

News announcement:

Ai Weiwei to unveil first-ever body of work in glass alongside one of the world's largest hanging Murano glass sculptures

“Glass, a special material and a part of our daily life, bears witness to joy, anxiety and worry in our reality. In its presence we reflect upon the relationships between life and death, and between tradition and reality.” – Ai Weiwei



A solo show featuring a new glass series by Ai Weiwei on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice

Works to be exhibited include one of the world's largest Murano glass sculptures alongside a network of weaving roots, unexpected LEGO pieces and a selection of iconic works

Contextualised within Venice's spectacular Basilica of San Giorgio Maggiore, the exhibition will explore themes in Ai Weiwei's practice: nature, spirituality, and the continual fascinations of the contemporary world

04 August 2022 – Ai Weiwei, in collaboration with Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore - Benedicti Claustra Onlus, Berengo Studio and Fondazione Berengo, announces a new body of work set to be unveiled at a solo exhibition in Venice this summer. Marking the artist's first experimentation with glass, which began in Beijing in 2009 and has culminated in a three-year project conceived in Murano, the works are filled with motifs from Ai Weiwei's long and varied artistic career. Alongside some of the artist's best-known and latest works in porcelain, wood and LEGO, the glass series will be presented within the dramatic setting of Venice's Basilica of San Giorgio Maggiore from 28th August to 27th November 2022.

The centrepiece of the artist's glass series is *La Commedia Umana*, an enormous hanging sculpture comprised of over 2,000 pieces of black glass handcrafted by the maestros of Berengo Studio in Murano. Measuring more than six metres wide and almost nine metres high, the twisted monument is one of the largest hanging sculptures ever made in Murano glass in living history.



The intricate details of the imposing work are made visible through the skilful use of light by the Italian company Luce5. Thanks to this illuminating support, the artwork reveals a cascade of bones, organs and unexpected items which act as a poignant reflection on the alienating relationship between humans and the natural world, a message that rings loudly in the fragile ecosystem of the Venetian lagoon. Moreover, in counterpoint to Palladio's balanced architecture, the gigantic work and exhibition enhance the Benedictine monks' centuries-old commitment to promoting a fruitful dialogue between the church and contemporary art.

“This vast hanging sculpture in black glass defies definition, nothing like it has ever really been seen or realised before. Part of its beauty is it remains a mystery, a human tragedy, a comedy, a tangled mess that we each must seek to unwind in our own time. It is a work that stirs emotions, that forces us to come to terms not only with our own mortality, but with the part our lives have to play in the greater theatre of human history.” – comments Adriano Berengo, Founder of Berengo Studio and Fondazione Berengo.

Weighing 2,700 kg, the monumental ‘chandelier’ debuted in Rome in March 2022 and returns to its origins in Venice, joining eight unseen glass works, including *Brainless Figure in Glass*, 2022, a self-portrait conceived through modern technology and manual sculpting; *Glass Root*, 2022, which harks back to the artist’s woodwork following the discovery of remnants of deforestation and natural causes in Brazil in 2017; and everyday objects, such as *Glass Takeout Box*, 2022, a symbol of globalisation (first introduced in marble in 2015), and *Glass Toilet Paper*, 2022, which reflects our society’s fragility.

Titled *La Commedia Umana – Memento Mori* and curated by Ai Weiwei, Adriano Berengo and Carmelo A. Grasso, Director of Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore - Benedicti Claustra Onlus, the exhibition will also feature a selection of Ai Weiwei’s most notable works, such as *Illumination*, 2019 (loaned by Lisson Gallery), an iconic selfie taken by Weiwei in Chengdu, China, in 2009, as police escorted him to a hotel lift; and *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 2016, a provocative series of black and white photographs recreated in LEGO bricks. The exhibition will also present two of Ai Weiwei’s latest LEGO works: *Sleeping Venus (After Giorgione)*, 2022 and *Know Thyself*, 2022, two debut works commissioned by Galleria Continua, and *Untitled (After Mondrian)*, 2022, loaned by Berlin’s neugerriemschneider gallery.

Inspired by the collaborative work of Peggy Guggenheim and Egidio Costantini in the 1960s, who invited masters such as Picasso and Chagall to produce art in glass, this project builds on Berengo Studio’s work with contemporary artists over the past three decades.

www.berengo.com

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Notes to the editors

For media enquiries and photo credits, please contact raquel@scott-andco.com

Photo caption: Ai Weiwei, Venice 2020. Photographer credit: Edward Smith

La Commedia Umana – Memento Mori opens to the public on 28th August (until 27th November 2022) and will be open every day except Tuesday, from 10am to 6pm.



Free entry.

Exhibition address:
Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore
Island of San Giorgio Maggiore
30124 Venezia

In partnership with:
Luce5

Thanks to:
Lisson Gallery
neugerriemschneider
Galleria Continua

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#MementoMori
#AbbaziaSanGiorgioMaggiore
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About Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei (*1957, Beijing) lives and works in multiple locations, including Beijing (China), Berlin (Germany), Cambridge (UK) and Lisbon (Portugal). He is a multimedia artist who also works in film, writing and social media.

About Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore - Benedicti Clastra Onlus

The Benedicti Clastra Onlus was born from the will of the Benedictine monks to promote and support, through direct collaboration, activities and projects for the development of art and artistic research. The monastic community of the Abbey of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, in the wake of a centuries-old tradition, still promotes art, culture and creativity in its various forms of expression. Within the Palladian Basilica, the Benedicti Clastra Onlus hosts cultural initiatives of great artistic value with a strong spiritual connotation. The presence of contemporary works of art within a sacred space has awakened the sensitivity of the faithful and visitors alike, triggering a fertile confrontation that opens up new horizons of evangelisation and dialogue. The various activities of the Benedicti Clastra Onlus are part of a general programme called 'ART SAVES ART'; all the donations for the various cultural activities are reinvested in restoration work to protect and enhance the works present in the Abbey.



About Berengo Studio

Berengo Studio was founded in 1989 by Adriano Berengo with the intention of creating a space for creatives of all disciplines to freely experiment with the medium of glass. Over the last thirty years the Studio has forged a new path for the medium within the art world, testing the limits of contemporary glassmaking with its innovative and inventive approach. Inspired by the work of Peggy Guggenheim and Edigio Costantini in the 1960s, who invited artists such as Picasso and Chagall to produce sculptures in glass, Berengo decided to further this creative vision, inviting contemporary artists from around the world to collaborate with the skilled glass maestros of Murano. It's an enterprise that has seen him collaborate with the likes of Ai Weiwei, Tracey Emin, Thomas Schütte, and Laure Prouvost. Today sculptures made at Berengo Studio can be found in museums, galleries, and collections around the world, and the Studio is seen as the leading glass furnace for artistic collaborations.

About Luce5 and The Lighting Factory

Luce5 is an Italian company that has been operating since 1991 working alongside architects, lighting designers, artists, and creatives who wish to realise unique projects with light. The Lighting Factory is an ambitious project that gathers and enhances the skills and competencies that Luce5 has developed thanks to several collaborations with international artists.

The name of the project pays homage to one of the most famous artist studios that ever existed and whose creative and collaborative spirit the company wishes to honour: Andy Warhol's The Factory. Light and its control are essential to enhance and appreciate the details of any artwork and Luce5 combines technical expertise with extensive research, cooperation, creativity and ambition to ensure every project is matched to its own unique lighting system.

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