Pentagram Stiftung
Title:	<b><i>Thomas Stearns at Venini</i></b>
Curator:	Marino Barovier
Press preview:	Friday 6 September 2019 at 11.30 a.m.
Dates:	9 September 2019 – 5 January 2020
Opening hours:	10 a.m. – 7.00 p.m., closed on Wednesdays
Venue:	LE STANZE DEL VETRO, Fondazione Giorgio Cini
Address:	Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice
Tickets:	Free entrance
Catalogue:	Skira, edited by Marino Barovier and Carla Sonogo

Info: info@lestanzedelvetro.org, info@cini.it  
Web: www.lestanzedelvetro.org, www.cini.it

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### How to get there:

To reach the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, take the Actv vaporetto line n.2 departing from:

San Zaccaria (duration around 3 minutes)  
Venice train station (duration around 45 minutes)  
Piazzale Roma (duration around 40 minutes)  
Tronchetto (duration around 35 minutes)

San Zaccaria (journey of about 3 minutes)  
Train station (journey of about 45 minutes)  
Piazzale Roma (journey of about 40 minutes)  
Tronchetto (journey of about 35 minutes)



### For further information:

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