

Glass-making workshop: fostering new design practices

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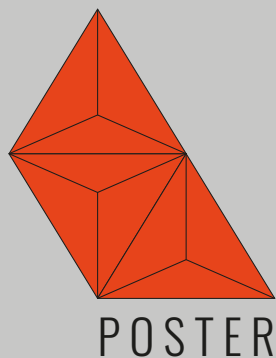
TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 13. Glass and Science**
ELTI CATTARUZZA
- 17. Glass and Architecture**
MARIA ANTONIA BARUCCO
- 21. Glass and Design**
ROSA CHIESA

- 24. How the technological advancement of glazing changes cities' identity: the example of Dubai**
CHIARA SCANAGATTA
- 34. Systemic reuse models for sustainable glass packaging design and innovation**
CRISTINA MARINO, PAOLO M. TAMBORRINI, LAURA MIOTTO,
GIULIA FERRONATO
- 44. Fragile Business: Libbey-Owens-Ford and the impact of the 1970s energy crisis on the american glass industry**
GIORGIO MARFELLA
- 54. POSTER Use of waste glass as aggregate for cementitious mortars**
JACOPO DONNINI, ANGELO MONTENERO, L. DAVID PYE,
VALERIA CORINALDESI
- 56. Glass on stage. The woman of fire Marietta Barovier**
MASSIMILIANO CIAMMAICHELLA
- 66. Insights into LCA and EPD environmental impacts data related to glass products for windows**
ANNA DALLA VALLE, MONICA LAVAGNA, ANDREA CAMPIOLI
- 76. The "beautiful scraps" a precious resource**
ERIKA COCCATO, LAURA BADALUCCO

86. **POSTER Ancient glass alteration and advancement in active conservation strategies**
GIULIA FRANCESCHIN, ROBERTA ZANINI, STEFANO CENTENARO
88. **Authorship in Glass Design in Portugal- Four Cycles: from 50's to Contemporaneity**
CLÁUDIA PEDRO SANTOS
98. **MURANO PIXEL. An experimental and shared research**
MARIA ANTONIA BARUCCO, ELTI CATTARUZZA, MATTEO SILVERIO
108. **From industrial float glass to collectible design: the functional light sculptures Baracche, project by artist Paolo Gonzato**
BEATRICE BIANCO, MARINELLA FERRARA
118. **POSTER Physico-chemical and morphological characterization of inner surfaces of glass pharmaceutical vials**
GIOVANNA PINTORI, SERENA PANIGHELLO
120. **(E)merging layers in Venice. The potential of one landscape and single raw material**
MAXIMILIANO ROMERO, ANNA LORENS
130. **Air, light, and liquid in motion: blurred transparency of the Glass pavilion in Toledo**
AKI ISHIDA
140. **POSTER Glass-making workshop: fostering new design practices**
SOFIA CRETAIO, CRISTINA MARINO, JOSEAN GARCIA DIAZ, PAOLO TAMBORRINI
142. **Glass Future Lab. Murano glass production and digital manufacturing: possible relationships in a future scenario**
ROSA CHIESA, RICCARDO BERRONE, LUCA COPPOLA
150. **Innovation scenarios in the glass industry in Europe**
LUCA TRULLI

160. **POSTER XPS characterization of plasma-activated surfaces. A possible benefit for glass bonding**
ANNE TALNEAU, CHRISTOPHE CARDINAUD
162. **Technology hybridization for multi-performance variable glazing**
CRISTIANA CELLUCCI, BENEDETTA MARRADI
172. **Glass and light. Suspension lamp design in Italy between 1930 and 1969 in the magazines**
FEDERICA DAL FALCO, RAISSA D'UFFIZI
184. **POSTER Guaranteeing the authenticity of VENINI Murano glass**
ELENA TESSER, FABRIZIO ANTONELLI
186. **Apparent divide. An observation of the handmade and the machine-made through the work of Laura de Santillana**
LAURA PANCHAUD
196. **Digital manufacturing for Murano glass**
OMRI REVESZ
-
206. **POSTER VETRO FUTURO muraNEWABLE: from the needs of glass comes a new energetic opportunity**
GIULIA CAZZADOR, GIANMARCO GNOATO, DANIELE VENDRAME, SOFIA ZANANDREA
208. **POSTER VETRO FUTURO poroVE: the fluid value of the waste**
CHIARA GHIDINI, SARA LABIDI, IRENE MARTIN, ILENIA PESSOTTO
210. **POSTER VETRO FUTURO wearGLASS: from waste to resource for wearable**
GIULIA DA PIAN, SERENA DE CONTI, NICOLA MASSIMI, MICHELE MESCOLIN



Glass-making workshop: fostering new design practices

SOFIA CRETAIO^A, CRISTINA MARINO^A, JOSEAN GARCIA DIAZ^B, PAOLO TAMBORRINI^{A,C}

Bringing future designers closer to the professional world requires the right balance of theoretical and practical activities; parallel to the traditional ateliers offered in design schools, some institutions are experimenting with different educational models, such as workshops.

Contaminating, reinterpreting and experimenting are the keywords behind this activity, carried out in the Politecnico di Torino, in which glass has been one of the protagonists as a material with strong socio-cultural connotations. Because of its increasing application in technological fields, glass's artisanal identity is getting weaker and requires a shift of focus from technological innovations to social innovations. Therefore, the week-long workshop "Il soffio di vetro", offers the chance to envision glass as the meeting point between the knowledge of a local glass master and the design-creative skills of students. The experimental approach offered during the workshop enables students to understand the synergy between the glass's aesthetic possibilities and functional constraints. It also helps define a more substantial value of sustainability in the relationship between university and craftsmanship.

The workshop's goal is not to create a perfect final product but to bring students to understand the process and review it in a logic of innovation. It also helps to foster sustainable and creative approaches where the relationship between the designer and the material is direct, personal and supported by the local know-how.

A Polytechnic of Turin.

B Joga Glass.

C University of Parma.

KEYWORDS: WORKSHOP, GLASS MAKING, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING





Fig. 01 Joga Glass workshop. On the table, combinations of glass rods prepared to be heated and picked-up with the roll-up technique.

Fig. 02 Final modelling of the glass object.

GLASS-MAKING WORKSHOP: FOSTERING NEW DESIGN PRACTICES

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WORKSHOP - GLASS MAKING - EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

ITALY

Introduction
In a future of evolving professions, in which the distinction between physical and digital is fading, the designer's education needs to be enriched with practical activities, so that they are provided with the richness and immediacy that only the experience can produce.

The contribution analyses the role of educational workshops as practices to contaminate, experiment and reinterpret the designing process promoted in the academic field, through the cultural and artisan strength of the glass material.

Workshops as teaching activities
Students' education and training effectiveness for the working path has always been at the centre of the academic debate. Here, besides the theoretical approach, it is important to experiment in specialized laboratories, intended as professional courses, with techniques and skills from the production world (Russo, 2019). However, the design output of these labs, which last only a few months, is often abstract and distant from the technical-operational languages of the working world. For this reason, the workshop model has been integrated into the designer education for several years, combining a collaborative approach and involving actors from outside academia.

The term workshop, which formerly defines "a place where things are done" (Merriam-Webster, 2016), denote a type of collaboration where a group of students acquires new knowledge, improves their skills, and solves sector-specific issues with innovative and creative solutions.

The educational value of glass
Every year, the Polytechnic of Turin organize a workshop panel where particular attention is given to activities that do not only involve companies and startups, but also local realities focused on craftsmanship. The purpose is to allow students to apply their methodologies in processes of sustainable enhancement of local resources (Tamborrini, 2019).

A practical example is the one-week workshop *Il soffio di vetro*, in collaboration with the local laboratory Joga Glass. The lab was born as a creative exhibition space where glass blowing objects are created with the ancient Murano blowing techniques, revisited in a European approach (Joga Glass, 2022). In the lab, the artist is guided by his instinct to transform simple rods of coloured glass into decorative objects, glasses and jewellery. The innovative point of view is not given by the products proposed but by the experimental approach that lies behind it; the transformation of the raw material is triggered by a participatory process with the workshop's participants: not mere observers, but actual designers. From the modelling of their design ideas, to the use of the glass masters' tools, to the realization of their first creation in the furnace. The goal of the workshop is not to create a perfect final product, rather impossible in such a short time, but to bring students to understand the process and review it in a logic of innovation.

Furthermore, the active participation during the workshop allows the participants to immerse themselves in the role of the craftsman and his routine, with all the necessary actions and precautions. Glass, a material as malleable as fragile, requires a total immersion in the actions that take place: the use of certain instruments, the pressure that is applied to the molten matter and the temperatures of the furnace do not allow distractions. Transforming glass enables future designers to understand the synergy between its aesthetic possibilities and functional constraints.

Glass, Design and Sustainable Innovation
The material value of glass has persisted for centuries at a functional and decorative level. Like many raw materials, however, its industrialization has opened the door to several applications with a greater technological impact, weakening its artisan identity. The Italian territory can count on a strong connotation of glass manufacturing, but this is not enough in making the material inert to the pressure exerted by technical-productive changes. To decline the craftsman's work to the future, beyond any form of nostalgia of the past, it is necessary to abandon designers' obsession for technological innovation to focus on the social dimension of innovation (Busacca & Paladini, 2019).

Thinking of the innovation produced by the artisan enterprise as a result of social interaction based on open collaboration between artisans, communities and networks (Busacca & Paladini, 2019), the value of sustainability in the relationship emerges between university and craftsmanship. The enhancement of glass through an educational and experiential approach adds value to the academic mission of directing future generations of designers towards more sustainable approaches (Sparre-Petersen, 2017). These approaches face the environmental issues of glass production: the blowing technique, which has remained unchanged over time, involves the extraction and transport of raw materials as well as high energy consumption by the furnace. To this is added aesthetic needs that often put on a secondary level the material consumption. Continuous explorations of the practical and narrative possibilities of both disciplines, glass and its modes of use may therefore reveal new possibilities for aesthetic and material innovation.

Conclusion
The fragile identity of glass is twofold: on one side more material, linked to shapes and colours, and on the other more abstract, linked to the heritage attributed to the product as much as to the process. The case *Il soffio di vetro* offers some insights for the development of new practices that focus on enhancing the artisan value of this material: its multidimensional malleability fosters sustainable and creative approaches where the relationship between the designer and the material is direct, personal and supported by the local know-how. This mutual exchange support a new educational framework where students are more aware of the context in which they can act in an innovative and sustainable way.

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Figure 3. A workshop's participants personally arranged the rods in a colour combination of choice. Then the set is placed in the area dedicated to the heating of the glass.



Figure 5. Two students collaborating to remove the blown object from the mould. Particular precautions must be taken during this step as the material is still extremely hot and delicate.



Figure 7. Final modelling of the glass object. As in previous steps the glass master is using his manual ability and experience to define the shape. The starting rods are clearly visible but they have been twisted to create a unique pattern.

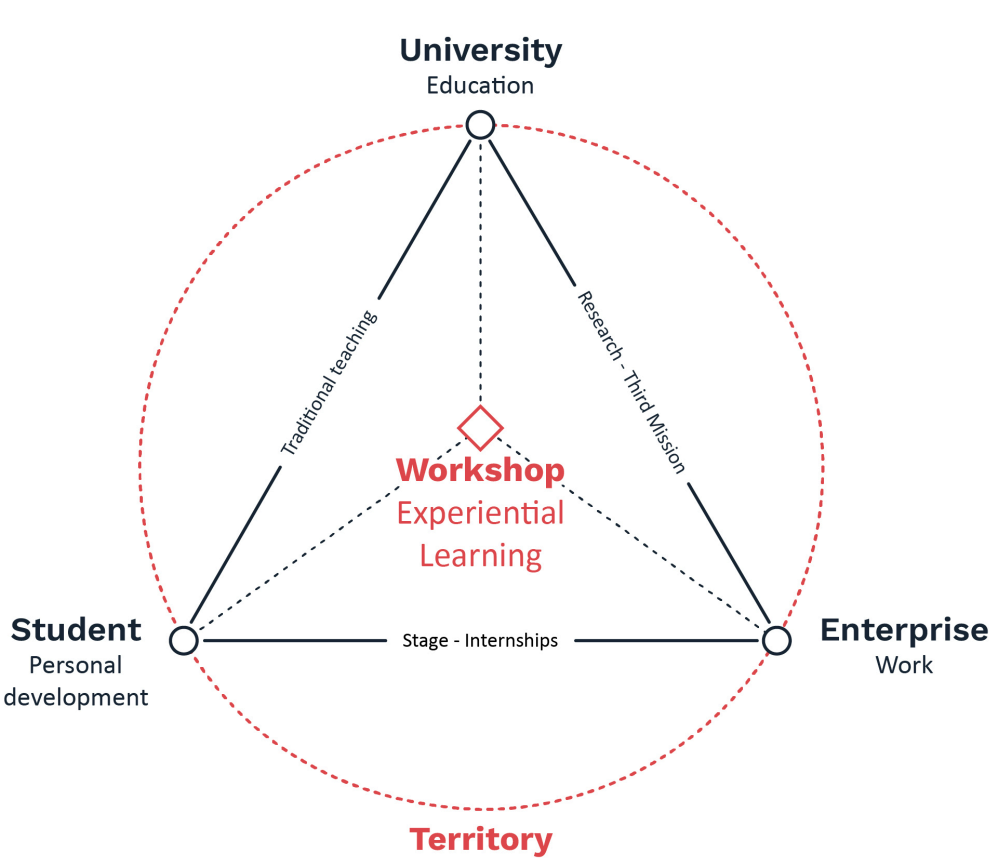


Figure 1. The local actors involved in the workshop development: student, university and enterprise.



Figure 2. Joga Glass workshop. On the table, combinations of glass rods prepared to be heated and picked-up with the roll-up technique. The different arrangements of colours allow to obtain different chromatic effects. The combinations are almost infinite and the result is always different.



Figure 4. The glass master giving a demonstration to the workshop's participants of the first step for the creation of a vase. The combined rods are placed on a ceramic plate to be rolled-up and then blown to get the final shape.



Figure 6. Joga Glass workshops. Some of the tools used by the glass master to manually transform the molten glass into the final product (e.g. the vases on the table).

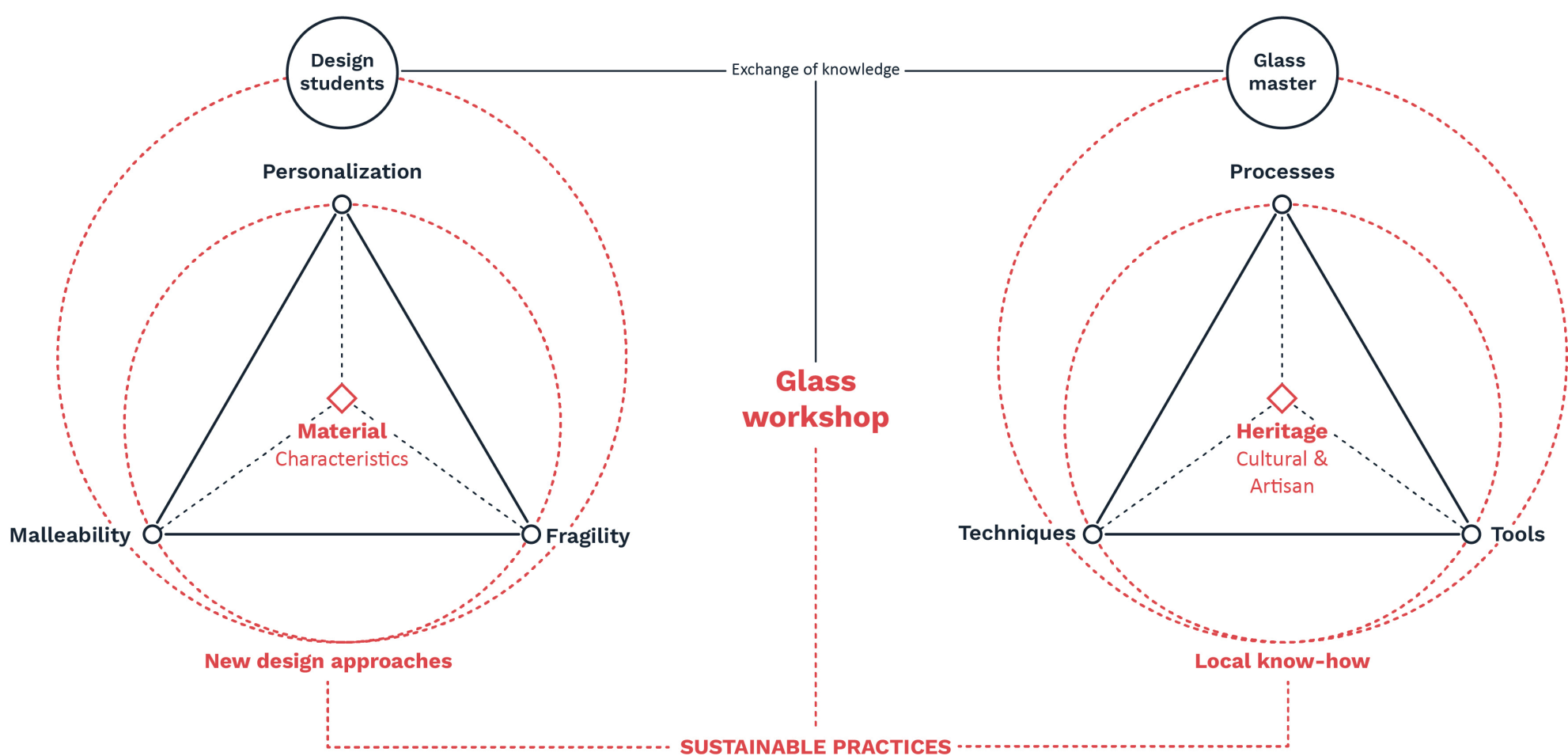


Figure 8. The twofold side of the glass emerging from the outcome of the workshop. The exchange of knowledge between the design students and the glass master allows the enhancement of the material characteristics and the cultural and artisan heritage of it. The combination of new design approaches in the formal-aesthetic characteristics of the glass with the local know-how has the potential to develop new sustainable practices.

GLASS is ANTIFRAGILE
because, throughout history,
it faces challenges, crises,
and innovations. Glass, its
design and its technologies
are in a constant state of
transformation by fulfilling
different functions, affirming
some of its characteristics and
modifying others, adapting
to changing contexts and
demonstrating a capacity for
innovation.

**In the International Year of
Glass, this book presents
the work of researchers and
scholars who highlight the
differences and at the same
time the commonalities
between three different fields
of study: Science, Design and
Architecture.**

**The aim of this book is to share
descriptions of the glass and its
innate aptitude for innovation.**

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