

The Lost Art

The art and craft of stained glass has something in common with Mark Twain: the rumors of its death have been greatly exaggerated. If you believe the rumors, then you might think that stained glass cannot today achieve the same high quality as seen in the European cathedrals built hundreds of years ago. You might have heard another rumor that real stained glass has been replaced with plastic. You may have even heard that no one really “does” stained glass anymore and that all stained glass comes from one or two suppliers.



These rumors — like most rumors that are untrue — are based on misunderstanding, assumption and misinformation. Stained glass is alive and well; the studios that are good enough to call themselves Accredited Members of the

Stained Glass Association of America are today producing windows in America that are every bit as good as those seen in the European cathedrals. There are poor imitators of stained glass out there, yet no other material is as durable, beautiful and — in the long run — as affordable as glass. Finally, as a quick glance at the membership lists of the SGAA will show, there are a great many people who are today creating beautiful stained glass windows, custom tailored to the needs of their clients.

At first glance, these rumors can be frightening when one is preparing to commission stained glass. When these rumors — and the rumors that derive

from these rumors — are examined, however, they quickly become more humorous than frightening... humorous, that is, until one realizes that it is exactly this sort of misinformation that keeps the beauty of stained glass from being enjoyed on a much more widespread basis.

Stained glass is both an ancient fine art and a craft. Stained glass can bring beauty, joy and inspiration into one's life. It is truly a shame that more people do not benefit on a daily basis from all that stained glass has to offer.

The first great stained glass falsehood is the belief that stained glass today is not of the quality seen in the cathedrals built in times past. This unfortunate misunderstanding no doubt stems from what people often encounter that masquerades as stained glass. While it is possible to see quality stained glass at the myriad craft shows and fairs across the country, one will just as often see some scrap of colored glass with a pewter figurine in the shape of one or another mythological creature glued to it and passed off as stained glass. It is unfortunate that these poor cousins to art glass are so often what one encounters as stained glass. Today — just as it has always been — work of varying quality is being produced, from the sublime to the trinket.

What is even more unfortunate is that these scraps and bits are compared to the stained glass windows in a gothic cathedral. Just as a craft fair is not a cathedral, so too is a glass jewelry box not a cathedral window. To see quality stained glass, one should go not to the fair, but to the buildings in which stained glass is a part. To quickly find locations where quality stained glass can be seen, contact sev-