



A Modern Artist with a Medieval Influence

by Sandra Sick

CONCEALED IN ANY CITY IS A WEALTH OF HISTORY AND KNOWLEDGE LEFT BY, OR PASSED DOWN

BY those who lived there before. When you walk through the streets of Prague and admire the amazing buildings, you can see and feel much of this history. But in all reality, unless you look deeper, explore in-depth, read more and meet the experts, you only have a piece of the story.

Working on one of these many incredible streets in Prague, in an atelier with an unbelievable history, is Fred Schendel, a young and skilled stained glass artist. We all know doctors and lawyers, teachers and technology workers, but stained glass artists are few and far between.

Stained glass refers to the material made from coloured glass or the craft of working with this type of glass. This is an art form dating back a thousand years and originally was most often used in the windows of cathedrals, churches and other important buildings around the world. Technically, stained glass is glass which has been coloured by adding metallic salts during the manufacturing process. The individual sheets of glass are cut into small pieces that are arranged to form a pattern or picture and are held in place by strips of lead. As an added feature, some stained glasswork also includes painted details (fused to the glass with the use of a kiln) to enhance the design. The design itself may be figurative or abstract and we often see works that incorporate narratives taken from the bible, history or other literature.

Some date the earliest documented stained glass reference back to the Phoenicians, but it is more likely that Egyptian or Mesopotamian potters accidentally discovered glass when firing their vessels. The earliest known man made glass is in the form of Egyptian beads from between 2750 and 2625 BC.

Regardless of the exact date or group of artists who first worked with stained glass, we are fortunate to see and enjoy many great works in Europe that have stood the test of time. One of the oldest known examples of multiple pieces of coloured glass used in a window were unearthed at St. Paul's Monastery in Jarrow, England, founded in 686 AD. The oldest complete European windows found are thought to be five relatively sophisticated figures in Augsburg Cathedral in Germany.

There are many great books and websites with extensive information on the history of this wonderful art form but speaking with Fred was an added bonus to hear about, as well as to see, many great samples of stained glass. Fred was born in Reims, France in 1975 and as a child was exposed to many wonderful cathedrals, museums and art in France and other countries. When he was 15 he saw a very important stained glass exhibit at the Musée de Cluny in Paris. Fred said "It was a shock. Stained glass was just a piece of art to me. But up close, seeing the details, I fell in love with it."

Fred studied history while at University in Paris with a focus on medieval history. His interest and desire to work with glass grew and grew and he began looking for a mentor. He continued his University studies, took additional classes and started to experiment with working with glass. During this time, Fred worked with many different types of glass as well as with enamel painting on glass achieving a more medieval look in some of his pieces of art.

During this period of study and experimentation, Fred spent a great deal of time at the Bibliothèque Forney in Paris. Founded in 1886, this library is devoted to the decorative arts, to those in art professions and to the fine arts.

Looking for additional exposure to the great masters and masterpieces of stained glass, Fred started his journey across Europe. Very much in the manner of the compagnons of the Middle Ages - the craftsman who would tour France and Europe to learn their craft - Fred made his way first to Barcelona, and eventually arrived in Prague. He currently works for a legendary stained glass workshop in Prague 1. The workshop has been in business since 1935 and has worked on all types of highly visible stained glass projects, including the windows of St. Vitus' Cathedral. The workshop was founded to renovate these illustrious windows.

As a stained glass artist today, he works on restoration projects as well as creating new works. Stained glass work takes time, imagination, the love of the art form and attention to detail. Artists work with many challenging factors such as extremes of temperatures when working in the workshop or installing new windows. It is often very cold in cathedrals and placing new stained glass

is patient work. There are also many tools and devices involved with this type of art, therefore the artist must pay great attention when working with historic drawings or glass and when using blow torches and other instruments.

Stained glass art can also be seen as illuminated wall decorations. Like paintings, sculpture, carvings and every other art form, there are specific talents and skills needed. I asked Fred what he enjoys best about this art form. "For me, I enjoy the art of developing something from the beginning to the end and being able to see the results. The project is a story in a design."

Fred gives stained glass workshops in French, Spanish and English where you can learn much more about this art form, as well as create your own stained glass art. The classes are informative, hands-on and very interesting. Find out more about the upcoming workshops at www.chefracedinvitro.com/coursadultes.html or visit Fred's website at www.chefracedinvitro.com. ■



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