

Essay Written 6000 words
Illuminating the Value of
Stained-glass

How 12th Century and 21st century
stained-glass is appreciated

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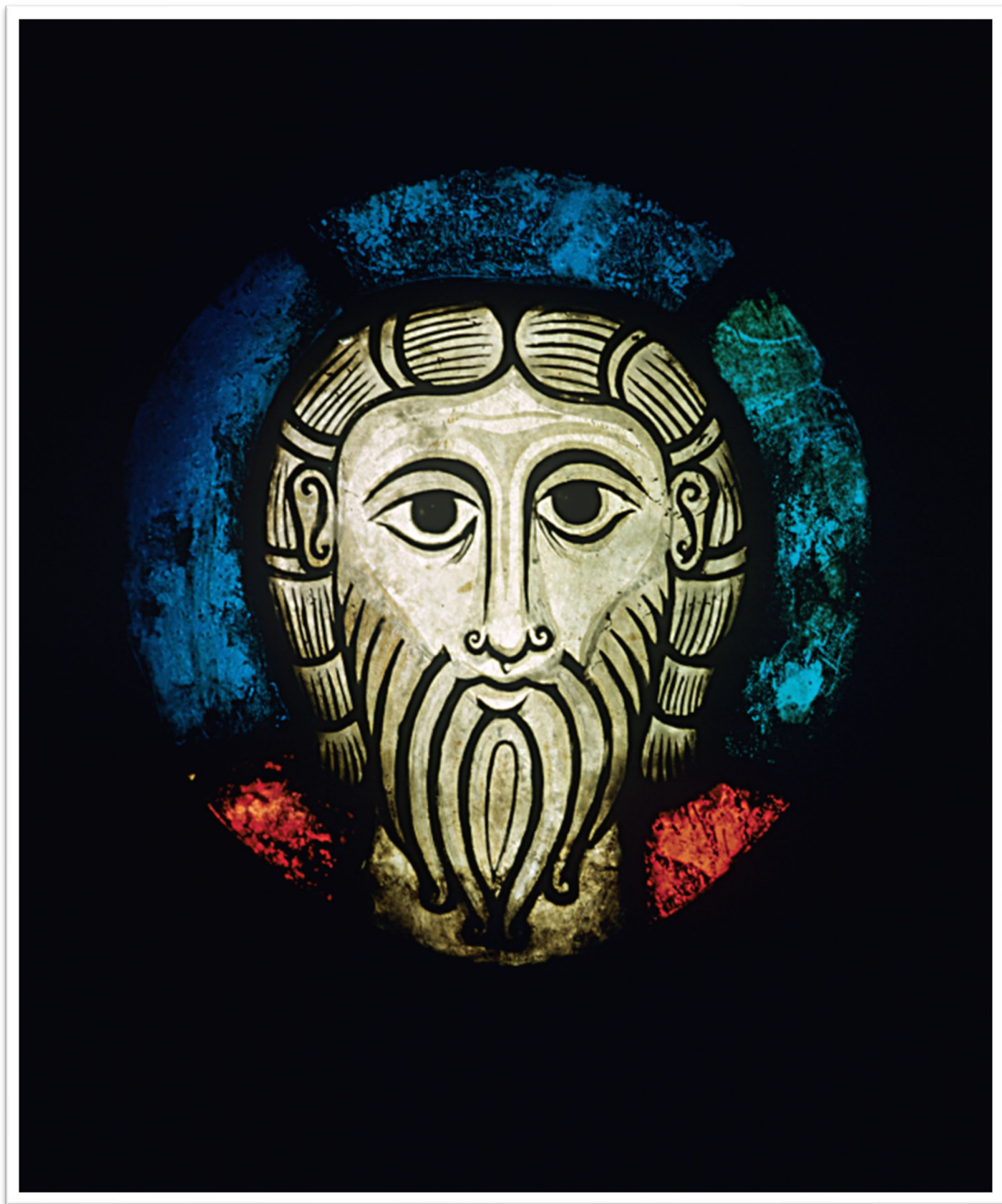


Fig. 1, Unknown Artist, Head of Christ, (late eleventh or early twelfth century)

Introduction

In this essay, the contextual importance of stained glass will be shown through the evaluation and contrast of twelfth-century and twenty-first-century glass. Primarily, it is an investigation into the history of stained glass, from the mediaeval ages into the contemporary. I undertake this essay by setting a touchstone; I refer to the methods of assembling stained glass and expand upon how this vibrant, sharp and ultimately fragile material is created. Pondering on distinctions between then and now leads me into a gathering of questions; what techniques were used? Who made it? How was it used? What is the purpose of stained glass?

This essay investigates these questions by analysing the 12th-century techniques of Theophilus, a Germanic Monk whose work, art, and writings display the views and production of stained glass of the time. Theophilus has written not just on how to create such work but has given details and ideas about his source of inspiration. This section will enclose the themes of religion and tradition as a basis for glass. Subsequently, I will compare this with the contemporary. We will then snap forward into the present day and examine ways in which contemporary artists such as Flora Jamison, Jonathan Michael Ray and Kehinde Wiley use this historic medium. I will lead the reader into an evaluation of contemporary trends in valuing stained glass.

Lastly, I will critically evaluate the value of stained glass through comparison of these two primary points in time: 12th-century and 21st-century. This evaluation leads me to my current belief that due to social changes in the way religion, governmental systems and tales are viewed, stained glass is no longer revered in the way it might have been in the mediaeval ages. However, it still holds an aesthetic and symbolic value in contemporary times.

Chapter One

What do I mean by *value*? I will use the Cambridge Dictionary definition of *value* as “the importance or worth of something” to define the *value* of stained glass. I will evaluate this medium's historical, religious, technical, and symbolic significance concerning stained glass.

It is vital to start this written work by analysing the creation of stained glass using historical and modern methods. We first research the way glass is created to uncover the contradictions and similarities of how it is formed inside the artistic studio, and how it affects the artist's work with the medium, thereby changing the result. As a consequence, both technical and non-material experiences have changed.

We begin this contextual research chapter with the interesting Germanic monk from the twelfth century, Theophilus. The writings he created during the early half of the century have informed students of the past and present — split into three books: painting, glass and metalwork, each having a preface, catalogue and near step-by-step instructions, they

have all come together to be known as his famous “De Diversis Artibus “ or, *On Diverse Arts*.

Originally in Latin, it was later translated into English by Robert Hendrie in 1847. This specific translation is widely used academically and often reprinted. This information is taken from the modern reprint of the latter author. He mentions noteworthy things, such as *The Lost Chapters*, in which Hendrie states that chapters Xii – XV of the work had undergone abstraction (page 163); this leads to a gap in historical knowledge. Theophilus has been accredited with achieving pioneer status in pushing stained glass into the academic field. The first book describes techniques in painting. From the mixing of shades, the planning of a portrait and the layering of a setting to achieve desired results.

The first book on painting is described to us in the preface as a ‘mentor’ with the hopes of teaching the reader about the composition of colours, mixtures and inventions with the goal of increasing artistic skill (Theophilus, page 59). The beginning of the preface in the second book on glass describes Theophilus’s thoughts on learning. As summarised, the preface talks about using this book as an appreciation of skill “which God has conferred upon man”. This does not take away from the actuality that labour is required for this skill. Theophilus suggests that once this labour is placed into the arts, “excellence awaits them”. As artists face various hardships, the book teaches them to embrace all of its teachings with ‘ardenti amore’ (Latin meaning to be so extraordinarily passionate or enthusiastic that your love burns). The ending paragraph serves the reader with such a sense of understanding and insight into not only the worship practised by Theophilus, but also highlights appreciation for the artists that came before the contemporary ones of today. This can explicitly be seen in the lines “neither through love of human approbation nor through desire of temporal reward [...] nor have I kept back anything reserved for myself alone [...] hastened to aid the necessities of many men.”

In the preface of the second book, Theophilus warns that treating art with a lack of respect and an air of loathness will make way for sacrileges repugnant in the eyes of God. I specifically want to discuss and explain the preface briefly — using the Apostle Paul as an example of whom Theophilus desires to imitate he states, “I, desiring to be the imitator of this man, have approached the porch of holy Sophia, and beheld the chancel filled with every variety of divers colours” (Theophilus, page 117). The Holy Sophia is a symbol of wisdom closely linked to the Hagia Sophia, the mosque in Istanbul. The chancel full of colours refers to the light of stained glass.

In his book, “De Diversis Artibus” Theophilus describes the fascinating evolution of glass-making. “Should you intend to make glass, first cut a quantity of beech-wood logs and dry them. Then burn them together in a clean spot, and carefully collecting the ashes,” (Theophilus, page 118). In the beginning, ordinary fine sand is mixed with a flux,

such as ash, accelerating the heating process. This process, which we now call glass-making, aligns similarly with contemporary methods.

The writing of Theophilus tells us that the repeated heating of glass creates darker shades of purple (an example crucial to my own physical work). This technique is unlike modern methods of colouring glass, where chemicals such as manganese are used in specific scientific quantities. Progressing into chapter five of his book, he presents a technique used in modern glass making. A hollow pipe is used, onto which a glass vase is placed on one end while the artist blows air on the opposite side. The blowing of air through this metal cylinder stretches the glass to a point where it can easily be shaped by pressing it into a flat stone or a piece of wood.

In chapter 17, 'Of composing windows', Theophilus describes the steps to creating a table big enough for the length of a window by drawing out a design that pleases the artist, and layering glass over the design made with chalk and water. The figures are drawn with lead or tin, followed by black or red pigments. The artist should make sure to note down what colours, signs, and symbols are needed for later referral. The end goal is to be able to perceive this drawing through the glass. In the following chapters, Theophilus guides us through his writing on creating cuts in the glass. The embellishment of the glass and setting of the steps for eventually uniting the glass is placed in chapter 27. In this chapter, Theophilus explains how to unite these vibrant pieces with lead rods; this is done using a "soldering iron which is long and slender, but at the end thick and small" (Theophilus, chapter 27, page 153). As described, the glazier can solder the pieces together by taking the hot iron and tin to the glass — this summary introduces the methods of creating stained glass. Unfortunately, going into further detail is beyond the scope of this essay.

The Stained and Decorative Glass by Elizabeth Morris describes a modern way of creating stained glass, such as flat glass, which though similar to the techniques of Theophilus, its difference arises when we talk about molten glass being pressed into flat glass rather than the medieval technique of blowing and pushing it into a flat mould. However, what Theophilus describes in the second book is glass tablets. As Morris describes on page 13, the 1950s invention of flat glass has taken over all previous methods. On a bed of molten tin, liquid glass is floated upon and squashed down into tablets. Though I have not made stained glass from scratch (although it does intrigue me to place theory into practice), I have used glass panels in various colours, opacities and textures made by other professionals.

We would need many supplies to make stained glass in the 21st century. Fortunately, we can easily find such supplies.

I will use *The Creative Glass Guild* as an example for where stained glass artists can buy materials for the purpose of discussing the prices of creating stained glass. Other companies would fit the vague criteria of selling stained glass supplies, yet this one has the easiest interface for listing what is included in a kit for starting a large variety of glass panes. The 'stained glass starter kit' includes: a glass cutter, grozing pliers, safety glasses, glass marker pen, lead Vice, Horse Shoe Nails, Tallow Flux, Black Graphite Polish, five sticks of solder, Led Light Cement, a bag of Whiting, lead knife, cutting square, all nova/fid, 1 Round lead cane, 1 Flat lead cane, Practice Glass and lastly a small selection of free glass. This in total comes round to a grand price of £393.56. (creativeglassguild.co.uk). This price is, at the time of writing this essay, current prices in the material cost alone needed for the creation of stained glass artworks.

The initial use of stained glass was for religious purposes. The commissioners were either The Government, The Monarchy or The Church as can be noted by the location of the glass itself. At the same time, other affluent families could afford stained glass, such as the families of wealthy merchants. Such wealth could award you a place onto glass.



Fig. 2, *Children In Peace Window, Bossanyi Window*, (2025)

The glass was often installed within a church or cathedral. Churches, with their priests and archbishops, would have regulated the subjects of stained glass by suggesting what stories were to be told. The messages and symbolism of 12th century glass correlates to the Bible as sources of information. History has, however, been captured in glass outside of the Bible—for example, the tales of Thomas Beckett. At Christ Church Cathedral, in Oxford, England, the viewer can see the Beckett windows, depicting the martyrdom of the saint. (Oxford Dictionary of Saints, page 505-506) Whereas in a more modern

example, the Bossanyi Windows, located at the southeastern transept, in Canterbury Cathedral, England were installed in 1960 and created by Ervin Bossanyi, a Hungarian artist who had suffered in both world wars. (Bossanyi window, canterbury-archaeology.org.uk).

The purpose of stained glass has served a multitude of reasons. While being described as a wall decoration, it also serves a purpose for the community. It is art, as well as literature. Stained glass and the use of luminescence as symbols of the divine light of God is another important section of 12th-century values. The book *The Gothic Cathedral* by Otto von Simson tells the reader on page 129 that those who take part in the building have “the illumination of their souls by the vision of the divine harmony”. Simson also describes Abbot Suger’s views on light and his architectural decisions. Suger is referred to as a patron of the arts during the refurbishment and reconstruction of the Saint-Denis from 1137 to 1148. Philippe de Montebello, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art who then went on to retire in 2008, introduces the book ‘Abbot Suger and Saint Denis: A Symposium’ by telling us that “Suger directly brought about the birth of Gothic art.” On page 119, Simson refers to Suger as someone “infatuated with light.” Stating that the designs of Suger had both beauty and theological significance. To expand on this, he informs the reader of “Lux Nova,” which Suger has used to reference Christ and allusions to the afterlife and physical light. Lux Nova is the Latin term that stands for ‘new light’. The use of this term has given stained glass a hastened value during the 12th century.

The value of stained glass concerning 12th-century practices is one of divine value — stained glass has been viewed as a way for the divinity of God to wash and bathe the church and its congregation via this illuminated wall.

Some artists are left unknown when discussing older glass works — it is a mystery. Historians and conservators have pieced together signatures that tell us of any links between windows, whether intentional or not, as artists have their ingrained stylistic habits. Famous stained-glass pieces from the 12th century include *The Head of Christ* (figure 1), whose creator is unknown. Historians have methods of identifying glass pieces based on signatures, though these only became popular among the glaziers of the 1500s onwards (Chris Parkinson, 2020).

In the later chapters of the book *A Thousand Years of Stained Glass*, Catherine Brisac tells us about contemporary trends in stained glass from 1945 until the present day. The author begins by describing how stained glass was destroyed during the world wars, or other periods of unrest, as well as subsequent iconoclasm leading to the replacement of the work with contemporary stained-glass artists. Brisac points out that due to the way artists were commissioned, the art was highly ‘academic’, and the resulting glass was a utilization of technique devoid of sentimental value. This way, we ignore the inherent bond between colour and light, and life and divinity. Brisac also describes how artists

tried to prevent stained glass from becoming ‘*moribund*’. The word comes from the 18th century and describes the ‘*mori*’ as the dying of something, in this case, stained glass. Therefore, bringing up interesting questions about using stained glass as a ‘life’. The symbolic correlation between light and life brings questions of philosophy and theology. The idea that stained glass is representative of a part of a living entity is one that piques curiosity.

Chapter two

The following artworks will highlight a noticeable shift from the incredibly intricate designs of the past to a more simplistic contemporary one. The following artists demonstrate a more individualistic approach, each bringing their unique perspective to the medium. There is a conceptual difference in how 21st-century artists approach this medium compared to mediaeval artists – it is not so much that artists have willingly stopped being taught in glass; more so, stained glass has become inaccessible. Specifically, the craft has joined the ‘endangered crafts’ list provided by heritage-crafts, an international charity working towards a future where heritage crafts are promoted and supported (Heritage Crafts, 2024). The British Society of Master Glass Painters list the threats towards stained glass as being ageing practitioners with few possibilities of funding apprentices, a lack of and rising cost of raw materials, and a decline in ‘relevance’ in the modern world (Mulligan, 2023). This lack of relevance is primarily due to the decline of society’s reliance on religion. Although the techniques have been modified, which comes naturally with using new materials and design tools, the reasons for creating them have changed over this period. Contemporary trends in stained glass have evolved into a more personal matter, a more individualistic and intimate response to the value of art.



Fig. 3, *Crux*, Jonathan Michael Ray, (2023)

Jonathan Michael Ray is a UK-based artist living and working in Cornwall. His artistic works consist the mediums of video, photography, drawing, sculpture and craft.

According to his website (jonathanmichaelray.com), his work is a shuffle of tales, artefacts, historical references, and materials he has collected and discovered. Figure 3 presents a mosaic stained-glass piece created using 'collaged' shards. This collage technique is less about placing pieces where they 'should' fit and more about playing with edges and creating an abundance of these dark lines which are significant strips of lead that were soldered together. If we look to Figure 3, from Ray's exhibition, *The Voice in the Shadows* (2023), we can see that the artist has used these contours to form the square turned on its axis – this geometric element within a seemingly chaotic piece demonstrates a deep understanding of the structure of a cathedral and in turn the way stained glass is framed. According to Abbot Suger, Gothic cathedrals, specifically the decorative architecture surrounding the windows, have a similar purpose of framing stained glass, such as the frames that border paintings. Ray's work also draws inspiration from early masons who would carve their signatures into stone blocks as seals; he has replicated these symbols.

Taking bits of stained glass and collaging them together keeps the historical use of the stained glass and pays attention to ways in which paintings and historical buildings are conserved. This conservation happens via the integration of new, modern glass with older, medieval glass in places where the original has deteriorated. The conservator will attempt to match the initial stylistic and technical choices.



Fig. 4, *Séance (Full House)*, Jonathan Michael Ray, (2022)

The artist includes carved bricks, lattice windows, and elements of geometry. A specific etched glass window that should be mentioned is the one Ray exhibits titled "*Séance (full house)*". The figures and symbols etched into the glass are very faint. As we observe the

video on his website, we can see where Ray plays with light and shadow. By intentionally directing the audience to view the shadow cast on the wall behind these etched windows, the artist pays motion to the intentions of stained glass from the 12th century as an illuminated wall that casts light. Another thing the artist also plays with is texture, the use of etching is a form of craft used in contemporary times. The church of St Nicholas in Dorset has several windows created with engraving. The use of this more modern technique in creating 'stained' glass windows shows the progression towards valuing the imagery present in these windows rather than technical skill.

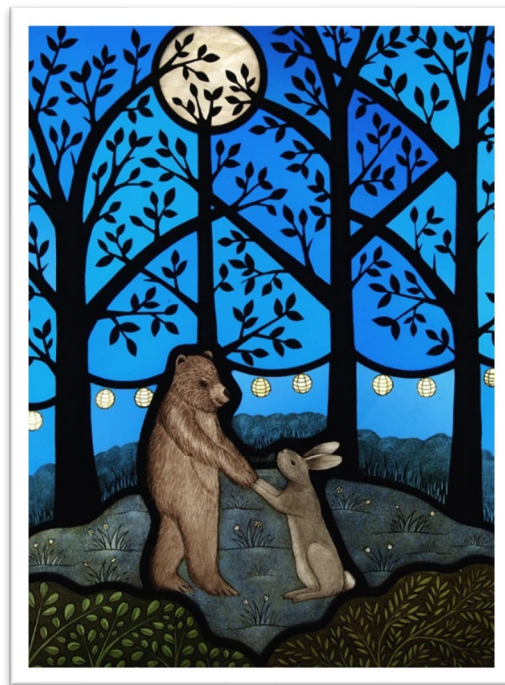


Fig. 5, Flora Jamieson, Bear & Rabbit, stained glass (Unknown date)

Flora Jamieson creates contemporary stained glass inspired by the 16th and 20th centuries and restores pieces in conversation with churches and private owners.

According to her website (florajamieson.co.uk), her contemporary works are made in consultation with the concepts and ideas of her clients, turning their stories into windows that hold a profound sense of significance in which a commemoration of life events turned into glass, symbolise the fragility of these memories. A customer commissioned the *Bear & Rabbit* (Figure 5) stained glass window as a wedding gift. Under the assumption that the animals are a stand-in for a couple to be wed, using animals as symbols of this unity is closer to the medieval ages than thought. Animals like the rabbit have long been used with symbolic intentionality.

To state the similarities between 21st-century contemporary stained glass artists and those of the 12th century we find their concepts and ideas relate directly to who their clients were. The church, for example, works with the images of the Bible, such as Saints, Christ, and God, whereas in the case of Flora Jamieson, she uses her client's ideas, which are secular in nature. With that, she is making her clients' stories more personal and sentimental.

The artistic choice to represent the couple as animals simultaneously hides and discloses traits about the people they represent. By subverting the appearance of who the bear and the rabbit represent, Jamieson provides a veil of privacy not found within 12th-century art, for the stained glass of this period is one to publicise all. In contrast with the art of then, Jamieson hides what is usually revealed. On the other hand, Jamieson also gives the viewer more information about the representation of the people. The bear and the rabbit have common cultural and social connotations that prevail today.

Flora Jamieson also restores stained glass windows. Some of her restorations include missing chunks of stained glass windows that are repaired via the replication of glass in the style of the original artists. While these are not explicitly 12th-century stained glass pieces, the fact that Jamieson is looking back in time and being informed by this creates a more meaningful impact on their contemporary work. As artists, we are constantly influenced by what is behind us and what might be in front of us. The way artist's styles and preferences are impacted by work that predates them is one that brings about conversation. There is an appreciation for Jamieson's restoration of glass and its influence on contemporary glass. In this instance, the heritage craft of stained glass is continuously being given life, not in an readily evident way, but in a visually aesthetic similarity.

By aesthetic, there is a reference to a series of observable tropes that stained glass particularly holds. Firstly, a set of dark lines follow the figures in the glass, framing sections in the glass or taking over with grids. Technically speaking, these lines are a crucial part of stained glass; they are, in fact, the lead soldering that holds the panels together. These lines take one of three observable directions for most stained glass in contemporary settings. They are integrated as part of the work itself, where the artist seeks at times to 'hide' these lines within the work itself (*Figure 5*); the lead is considered a significant segment of a whole (*Figure 3*) and lastly, where the lead is there solely for stable necessity, it aims to be symbolic as a motif and then wildly passed over for the panels it shapes (*Figure 6*).



Fig. 6, Kehinde Wiley, "Go", 2020.

A New York based contemporary painter, Kehinde Wiley's work has direct thematic and aesthetic themes to that of stained glass. They use portraiture across all areas of their art. Wiley's commissioned work in Moynihan Train Hall, Entrance Hall, New York, shows excellent technical skill. This commissioned work is shown in *Figure 5*, unlike the traditional, medieval way of painting on stained glass, which involves using various layers of powdered paint mixed with a solvent to build layers that are fired slowly. Unfortunately, due to the gap in Theophilus's chapters, we have no records of what chemicals were used in the 12th century. In the 21st century, artists use enamel and silver stain paints.

According to Wiley's description of his work, the stained glass was designed to recreate 18th-century ceiling frescos from Europe. This leads to another side of Wiley's practice, where he increases the representation of darker skin tones within glass. From the 12th century until now, the world of art lacks this representation; however, it is not wholly devoid of darker skin tones in stained glass. During the 15th century, the stained glass window *The Adoration of the Magi*, currently being held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, depicts part of a scene showing "*The Adoration of the Magi before the Virgin and Child*", as depicted in *Figure 7*.

Wiley also uses "breakdance" and the "modern Black body" to offer a new and unique view on the evolution of modern culture and art history (Kehinde Wiley, 2020). Wiley describes this as a convergence of "the epic and the intimate".

This artist was chosen because of their work's scale and luminosity. Using such a large installation space alongside their habit of creating with huge canvases adorned in intricate patterns and vibrant colours, in their portraits, the backgrounds sometimes crawl their way over the figures in a tight embrace. Giving the reader more to look at, the viewer's eye does not remain in one place but flows with the paint. Of this maximalist

ornamental design, I also correlate the background of the paintings with the frames and ornamental designs seen within 12th-century stained glass.

By looking closely at some of the 12th-century stained glass spoken about in this essay, it is to be discovered that the background is not flat and visually textureless. The glass has patterns, and if one observes Figure 6, it can be found that stained glass is quite maximalist and has been in the past. By using the term maximalist, there is an implication of an abundance of these details that do not add any significance to the work, instead making it cluttered. To this, the connection that stained glass has to 12th-century Gothic architecture must be forwarded. An essay written by Irene Scalbert titled *The Nature of the Gothic* talks explicitly about the Gothic Cathedral, which houses stained glass as part of an organism, as a living and breathing entity, the process of its creation, and its survival. An extract of this essay describes how the rib vaulting that takes place inside a cathedral is like a network of blood. The value of stained glass within this context is that it is part of a body, one intricately designed.



Fig. 7, *The Adoration of the Magi*, V&A South Kensington (1500)

It is a contemporary trend to remove these details, and several artists, such as Brian Clarke, Henri Matisse and Gerhard Richter, have gone for a more simplistic approach to their stained glass. This lack of ornamental design signifies that contemporary artists are moving away from highly detailed and intricate pieces and into ideas of spirituality through less visual means. However, as noticed by the artists I chose for this specific

essay, there is an appreciation of meaning through intricate designs. The designs are part of the meaning and a crucial message vital to the work.



Fig. 8, Detail from the border of a window, Île-de-France, Victoria and Albert Museum , (1140 – 44)

Chapter three

Stained glass has become further expanded in practical and decorative functions, for glass has been enlisted as a way of pictorially divulging the doctrines of Christianity, serving a similar purpose to frescos, allowing the artist to create a series of illuminated symbolic histories while concentrating on biblical stories (corresponding with pictures of illuminated manuscripts seen during the same period). Interestingly, stained glass can be dated similarly to paintings; the study of pigments and stylistic choices of 'foliage' can tell an investigative viewer the date of creation of particular stained glass windows (Bernard Rackham, 1957, page 10).

One thing stained glass has sought to do in the 12th century was to illuminate the core beliefs of Christianity (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2025). Stained glass was used to show beliefs and tell tales of miracles and empowerment while also being a medium. For example, this essay frequently speaks of tales and legends of the saints and the monarchy. It would not be incorrect to think of stained glass as a storybook, where a respected figure tells a story while a viewer looks at images. This intends to fill a gap in the illiteracy found within medieval times. As previously stated earlier in the essay, stained glass is not just a medium but also literature, a matter of religious symbolism and cultural importance. For every bit of a cathedral, in this case, stained glass is important in painting a holy picture.

Stained glass has specific methods of being read as literature. The book '*The stained glass windows of Canterbury Cathedral*' by Bernard Rackham explains precisely how this older medium is to be read. Using Rackham's transcriptions of stained glass, the viewer, or in this case, the reader follows the story of the North Choir Triforium on page 32; as seen in figure nine, the window would have three central circles. These circles date back to around the 1200s and depict the lives of sainted archbishops Dunstan and Alphege.

According to Rackham, the first circle on the left shows the following: King Edwy's release from Hell and Dunstan in mitre and vestments beckoning the king, who among the figures and flames emerges the jaws of Hell, crowned. It also depicts other victims dragged away by demons. The second circle, which is the far right one, depicts "an ordination scene" (page 35); depicted in full vestments, the archbishop stands before an altar upon which a book and chalice are depicted, extending his hand towards the kneeling priest who holds a chalice. Lastly, the third circle, situated in the centre and above the two, depicts the division of stricter Monks from the secular Clerks (Rackham, page 35).

In the 21st century, this is changing; art focuses more on the subjectivity of aesthetic beauty. In contemporary stained glass, this subjectivity refers to the diverse interpretations and personal experiences that viewers bring to the art rather than a universally accepted standard of beauty. By this, I mean the quality of contemporary stained glass has become a wildly debated subject. While holding high skill, the artists I have discussed do not seek to give viewers a sense of religious value. Whether they would like to remove themselves from this religious element or otherwise, it becomes nigh impossible to do so. Stained glass has a deeply entangled history with religion, and the connotations of religious symbolism will persist. Even after nine centuries, stained glass has been unable to remove itself from this relationship. Instead, it had nearly died during its 'trial' of removing itself and turning to the purely academic.

Like in the case of Ray and Wiley, an air of spirituality is still present. To add Jamieson to this bundle, I must emphasise the use of history that all three artists refer to as a foundation of their inspiration. The artists refer to history as their inspiration in differing ways. Ray directly takes history and recontextualises it within the contemporary gallery space; Jamieson has the history of traditional glass as a part of her contextual research and is the only contemporary conservator mentioned in this essay. Wiley directly states the inspiration and period from which he bases his work as informed by art seen inside the church.

In the 21st century, where the medium is more so something to be painted on or something to paint with, the symbolism and the intentionality of glass have not been carried across through the centuries. This does not mean the stained glass is wholly unreligious or unspiritual. There is an indication of spirituality in the contemporary world. I must reiterate that this spirituality is not purely deliberate. The craft of stained glass was a dying art and is now considered a heritage craft. The Morris and Co. Foundation, founded by William Morris, plays a crucial role in preserving heritage crafts. It offers scholarships for people practising older crafts that may be on the brink of dying (such as masonry).

Back in the 12th century, and to talk about its relation to the broader public, the glass was indicative of divine light; the places where the population would see glass would be in public spaces such as churches and cathedrals. It is a tool used to teach biblical stories, give people hope and warnings of the future as well as impact their daily lives. One significance of stained glass in the 12th century is its value to the community; it brings people together over a familiar story that has a moral message on some level. Again, this differs from the contemporary glass art of the 21st century, which is more privatised and less about the public. It does not teach future generations how they should live their lives or how they should not. As seen by the artists talked about, it is isolated; it goes straight from the creator to the purchaser, and there is little possibility of contact with the broader population. Hence, these pieces, sometimes small as they are, gain significance for the individual.

Though contemporary stained glass is still installed in public areas, on a larger scale, most works have since been replaced by other art, a common theme in the exhibiting of contemporary glass outside religious spaces.

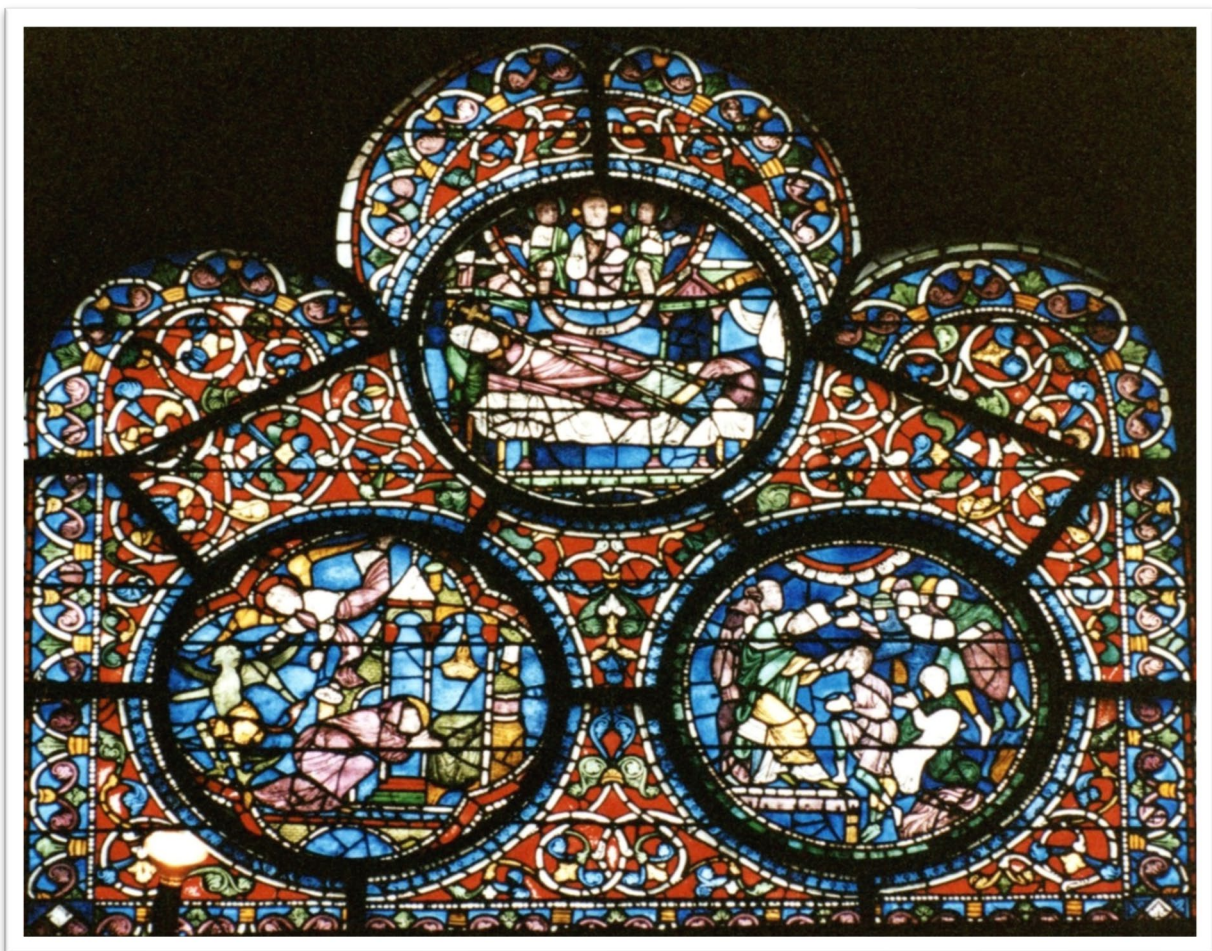


Fig. 9, Canterbury Cathedral Choir Aisle Triforium Dunstan Scenes, 1200s, Mildred-Budn

Conclusion

To round up this illumination of the value of stained glass, specifically in the 12th and the 21st century, I must first state that there is a considerable shift in value from both a symbolically religious to a spiritual. A monumental shift in value due to cost, relevance and usage leads to a medium that is pivoting sharply downward in use; this is thoroughly relevant in large-scale public installations. While stained glass is not '*moribund*' as explained previously, this substantial shift in value has made stained glass in the 21st century downsize to a more minor, particular art. The glass of contemporary times, on occasion, captures the aspirations and motivations of current practitioners. Contemporary art seeks to capture the 'human condition'. As such, it holds a quality explicitly relevant to the glass of medieval times. Some contemporary art does not sit within the privatised and expands upon public venues, for example, inside a gallery or a train hall. The looming figure of stained glass windows situated within churches differs in the way of message and intention. These windows were designed to convey religious narratives and teachings, serving as a source of inspiration for the faithful.

In the 12th century, stained glass was used to commemorate influential figures, thereby adding a historical weight to the medium. The focus was on religion and the symbolic power of divinity, with life and death represented in the "transcendental reality" (Simson, 1962) of stained glass windows. By transcendental, the writer, Simson, refers to a state where the message of light surpasses an ordinary experience. Artists of the 12th century focused on immortalising influential people of the time; the wealthy chose to be immortalised in stained glass to commemorate their life and social status. Other times, the artists placed important religious tales to teaching or, at times, local influential people, such as priests, nuns or prominent merchants, to reinforce the status of these figures in the community. An example is the stained glass featuring Abbot Suger, a piece dating back to 1140-44 in the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis. As shown in figure 10, the stained glass window depicts Abbot Suger at the feet of the Virgin Mary (Web Gallery of Art, 2025). The encryption of artists into their own stained glass designs is shown using Abbot Suger and Kehinde Wiley's representations of themselves within the stained glass.

The completion of this essay has led to the conclusion that changes in the way stained glass is valued, arrives from a societal shift in beliefs. Several things have influenced this shift, most significantly, the change in reverence towards the church and state, which is detected in the work of contemporary stained glass artists and the unravelling of their artistic and historical sources. Contemporary stained glass holds its radiance within the aesthetic, characterized by a shift in artistic style towards minimalism and symbolism, which is held in its representation of the contemporary.



Fig. 10. Abbey Church, Saint-Denis. 1140-44, Stained glass window. Web Gallery of Art. (2025)

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Fig. 2. Bossanyi Window, The central two children offer flowers to Christ, the left flower is a (western) water lily whilst the right one offers a (eastern) lotus (Image 6). Available at: <https://www.canterbury-archaeology.org.uk/bossanyi-window>

Fig. 3. "Crux, 2023." Jonathan Michael Ray (2023). Available at: <https://www.jonathanmichaelray.com/the-voice-in-the-shadow>

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Fig. 5. Bear & Rabbit, Flora Jamieson, (2025). Available at : <https://www.florajamieson.co.uk/contemporary-stained-glass>

Fig. 6. "Go" Kehinde Wiley, (2020) Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CJbxW0MM7IL/?img_index=1

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