

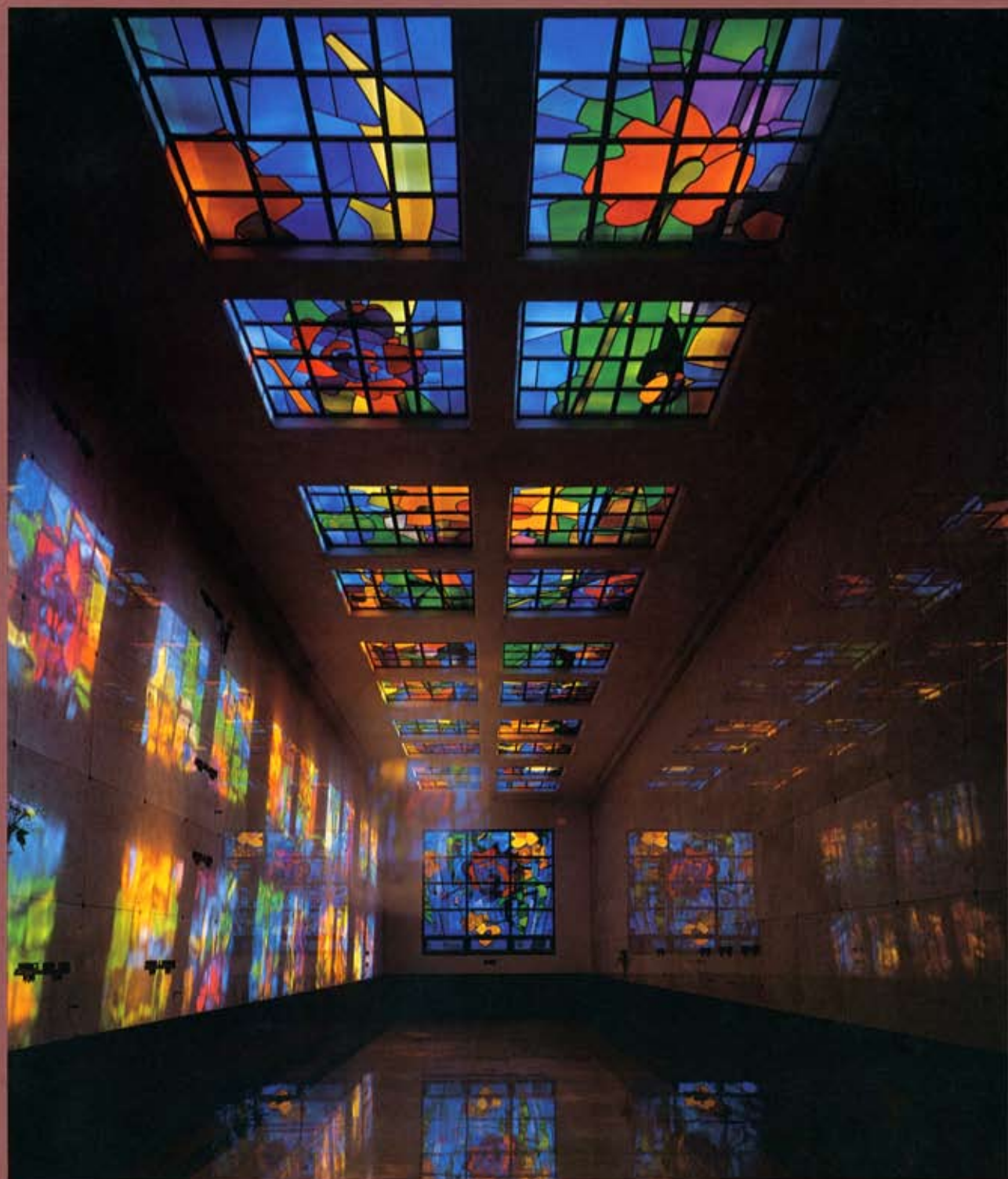
# STAINED GLASS

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# FROM GALLERY TO GALLEY

by Harriet Hyams

Last year, as I considered mounting an exhibition of stained glass panels in a gallery setting, I got some very mixed criticisms. Some of my friends and fellow artists, who had done their fair share of autonomous panels, were the least encouraging. They expressed reservations such as the expense, the time, and the notion that a gallery show is an ego trip. I also heard the classic reasons, "Stained glass is an architectural art form. It's an indulgence." And because I announced that I wanted to do the figure, they fired back, "What? The figure in glass! Everybody's doing the figure," as if doing the figure was a fad and not something carried forth from ancient times.

I also realized that a panoply of American architectural stained glass artists, Elskus, Pinart and Sowers among others, have displayed their work in galleries. So too is the exquisite work of Cocteau, Johannes Schreier and even Ludwig Schaffrath to be found in galleries. I thought Picasso worked every medium but glass; but low and behold, while traveling in southern France, I found a simple line drawing of a figure rendered by Picasso on clear glass.

I took some comfort in the fact that other, more famous stained glass artists have shown their work in galleries. I was not alone among glass artists who do architectural commissions and occasionally try out experimental projects for their own purposes or for exhibitions, knowing the work may never see the light of day after the exhibit comes down. My reasons and feelings for doing autonomous panels are not much different from what I imagine to be the reasons and feelings of others — I need and want the artistic imaginative stretching.

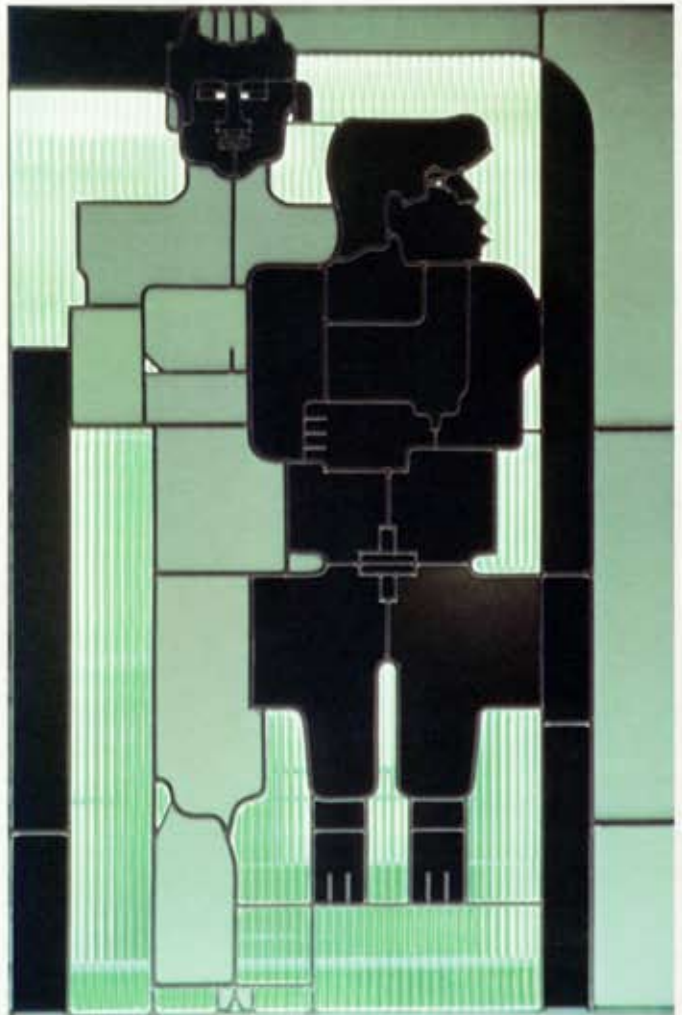
So when the trustees of the Rockland Center for the Arts in nearby Nyack, New York saw my abstract *Glas Architektur I* and invited me to exhibit stained glass panels at the center, I was resolute, that although I am primarily an architectural artist, this experience would be good for my artistic development.

As we worked out the details of modifying the exhibit space to include more natural light by removing some of the interior walls and backlighting some of the white walls, we realized that while it was not a perfect set-up, it was flexible enough to work well. Rather than exhibiting just my stained glass panels, we decided to mount a more comprehensive exhibit by including my welded steel sculpture, renderings of architectural commissions and recent figurative drawings in addition to the stained glass. It would give a more complete picture of how I worked. I was also able to deliver a lecture a week after the opening of the exhibit. This opportunity helped to clarify some of my own thoughts and discuss them with my audience.

I had abandoned doing autonomous panels several years ago because designing abstract panels became too cerebral

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*"GODDESS I" — a spontaneous feeling composition developed strictly from the artist's imagination. The work is the product of the artist's transition into intended gallery display. 35 1/4" by 48 1/4", 1988.*



*"DUALITY" — uses black on white enaille glass where the black on one side reads white on the other and vice versa. It is a transition from architectural stained glass to the "Goddess Series." 31 1/2" by 45 1/2", 1988.*





"GODDESS II" — developed from a full-sized sketch, the work exhibits a powerful palette of black opak, red and soft beige opalescent glasses. 36" by 44", 1988.



"THE OTHER WOMAN" — a 190' Australian built seafaring yacht will house the 6' 8" diameter circular skylight now being installed. The photograph is of the art rendering for this project.

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and not juicy enough. I concentrated on drawing the figure in black and white (charcoal, pencil, conté crayons). Not really knowing that I would want to translate figures into glass, I just kept on working — loving drawing for drawing's sake.

When faced with the upcoming exhibition, I knew that I would want to have new stained glass work on hand, as well as earlier work that I could borrow from former purchasers. I did not know what the new work would be, but I was intrigued by the thought of doing figurative work in glass for the first time. I have done designs with an abstract figurative content, but I knew my expression was changing and the outcome would take a new and unknown shape.

Within a short time, I designed *Duality*, a study from a design I had been experimenting with two years ago. I had my sketch, and quickly worked it into a stained glass motif in black on white enamel glass and reeded glass. The panel reads from both sides. The image reverses itself, the black changing to white and the white to black. *Duality* is a transition piece between my abstract architectural work and the *Goddess* panels, which were to come.

*Goddess I* was pure imagination. Working from a quick sketch, I honed the design to work as a glass piece and made several linear changes to retain the spontaneous feeling of the drawing. I selected seedy clear with opalescent white on clear and opalescent blue glass.

*Goddess II* came to life from a full-sized sketch I did from a model. Her coloring and regal bearing dictated the powerful palette of opak black, red and soft beige opalescent for the skin tone. I constructed all three of these new pieces before knowing the flexibility of the lighting situation at the center. Consequently, I used glass with a lot of reflective surface in the new pieces.

I also included some restrained and reflective panels from my *Glas Architektur* series of the mid-1970's, and a free-hanging colorful and expressive work *Ambiguity* made in the late 1960's. *Ambiguity* might also be described as transitional. It is more like a glass sculpture; metal being my primary medium before I started as a stained glass artist. Showing some welded steel sculpture was an interesting accompaniment to my stained glass.

If I think of each autonomous panel as a singular "lied," architectural stained glass takes on the aspect of opera, being a part of the whole. When it works — it sings! The stage is set. There is the story (any particular project or situation), music (aesthetics), lighting (natural or artificial), the stage (environment) and costumes (accessories and decor). The challenge of an architectural commission includes the client, budget, architecture, lighting, colors and textures. It is a team project with limitations and compromises as well as the benefits of the work of many creative minds and hearts.

As we mounted the show I continued to work on my architectural commissions, which at the time included a seven foot diameter skylight to be installed aboard a 190 foot seagoing yacht. The concerns and design considerations for the yacht's skylight were many and varied. I was allowed free reign in the design with the exception of the choice of colors. Gray, red, and black were specified. To this palette I added some mirror to serve the dual purpose of appearing reflective and, at times, black. The skylight is situated directly above a clear Lucite; pm spiral staircase, and is under a transparent walkway (1½' thick). There is safety glass beneath the stained glass as well. A stainless steel frame contains the stained glass and lower safety glass.

The type and placement of lighting, as well as a venting system for the heat generated by the lights, fixtures, diffusers, and dimmers were but a few of the questions to be resolved in this complex architectural installation.

Further complicating the project was the fact that I could not see or examine the space for the skylight. The yacht was being built in Australia. The architects and engineers were in Jacksonville, Florida, and the client was in New Jersey. I would have been lost without a facsimile machine to help me.

The project was a blockbuster for the entire cast: client, architect, engineers, shipbuilder, interior designers, and the others waiting in the wings, including me, of course. □

*Photographs by Charles Shimmel*