

New Fellow: Judith Schaechter

Judith Schaechter has worked in stained glass for 35 years since graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design in the USA. From her studio in Philadelphia she makes highly intricate and collectable exhibition pieces.

Judith's work in stained glass is internationally renowned and is represented in collections such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. She is the recipient of many grants and awards including the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and she has been inducted into the American Craft Council College of Fellows. Her stained glass has been widely exhibited, including at the Venice Biennale 2012, and has been written about extensively.

The imagery is predominantly drawn into layers of flashed glass that have been sandblasted, engraved and filed by



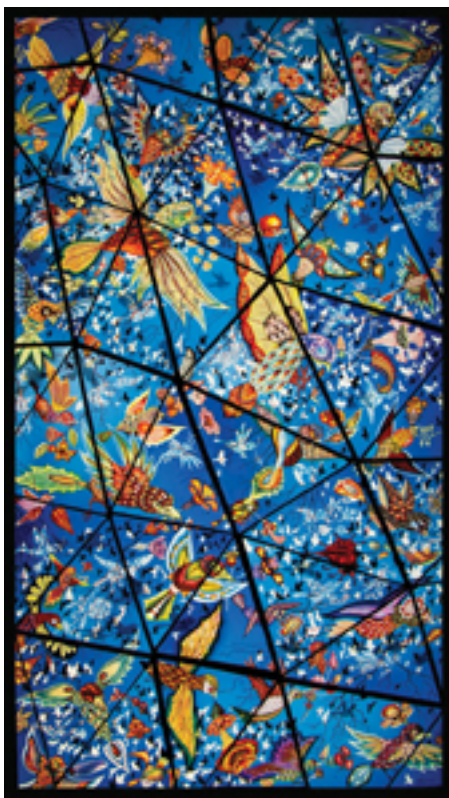
'Meadow', 2018 exhibition panel

hand with a diamond file. Up to five layers of glass are then plated together with copper-foil and soldered to create the final distinctive image. All of Judith's work is shown in framed light-boxes.

Judith describes her influences and her way of working in glass as follows:

'Without launching into the full technical explanation, I would describe my process as deriving almost entirely from traditional techniques used for centuries. The imagery is predominantly engraved into layers of glass; only the black and yellow are painted and fired on in a kiln. The pieces are soldered together in a copper foil and lead matrix.'

Much of my work is improvised and made without prior plans or sketches. Nothing is more inhibiting than the pressure to come up with some Brilliant Artistic Idea — I do a lot of doodling in front of the TV or at meetings, and this distraction frees me to mess up. All my



'Sky Life', 2019 exhibition panel.

best work seems to result from accidents and mistakes.

I don't have clear narratives in mind and I am trying to be deliberately vague, but with hindsight I can say a few things about the subject of my work. Of course, as I have said, the glass is part of that. I found the beauty of glass to be the perfect counterpoint to ugly and difficult subjects. A radiant, transparent, glowing figure is not the same as a picture of a figure (which reflects light). It's a blatant reference to holiness or some type of "supernatural" state of being. In terms of my figures, although they are intended to be ordinary people doing ordinary things, I see them as



'The Life Ecstatic' 2016, detail
(images © Judith Schaechter; quote from website: www.judithschaechter.com)



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having much in common with the old medieval windows of saints and martyrs.

They seem to be caught in a transitional moment when despair becomes hope or darkness becomes inspiration. They seem poised between the threshold of everyday reality and epiphany, caught between tragedy and comedy.

It seems my work is centered on the idea of transforming the wretched into the beautiful in theme as well as design. For me, this means taking what is typically negative — say, unspeakable grief, unbearable sentimentality, or nerve-racking ambivalence, and representing it in such a way that it is inviting and safe to contemplate and captivating to observe (to avoid ending with preposition). I am at one with those who believe art is a way of feeling one's feelings in a deeper, more poignant way.

Medieval windows sought to confer inspiration and enlightenment to those who would see it. Beholding a stained glass window can enable, encourage, and literally enact the process of being filled with light. It sounds like some kind of preternatural phenomenon, but it's a physical fact. While one is busy identifying and empathizing with the image, one also physically experiences the warming, filling sensations of light. It's so persuasive not because the pictures are convincing narratives but because the colors are overwhelming and the light is sublime... and, by golly, it's coming from inside you, it's part of you.'