

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: 'ASPECTS OF 20TH CENTURY STAINED GLASS'

Following a successful 2005 conference on the aesthetics, history and conservation of 19th-century glasspainting, this summer the British Society of Master Glass Painters, in conjunction with the Worshipful Company of Glaziers of London, organized a second International 2-day conference at Glaziers' Hall, London. Featuring eminent speakers from the UK, Europe and the USA, lectures presented a wide-ranging historical overview of the far-reaching developments in stained glass that took place throughout the 20th century. The following text is a summary of the main points of the conference (a more detailed report will appear in the 2008 *Journal of Stained Glass*).

On day 1, the morning session was chaired by BSMGP Chairman Caroline Beynon FRSG. She opened the conference, welcoming the speakers and the delegates, and then introduced the first speaker, Julie L. Sloan MSc, a stained glass consultant in the USA, spoke on the 'Crystallization of Form: The Stained Glass of the Prairie School'. The Prairie (or Chicago) School, an architectural movement in the USA popular between 1875 and 1925, was born in Chicago and spread through Wisconsin; it is related to both the US Arts & Crafts movement and Modernism. Its philosophy was unity of design, 'form follows function', and its designs were characterized by low-pitched roofs, open floor plans and large horizontal-banded stained glass windows that take advantage of light during different parts of the day.

Within the movement were two architectural firms of particular note: Adler & Sullivan and Joseph Silsbee. Frank Lloyd Wright worked for Silsbee for a year then was offered more money to work for Louis Sullivan, who became his mentor. Examples of the Sullivan firm's work included banks such as the National Farmers' and Merchants' Bank in Minnesota. In these buildings, the glass and colours in the windows were chosen to give a large quantity of interior light, but avoid glare or heat. Plate glass was used on the exterior to regulate the internal temperature. The tellers' desks were also carefully placed so that the light coming through the windows fell on the bank customer, not the clerk. Frequently its motifs were geometrical – square, circular and hexagonal – or based on organic forms; some taken from a school botany textbook – e.g. shapes resembling a seedpod. Works by other members of the School such as the firm of Purcell, Feick and Elmée were also illustrated, along with their motifs and characteristic styles.

The second talk of the morning titled 'Frank Brangwyn's Stained Glass' was by Dr Libby Horner. Her talk detailed the politics that informed the designs and Brangwyn's working methods. Frank Brangwyn was the quintessential artist-craftsman, but it is little known that he produced designs for stained glass throughout his career, beginning with six panels commissioned by Siegfried Bing in 1899 and made by Louis Comfort Tiffany. He delighted in experimentation and new techniques, and his designs for stained glass particularly highlighted his innate understanding of colour.

He had no formal training, and worked in many styles. At the age of 15 he joined Morris & Company as an apprentice copyist of Flemish tapestries. Morris suggested that he be apprenticed to 'the glassworkers' job', but Brangwyn did not take up his advice, instead becoming a painter. When one of his paintings won a medal in Paris, he was introduced to Siegfried Bing, and was subsequently engaged to produce designs to decorate Bing's rue de Provence Galerie, a series of murals and stained glass panels based on Japanese plant designs. Other designs for Tiffany included a Baptism, with a dove descending from Heaven (similar to a Piero della Francesca painting), and stylized Art Nouveau designs with scintillating female figures amongst trees and flowers, with titles such as 'Music'.

Church designs included four windows for St Mary the Virgin, Bucklebury, Berks; an East window for a Congregational church in Northampton for a friend's son who had died at Pischendale; a memorial to the son of Cecil Hunt who died aged 19 at Saint Winifred, Manniton, Devon; and five double lancets at St Andrew's Abbey, Zenkerken, Bruges. Two further designs commemorate the 1st Earl of Iveagh (Edward Cecil Guinness of the brewing family); one, Brangwyn's largest and probably best known, is at St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, the second at St Andrew and Patrick in Egham, Suffolk.

After coffee, the emphasis switched to developments in Continental Europe as Michael Barker spoke on 'A Survey of 20th-century Stained Glass in France from the End of the Belle Époque to Abstraction'. This talk examined the roots of Modernism stemming from Samuel Bing's commissions from Nabis artists; the Impetus of the Art Sacré movement spurred on by Maurice Denis; the influence of the new Art Deco style in the 1920s; and the dynasties of stained-glass makers based at historic centres such as Chartres and their creative collaboration with renowned painters including Matisse, Braque, Léger, Rouault, Chagall and Miró.

He began by setting the scene in France at the peak of its Belle Époque, with the Exposition Universelle of 1900. Amongst the stained glass there was a significant work which led the way artistically not only for Art Nouveau but also to the twentieth century: *Le Printemps* (Spring) created in 1895 by Eugène Grasset and executed by Félix Gaudin. Also the artists of the Nancy School breathed life and excitement into the medium in the 1890s with new glassmaking techniques developed by the Daum brothers and adapted to stained glass by Jacques Grébet. Samuel Bing – sent to America by the director of the *Beaux-Arts* – commissioned Tiffany to execute 13 designs by

Bing's artist friends Toulouse-Lautrec and the Nabis painters. They were exhibited first at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris in April 1895, then installed in December that year at Bing's Galerie de l'Art Nouveau in the rue de Provence. However, despite avant-garde painters already creating waves in the first decade of the 20th century, stained glass largely remained in its pictorial figurative tradition.

After the Great War there was a renaissance with a vast programme of rebuilding in war-devastated Northern France – creating an explosion of new building and associated decorative arts. The key work in the history of modern ecclesiastical architecture was Notre-Dame de la Consolation at Le Raincy, a suburb of Paris. Regarded as the world's first modern church, building commenced in June 1922 and was completed in a mere 13 months. Maurice Denis was chosen to design the great expanse of stained glass, executed by Marguerite-Félicité Huré. Notre-Dame was nicknamed the 'Sainte Chapelle' of modernism and influenced church design internationally from then on but its concrete construction proving faulty it was necessary to restore the church and its stained glass from 1953 (by Gabriel Loire).

Despite the early emergence of avant-garde art in France, it was not until after the Second World War that abstraction made its general reappearance. In the interwar years, the figurative style we now call Art Deco dominated; an example is to be found in the Reading Room rooflight by Jacques Gruber in the new library at Reims – a city largely rebuilt in the 1920s. Three sublime small post-war churches were each created by a single artist: the 'Chapelle du Rosaire' at Venice in the South of France by Henri Matisse, the pilgrimage chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp by Le Corbusier, and the church at Varanville, near Dieppe, where Georges Braque created the beautiful 'Tree of Jesse', which has been described by Patrick Reyntjens as 'the best stained glass of the 20th century'.

The list of major artists of the 20th century who designed windows for French churches at that time is very long, and included Marc Chagall, who was 70 when he designed the stained glass for the cathedral of Metz then later Reims cathedral, where he painted the figures on the glass himself; Jean Cocteau at St Maximin in Metz, St Blaise-des-Simples at Méilly-la-Forêt, south of Paris, and Notre-Dame-de-Jérusalem near Fribourg; surrealist Joan Miró at Senlis; Alexandre Clugnia at Le Fayet in the Haute-Savoie; the abstract artist Alfred Manessier at numerous churches, including Hem, near Lille, Charles Marc at Lyon, Léon Zack at, for example, Issy-les-Moulineaux, Max Ingrand at Yvetot, and, probably the most prolific, Gabriel Loire.

The afternoon session was chaired by Martin Harrison FSA, Hon. FRCG, and continued to look at glass on the Continent, this time in Germany. Dr Iris Nester spoke first, about 'The Influence of Modern Art on Glass in Germany'. The analysis began with Bruno Taut's glasshouse at the 1914 'Werkbund' exposition in Cologne. The period between Bruno Taut and Johan Thorn-Prickler, on one hand, and Heinz Mack's architectonic utopia, on the other, was marked by strong contrasts. Her study of glasspainting in the second half of the 20th century, and in particular the three post-war decades, started by referring back to Prickler. She posed two questions: What actually happened between Prickler and the present? and what is the difference between the achievements of Prickler and Meßnermann, and were there actual regressions between Prickler and the 1960s?

Studying the works of German glasspainters the speaker revealed, as well as a relationship with the architectural space of the contextual building, a stylistic comparison with contemporary trends in the art of painting. The artistic development of the period between 1900 and 1960 encompassed Art Nouveau, Expressionist, Surrealist, Constructivist, Bauhaus and, in contrast, very painterly tendencies. Looking at a selection of German architectural glass over the same period, very similar diverse tendencies can be charted within this wealth of stained glass windows from five decades. There exist links to Expressionism, Constructivism as much as lyrical abstraction, optical kinetics as well as gestural painting.

The next contribution, on behalf of Derby Studios, was by Andrea McKay: 'Glass as Fine Art in Architecture' from the Second Half of the 20th Century to the Beginning of the 21st'. She is the International Art Projects Adviser and Coordinator for the Studios, who have a 150-year history working with more than 1000 artists worldwide. She examined the role of the Studio in achieving an artist's concept and vision and the diverse range of artists requiring different techniques and approaches. She also covered the practicalities of developing commissions from ecclesiastical art to the growing number of public art projects and the use of art glass in architecture.

From the 1960s, a new sense of freedom was felt in music and fashion, and British artists were hungry for new influences, such as Brian Clarke, travelled to Germany, and encountered the work of Johannes Schreier amongst others. Realizing the importance of the 'German masters', Clarke was instrumental in introducing this work to the UK, in 1978 helping to stage the exhibition 'Glass Light', followed in 1980 by the Swansea exhibition 'Glass Masters'. The 'German style' embodied the return of the most basic elements of glass – glass, lead, and light – on a grand scale. A number of artists' works were shown to illustrate and exemplify stylistic points and materials used in projects that Derby had been involved in executing, including Johannes Schreier – one of the first artists to plate glass with Plexiglass, whose famous

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free-floating leads were not glued on the surface of the Plexiglass, but depressions were cut in the latter, which the leads sat in; Jochen Poerogen, master of the 'repeat' in glass, whose window at Wiesbaden Town Hall demonstrated the use of clear glass with silver stain and other points of colour; also Wilhelm Bosshulte, Brian Clarke and Alex Beloshchenko.

The speaker continued by explaining the diverse ways in which the Studio works with different artists. The extent of the artist's material involvement in the manufacture varies, but frequently artists will come and stay in the Derix house if they wish to execute the painting themselves, for instance. Other designers never see the piece until its installation. The speaker finished with a detailed account of the various traditional and more experimental techniques, such as lamination, fusing and printing, used to realize a piece.

The evening Glaziers' Lecture was given by Artist Alexander Beloshchenko, who discussed his work and the ideas that have influenced him, offering in-depth insights into the thought-processes and practices employed when working with glass in architecture, both for private commissions and for public competitions. (The Glazier's lecture will appear in the *Journal of Stained Glass XXXIII*.)

On day two, the morning session was chaired by Peter Cormack FSA, who introduced the first speaker, artist Patrick Reynders OBE on: 'The Vital Exchange'. This talk examined the interconnection of vision, imagination and teaching which has benefited both the arts of painting and stained glass. The speaker began by comparing the activity of sensitively interpreting another's designs versus that of realizing one's own designs, and pointed out that the one does not preclude the other; the latter is often a result of compromises between one's own ideas and those of clients. He likened this activity to the Trinity: the relationship between the trust of the Idea (the Father), the other's ideas and methods (the Son), and the process of opening to a spontaneous and creative artistic activity to personalize the statement in glass (the Holy Spirit).

Moving on, Mr Reynders elaborated on some John Piper's panels that he had executed, including those at Oundle, Coventry Cathedral and Eton College. Then a number of other examples included illustrated the need to consider the emotional content, the time sequence involved and the cultural context.

The speaker then elaborated on his personal history and discussed the evolution of his style, from his travels around France, where he was heavily influenced by non-figurative art, to his subsequent abandoning of it after reading 'After-Virtue' by Alasdair MacIntyre, as he realized that 'the truth was to be found in human beings, not in abstraction'. The talk was concluded by a selection of Mr Reynders' own autonomous designs, from Oyd and the Greek myths to his circus roundels.

Dr Donald Buttress IVO OBE, conservation architect, then spoke on the subject of glazing new glass in old windows: 'New Wine in Old Bottles' - a discussion, illustrated by examples, on the overriding need to respect the setting of a window in order to achieve an overall textual and tonal balance. He said that the architect's role here was to keep a balance in the building as a whole, because a stained glass piece thoughtlessly inserted without regards to these other elements could ruin a building, and it was sometimes necessary to say 'no' to the bright ideas of clergy and others in the wider interests of the building's context. In the context of stained glass, before the 1950s architects used to have a greater input. Pugin and Comper, for example, designed stained glass in a conceptual sense, and then handed over their designs for others to follow.

Moving on to address the subject of re-glazing, he said that there is an art to successfully 'recycling' old fragments, which both Pugin and Kempe were able to achieve. However, architectural education had suffered with respect to conservation, particularly since the rise of the avant-garde in the 1960s, and that unaltered conservationists could have a deadening effect on a building (a viewpoint that he acknowledged was controversial). A number of examples were then shown to illustrate these points, and both successful and

unsuccessful windows in old settings. The speaker then concluded with a number of pointers to artists concerned with resetting old glass.

The third speaker, Julie Sloan, returned to the platform to discuss 'Restoring the Whitefriars Windows in St Thomas's Church, New York'. This is an ambitious project, for which she is the Consultant, to restore and conserve the major scheme of stained glass (34 windows made between 1929 and 1970) by James Powell & Sons of Whitefriars for Saint Thomas's Church, Fifth Avenue, New York, next to the Museum of Modern Art. With 8600 square feet of glass, and the involvement of 12 conservation studios, this is the largest restoration project of its type ever undertaken in the United States. The restoration is being undertaken in three phases: phase 1 is the north nave, phase 2 the south, and phase 3 the chancel, above the reredos and the rose window.

The condition of the windows was first set out, then detailed particular problems concerning erecting of scaffolding and the handling of sealant putty containing asbestos. Finally she described their solution to the latter - which involved cutting through the glass fillers with a knife to separate the body of the panels from the asbestos-containing borders.

The afternoon session was chaired by David Bull, Master of the Glaziers Company. The first speaker was Peter Cormack FSA on: 'Teaching Stained Glass in the Arts & Crafts Era: "a single grain of wheat, not a whole ear of corn"'. This set out how the Arts & Crafts Movement, which originated in England in the late 19th century, had a transforming impact on the teaching of stained glass for ever half a century. For the first time, it introduced workshop practice into the education system alongside designing skills, and it reinvigorated the idea of apprenticeship - for women as well as men.

He looked at how Christopher Whall and his followers taught the craft, and with what results. Christopher Whall was known as 'daddy Whall', and he believed in having an intimate involvement with his chosen craft. From the late 1890s to 1905 he taught at the Royal College of Art (RCA) during the day as well as the Central School of Arts and Crafts, founded in 1896, during the evening. Alfred Drury - who in 1897 set up in partnership with Mary Lowmder - was first a pupil, and then became his assistant teacher and chief glazier.

The syllabus comprised three main elements: (1) cutting and glazing, mainly taught by Drury; (2) drawing from nature, and glasspainting; (3) ornament. Whall advocated looking for 'colours that make the window sing'. He further encouraged students to look at colours in nature with a 'stained glass eye'. Whall also advocated copying to students 'as a discipline'. Through such studies, pupils learned to distinguish the intricacies of colour, leading and the complexity of their design.

Among Whall's students and followers were many women, including his daughter Veronica, Mabel Esplin, Lillian Pocock and Margaret Aldrich Rope, as well as Karl Parsons, James Hogan, Eddie Nutgens, Gordon Forsyth, Henry Payne, Richard Stubbington, and others overseas including the An Túr Gloine artists and Charles Connell.

The final lecture, by Martin Harrison FSA, was titled 'The Persistence of Gothic'. He argued that interest in English 20th-century stained glass has tended to focus on the Arts & Crafts Movement or its avant-garde offshoots. Nevertheless, until the 1920s most of the stained glass supplied to churches followed more conservative idioms, rooted in the Late Gothic of Burlington & Grylls and C. E. Kempe. He considered a number of artists and firms including Comper, the Webbs and others who had continued the medieval tradition in relation to the relatively few designers who aligned themselves with Modernism and sought an abrupt break with the past.

Contributions for the next newsletter
to Chris Wyard by 10 November