

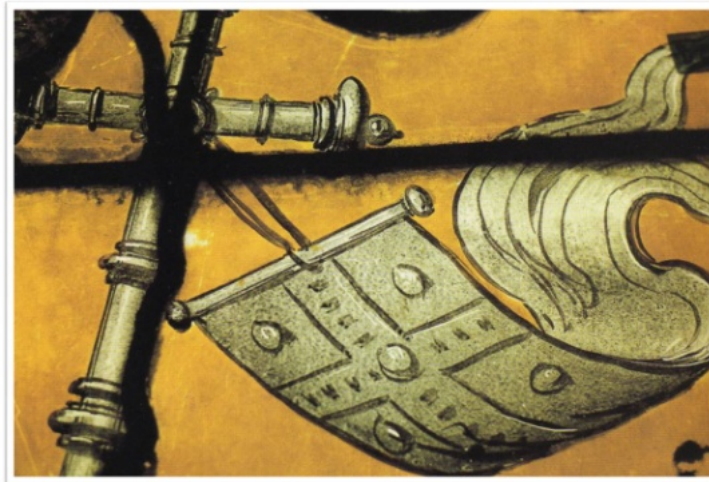


Tapestries of Colored Lights

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Abstract

Stained glass windows make an impression by pictorial and symbolic means and communicate many things to many people. These windows—first used in churches to teach the gospel story to laypeople—have evolved from a solely religious form of devotion into the secular world. Memorial windows have been commissioned in colleges, libraries, state capitols, museums, and memorials to convey the spirit of their time period. These “tapestries of colored lights”, which use images of flags, coats of arms, and other symbols, tell a story—speaking to all generations—maintaining present the history of the past.



A Brussels window of the 1530s

Tapestries of Colored Lights

Stained glass is unique because it is created by the few for the many to a level not even remotely approached by any other art form. Stained glass windows communicate many things to many people.



Figure 1

It is not easy today, when everyone can read and write, to appreciate the purpose—even the necessity—of the early church stained glass window. Those windows were designed, under the direction of the clergy, to teach the gospel story to laypeople and to make an impression by pictorial and symbolic means. The window of the Ascension (**Fig. 1**) shows figures of the Apostles on the Mount, depicted in a simple fashion, demonstrating the simplicity of the emotional reaction to a phenomenon beyond human comprehension.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, stained glass was considered a precious object; it received a place of honor in the building that housed it. Architects designed their structures to include stained glass windows which integrated architectural space and served as planes for storytelling such as in this 13th century French stained glass window depicting a battle against Protestants, displaying the French banner of fleur de lis with the Virgin Mary for protection above the battle scene (**Fig. 2**).



Figure 2

The 14th and 15th century craftsmen were turning to nature for inspiration; the classical motif was substituted by the representation of nature and contemporary life. The impersonal and universal was replaced by the humanistic viewpoint. Portraits of donors were introduced into the windows and, for the first time, heraldry made its appearance in glass. For example, in this window honoring the Three Magi (**Fig. 3**), a series of figures of kings are standing over the shields of the donors of the windows. The work, however, was still primarily dedicated to God but the individual personalities of the dedicators were no longer hidden.

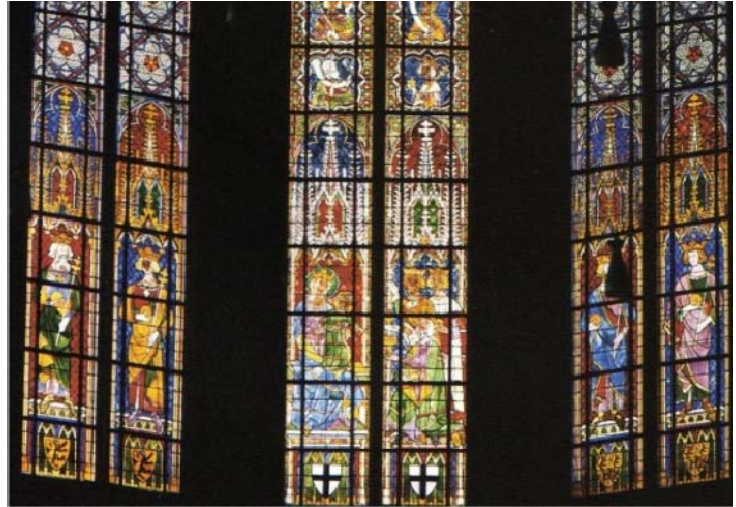


Figure 3



Figure 4

Borders were broken by alternating heraldic symbols such as the fleur de lis and leopards (**Fig 4**). At the Bourges Cathedral in France, a 15th-century stained glass window, in the shape of a fleur de lis, bears the arms of France supported by angels (**Fig. 5**).



Figure 5

Up to this point in history the dominating influence had been that of the church and the nobility; however, the power of commercial interests began to emerge in stained glass windows. Heraldry in roundels showing secular subjects came into common use to adorn the windows of the private homes of the affluent. **(Fig. 6)** Silver stain was also introduced in the early 14th century, becoming one of the most valuable techniques for window design. It was used in broad applications, such as this triumphal banner against a golden sky from a Brussels window of the 1530s.

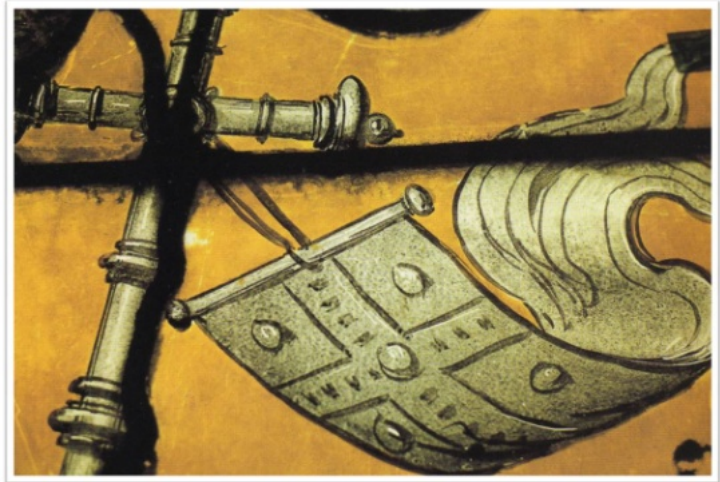


Figure 6

In the 16th and 17th centuries stained glass, probably more than any other craft, expressed the spirit of the age. One of the most popular secular outlets found by the glass painter at this time was the depiction of heraldic signs and markings. With the great numbers of princes, nobles and knights being brought together and surnames not in common use, it became essential to find a way to identify each of the many persons carrying the same given names. This was done by the use of the coat of arms. Later, after last names came into more popular use, coats of arms carried over to identify families and to add prestige and stature to an individual's lineage. As a result, we find these shields filled with symbols being placed in the glass windows of mansions, libraries, schools, etc.



Figure 7

This image **(Fig. 7)** shows an excellent example of early 17th century work. The left-hand panel shows John the Baptist and the center panel an olive tree bearing six shields, showing the descent of the heiress of Beauchamp, wife of Oliver St. John.



Figure 8

Other examples characteristic of this periods near predominant interest in heraldic emblazonment is this panel of St. Benedict with the shields of Salm-Reisserscheidt and Hoya (**Fig. 8**) and (**Fig. 9**) this window of Henry VIII surrounded by his coats of arms.



Figure 9

The growing business class of the industrial age of the 18th and 19th centuries replaced the church as patron of the arts. Secular subjects and uses for stained glass increased. When the amateur layman paid out his money for art he also wanted to dictate what it should be. In every way deterioration had set in—in quality, technique, design, and materials. By the 1800s the craft had reached what many had considered its lowest point.

However, from the mid to end of the 19th century there was a time of reexamination and revitalization, especially with regard to stained glass. The industrial era released vast amounts of money for creative artistic efforts. This Tiffany-style glass clock (**Fig. 10**) dates from the mid-19th century. According to the 32 stars, the exact period would be 1858–1859. The 13 stripes have been carefully delineated in the body of the flag, although only five stripes appear in the back fold of the flag.



Figure 10

During this period many new churches were built and many existing ones were restored. Countless church widows were commissioned. A window at a church in Virginia (**Fig. 11**) features St. John below the state seal of Virginia. In the 1870s stained glass coincided with the enormous religious fervor which swept over the United States. In 1875 alone over 4,000 churches of all denominations were under construction, each proudly embellished with memorials to former respected members of the congregation and clergy.

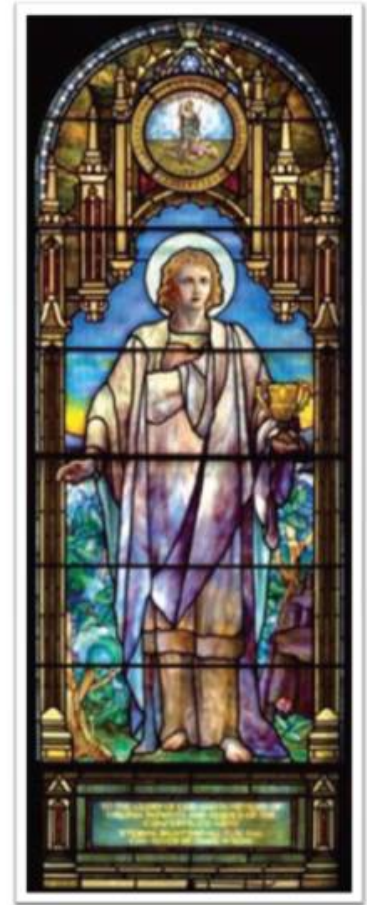


Figure 11



Figure 12

This Episcopal interpretation of a knightly St. George (**Fig. 12**) bears his characteristic sign of the red cross. In Britain, St. George's symbol of the red cross on a white flag has been incorporated into the national flag and the George Cross is one of the highest awards given for bravery. St. George came to represent in England the ultimate protector of purity, honor, and the nation. That imagery can be seen in American Episcopal churches and also in non-denominational contexts, where the battle of the soldier slaying the dragon came to symbolize other forms of struggle.

In a basilica in Nowy Sacz, Poland (**Fig. 13**), you will find this magnificent stained-glass door. This door is a tribute to two archbishops of Krakow—one the first Polish cardinal and the other the first Polish pope. The window on the left shows the coat of arms of Pope John Paul II and the panel on the right shows the arms of Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki (Oleshnitsky) (1389–1455), the first cardinal of Poland.



Figure 13



Figure 14A



Figure 14B

In the secular world, construction kept pace. New colleges, libraries, and state capitols had to be built and decorated. Decorative windows became highly fashionable as a form of domestic beautification. The window on the left at Harvard University entitled “Student and Soldier” (**Fig. 14A**) shows in the left half a student dressed in black and in the right half a soldier with a gray tunic bearing a red cross on his chest. He holds a staff with a gray and black banner. The window on the right “The Battle Window” (**Fig. 14B**) shows a classical warrior—in his right hand he holds a sword and in his left a staff with a dark red banner horizontally above his head. Both windows emphasize the heroism of those who died in the Civil War and the courage of the Harvard men who fought in that War.



Figure 15

Often roundels (drawings on a single glass sheet) were favored for secular installations. The Fairhaven High School in Massachusetts, displays a series of emblems of the States of the Union in its stairwell including this seal of North Carolina (**Fig. 15**).



Figure 16

A stained glass window in the Cadet Chapel at West Point Military Academy (**Fig. 16**) depicts a uniformed soldier standing in front of a United States Flag.



Figure 17

Stained glass windows could also be found in homes, shops, railroad stations—even steamships. There was scarcely a respectable house whose entrance did not boast a stained glass window or door (**Fig. 17**).

An early American work is a window at Trinity Church, in Milton, Connecticut, (**Fig. 18A**) which shows a standard religious symbol, the Paschal Lamb holding its flag. The coat of arms of Puerto Rico (**Fig. 18B**) and the flag of San Juan (**Fig. 18C**) both have, as their principal charge, the Paschal Lamb, which represents Jesus Christ and St. John the Baptist. It was natural to place the Paschal Lamb on the shield of Puerto Rico, because it was originally called the Island of St. John the Baptist.



Figure 18A



Figure 18B



Figure 18C



Figure 19

The interest and appreciation of stained glass continued in the 20th century. Modern viewers wanted to see their own values and priorities reflected in the stories depicted in the windows. The complex theological programs of the 12th century or the episodic stories of the saints in the 13th century were no longer as significant as they once had been. After World Wars I and II, memorial windows to the fallen were commissioned. **Fig. 19** is a World War I memorial to all who served in the American Armed Forces and to the nuns and nurses who cared for them on the battlefields. At the right of the scene are soldiers and sailors arriving on shore bearing the American flag and supporting

the wounded. To the left are other soldiers and a Sister of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul tending to a fallen nurse.

In this church, the stained glass created after the Second World War shows the emblem of the 17th Airborne Division (**Fig. 20**), which fought in the region of Bastogne, Luxembourg. The flag appears as a way for the people of Bastogne to express their thanks to Americans for what they did in the Battle of the Bulge and remains a lasting symbol of the sacrifice of American soldiers who died for the sake of their freedom.



Figure 20

At a Soviet war memorial in Berlin, Germany (**Fig. 21**), a multicolored skylight composed of hundreds of different pieces of colored glass reproduces the coat of arms of the Soviet Union. Immediately after the end of World War II, three large Soviet memorials were built in Berlin to commemorate the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. More than 13,000 officers and soldiers of the Red Army who were killed in the last stages of the war in Berlin in April and May 1945, including 120 women, were buried here at this military cemetery. Memorial events and wreath-laying ceremonies continue today for the Soviet victims of the war.



Figure 21

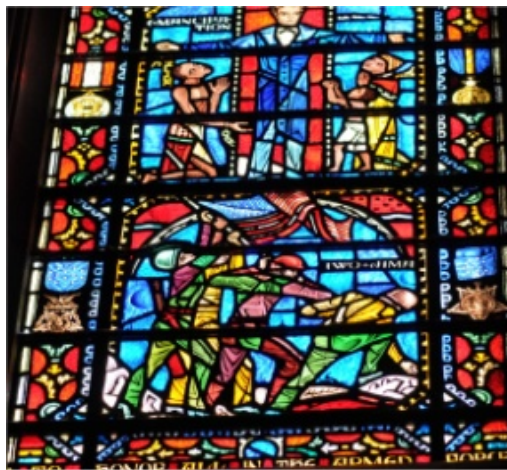


Figure 22

The War Memorial Chapel at the Washington National Cathedral is home to numerous stained glass depictions of moments in American military history. This frame shows Marines raising the flag during the Battle of Iwo Jima (**Fig. 22**).

A memorial stained glass window of the 366th Infantry Regiment (**Fig. 23**), an all-black unit that saw action in North Africa and Italy during World War II, is in the chapel on the campus of Howard University in Washington, DC, the *alma mater* of many of the officers.



Figure 23



Figure 24

At the national headquarters of the American Red Cross (**Fig. 24**) a stained glass window depicts a Red Cross knight administering aid to a wounded comrade with the flag of the American Red Cross waving above the scene.

Since the end of World War II stained glass in America has come of age. In terms of quantity more decorative colored glass windows are now being made and installed in the United States than in the rest of the world combined. That work is primarily a history, setting down for the record the events that have led up to the present blossoming of the craft in the United States.



Figure 25A

These two windows are among several windows at the First Congregational Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that represent various scenes in American history. **Fig. 25A** depicts President Abraham Lincoln delivering his Gettysburg Address on 19 November 1863, at the site of the Civil War battlefield and **Fig. 25B** illustrates the legend of Betsy Ross, sewing the new American flag, with the inscription “June 14, 1777”, the date the design was approved by Congress.



Figure 25B



Figure 26

The geographic reach of architectural glass has spread worldwide from shopping malls in Rio de Janeiro, sports centers in Tokyo, to a stained-glass window of the Saudi Arabian national flag in the King Fahd Cultural Center (**Fig. 26**).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, support for stained glass art has become more secularized. The new century began with a widespread desire to formulate new modes of expression unencumbered by the artistic language of the past. Today, artists working with window design are also creating architectural sculpture, bringing the material into three dimensions. This one-of-a-kind mosaic window (**Fig. 27**),



Figure 27

which dominates the entrance of the Masonic Center in San Francisco, tells the story of the people who traveled by land and sea and helped to establish California Freemasonry. This historical window features thousands of bits of metal, parchment, felt, linen, silk, natural foliage, thinly sliced vegetable matter, shells, and sea life, plus 180 colors of stained glass including the 48-star flag of the United States and the state flag of California. The lower portion of the mosaic is composed of actual gravel and soil from the 58 counties of California and the Islands of Hawaii.

Stained glass windows are both beautiful and informative. Still regarded as essentially a medieval art, stained glass has a universality and timelessness that rises above any given period. Stained glass conveys a clear statement of the spirit and religious view of their time period.



Figure 28

As a memorial to those who lost their lives on 11 September 2001 (**Fig. 28**), two 11 ½ foot steel beams, salvaged from the New York City Twin Towers, flank the world's largest stained glass American flag (29 feet tall), located at the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics in Kansas. After the attacks, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg presented the steel beams to former Senator Dole as a gift of appreciation for his work with President William Clinton on the Families of Freedom Scholarship Fund, which provides post-secondary scholarships for the children of September 11 victims. An engineer for the World Trade Center in New York City has identified the original location of the two steel support beams—originally supporting floors 58 to 61 in Tower One. The columns appear exactly as when recovered from Ground Zero—coated with flame retardant foam, jet fuel, and debris.

Looking back at the history of stained glass, both its beauty and its social importance resonate through the choice of image and placement within the building. A precious material in the Middle Ages and a valued commission for the artisan in the modern world, the stained glass window is a source of contemporary delight even as it retains an ability to make present the past. When the workmanship is good and traditionally pure in form, it lives on to set an example for future generations. These tapestries of colored lights, which incorporate images of flags and other symbols, speak to all generations and, since they live for centuries, they speak of things that not only matter but continue to matter and, thus, will be forever new.

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About the Author

TERRI MALGIERI has been the Publications and Artwork Manager at the Flag Research Center, Winchester, Massachusetts, since 1993. She is the graphic designer of *The Flag Bulletin*, the journal published by the Center, and has been the graphic artist for several books written and published by Dr. Whitney Smith. She accompanies Dr. Smith on research trips, organizes special projects, and is involved in the long-term decisions, analysis, and future planning for the Center.

