

Gilles CHABRIER

Born 1959 in Riom-ès-Montagnes, lives and works in Paris.

He began work in the glass-engraving company founded by his grandfather in 1928 and taught himself all the skills he would require over the years to develop into one of the great glass artists.

The major decorations for the first-class decks of the luxury liners Normandie and France, amongst others, were produced by his workshop. As a young ambitious artist Gilles did not want to follow the tradition of the well-known workshop as established by the firm's founder, nor that of his father.

In 1985 he took over the family business and disregarding any artistic differences abandoned the practice of commission orders to devote himself entirely to working with glass.

By 1975 the technique of sandblasting – with engraving one of the two processes for decorating the surface of glass - had already been perfected to such an extent that it enabled him to sculpt large blocks of glass and crystal.

Other processes include "choc thermique" (applying extremes of temperature) and the use of special machine tools for working the material by hand. The artist has developed and improved other techniques to unlock the fascinating inner beauty of the difficult and complex material of glass.

Chabrier works on different types of glass: optical glass, Baccarat crystal or plain glass. Coarse blocks of the coloured source material are of special significance for him and these can be brought to true colour brilliance by his methods. The glass blanks he uses can weigh up to 350kgs. They are processed in specially developed rooms, like those in a high-security laboratory, using a sandblasting tool at a pressure of several atmospheres. Thus the glass blocks determine from the outset how the finished sculpture will look.

His creative work deals first and foremost with the depiction of human physiognomy in its countless forms of facial expression and emotion.

His earlier works are characterised by faces often tortured and twisted in pain which experience a "relaxation" in the course of his creative work. More recently these have become reduced in part to large-scale, abstract and simplified outlines.

He also produces massive sculptures using mixed materials. For this Chabrier combines bronze, steel, concrete, stone and wood in order to bring out the contrast between these materials and glass in these creations. These sculptures extend to larger outdoor sculptures several metres tall.

A further creative area is installation objects, new-German designer pieces which have found their enthusiasts and collectors from Los Angeles to Tokyo, and Sao Paulo to New York and the United Arab Emirates.

Gilles Chabrier is one of the few great glass artists of our day who knows how to model GLASS which has fascinated man for millennia yet is formed from three simple substances. In his hands it can seem to evoke a gentle whisper amongst us observers.