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MODERN STAINED GLASS AT THE PARIS EXHIBITION, 1925

By Charles J. Connick.

(Reprinted from the *New York Times Magazine.*)

THE Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris revealed an exuberant spirit in all the crafts. Experiments shown there shocked many designers and craftsmen from the orthodox shops and factories of America. The conventional glass maker was not spared, for the rules of the art, so well established centuries ago in France, had no terrors for many of these newer creators. But their cheerful play of ideas and their delight in unusual colors, textures, and qualities of glass—many of them overlooked by more reserved designers—were interesting and diverting.

Workers in stained glass, represented in almost every large pavilion, showed a gay inventiveness in line and color, even when their task encroached upon that of the sign painter. From the simple panels of glass that advertised the various crafts of the schools in the handsome pavilion of the City of Paris, to the most elaborate stained glass window of Mauméjean in their own pavilion, the spirit of playful adventure was evident.

The American craftsman who has striven for years to replace the pictorial "Easter Lily" window with glass honestly designed in pure color as an architectural unit might easily assume a critical attitude toward this group of reckless adventurers; but if he has ever been young, and if he still enjoys the freshness and color of youth, he can find a great deal of charm in these modern expressions.

It is false to assume, however, that all the displays in the exposition were tricked out for the moment only. Any one who travels through France will find the same development in various stages throughout her towns and cities, and doubtless the same thing could be said for other countries represented.

The real importance of the exposition to us was its powerful reminder that art is not a thing to shut up in museums, but a vivid force for expression everywhere in the workaday world.

Stained glass can cheerfully announce a salesroom for exquisite textures, laces and satins, as it does in the curious arrangement of chunks and knobs and ribbons of glass set in iron and lead that almost filled the huge portal of the Pavilion des Galeries Lafayette, the work of Jaques Gruber. It can announce the characteristics of the famous cities and towns of France, as it did in the Pavillon de Tourisme. Long panels of leaded glass surrounded this pavilion, like a misplaced frieze, low enough to be easily read, yet cleverly combined in nervous, angular lead lines and black and white "print" glasses, suggestions of chateaux, cathedrals, and mountain peaks of picturesque France. They were designed by Barrillet. A bolder type, by Schneider, with color added, served equally well in the great restaurant towers and through smaller windows and panels that were to be found almost everywhere.

If this work were to be rigidly classified under that much abused word "commercial," we should never confuse it with the hackneyed patterns usually associated with that term. Here were shown in many ways—in none more clearly than in stained and leaded glass—that publicity may be directly associated with beauty of expression.

There were two great pavilions devoted entirely to stained glass. The larger one presented the work of various French artists and craftsmen. The other exhibited the work of Mauméjean Frères, a well-established firm whose work is known over all the world. They have a large workshop in Paris and another in Spain, and were represented in the Spanish pavilion by a great colourful panel of warlike fish flashing about in brilliant, bubbling water, frankly described as the reproduction of a painting by Nestor.

It is significant to recall, when considering the distinguished panels and windows Mauméjean Frères showed, that much of their work is standardised church windows and mosaics of a type familiar to American ecclesiastical architects. It is made with neat precision for an uncritical public of vast numbers, and its success would probably admit the firm to the ranks of big business as we know it.

It is encouraging, therefore, to find this great institution intent upon youthful experiments. They used new and strange color schemes in their decorative allegories, theological

and secular, designed like modern illustrations, but made significant through a daring use of large and small leads, great nuggets and slabs of glass contrasted with tiny jewelled pieces.

Here, as elsewhere, the architectural contours were strangely unfamiliar. They were more like the oblong wall space furnished by a decorator than the slender lancet and shapely panel familiar to us in churches and public buildings.

There seems to be no good reason why the handsome compositions, "L'Art" and "Le Luxe" should have been arranged on horizontal lines, unless architect and designer wished to recall the painted panel or to utilise an unusual space for a window. The gentle color scheme of violets, golds, ivories and whites threw into relief the agitation of the angular ornament and the vigorous lines that divided the figures into pleasing patterns. Although the excellent custom of announcing credits to every artist, designer and craftsman marked the exposition, these windows, great and small, were signed simply "J. and H. Mauméjean," with no reference to collaborators.

In the great pavilion next door, where glass designers of all parts of France were represented, there was bewildering array of names. Designers, cartoonists and craftsmen, even manufacturers, were all clearly announced, and some famous painters were among them. Maurice Denis's "Pieta" was sympathetically done into glass from his cartoon by Rinuy and Stevens. It had all the characteristic touches made familiar by his canvases and decorations. In both color and design it reflected the genius of the decorator of flat spaces and the inspired illustrator rather than the glassman. Shapes of glass were twisted to follow free strokes of charcoal or brush.

But Denis is a real decorator and never attempts the frank translation of canvas still life and landscape into glass, as do Auguste Matissa and Leon Paul Forgue, Louis Balmer, and François Chigot. Louis Barrillet leaves his black and white Saint-Gobain glasses to collaborate with Jacque le Chevalier in an Epiphany window, unique in architectural arrangement and reflecting his devotion to curious combinations of strips and angles. Hot violet colour seems to belong to these warring acute angles and opposing lines, but both color and angularity were somewhat foreign to the gracious subject itself.

Jacques Gruber was somewhat more successful in his

"Assumption," although its long strips of glass gave a sense of impending disaster to any one who respects the brittle tendencies of glass His "La Pêche" was a more satisfying scheme in decorative design.

An interesting comparison with Gruber's technique was to be found in the rose window of the Church of St. Jean in the modern village. It was the work of Mlle. Reyre, who made the cartoon, and of Charles Lorin of Chartres, worker in glass. The devotional spirit of this little window was unobtrusive but charming, and it was conceived in terms of lead, glass, and color, that are related to the best of the old windows of France, though it was unmistakably "modern."

A contrast with both these windows, invited by related subject-matter, was the gorgeous panel of the "Nativity" by Otto Morach in the Swiss section of the exposition. The full-organ power of that composition can be only mildly suggested by a photograph. It was done in colored glass and leads with so great a faith in daring harmonies of pure color that its sheer beauty transcended its unfamiliar, gaunt fashioning, and one remembers it with a thrill of appreciation. In color it was blue, rich and deep, tending toward violet, gold, red gold, green and vivid red, so woven and inter-related that the glow suggested the almost raucous power of Stravinsky's "Sacre du Printemps."

In the Polish Pavilion was another religious subject, "The Redemption," by Joseph Mehoffer. The upper half was devoted to a feathered dragon and the lower was divided into two horizontal panels of the Passion in a style reminiscent of Byzantine enamels. It was also vigorous in warm color and forced the craft into unfamiliar forms with little regard for tradition.

The tendency to supplement the hues of the glass itself, colored when it is molten in the pot, with enamels applied with a brush and fused lightly into the glass, is one that may be seriously questioned. The windows of Maurice Denis in the Church at Raincy, made in this manner eight or ten years ago, have already begun to "peel." The result is disastrous, as the unsightly spots can be corrected only by replacing the pieces by others that will disintegrate in their turn. The effort to fuse small bits of glass together into larger mosaics that may

be fashioned into windows, while not new, was made with some distinction by Emile and Henri Daumont-Tournel.

There were also refreshing examples of attempts to enrich the craft through the development of some qualities not generally appreciated The varying subtleties of reflection and refraction related to slight changes in glass surfaces occupied the attention of many craftsmen Schneider, Gruber, and Barrillet, I have mentioned for their work that serves as signs or announcements ; but to Gaetan Jeannin and his collaborators, Clement Mezard and Eric Bagge, should go the distinction of having presented in the Stained Glass Pavilion two unique examples of alluring fancies traced in delicate lines and textures on the pieces of plate glass enhanced by the use of black paint and gold leaf.

To most of us who delight in the inequalities of blown glass, the hard perfection of polished plate has been effective chiefly as an irritant. Equally annoying has been the etching and cutting, familiar to us in past ages when rare birds and beasts and landscapes decorated the entrances to bar-rooms, saloons, and rich men's vestibules.

No wonder we were astonished to see these resourceful French craftsmen use plate glass, with such out-worn expedients, to excellent purpose in the graceful "Fountain," etched on a huge piece of plate, and the powerful "Leopard" stalking through a jungle, direct and effective in the same materials. The fastidious might complain that this is not stained glass, although, to be sure, "The Fountain" was surrounded by an ample border of colored glass, leaded in hieroglyphic patterns. Nevertheless, here is a use of glass and light, to intrigue every lover of its play through changing textures.

A review of any craft at the exposition would not be complete without an appreciative word of the Société de Saint-Jean for its encouragement of Christian art. With its collaborating societies, Les Catholiques des Beaux Arts, L'Arche and Artisans de l'Autel, it has erected and decorated the beautiful church of St. Jean. Jacques Droz was the architect.

Many famous artists and craftsmen are well represented there. Gruber, Chigot, Denis, Stevens, Renuy, Barrillet, and Mlle. Reyre, have helped to give it distinction through windows that mark many avenues of approach to the craft. This chapel

recalls the one at Wembley, where modern English glass was more fully represented there than in Paris.

The whimsical St. Francis of Louis Davis, the cupids with wreaths by Martin Travers and work by Miss Fullylove and E. A. Bell, led one to look for some work by American craftsmen, for they are following a similar direction to equally interesting purpose.

If craftsmen and artists had been consulted when France, through the U.S. Government, invited Americans to take part in the exposition, the invitation would have had a hearty acceptance. Work from studios and workshops here, designed for American churches and residences, would have been welcomed as significant contributions to this "modern" exposition.