

2 September 2025

MAGAZZINO ITALIAN ART

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Yoichi Ohira, Mille Luci, 2004,
Courtesy of Magazzino Italian Art



Magazzino Italian Art To Present the First Retrospective of Master Glassmaker Yoichi Ohira, Featuring 60 Exquisite Works by the Glass Artist Who Linked Italy and Japan

[Link to Press Kit](#)

Cold Spring, New York (September 2, 2025) — Magazzino Italian Art today announced the exhibition *Yoichi Ohira: Japan in Murano*, a retrospective of the Japanese-born, Venice-based glass artist's work in the United States. Curated by Nicola Lucchi, Magazzino's Director of Research and Education, the exhibition traces the full scope of Yoichi Ohira's (1946–2022) career in Murano, which spanned nearly 40 years, from his formative experiences at the Fucina degli Angeli glassworks, to his appointment as Artistic Director of the De Majo glassworks, and finally to his work as an independent artist and central figure in contemporary glass art.

Opening to the public at Magazzino's Robert Olnick Pavilion on September 8, *Yoichi Ohira: Japan in Murano* brings together a representative selection of more than sixty works, ranging from early serial productions to the artist's final explorations of form, matter, and light, alongside rarely seen preparatory drawings.

Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu, co-founders of Magazzino Italian Art, said, "This rare presentation of Yoichi Ohira's work will reaffirm his position as one of the preeminent artists of his generation. As a Japanese-born artist in Venice, Ohira brought a fresh perspective to the heritage of glassmaking in Murano, breathing new life into a venerable artform."

Adam Sheffer, Director of Magazzino Italian Art, said, "*Yoichi Ohira: Japan in Murano* is a testament to the broad scope of Magazzino Italian Art as the only institution in the United States dedicated to the art and culture of post-war Italy. On view concurrently with *Piero Manzoni: Total Space*, this presentation brings to our audiences a wide perspective on the rich history of this era and its artists."

Nicola Lucchi, Director of Research and Education, Magazzino Italian Art, said, "Yoichi Ohira's work was marked by a particular sensitivity to the history of glassmaking in Murano. Of particular interest in this exhibition are studies on paper that Ohira shared with master glassmakers, illustrating the characteristics he sought to achieve in his work. These documents of thought and invention provide a rare opportunity to delve into the artistic process at the heart of Murano glassmaking."

The exhibition begins with Ohira's early works, which are marked by impeccable formal inventiveness and continuity with Venetian glass traditions, before moving into a phase of

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bold experimentation with color, innovative forms, and new techniques rooted in Ohira's deep knowledge of works by Murano's master glassmakers, culminating in a later period characterized by a radical minimalism in which Ohira almost completely abandoned color in favor of pure contemplation of light and volume.

A key feature of the exhibition is an extensive selection of original working drawings, prepared by Ohira and used by Murano's master glassmakers in producing vases. Executed personally by the artist, these drawings include precise instructions on proportions, thickness, and color to guide the translation from two-dimensional lines to three-dimensional forms. The drawings shed light on Ohira's unparalleled creative process and on the dynamics of working around the kiln, where a master glassblower transfers drawings into technical gestures. The drawings demonstrate how, for Ohira, design precision was an expression of respect toward the materials and skilled artisans who brought his visions to life.

Yoichi Ohira: Japan in Murano will remain on view at Magazzino Italian Art through March 23, 2025. Also on view will be *Piero Manzoni: Total Space*, an exhibition anchored by two immersive environments conceived by Manzoni in 1961 and gifted to Magazzino by Fondazione Piero Manzoni and Hauser & Wirth.

Exhibitions details

Yoichi Ohira: Japan in Murano unfolds through clusters of works that exhibit aesthetic resonances, chromatic contrasts, and formal affinities, creating dialogues across different periods of the artist's career. The first works he made in Murano showcase a continuity with the great Venetian tradition: mastery of techniques such as *reticello* and *incalmo* is combined with the artist's sensibility, evident in balanced proportions, clear surfaces, and carefully calibrated color juxtapositions.

Representative of this period is the series *Venezia e l'Oriente (Venice and the Orient)*. Drawing on centuries-old relationships between the ancient Republic of Venice and the Eastern world (Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire, the Far East), Ohira created a series of vases that reinterpret wonders worthy of Marco Polo's tales through a measured, postmodern exoticism.

Already in this first phase of his career, Ohira's deep respect for the practical intelligence of Murano's artisans is evident. Each object is the result of close dialogue with the island's master glassmakers, with preparatory drawings serving as maps to transform ideas into blown glass. A vivid vocabulary of lines, colors, metaphors, and adjectives translates his perception of the material, revealing the beauty of volumes and transparencies in their nascent stages, before they take shape in the glassworks.

From the mid-1990s onward, Ohira entered a phase of great creative freedom. He abandoned the constraints of serial production and focused on unique pieces. Here, colors—milky or vibrant hues; the interplay of opacity and transparency; unusual combinations that recall hardstones, Japanese lacquer, or minerals weathered by time—take center stage. At this point in his career, Ohira's vocabulary of forms expanded, profiles curved, and surfaces grew richer with intricate patterns. Ancient techniques such as *murrine* and *battuto* were reinterpreted in contemporary ways, sometimes pushing the material to behave "against its nature" in order to achieve surprising effects. Always grounded in close observation of nature, Ohira's mature work celebrates the chromatic richness and vitality of Murano glass: calligraphic lines and vivid colors, transparencies that amplify the artistic potential of light, and a density of matter and hue that evokes the Venetian lagoon's shifting impressions, as if painted onto glass. Among the most remarkable works of this golden period are masterpieces such as the *Acqua alta di Venezia (Venice at High Tide)* vases, in which Ohira's use of powdered glass in an opaque body creates the impression of ancient pavements, overlaid with incised blue glass evoking the restless waters of high tide.

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In the final years of his career, Ohira embraced reduction. He abandoned nearly all color and focused on the relationships between crystal and light and the balance of volumes and voids. The traditional form of the vase, though still respected, became openly sculptural, transforming thick yet transparent matter into monumental, luminous forms.

This phase reveals the artist as a master of subtraction: with naturalistic and figurative references stripped away, his work became an expression of silence, a volume in which negative space and light are integral to form. It is a return to origins—not in a technical sense, but a spiritual one. Ohira had fallen in love with glass as a young man after reading a novella by Hiroyuki Itsuki in which the author described glassmaking as “music without sound.” In these final works, the material is returned to silence, becoming an instrument of visual meditation.

About Magazzino Italian Art

Magazzino Italian Art is a museum and research center dedicated to advancing scholarship and the public appreciation of postwar and contemporary Italian art and culture. Located in Cold Spring, New York, the museum was founded by Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu in 2017.

Magazzino, meaning “warehouse” in Italian, was inaugurated with an exhibition dedicated to Margherita Stein, founder of the historic Galleria Christian Stein in Torino and a key advocate and supporter of the artists associated with Arte Povera.

Set within several landscaped acres of the Hudson Valley Highlands, Magazzino's first building, designed by Miguel Quismondo, houses the Museum's collection and a Research Center. In September 2023, the Museum inaugurated its Robert Olnick Pavilion, designed by architects Alberto Campo Baeza and Miguel Quismondo. This new building provides additional exhibition space, an Education Center, Spazio Aperto, The Store, and Café Silvia, serving Italian cuisine by Italian Chef Luca Galli

About Yoichi Ohira

Yoichi Ohira (Tokyo, 1946–2022) was a Japanese artist of international renown. After graduating in 1969 from the Kuwasawa Design School in Tokyo, Ohira began working as an apprentice glassmaker at the Kagami Crystal Company, where he gained first-hand experience with the optical and formal potential of glass. In 1973, he moved to Venice to study sculpture at the Accademia di Belle Arti, graduating with top honors in 1978 with a thesis entitled “The Aesthetics of Glass.”

During his years in Venice, Ohira developed a relationship with Egidio Costantini, founder of the Fucina degli Angeli glassworks and a master of the art of translating two-dimensional works into glass sculpture. Through a collaboration with Peggy Guggenheim, Costantini entered into dialogue with artists such as Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, Max Ernst, Alexander Calder, Lucio Fontana, and Georges Braque. Ohira's encounter with Costantini was decisive in shaping his sensibility. Glass would no longer be a mere decorative medium, but rather a fully autonomous artistic language.

In 1987, Ohira was appointed Artistic Director of the De Majo glassworks in Murano, where he created collections that connected Eastern forms with Venetian techniques, winning that year the prestigious Premio Selezione at the Premio Murano glass art competition. In 1992, he embarked on an independent career, collaborating with master glassblowers Livio Serena and Andrea Zilio and master glass cutter Giacomo Barbini to produce unique works of extraordinary refinement. His first solo exhibition of Venetian glass was held in 1997 at Caffè Florian in Piazza San Marco.

Over the course of his career, he exhibited internationally alongside masters such as Carlo Scarpa, Lino Tagliapietra, Dale Chihuly, Laura de Santillana, and other leading figures of the contemporary glass scene. Ohira was also the first artist in Murano to sign each glass work with its exact date of production and the names of both the master glassblower and the master glass cutter.