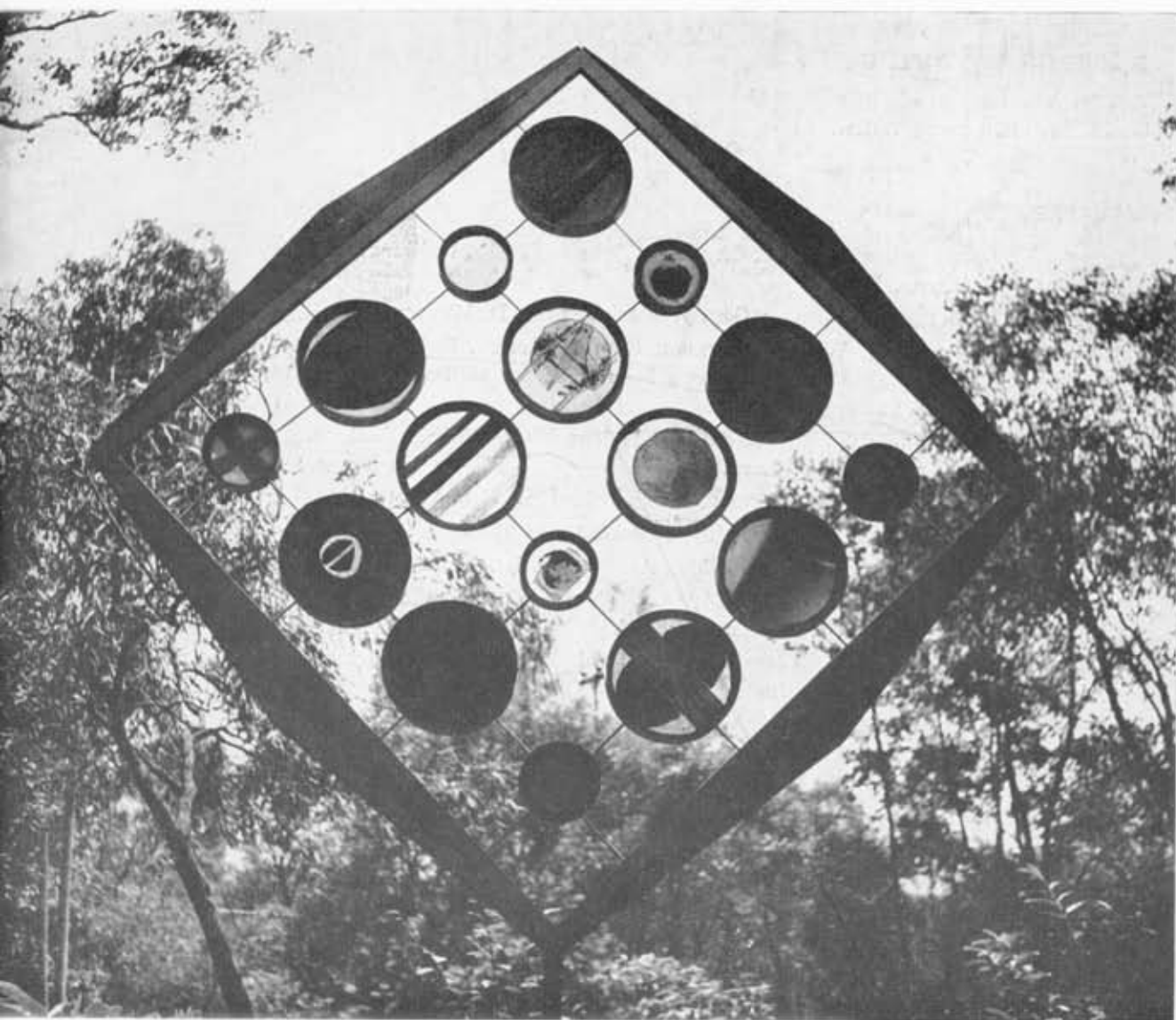


STAINED GLASS

WINTER 1975 / VOLUME 69 / NUMBER 4



charge. She is the spiritual as well as the visual "base" of the Family. There is a sense of intimacy, tranquility and the reassuring certainty of an underlying order. All this is conveyed with an easy elegance, and again, with the least amount of artistic means.

One could go further and reproduce more examples from the same codex. There is a magnificent Crucifixion on folio 117. One could also compare different formal approaches to the same subject matter by following the iconographic fate of certain motifs. One has to realize, that to pay the kind of due attention to the richness of our holdings alone, would require a lifetime of devotion. Even to attempt anything on that order would go way beyond the scope of this modest essay. Before concluding, however, I would like to offer an interpretation of an eighteenth century illumination that goes back to medieval sources and now is in the possession of the Mechitarist Monastery in Vienna. Since the request for photographic reproduction has been consistently denied, the greater is the justification to publish this striking work in one form or the other. (The original is in color). I used a modern "commercial art" technique for my interpretation. Even at the risk of not doing justice to the original, I reproduce my interpretation without any further comment (Figure 6).

This brings us to the end of our brief survey. In conclusion, one can state in good conscience that while these works hardly raise any burning issues or declare any unexpected revelations, none of them is without at least a lesson. In sum they are still guiding posts in the murky waters of commercially and "officially" promoted gimmickry, patternmaking, photoblowups and all the paraphernalia which renders our contemporary exhibitions so singularly bleak and shallow. To consider the reproduced and similar works intelligently is neither slavish imitation nor affected anachronism: It is simply salutary practice to behold good art.

A SCULPTOR TURNS TO STAINED GLASS

HARRIET HYAMS *

The article in *Stained Glass* (spring-summer, 1974) entitled *Color - Glass Imagination* by Aaron W. Godfrey brought to the fore in a cohesive way many of the areas that stained glass artists are concerned with commercially and aesthetically. He outlines intelligently, ways that colored glass and architecture can work together. The existing problem, subjectively seen from the stained glass artist's viewpoint, is to penetrate the psyche of the architects who are designing these "impersonal barns without focus." Granted, the architect's penchant for simplicity and uncluttered effects are most times reliable principles, but the possibility of colored glass sculptures in design plans is exciting to contemplate for all the reasons mentioned by Mr. Godfrey. It seems that architects are not using the reflection, refraction, and absorption properties of light in making a building truly unique. The foresight of the planner and his initiative in convincing clients to use colored light is problematic. It seems to boil down to a lack of aesthetic initiative in some respects and being unimaginatively realistic in continuing the pre-packaged ideas which some architects deem infallible.

Actually, my experience lately has been that some architects certainly are trying to extend their interest in this medium despite the severe problem of economics, and have greeted ideas to use glass enthusiastically. However, interest in an individual artist's work must exist before permanent design plans are drawn up and so it is incumbent upon the artist to introduce himself and his work to architects and discuss the problems of light at the earliest stages of design. The time element is the greatest hindrance to this plan. None of us wants to leave the studio to be salesmen too! Fortunately, many cycles of change in my work and life enabled me to extend myself in this manner.

* Harriet Hyams lives and works in Teaneck, N.J. devoting her time to stained glass. She received her B.A. from Rutgers University and her M.A. from Columbia University where she conducted a stained glass workshop for the past three years. She has had several one-woman shows and has received stained glass commissions for residences, religious buildings, and public buildings. In 1973 she was the subject of a film on stained glass photographed by Yehudi Yaniv and Itzak Sofer.

It would be more usual for an artist to arrive at stained glass through a career as a painter, but I happened on to stained glass after many years as a sculptor, carving stone, wood, and working

with metals. The purity of form and space were my main concern. With an increased interest in light, my work started to incorporate color and quite naturally the direction was toward stained glass.

With the encouragement of The Greenland Studio of New York City, I designed the windows for Temple Emeth of Teaneck, N.J. Upon the completion of this commission and none other in sight, I started on a series of stained glass panels and stained sculptures that were unique for this medium. Using natural light I constructed a series of works in luminous antique glass, leads and armatures of steel incorporated within the structure. These abstract expressionist works were exhibited at The Volkswagen of America in Englewood Cliffs, N.J. and The New York University School of Medicine. Some of these pieces were eventually sold and permanently installed. Columbia University purchased a major panel and installed it in Thorndike Hall lobby at Teachers College.

With subsequent commissions my work became known to Philip Kalker, a builder from New Jersey who commissioned me to design a stained glass wall (22 ft. x 7 1/2 ft.) for The Hallmark Building in Houston, Texas. The architectural



Windows in Hallmark Building, Houston, Texas. Designed and executed by Harriet Hyams. (Above) Lower level. (Below) Upper level. Photos Harper Leiper Studios, Houston, Texas.

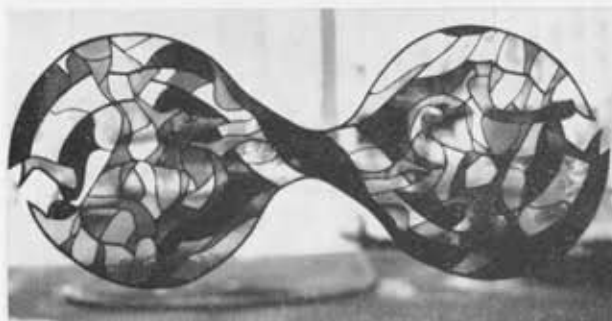


Temple Emeth windows. Teaneck, New Jersey. Photo by Christian Grube.



plans were complete and the construction of the building had been started when I was consulted, so that any plan to use natural light was ruled out. The area for my work was specifically designated with a balcony cutting the design in half. With consultation at the conception of the plan, in all probability, this glass mural might have appeared in a different relationship to the building. Realizing that the traditional use of stained glass had to be transcended in this artificially lit project, I set about to design a stained glass mural, experimenting with different back wall textures and contours and a variety of artificial luminaires. Artificial light tends to look plastic or opaque and the glass loses its liquid quality most times. My concern was to try for the most natural effect possible. Shadows and variations were important rather than uniformity of light. So with experimentation using high intensity lamps of several varieties and ultimately deciding to use a color corrected mercury vapor lamp and carefully working with foot candle measurements (which are not too reliable), I devised a method of translating artificial light to a feeling of natural light. The builder could not finance the possibility of continually modulating light, but was delighted with static "natural" lumination.

The Ingersoll-Rand Co. called me to design a stained glass window at an even later period. Their headquarters building had been completed, and was entirely decorated. They presented me with the placement of the project, the subject matter and the colors. The theme was to be a map of the world depicting the languages spoken by the peoples of the world with a specific color designating each language. Fortunately, the horizontal elongated space worked to my advantage and the design went exceedingly well with the meridians used as structural elements in the window and the colors of their interior incorpo-



Stained glass sculpture, titled *Finitude*. It hangs before natural light by stainless steel cable.



Stained glass sculpture, titled *Ambiguity*. It hangs before natural light by stainless steel cable.

rated into my design. However diminished my freedom seemed in this project because of the many requirements and the time lag in starting—the obstacles were challenging. Ideally, the best situation for the artist is to work from the beginning stage. When this is impossible, flexible creativity is needed and stained glass has many answers.

Designing for corporate art poses many problems which can be both challenging and frustrating, but it seems that the tradition of stained glass abstract expressionism is a natural dimension in corporate art. It allows the contemporary office building to retain and enhance its integrity unmarred by the more limited conventional art. Art that is suitable and in harmony with the design and function of the building can provide a positive aesthetic experience, and the continuing experience of a unique encounter. Obviously, business executives recognize these truths as proven by the emergence of organizations that specialize in buying corporate art and their emphasis in using abstract expressionist works.