

# ALTE VITRIE

L'ARTE DEL VETRO E DINTORNI

Altare meets Argentina

✖ Special number



The seventieth anniversary of the last migration of Altare's master glassmakers constitutes an opportunity to dedicate this edition of "Alte Vitrie" to the town's links with Argentina. Indeed, in 1947, the TOVA Group moved from Italy to the South American country and founded a glassworks modelled on the factory in Altare, a business



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which is still running today. And thus, yet again, the destiny of the migrating glassmakers of Altare was renewed, carrying on their age-old tradition of spreading their extraordinary skills throughout the world. Indeed, it was no coincidence that Altare glass was esteemed and desired in all the royal houses of Europe. Links with the last migrating master glassmakers have remained to this day and have been consolidated with a twinning arrangement between the two local authorities which became effective in 2009.

The two exhibitions that the MAV has dedicated to Miriam Di Fiore and Silvia Levenson, two Argentinian artists who have been living and working in Italy for decades, therefore assume even greater significance. Both have been the protagonists of two consecutive editions of Altare Vetro Arte, an event which has been promoting Italian and foreign artists in the Altare Glass Museum since 2011, many of whom testing themselves with glass for the first time. In Miriam and Silvia's case, however, we have two artists who have chosen glass as their medium of expression, suitable for translating their personal feelings. Although their bond with Italy is strong, they can never forget their homeland, a place to which they constantly return in their work.

*The editorial staff*

### THE ALTARE TOWN

### TWINNING

### COMMITTEE

**T**his year, the Altare Town Twinning Committee has reached its eighth year of activity. Founded in 2009,

initially under the stewardship of Stefania Marini and more recently with the passionate and unerring commitment of Alberto Saroldi, the committee has constantly strived to organise exhibitions, film festivals and gatherings. Its history and its operations are inextricably linked, just like the town itself, to the production of glass, and the exporting of glassware "à la façon d'Altare" throughout the world. Migrating glassworkers by vocation right from the outset, the people of Altare have always alternated activities in their homeland with highly specialised operations connected to their migration, albeit regulated by cast-iron statutes.

Initially named "Committee for the Town Twinning of Altare and San Carlos Centro", it later changed its name to a more general and wider-reaching "Town Twinning Committee" in order to embrace and commemorate the presence of people from Altare around the world, a presence which has persisted for centuries; but that's not all: indeed, there is a project to extend this

brotherhood to other towns which have welcomed Altare glassworkers and their art over the years.

In particular, the twinning arrangement with San Carlos Centro is linked to the last wave of migration to Argentina organised by the Altarese craftsmen in 1947.

In those years, through the activities linked to the "Sol De Mayo" initiative as well as others promoted in collaboration with cultural institutions and foundations, the committee contributed to raising awareness of a different but at the same time akin reality, touching on a variety of subjects: from geography and the history of migration to the social issues facing Italians in Argentina, as well as the sensitive and delicate issue of human rights, which today is more relevant than ever.

*Giulia Musso  
Member of the Altare Town  
Twinning Committee*



opposite page:  
citizens of San Carlos Centro  
support the Twinning with  
Altare, San Carlos Centro,  
October 31, 2009, photo by  
Marco Saroldi

side:  
The TOVA group,  
september 1947,  
photomontage



## THE TOVA GROUP

**T**he summer of 1947 saw the beginning of an adventure for fourteen young people from Altare. On May 25th of that year, they had formed the Tova (Tecnici e Operai Vetrari Altaresi, "Glass Technicians and Workers from Altare) Group, with the aim of setting up a craft production facility for blown glass modelled on the SAV (Società Artistico Vetraria) in Altare. It was a team that comprised all the necessary artistic and technical skills: technical director Vinicio Saroldi; foreman Luigi Visani,

known as "Gino"; master glassmakers Isidoro Bormioli, known as "Dorino", Gerardo Bormioli and Aldo Buzzone, known as "Matè"; glassblowers Pietro Gaggino, known as "Piero", Carlo Garabello, known as "l'ògg", and Edoardo Pioppo; master engraver Carlo Rotazzo, known as "François"; furnace, mould and equipment specialists Virginio Bazzano, known as "Ginio", Adarco De Biasi, known as "Darco", and Carlo Rabellino, known as "Carlèn"; designer Anselmo Gaminara; composer Rinaldo Scarrone, known as "erfulàt". They were subsequently joined by Romano De Biasi, Franco Gaggino and Renzo Paracchini. The second world war had just drawn to a close, Europe was going through a period

of great economic crisis and unemployment and the Italian government, in order to encourage emigration, had stipulated bilateral agreements with the Argentinian government, which was keen to trigger a phase of large-scale industrial development. The youth of Altare, like many other Italians, were prepared to take a gamble and invest all their skills and knowledge in order to create a better future for themselves and leave the tragedy of war behind them. Moreover, they were looking for a way out of the bleak climate that had engulfed the country at the time, aware that they were carrying forward an age-old artistic tradition and that they possessed rare skills and know-how. Their aim was to keep craftsmanship alive,

something which was destined to fade away in Altare in favour of automated production techniques.

This phenomenon was nothing new in the history of Altare's glassworkers. Since ancient times, they had been taking the art of glassmaking throughout the world, first to various regions of Italy and Europe (more than 100 settlements in Italy, 110 in France and 20 in other European countries between the 15th and 19th centuries), and subsequently in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America (including 14 large glassworks in South America in the 19th and 20th centuries). In 1870 in Argentina, Francesco Bordoni founded

## LE TRE FASI DELLE MIGRAZIONI DEI VETRAI DI ALTARE IN SUDAMERICA

1. "Operaj Vetraj" pionieri del vetro (prima metà dell'800)
2. I fondatori delle grandi vetrerie (con la "grande migrazione" tra '800 e '900)
3. "Tecnici Operai Vetrai Altaresi" maestri del vetro (secondo dopoguerra)

the Cristalería La Argentina in Buenos Aires, the first ever glassworks in Argentinian history, and in 1893 Pietro Lavagna established the first glass factory in Rosario. They were the harbingers of the devevelopment of the art of glassmaking that the Tova Group would bring to the Province of Santa Fe more than 50 years later.

Indeed, following a period of epistolary correspondence with a number of young people from Altare, a number of Argentinian entrepreneurs gathered to finance the project on June 1st 1947 in San Jorge (Santa Fe), and on July 13th they constituted Saica (Sociedad Anónima Industria Cristal Artístico). On September 8th, the Altarese emigrants boarded the motorship Mendoza in Genoa, bound for Buenos Aires, and on September 29th 1947



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they arrived in San Jorge and beheld an empty field upon which the glassworks would have to be built. It was the beginning of an enterprise that in a few years would lead to the creation of four large factories for the craft production of blown glass and crystal in the Province of Santa Fe: Saica and Cristalería Altar in San Jorge, Cristalería La Liguria and Cristalería San Carlos in San Carlos Centro, which is still operating today and which constitutes the only remaining craft production of crystal in Argentina, a skill which continues to be handed down from one generation to the next.

*Alberto Saroldi*  
Coordinator of the Altare  
Town Twinning Committee





opposite page, above:  
the three phases of the  
migrations of Altar'es  
glassmakers in South  
America, elaboration by  
Alberto Saroldi 2016

opposite page, below :  
Silvia Levenson, *Memory*, 2010,  
barbed wire, wood, glass, photo by  
Emilio Tremolada

side:  
Miriam Di Fiore in occasion  
of "Altare Vetro Arte" 2016,  
Museo dell'Arte Vetraria  
Altarese

«As a partner of 24marzo.it I am very glad that we are present, and I am very glad to accompany yet again this exhibition which, starting with the exhibits themselves, takes into account the imprints of memory and gives a "presence" to the "absence" the dictatorship, with all its crimes, left in our society and in each and every one of us»

**Vera Vigevani Jarach**  
*Movement dele Madres  
de Plaza de Mayo*

*Phrase sent on the occasion of the  
inauguration of Silvia Levenson's "Double  
Absences-Dobles Ausencias" exhibition  
at the Museo dell'Arte Vetraria Altarese  
Altare, May 27, 2017*

## TWO ARTISTS FROM ARGENTINA PROTAGONISTS OF "ALTARE VETRO ARTE"

**T**he work of Silvia Levenson, an internationally renowned Argentinian artist born in Buenos Aires but resident in Italy – and the world – since 1981, confronts issues relating to everyday life and problems facing society today. Violence against women and children is one of the main themes she addresses, as well as the constant search for pleasure and eternal youth. Moreover, her more recent work is closely linked to Argentina's recent history as well as reflecting the artist's personal experiences. Indeed, during the years of the dictatorship (1976-1983), Silvia was

forced to flee with her partner and two young children to escape the persecution, torture and imprisonment that had befallen friends and colleagues.

The choice of glass as her medium of expression was in reality somewhat fortuitous. She was fascinated by the work of Swedish artist Bertil Vallien, whose output she had occasion to admire in 1987. Ever since, this material, transparent and thus allowing the beholder to look beyond it, strong enough not to undergo modifications despite its fragility, has been moulded by the artist using a variety of techniques. Her aim is not the perfection of form which is so dear to master glassmakers, but rather the ability to infuse her own feelings and emotions into the material. In Silvia Levenson's work, reality is never as it seems, but each piece is distinguished by a strong perceptual deviation, wrong-footing the observer and forcing him or her to engage in often painful reflection.

Landscape is the fundamental element in Miriam Di Fiore's research, Argentinian with parents of Italian origin, she was born in Buenos Aires but grew up in Miramar, a locality on the country's Atlantic coast. In 1980, still very young, she left her homeland for Italy and she settled in Milan. Initially, she worked with both ceramics and glass until 1987 when she opted to concentrate solely on the latter, a material which has completely absorbed her ever since. Always striving for increasingly refined techniques, she has collaborated with such masters as Narciso Quagliata and Lino Tagliapietra, experimenting with glass fusion, pâte de verre, engraving and blowing until she was able to formulate her own individual and rather complex procedure which is aptly named after her, the "Di Fiore technique". The artist doesn't paint on glass, but with glass. Indeed, Miriam is able to translate depth, creating a series of successive planes. First she

defines the background: sky, clouds and distant elements are initially formed with spun glass before being flame-moulded and then arranged to depict the horizon. Then, she uses crushed glass passed through a sieve to create many particle sizes and translate coloured masses such as water. She then proceeds to the fusion stage and this initial level is wrapped in a layer of colourless glass. This is followed by the definition of a plane closer to the observer, which in turn is fused in a second phase and subsequently wrapped in a further layer of transparent glass and so on until the glass is baked up to six, eight or even ten times in the furnace. Such a practice requires great skill in timing and temperature control.

**Mariateresa Chirico**  
*Curator of Altare Vetro Arte  
2016 and 2017*

**MUSEO DEL VIDRIO  
DE CRISTALERÍA  
SAN CARLOS**  
San Carlos Centro,  
Argentina

**T**he Cristalería San Carlos is a company which began trading in October 1949. In the emergency of the post-war period, the insertion of traditional European manufacturing into the Argentine economy gave rise in the small business sector to new contractual relationships with workers who performed manual activities. The opening of the company thus transformed a small creole village into a pole of sustainable regional development. The production of fine crystal was the result of constant technical and aesthetic research, without abandoning the hand-crafting of crystal in the traditional manner. The craft production method with the support of minimal mechanical finishing systems was refined through a

procedure developed locally over half a century. What is more, in order to survive economically, the factory community had developed an activity of continuous experimentation, ensuring the production of pieces of considerable quality and some of which achieving important international recognition. Furthermore, the production of crystal became an indicator of periods of economic boom and crisis, being linked to the variability of domestic consumption, thus creating strong social links between the workers, the company and the town itself and influencing everyday personal relationships. The Museo del Vidrio preserves and enhances a unique cultural heritage: the relationship between modern industry and craft production. With this objective, the museum gives value to the daily work of the craftsman-labourer, within a community whose identity is inextricably linked to the Cristalería San Carlos.

*Jesica Savino*  
Museologist of the Museo del Vidrio  
de Cristalería San Carlos  
*Gustavo Ferneti*  
Conservatory and curator of Museums  
Municipalidad de Rosario



side:  
the glass art at San Carlos from  
generation to generation

below:  
glassblower at work in the  
Cristalería San Carlos

below, left:  
glass objects by Argentine artists  
realized at the Cristalería San  
Carlos for the exhibition "El Cristal  
del Arte", Buenos Aires, 2012

photo by Vanesa Fresno



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**Cover:**  
Large Chiriguano vase featuring  
a stylised owl, late 20th century,  
Cristalería San Carlos, Argentina,  
Museo dell'Arte Vetraria Altarese