

FP. 2

Challenges with the Exhibition of Stained Glass: A Discussion among Researchers, Conservators, and Craftspersons

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Défis dans l'exposition du vitrail – un colloque entre chercheurs, conservateurs et artisans - Résumé

Dans le monde contemporain des musées, l'exposition de vitraux, en particulier de panneaux historiques, est remise en question par les tendances modernes. Les musées s'éloignent des galeries permanentes qui présentent des périodes historiques ; ils valorisent des espaces plus changeants, favorisant souvent les expositions thématiques juxtaposant les cultures et les médiums. Les exigences physiques de l'exposition du verre rendent ces œuvres beaucoup moins susceptibles d'être incluses dans un tel mélange. Il est peu probable que les professionnels des musées préconisent des dépenses supplémentaires pour un média qu'ils considèrent comme spécialisé. En outre, souvent des conservateurs ne sont pas familiers avec les approches conceptuelles exigées pour des fenêtres médiévales ou de la

Renaissance où la connaissance de la religion, le patronage et le cadre original devraient être évoqués. En effet, la forte présence de l'iconographie chrétienne dans le milieu du verre exacerbe encore sa marginalisation. Si nous facilitons la mécanique de cette exposition, nous pourrions peut-être atténuer cette situation. Avec l'aide des collègues, ce poster présente des schémas d'exposition temporaire et à long terme artificiellement conçu. Il met l'accent sur la disponibilité de panneaux LED pratiques et peu coûteux comme sources lumineuses et matériaux contemporains qui peuvent être utilisés efficacement. En outre, les critères d'exposition au niveau des musées peuvent être différents de ceux d'une église qui souhaiterait afficher des fenêtres historiques à partir d'un site maintenant détruit ou inaccessible. Pour les puissants et les impuissants, aidons à allumer la lumière !

Challenges with the Exhibition of Stained Glass: A Discussion among Researchers, Conservators, and Craftspersons – Abstract

The exhibition of stained glass in museums and even in some areas of functioning buildings is dependent on ensuring its visibility. This poster strives to encourage cooperation especially among members of the Corpus Vitrearum and members of the Forum who have been involved with display of windows in venues other than their original positions. The hope is to encourage us to be proactive and to realize that our colleagues in museums and preservation agencies are unfamiliar with the medium of stained glass. Invariably when people are confronted with new experiences, especially if they are in positions of

authority, they avoid them. We need to seize the opportunity that has opened up with access to light sources that do not bring heat; the LED has liberated possibilities of display. If there were some approved models in circulation, possibly even through a website, institutions may learn that stained glass could be exhibited without prohibitive expenses. Glass from an abandoned church might be incorporated in the entrance way of another building. Paintings, drawings and windows may be brought together in the same exhibit. Experience has shown that viewers are invariably fascinated by the medium and not at all intimidated by unfamiliar, or religious, subject matter. This poster has been developed with cooperative colleagues, for whom I am most grateful.

Fear and Neglect

The exhibition of stained glass in museums and even in some areas of functioning buildings is dependent on ensuring its visibility. In the contemporary world of museums, displaying stained glass, especially historic panels, is challenged by trends in exhibition philosophy. Museums are moving away from permanent galleries that profile historic periods to more changeable spaces, often favoring thematic displays juxtaposing cultures and mediums. The physical demands of exhibiting glass make it far less likely to be included in such a mix. Museum professionals are unlikely to advocate additional expense for a medium which they see as specialized. Most curators possess expertise in the areas of the decorative arts – furniture, silver, or porcelain. This makes them unfamiliar with the approaches demanded for the display of medieval or Renaissance windows where knowledge of religion, patronage, and original setting should be evoked. In addition, we are witnessing increasing criticism of the period and material we study as “Euro-centric” and not in line with the present need to understand global cultures. Indeed, the strong presence of Christian iconography in the medium of glass further exacerbates its marginalization. We are faced with professionals and a public who are untrained, and a political climate that sees Christianity as both a dominant culture and unchanging. Thus, the fascinating display of different approaches to affective piety, theological discourse, and political and social self-identity is less and less before the public. This poster presents schemes of temporary and long-term

artificially designed display. It will focus on the availability of practical and low-cost LED panels as light sources and contemporary materials. Museum-level criteria may not be necessary for a church which would wish to display historic windows from a now destroyed or inaccessible site. For the powerful and the powerless, let us help to turn on the light!

Several missed opportunities

I have been working over many years, benefiting from the expertise of Corpus Vitrearum colleagues, to catalogue the collections of windows in the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Two recent exhibitions at the Getty Museum should have showcased stained glass brilliantly. In November 2019, *Balthazar: A Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance Art* focused on the *Adoration of the Magi* in manuscripts and paintings including the Getty's Book of Hours from Provence, France, about 1480–90; Georges Trubert. Studio of Jean Bourdichon, Andrea Mantegna, painting, Italy, about 1495–1505, Ottonian manuscript from Regensburg, Germany, about 1030–40, Rubens study for the head of Balthazar about 1609–11. Stained glass in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art could easily have been included. An *Adoration of the Magi* from the canton of Glarus, Switzerland, dated 1612 – complete with an inscription establishing that it was given by Caspar Gallaty Knight; His Royal Majesty of France and Navarre appointed [him] Field Colonel 1612) Switzerland, canton of Glarus. Small, only 35.6 × 22.9cm (14 × 9in.), a light box with the panel could have been a striking complement to the small-scale manuscripts. The panel was part of the William Randolph Hearst Collection (45.21.35).

The second exhibition was of drawings: *Marks of Collaboration: Drawings in Context* February 5–April 14, 2019 at the Getty Center. *Ecce Homo, the King Caspar, the Virgin and Child and the Arms of the Families Kündig and Pfyffer*. Murer's drawing is part of a large and important series of stained glass donors' windows designed for the cloister of the Cistercian abbey of Rathausen (canton Lucerne). Sixty-seven panels were fabricated before 1611 by Franz Fallenter, after the designs of Daniel Lindtmayer, Hans Heinrich Wagman, and Christoph Murer, among others. The window after the drawing is preserved in Schloss Heidegg, Switzerland and bears initials of Fallenter and date (FF 1593). The Los Angeles County Museum of Art owns four well-preserved panels from Rathausen, including a stunning *Adoration of the Magi*, with the same signature (FF). None were included in the exhibit. As stained glass, it presented too foreign a material and a challenge to engage in the mechanics of installation. Alas, a moment of reunion that, from our standpoint as historians of glass, should have been an essential element, was thwarted.

Collegial Communications

Linda Canon of Glasgow reports a number of installations of stained glass in museum settings: <https://lindacannonstainedglass.com/museum-work/>. In 2019 she couriered, and helped to install, seven Pre-Raphaelite works of art (tapestry, stained glass, prints, drawings and a painting) from the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester to the Mitsubishi Museum in Tokyo. She reports that the exhibition was a three month and three venue traveling exhibition, and her “very simple display method worked a treat, despite some very dodgy wood composite materials being provided. The trick is to maximize the ventilation top and bottom within the case to a) to get rid of acetic acid fumes and b) to get rid of any heat buildup” (fig. 1). She states “In my experience, as long as you follow these two rules, everything is fine. The Tokyo exhibition box could not have been made any simpler nor cheaper. If you give the problem to specialist museum designers, you can pay mega-bucks for something which looks no better and may well not work.”

Her last comment is something that I believe can find resonance with many Forum and Corpus members. In museums the exhibition designer can be very territorial about seeking help from professionals with long-standing experience outside the museum. Even more, site of worship are hard pressed to funding or expertise and are often intimidated by what they see and “becoming a museum.” The need to be encouraged to display historic treasure through the simplest, but also safest means possible.

Léonie Seliger, of Canterbury reports on long experience of installing windows outside of their architectural settings. She also commented on her admiration for the Vitromusée Romont in Switzerland. It uses 360-degree accessible displays, even some panels hanging at eye level suspended on chains in the middle of their display spaces, with no safety barriers at all. We agree that it is marvelous that in Switzerland people can be trusted not to abuse that trust!

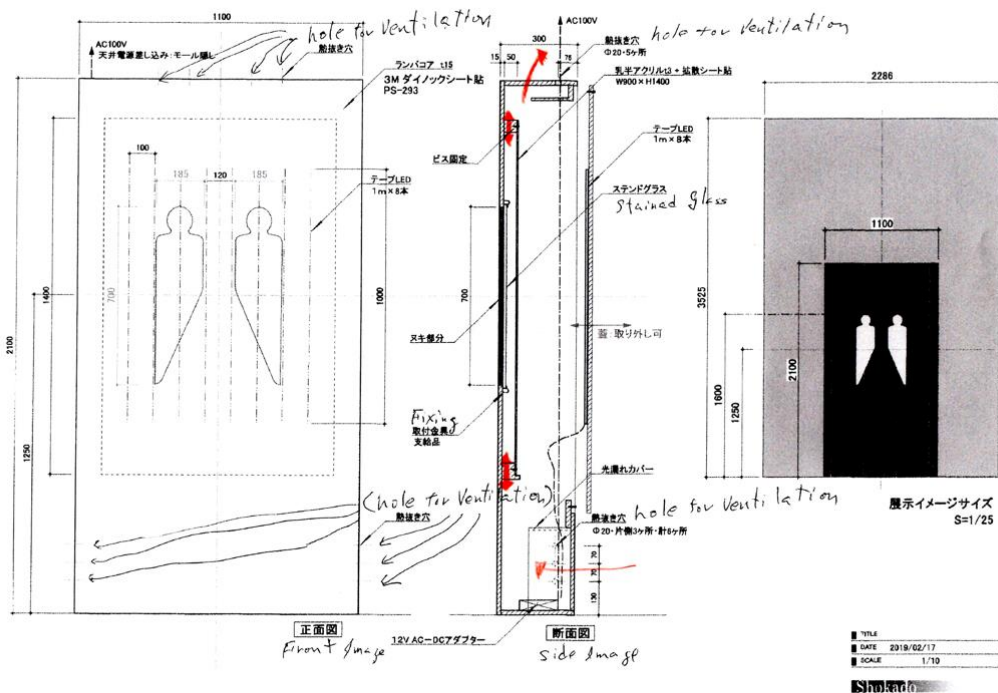


Fig. 1. Diagram of light box for Pre-Raphaelite stained glass, Mitsubishi Museum in Tokyo, 2019. Courtesy of Linda Canon.

Lighting: “All of displays at Canterbury used LED light panels with low heat development which was easily controlled via hidden ventilation slots. In addition, Canterbury still uses many of the LED light panels in its working light benches in the conservation studio. The modern ones have a very good life span. The color is not daylight, but slightly warmer than daylight. Canterbury found that daylight LEDs actually look too cold.”

Safety: “The Crypt display had to have laminate safety glass in front of the stained glass to prevent people touching. The Crypt is a large space with many side chapels and pillars, so although cathedral volunteers are always somewhere in that space, they did not necessarily always have a direct sight line of the displays. We had to clean the safety glass at least once a week; a lot of people did not realize it was there due to the low ambient light, and tried to touch the stained glass.”

Popular reception: “The free-standing single panel display was part of The Ancestors, a legacy of the *Radiant Light* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (fig. 2). They very kindly donated to us their display case for our panel after their exhibition finished. The original inspiration came from a display I had seen about forty years ago in Frankfurt, which kick-started my fascination with medieval stained glass, and I am glad to report that it had the same effect on others: the freestanding panel was one of the most popular displays at the Getty, the Metropolitan, and again in Canterbury, with people spending on average significantly longer looking at it than they did looking at the displays that could only be seen from one side. The Ancestors were displayed without safety glazing, as the exhibition was always closely invigilated, and we installed discreet railings (not yet in place on the images) to prevent people from mounting the plinth of the exhibition tower. The high levels of ambient light in the Chapterhouse would have created very large reflections on safety glazing.”

Others are in communication, including Kathy Jordan, at Willet Hauser, and President of the American Glass Guild 2020-21, who communicated her enthusiasm for seeing more glass displayed in sites other than architectural openings. Janet Lipstreu, General Operations Director, Whitney Stained Glass Studio, Inc., Cleveland has reinstalled Tiffany windows in new setting through the use of LED sheets. The shift from incandescent bulbs to LED made a significant difference on viewing a large Wisteria window and an Apple Blossom laylight in the Nemaconlin Resort, Farmington Pennsylvania. Like others she recommends a rheostat for intensity and the ability to move from warm or cool light. Don Samick, of Lamb Studios, Midland Park, New Jersey has also been involved in the new ways to install and illuminate.

Virginia C. Raguin USA, in cooperation with International Corpus Vitrearum colleagues.



Fig. 2. The Ancestors, free-standing display of Canterbury windows, developed by the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the exhibition Radiant Light, 2014-2015. Reproduced courtesy of the Chapter, Canterbury Cathedral.

