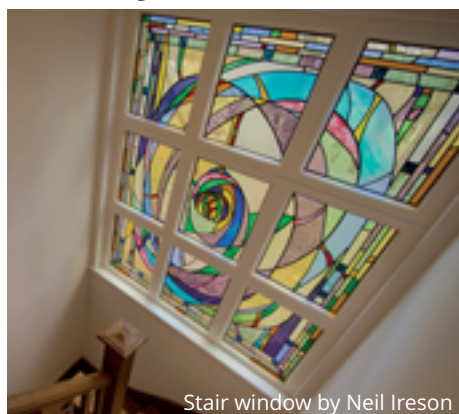


Review: Discussion Day

The 2019 Discussion Day took place at Glaziers' Hall on 31st May. We were very fortunate to have most of the Steven's Competition entries on display in the River Room and we took the opportunity to enjoy the wonderful sample panels and detailed notes. The subject this year was 'Splendid yet Intimate – stained glass for house and home'. The day was introduced by Caroline Swash, who was the co-organizer alongside Rachel Mulligan. The speakers were Neil Ireson, Rachel Mulligan, John Reyntiens and Flora Jamieson.

The first speaker was Neil Ireson. The title of his talk was 'Inspiration and the art of stained glass'. He has a fine arts background and studied stained glass under Patrick Reyntiens at Central Saint Martins. He had no planned career path and combined teaching art at Holland Park Comprehensive for several years with working in his own glass studio. His first commission came from a note pushed through a neighbour's door, which resulted in a large window for the owner's house and over the years, further commissions for his businesses. Some of his quotes were: 'if you're not enthusiastic you can't expect your client to be', 'explore positive and negative spaces', 'imagination can be used to broaden the perception of others' and 'don't under-estimate chance'.

Clients can be demanding or open-minded and you need to adapt yourself appropriately. Some design pointers were to keep an open mind and take inspiration from other artists as well as from nature and the environment in which you live. Luck and good fortune also play their part! Neil also shared some tips about installing glass panels such as using an oil-based silicone sealant and using a sheet of opal perspex polycarbonate to diffuse fluorescent light.



Stair window by Neil Ireson

The next speaker was Rachel Mulligan, who was a student of Caroline Swash at Central St Martins. The theme of her talk was 'the art of effectively presenting design ideas'. It is very important to manage expectations and your client

needs to understand that the cost of a panel will depend on the complexity of the design as well as the size. Rachel would send a few images with charges per square foot (the charge per metre would be too scary!). She would also provide a sheet of information about the process and, if the client is local, pay them a visit with a sample panel, tape measure and sketchbook. It is vital to listen carefully to the brief and then explore ideas in charcoal to build up a rapport with your client. Then price should be discussed to decide how much detail can be included and a pencil drawing created. As a goodwill gesture a deposit should be paid by your client once the price has been agreed.

Rachel will always keep her watercolour designs and ask for a contribution towards materials once price and design have been finally agreed. She would invite her client to see work in progress at her studio and even encourage them to take part in some way if appropriate. She would then photograph the final result (if she likes it!) for her portfolio. She keeps a detailed record of the hours spent on every aspect of her work in order to have evidence for her client if necessary but also to refine and improve her costings for future work.



Panel by Rachel Mulligan

After breaking for lunch at Southwark Cathedral and Borough Market we continued with a presentation by John Reyntiens who has grown up with artists in stained glass and many other fields. He recalled writing about stained glass for a school project and later, while working in a restaurant, phoning Graham Jones to ask if he could work as his assistant. He did that for a year followed by time with his father Patrick. His first commission was a heraldic design for Windsor Castle, which he had no clue how to start, but was accepted for the job – possibly because he was cheap! He went on to talk about other commissions including the restoration of Keith New windows at the Commonwealth Institute and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee window in Westminster Hall. John stressed the importance of keeping yourself known in order to move onto bigger projects.



Windows by John Reyntiens

Our last speaker was Flora Jamieson, who spoke about how she has used Instagram to build up a large following of over 30,000 for her account (@theroundwindow). She moved to Dorset in 2003 after working in a South London studio, and needed to find commissions further afield. Local advertising and emailing proved rather unfruitful, but not long after she happened upon a blog from a textile artist, which inspired her to start her own. After a few years of posting her work and sources of inspiration online, smart phones and then Instagram arrived. She stressed that Instagram is not just about having large numbers of followers, but about sharing information and connecting with others. It should be 'the shop window for your business'.

Social media shows that you are a real person and keeps you fresh in potential clients' minds, with regular updates. It conveys what you want to do and a good quality photo is very important to show the quality of your workmanship – a clean lens, natural light, straight and clear. Quality is much more important than quantity. If you have no new work to share you can post videos and photos of yourself at work in your studio, tools, sources of inspiration. Flora even renovated her studio and made it more 'Instagrammable', which generated several press features as a result. She also gave examples of who to follow – fellow artists, stained glass companies and suppliers, architects, designers and magazines. You need to engage with others and remember that social media should be a two-way street. She recommended some podcasts for further listening. Her parting advice was to 'enjoy yourself, be friendly, genuine and post regularly'. Nearly all of her commissions come via Instagram or Pinterest.

Finally, all four speakers came to the front for a Q&A session moderated by Caroline. Many thanks to the speakers and the organizers for such an interesting, informative day. Also thanks to the Worshipful Company of Glaziers for providing the beautiful venue.

Sue Shaughnessy