

Featuring the latest from the American Glass Guild

The AGG Honors Barbara Krueger



Barbara Krueger at work in her studio.

by Patrice Schelkun

If there's one person whose passion for the art and craft of stained glass has flavored much of her life's work, it is Michigan's historic preservationist, stained glass artist, and American Glass Guild (AGG) founding member, Barbara Krueger. At this year's AGG Conference in Chicago, Illinois, Krueger will be recognized as the 2016 recipient of the Joseph Barnes Lifetime Achievement Award. As many of us who know her can attest, few can match the energy and enthusiasm of this wonderful lady when it comes to her love of glass.

Krueger joins the ranks of past Barnes Award recipients including Peter McGrain, Jack Cushen, Sylvia Nicholas, Rowan LeCompte, and Nicholas Parrendo, who sadly passed away several months ago. The Barnes Award acknowledges distinguished accomplishments and service by those in the stained glass field. It was initiated in 2008 when Joseph Barnes himself was honored by the AGG. Barnes was a longtime employee of glass distributor S.A. Bendheim, well-known and respected by many glass artisans who counted on his assistance when selecting art glass at the warehouse.

Celebrating a Multifaceted Artist

Born and raised in California, Krueger has spent much of the last four decades in the Midwest, where she has been an integral part of, and now Director of, the Michigan Stained Glass Census, founded through the Michigan State University Museum 30 years ago. She co-authored the award-winning book, *Detroit's Historic Places of Worship* (Wayne State University Press, 2012), a result of years of research on the art and architecture of the city.

A glass artist herself, Krueger has done everything from art fairs to private commission work and has exhibited some of her pieces at the *American Glass Now* juried exhibitions that have become an integral part of the AGG's annual conferences. It all began with a move from California, where Krueger had previously been an elementary school teacher, to Michigan because of her husband's job. In an attempt to connect with new people, she took a class in stained glass through a local arts group in 1975, and she was hooked. "I've often thought about 'why glass?' But I realized that I have always been very interested in things that have been made by hand."

Krueger sees a connection between her visual interest in fabric art, though she's never done any herself, and stained glass design. "I would see a felted fabric design in some magazine and use that as the starting point for a design in glass," she remembered. There might be something about the colors used or the particular composition of shapes that would inspire her. She was also influenced by stained glass artist Marie Snell, who was active in the stained glass community and always did her own designs. "From the beginning, I've done my own designs. I've never used pattern books. I prefer to do things that take imagination."



Barbara Krueger, *Stairway to Heaven*,
30" x 14", 1985.



*Barbara Krueger, Wings on High,
26" x 14", 1990.*

The artist's personal work is characterized by its abstract, contemporary design, using mostly cathedral glasses, which allow the full transmission of light. "I don't use opaque glass, because I want the light to hit it from the outside so that what's on the other side of the glass becomes an element of the piece." Only recently has she experimented with some streaky glasses in her work so that the viewer's eyes have to bounce between what's on the glass and what's beyond it. She rarely does a stained glass panel that is in a round or rectangular format, but rather prefers odd shapes, which she finds more challenging and interesting.

Preserving the Past

Krueger's interest in historic preservation was triggered by her travels to Europe with Albinus Elskus and Dick Millard as she pursued new learning opportunities in stained glass years ago. "Here in the U.S. we're tearing down buildings that are *younger* than any of the buildings over there," she said with distain.

The artist first heard about the formation of the Michigan Stained Glass Census about 30 years ago and got involved in its efforts to document stained glass windows throughout the state. Organized under the Michigan State University Museum, there are now over 1,200 buildings, most of them churches, included in the census. Her research eventually led Krueger to pursue a graduate degree in historic preservation at Eastern Michigan University, which she was granted in 1995.

As the Director of the Michigan Stained Glass Census, Krueger is continuing to work with Michigan colleges to encourage student research and incorporate that research into the existing database.

She has, for many, become the go-to person when it comes to assisting community leaders and pastors in researching the history of stained glass in their historical buildings and churches. Krueger has been asked to provide assessments on the physical condition of stained glass windows in many Michigan churches. Recently, she has been working with someone from the Toledo, Ohio, area who has two 7-foot-tall windows, one representing George Washington and the other Napoleon.

Encouraging Other Stained Glass Artists

A regular speaker on the art and architecture of stained glass, Krueger uses many of her own photos taken in France, Germany, England, and Scotland, as well as the United States as examples. Each year, she organizes a local church tour, highlighting its stained glass. Krueger, along with other friends she acquired in the stained glass community, was also instrumental in organizing the American Glass Guild 11 years ago. Her efforts helped establish this new group, which is dedicated to both cultivating the talents of novice stained glass artists and encouraging experienced artisans to attain a higher level of practice through its annual conference and workshops.

Krueger can always be found reaching out to new faces and connecting people at the AGG conferences. "In a sense, it's like teaching. You have to really get to know your students," said Krueger, referring to the sense of camaraderie and fellowship that can be felt at these gatherings. She was recently named a Senior Advisor to the AGG in light of her dedication to the organization.

Upcoming Projects

Krueger's latest project is researching the work of the African-American glass artist, Douglas Phillips (1922–1995). In the process of exploring Michigan stained glass, she found that this Ohio-based artist designed and created both leaded and faceted stained glass projects in at least four Michigan churches. Phillips grew up in Cleveland and was schooled in Buffalo, New York. He was perhaps the first and only African-American stained glass artisan of his time. His style was unique, using designs that incorporated arcs and curves created with thick lead lines—1 to 1-1/2 inches wide—in order to guide the viewer's eyes through the story of the window.

Krueger recently traveled back to her original home state of California, where she met with Phillips' daughter, Elisabeth Sunday, in order to find out more about the artist and his work, not only in Michigan but in Ohio and other states as well. Sunday has maintained all of the archival materials from her father's studio and has created a blog dedicated to his life's work.

Much of Krueger's journey in researching stained glass is documented on the AGG Bulletin Board, a discussion site that she helped develop. You'll find that Krueger has a major presence on the Bulletin Board, where she regularly posts interesting tidbits of information of stained glass of all kinds. **GA**

Visit the following websites for more information on Krueger and her influence in stained glass art.

- www.americanglassguild.org for the American Glass Guild, the AGG Conference, or its Bulletin Board
- www.michiganstainedglass.org for the Michigan Stained Glass Census survey of architectural stained glass
- www.phillipsstainedglass.blogspot.com for artist Douglas Phillips

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