

# Czech artist's love affair with glass

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Jiri Pacinek's 'Rudena' (hand made and blow crystal glass, 2016). Photos: The Star/Muhamad Shahril Rosli

## Arts

Contemporary Czech glassmaker Jiri Pacinek is a tall, big man with a hearty laugh, who eagerly launches into the story of how he got into glassmaking at the tender age of 14, during an interview at Galeri Petronas in KL, where some of his works are currently on display.

The liquid gold worked into one of the glass sculptures glistens under the light, a sleek contrast with the deep red it is matched with. It is a hefty 10kg piece, but Pacinek lifts it effortlessly as he adjusts its position on the stand under the bright spotlights.

"I was a big sportsman as a teenager, very tough and strong, broad shoulders, really into Greek wrestling," recalls the 45-year-old, his eyes twinkling at the recollection.

"A friend told me that I would one day be a big star and I thought it was a great dream. You see, I was convinced that I wanted to be a big sportsman forever!"

But serendipity struck in the form of a TV series on the art of glassmaking that Pacinek, who was born in Litomerice, Czechoslovakia, just happened to watch.



Jiri Pacinek with his Renata 3 (handmade and blown crystal glass, 2016).

Back then, he was a young man ready to take on the world with a mighty roar, who didn't know the first thing about glassmaking.

"But I saw the first episode of this series and I remember being very surprised to see that the people making these beautiful pieces of art were big and strong men, who handled hot, molten glass so confidently. When I saw the strength, the exertion and the skill that went into glassmaking ... oh, I liked it, I really, really liked it," he says.

Week after week, he devoured each episode, and by the time the series ended, he found himself thinking an awful lot about glassmaking – a lot more than a dedicated Greek wrestling enthusiast should. That itself was enough to nudge him into visiting a glass factory with a friend's brother who was just about to enrol in glassmaking school, to watch the process live.

Pacinek returned home all wide-eyed, dreams of being a superstar athlete cast aside, and announced to his mother that he now wanted to be a glassmaker.

"She said, 'Do whatever you like', which suited me just fine!" he laughs.

At 15, he enrolled at the glass apprentice centre in Novy Bor, a town known for its glass production, where he learned glass blowing and shaping, and soon developed a fondness for free-hand shaped glass making. In between being conscripted into the army and art residencies abroad, Pacinek found himself being appointed master glassmaker at the age of 23.



"I was the youngest, working with assistants who were almost 50 years old, but all very good, friendly guys. Glassmaking is all about teamwork, but as the master glassmaker, I had an important role to play. As the frontman, I finish the piece and make sure it is good. I was pushing on hard, working like a machine, you know. It was all so perfect," he says.



A close-up of the Renata 4, which is one of Pacinek's masterpieces.

Pacinek has been making glass art ever since, from nature-inspired and animal themes, to quirky bowls and vases that emerge from his home studio, to the sometimes grandiose commissioned works, such as chandeliers, from his glass factory.

"I have a glassmaking studio in my house. When you take something to your home, you must really love it. Home, to me, is family and glass," he grins. With three decades of glassmaking experience under his belt, Pacinek shares that it is a steep learning curve, and one that never really eases up because of all the different techniques and the open possibilities of exploration and experimentation.

"It looks very easy, you know, but glassmaking is in fact very hard work. Anyone who wants to be a glassmaker should be aware that you need a lot of strength, lots of energy, and that you will make mistakes many times and produce many very bad pieces. But love your job, keep at it, and you can go a long way with it," he says.





'It looks very easy, you know, but glassmaking is in fact very hard work. Anyone who wants to be a glassmaker should be aware that you need a lot of strength, lots of energy, and that you will make mistakes many times,' says Pacinek (left).

Pacinek has three glass sculptures on display at *Concerto Glassico*, a stunning showcase of 22 works by 12 glassmakers from the Czech Republic. For many artists in his home nation, glassmaking is as much tradition and heritage as it is a part of life.

Pacinek, the first person in his family to pursue glassmaking, beams with pride when sharing that his two sons, 20 and 16, are following in his footsteps.

"The older one works with me and the younger one is going to go to the same glass school I went to. Some of the teachers are still there. They are old now but they still remember me because I was a bad boy who loved glass but got into trouble a lot! I might be the first glassmaker in my family, but now I know I won't be the last. My sons will continue this journey," he says.

"And as for me, what I know now is that in my next life, I will be a glassmaker again, that's for sure."



Pacinek's Renata 4 (handmade and blown crystal glass, 2016).

The *Concerto Glassico* glass sculptures yield a masterful blend of form and balance, purposeful in execution and unapologetically present. The exhibition offers a magical realm in the corner of the gallery, where you can easily lose yourself in every crisp line, fold, dip and curve – and the brilliance and intensity of the colours.

In every piece, it is evident that there is a calm and collected lightness, a certain joy, about them. If this is not perfection, then it certainly comes close.

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*Concerto Glassico: The Czech Art Of Glass* is on at Galeri Petronas, Level 3 in KLCC till June 11. Opening hours: 10am-8pm. Closed on Mondays. Free admission. For more information, visit [galeripetronas.com.my](http://galeripetronas.com.my).