

THE FATAL BLOW

A Manifesto by Emmanuel Babled



Production of Pyros Cromatico at Venini's furnace in Murano, Italy
Photo: Venini



Emmanuel Babled

Stefano Micelli published his authoritative analysis of Italian artisanal craft *Futuro Artigiano* in 2011. His research shows how artisan traditions have evolved to include sophisticated contemporary tools and technologies. In 2012, the book received the ADI Design Index prize. Professor of Business Economics and Management at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, he is the author of several articles and volumes, one of the most recent being *Fare è innovare. Il nuovo lavoro artigiano* (To make is to innovate. The new craftwork, edited by Il Mulino, 2016). Central to his work is how craftsmanship, using a local and digital-based approach, can be the key to the international future of manufacturing diffused prosperity, especially in the face of mass-produced industrial design.

At a fusion of 1200°C, no pigment can resist. It's futile - but not if you want to colour glass. For centuries, alchemists have been inventing recipes that mix various elements in subtle quantities to get the right colour tonality. The astonishing results have become the signature trademark of the artisans and workshops on the Venetian island of Murano. Now, new European legislation, aiming to protect public health and the environment, will prohibit the use of substances like arsenic trioxide (As_2O_3 , as of 2015). Without arsenic, it is no longer possible to do *Smalto* glass, and these moves threaten one of the most refined techniques, *Reticello*. Soon, Cadmium (Cd) will leave the Italian furnace, so no more red, orange, or yellow. And the list will go on.

Protecting workers and the wider population is essential, and we support that. But, Murano is not a well-oiled chemical giant, just a series of workshops, where artisanal know-how has been developed often through trial and error. The potential irony is that we will probably end up importing coloured glass from other parts of the world, where there is much less regulation. A conscious and proactive Europe needs to focus on developing and sustaining scientific research to find eco-compatible alternatives and replace the banned

ingredients. It's not only to maintain traditional European glassware alive, but also to project this craft industry to version 2.0

To raise public awareness, we have joined forces with the historical glass company Venini, and presented the *Pyros Acromatico* (Venice Glass Week, September 2017). A colourless version of an otherwise distinctly colourful family of Murano glass objects, Venini will produce a series of the design in early 2018. Part of the profits generated will be invested in a future research programme, in which we will partner up with Lisbon's Nova University's research unit, VICARTE, through its mentor Prof. António Pires de Matos. The first goal will be to find alternative compositions for Murano's *vetro smalto*. Meanwhile, we have been in contact with various institutions, including the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Università Iuav di Venezia and the Venice city hall, with a view to them joining us on this quest.

I believe we, as designers and artists, have an active role in society. It's not enough to just design and produce. We work in a context, with a legacy that we have to honour, and when times demand, bring about the necessary contemporary evolution.