

THE DESIGN EDIT

FOR COLLECTORS AND DREAMERS

NEWS

Object of the Week: 'Merletto Basket Set', 2019

Dale Chihuly

By TDE Editorial Team / 3rd June 2020



Dale Chihuly, 'Merletto Basket Set', 2019
COURTESY: © Chihuly Studio. All Rights Reserved

THIS WEEK'S OBJECT is pretty much brand new. The techniques used to create it, however, date back hundreds of years. Dale Chihuly is a contemporary glass maker. He has been a pioneering figure in American Studio Glass, experimenting with the sculptural potential of the medium for more than fifty years. As well as creating major public installations of his candy-coloured spiralling constructions across the globe, he has built a highly successful business from his smaller scale pieces. He has also supported the education and development of glass makers throughout the United States.

One abiding thread within his work, since the late 1970s, has been the lyrical asymmetrical basket form – inspired by a visit to the Washington State Historical Museum in 1977. Chihuly has recalled “I saw some beautiful Northwest Coast Indian baskets ... and was struck by the grace of their slumped, sagging forms.” With his ‘Baskets’ Chihuly explores forms that can be created on a blowpipe, subject to chance, gravity and the deft movements of the blower as he weaves the pipe in and out of the flame. The fluidity of the shapes is an immediate reflection of the dramatic process of their making. Last year, Chihuly began a series of these baskets using the centuries-old technique of ‘merletto’ in which fine canes of glass swirl within the body to create an effect like netting in water. Merletto, which means lace, was developed on the island of Murano in the 15th century, but was most recently revived by the great twentieth century Venetian glassmaker, Archimede Seguso. It is a labour-intensive and complex process of embroidery with glass.

This particular example, which goes on view online today as part of the exhibition Dale Chihuly: Chihuly Merletto at Traver Gallery in Washington State (until 1st August 2020), is made using a white glass called Marko Blanco, which Chihuly developed with Bullseye Glass in Portland, Oregon, specifically for this project. It produces a crisp white edge which delineates the graphic line of the basket’s rim. The nestling of one vessel within another has also long been a feature of Chihuly’s vessels. Here, the effect is of a ghostly vessel – a boat perhaps, or a fish – shimmering in a body of water shot through with sunlight, evoking the Venetian lagoon.

Dale Chihuly – an American glass sculptor.

Chihuly Merletto runs from 4th June – 1st August at [Traver Gallery](#), Seattle, Washington.