May 1853. Thirty-one-year-old Leopold Blaschka is on board a ship bound for North America. His father and wife have died recently, in quick succession. On the high seas, the days between oblivion and a new beginning drift by, as in a trance. Lost in thought, Blaschka stares into the depths of the Atlantic and, quite by chance, witnesses the surreal nocturnal ballet of a colony of *pelagia noctiluca* – jellyfish that glow in the dark. The next day he notes in his logbook: “Then a tiny creature appears, right in front of us, in a garish, greenish light, growing bigger and bigger. All the while a dark speck, probably a fish, is darting about among the luminous creatures. It is as if they wanted to entice the enchanted onlooker into a magical world.” Without knowing precisely why, Leopold begins to follow the enchantment, filling his sketchbook with pictures of the exotic marine creatures.

For generations, Blaschka had been a leading name among the glassblowers of Northern Bohemia (now included in the Czech Republic), whose forest huts had been as much a part of the traditional scenery as the watermills and charcoal burners’ huts had been since the twelfth century. Every one of the dynasties there had its father and son model-makers Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka created sea creatures from glass. The models were used to fill empty aquaria in the days before these delicate animals could be kept alive in captivity. The Blaschkas also made educational models of microscopic organisms such as radiolarians (above). Among the Blaschka’s subjects were squid and octopuses including *Tremoctopus velifer* (following page) and *Onychia platyptera* (page 25, clockwise from top left): *Argonauta argo*, octopus; *Histioteuthis bonelliana*, squid; *Onychia platyptera*, squid; *Sepia officinalis*, squid; *Argonauta argo*, octopus; *Histioteuthis bonelliana*, squid; *Onychia platyptera*, squid; *Sepia officinalis*, squid.
own particular way of using wood, pebbles, quartz, and lead oxide to produce a range of functional items, cheap everyday decorations, or exquisite ornaments. And these family recipes were guarded like precious treasures. The Blaschkas quickly became established among the glassmaking elite, the opulent crystal chandeliers, exquisitely cut glasses, and gilded, colored goblets finding their way into the palatial residences of aristocratic society. From an early age, Leopold – who also trained as a goldsmith and gemcutter after school – had a strong urge to break new ground. He went for endless walks, sketching ferns, plants, and flowers that he transformed at home into elegantly shimmering glass ornaments. In 1870, the year his son Rudolf was born, he began making life-size, astonishingly lifelike, glass models of orchids, amazing academic experts and private collectors. Dresden's natural history museum gave his work the ultimate accolade when it invited him to move to the area, providing him with a villa and a new studio in a village on the Elbe.

With his precise, naturalistic synthesis of solid craftsmanship and avant-garde art, Blaschka anticipated the spirit of the late nineteenth century. This was a period obsessed with researching and measuring – activities that were undertaken with an almost colonial fervor; science faculties and museums were springing up across the world’s major cities. The Blaschkas, with their lifelike, hyper-precise glass objects, were ideally suited to the moment. Around 1870, Rudolf began working with his father, and the pair soon achieved widespread fame, with clients in Japan, India, and the U.S.A.

Although he was mainly occupied with various plant models, Leopold suddenly recalled the magical marine world, the spectacular submarine light show, the dancing polka of cuttlefish, squid, and octopus. A huge marine aquarium was constructed so that the Blaschkas could replicate the world of marine invertebrates with microscopic precision. The glassmaking duo returned the favor by creating phenomenal models, Leopold suddenly recalled the magical marine world, the dancing polka of cuttlefish, squid, and octopus. A huge marine aquarium was constructed so that the Blaschkas could replicate the world of marine invertebrates with microscopic precision. The glassmaking duo returned the favor by creating phenomenal models, bid up to 8m, inspired by the first aquariums appeared in London, Vienna, Pisa, and Tübingen will open a side wing housing – activities that were undertaken with an almost colonial fervor; science faculties and museums were springing up across the world's major cities. The Blaschkas, with their lifelike, hyper-precise glass objects, were ideally suited to the moment. Around 1870, Rudolf began working with his father, and the pair soon achieved widespread fame, with clients in Japan, India, and the U.S.A.

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