

Poster:

Challenges in Exhibiting Stained Glass: Fear and Neglect

The exhibition of stained glass in museums and even in some areas of functioning buildings is dependent on insuring its visibility. This can be compromised by renovations within a building or adjacent construction to the building that blocks the light source. 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 public who are untrained, and a political climate that sees Christianity as both 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.

If we make the mechanics of display easier, perhaps we can mitigate this situation. This poster will present 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 that can be used efficiently. Our major museums have policies that may need revisiting. In addition, 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 powerhouses and the powerless, let us help to turn on the light!

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