

CRYSTAL

REVOLUTION

CRYSTAL CAVIAR IS WELL KNOWN WITHIN THE INDUSTRY AS MAKERS OF CHANDELIERS FOR SUPERYACHTS. I WAS INTRIGUED WHEN THE OWNER OF CRYSTAL CAVIAR, MAREK LANDA, INVITED ME TO VISIT HIS PREMISES TO SHOW ME AROUND AND TELL ME OF HIS PLANS. I WAS IN IT FOR A SURPRISE - CHANDELIERS HAVE BECOME ONE SMALL FACET IN CRYSTAL CAVIAR'S REPERTOIR. WORDS BY SERVANNE SOHIER

In 1995 Marek Landa launched his first company (named after himself) which produced engraved glassware and custom made chandeliers. In 2010 Marek and his wife Michaele invented a crystal wall finish which looks like caviar. Together they decided to start a company called Crystal Caviar and a busy period producing items for many private yachts and residences followed. This crystal finish is now mostly used in luxury frames for one-of-a-kind mirrors, fountains, wall art and chandeliers. The chandeliers are gorgeous, the craftsmanship involved is undisputable and they wouldn't look out of place in a design museum but Marek didn't want to end it there. "I want to become the company with the biggest Bohemian Crystal Art collection in the world," states Marek.

FROM CHANDELIERS TO FINE ART

In 2007 Marek and Michaele bought a few pieces of art from the artist Jan Frydrych and found out that the value had tripled over the years. Marek concluded fine art was a good investment and decided to move into fine art.

His first foray into fine art was contacting this artist, Jan Frydrych, a Czech Bohemian crystal artist whose career started in the seventies and whose pieces are made through a complicated manipulation of optical glass. His work can be found in museums such as the Guggenheim and Victoria & Albert museum. Marek asked Frydrych to produce a chandelier made of optical prisms for a superyacht. The result was a success in terms of both collaboration and product.

One of the other things Marek did was to buy the last reserves of this raw crystal in the colours ruby red, smoked blue, and multi-coloured ones. Creating Bohemian Crystal entails using a mixture of silica-sand (also called silver sand), potash, and red-lead that come in a variety of colours. These colours are not being produced anymore and the recipe for the ruby red raw crystal is only known to Marek. Artists who wish to use these colours now have to get it from Marek. Interestingly, he does not charge for the material but does wish to see the finished artwork first. If the artwork fits in Crystal Caviar's style than he buys it and adds it to the company's growing collection of artworks. Crystal Caviar welcomes all artists, even the ones who have not worked



VLASTIMIL BERANEK IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST NAME IN CRYSTAL CAVIAR'S ARTISTS LIST. CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: AQUAMARINE JEWEL; EMERALD PLUM OF SMOKE WHICH IS 1.5 METRE HIGH; RED ONE MADE WITH THE VERY RARE RUBY RED CRYSTAL AND WAS SOLD FOR OVER £1M; SEA SHELL. VLASTIMIL'S LATEST ARTWORK: ORANGE ONE WHICH WEIGHS 160 KG.



ith crystal to work with the company on creating new pieces.

Next on his to-do list was to find space for workshops, ovens and the artworks. Crystal Caviar already had two premises; one converted church and an office cum factory in Ceska Lipa, but these were already full up. While driving in the area of Sluknov one day, Marek came across an abandoned factory that proved ideal. He bought the empty building and set to turning it into a Bohemian Crystal factory on the ground floor and a 3,000 square metre exhibition space on the floors above. The size of the factory allowed him to house multiple ovens. Three new ovens are now working full time and Marek plans to add another three to it. 'I am anticipating for a rise in demand once we are all set up, so I need to be ready for it,' he explains.

Why the need of so many ovens? The answer is pretty simple. To create a piece of crystal glass artwork, the raw material needs to be melted inside a mould. Depending on the size of the artwork, it can take up to a year in an oven to get to its final shape.

Marek continues to expand the collection by buying artworks directly from artists. The collection now includes work from an extensive list of artists (about 65 of them). The most notable ones are Vlastimil Beranek, Dr Najat Makki and Jan Frydrych.

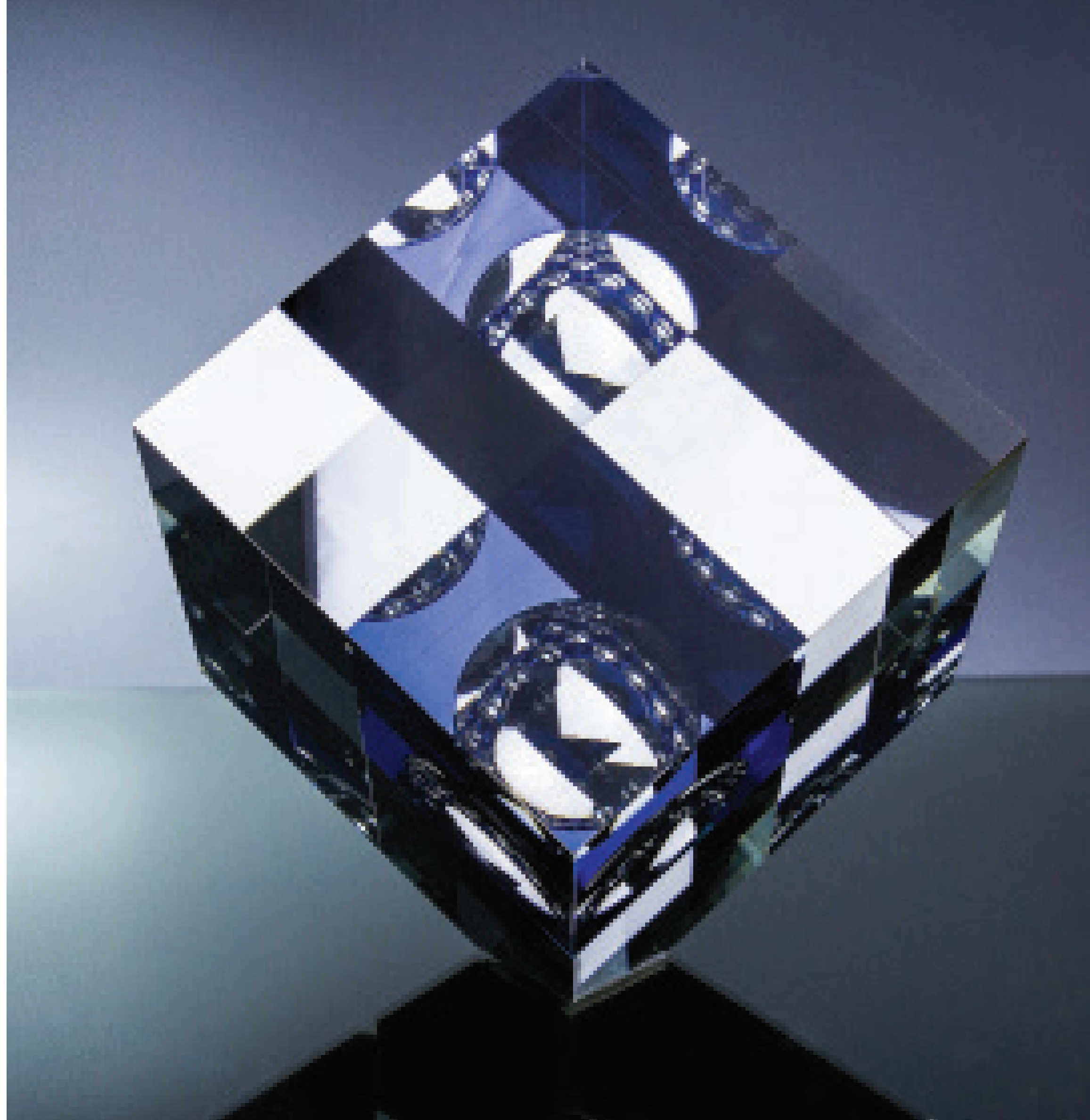
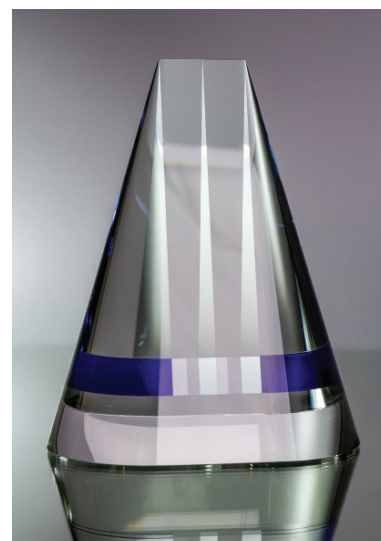
VLASTIMIL BERANEK

is a highly respected glass artist, who is a third generation member of the Beranek family which founded the Glass factory in Skrdlovice. His glass sculptures tend to be big and heavy. His largest piece so far is made of 15% lead Bohemian ruby crystal and weighs in at 260kg. The sculpture was sold last year to a private owner for over £1m.

JAN FRYDRYCH

Marek continues to work with Jan Frydrych and I met Jan at his house in Sluknov. When I say house, I actually mean a castle, complete with a park and two lakes. His home is also his own private gallery, an art centre for the community and contains a studio (including five ovens) in his cellar. A polite and soft spoken man with piercing blue eyes, Jan lead me around and showed me the different stages of his work. At the time of my visit he was working on a chronometer. I couldn't see it of course as it was melting in an oven but I was told it will be, 'an amazing piece with gold and optical glass.' Over coffee upstairs I discovered that Jan has another passion in life: collecting golden clockworks. His living quarters are filled with over 500 clocks from the 17th and 18th century and artworks gifted from other artists. 'That is the currency in our

ABOVE: GALLERY ON TOP OF THE SLUKNOV PREMISES.BELOW: PROTOTYPE OF CRYSTAL ART PAINTING BY DR MAKKI. BOTOM: THREE-MASTER BY JAN FRYDRYCH. NEXT PAGE: CUBE MADE OF OPTICAL GLASS BY JAN FRYDRYCH.





OTHER ARTIST

1. Vaclav Cigler
2. Jaroslav Prosek



3. Michaela Smrcek



4. Jindrich Nebesky



5. Jan Fedorcak



6. Petra Poricka

7. Stepan Knakal

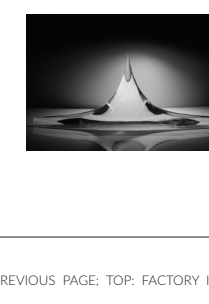
8. Wael al Mulla

9. Tim Heywood

10. Jacques Pierrejean

11. Luca Valebona

12. Igor Lobanov



PREVIOUS PAGE: TOP: FACTORY IN SLUKNOV. BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: MOULD FOR A NEW PIECE FOR JAROSLAV PROSEK; FINALISING NEW PIECES OF ART FROM VLASTIMIL BERANEK AND SMRCKOVA. THIS PAGE TOP LEFT: SCI-FI LADY BY MICHAELA SMRCEK. RIGHT: SEA GRASS JAROSLAV PROSEK.



world. We do not pay with money, we exchange artworks in the hope they will rise in value, although I can't bear to part with them!' he laughs.

DR. NAJAT MAKKI

has gained worldwide success and recognition as one of the leading female Emirati contemporary painters. In 1977 she became the first Emirati woman to study art abroad. She obtained her bachelor's and master's degree in relief sculpture and metal from the College of Fine Arts in Cairo. She is also a member of the Dubai Cultural Council. A newcomer to the Crystal Caviar family, Marek is very excited about this new collaboration. 'Unfortunately I am not allowed to show you what she is working on. Dr. Makki only wants it to be revealed at the exhibition, not before.' He says. The exhibition will be held at the Dubai Boat Show in march 2017.

DESIGN OR ART?

When I ask Marek if he sees himself as the owner of a gallery, he answers emphatically. 'No, I am not a gallery. Not only do I buy the artwork from the artists and sell them in the exhibition space, but Crystal Caviar also helps produce the pieces with the artists. We offer them workshops and ovens so they can work and create beautiful pieces. I don't see myself as an art dealer either. There is too much negative connotation linked to the word dealer in my country. Besides, we also take bespoke orders from clients. I don't want to fit in any box, I want to be the go-to place for Bohemian Crystal Art.' Crystal Caviar as a company for chandeliers will stay as it is, Marek has however started a new company for the fine art side of his business. It will focus on consulting and advising clients on investment and supervise production of the pieces of art. Perhaps more importantly, the company will make sure every piece of Bohemian Crystal Art is genuine. 'I don't want my client to get their fingers burned so I make sure what they buy is genuine Bohemian Crystal. I want them to have a return in their investment.

The word is definitely getting out to buyers, orders are coming through fast. He is currently producing a glass chandelier made of 500 swallows and he has a few others in the pipeline. The word is also getting out to artists, as more and more are joining the company and producing their art on the premises. The Crystal Caviar collection now has 650 pieces available for clients.

'A lot of people used to view Bohemian Crystal pieces as design. These days they are viewed more and more as fine art. I personally see them as Art. The artists spend hours working on the pieces, polishing them, they tell a story with an emotional depth you wouldn't find in design,' Marek says. 'An art chandelier by Mr Beranek or Mr Frydrych is not only a beautiful object but also an investment which will be multiplying in value.'

'Bohemian Crystal,' he adds with a smile 'is the Bronze of the 21st century.'