



The Purpose in the Meeting

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new?’ It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.”

Ecclesiastes 1:9–10 New International Version (NIV)

by Bryant J. Stanton, SGAA Editorial Committee Member

Another summer Stained Glass Conference, the 106th to be exact, has come and gone. One more for the books. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again, and we will do it all again next year in another city. So here is a cynical question: Why do we meet every year? What’s the purpose? I suppose in a modern age that is a very valid question: “Why do we?”

Building on the Past

A few years back I was fortunate enough to place the winning bid on the SGAA *Reference and Technical Manual* during the Stained Glass Association’s summer conference silent auction. The coveted 1988 large, two-volume loose-leaf set is old, yellowed, and full of very useful stained glass history and technical information. For young artists starting out in the glass business, the information is all exciting and brand new. To experienced tradespeople, however, it was well known but had not been made readily available to those outside of established stained glass studios at the time some of the articles in the manual were written.

The other day I was leafing through my newly coveted technical manual and read an interesting section under the history of the SGAA on “Exhibits” written by E. Crosby Willet. His writing on the 1953 juried conference exhibit really stood out to me: “The panels introduced a spectacular variety of modern techniques such as fusing and laminating, as well as more conventional leaded and painted stained glass.”

When I read that, I realized there really is nothing new under the sun. It was here before my time. Did he say “fusing and laminating” glass in 1953? I suppose we never really invent new techniques but only rediscover and improve upon them. We simply adapt and evolve. Technically speaking, if my art history recall is correct, beadmaking, glass casting, slumping, and kiln formed glass date back to the Bronze Age, 3000 BC. The development of blown glass came along much later. So forming glass has been around for a long time now, and it still amazes me that they did it all without gas, electricity, or computers.

As far as that goes, fabricating stained glass windows hasn’t really changed much since the 12th century. It was developed primarily for use in ecclesiastical architecture. Trends, design styles, and usage of stained glass have changed and adapted to fit into the latest architectural genre, but the nuts and bolts of fabricating a window still remain unchanged.



Girl with Braids by Janet Zambai,
Casper, Wyoming.

Setting the Standard of Excellence

Continuing to read through the past history of the SGAA, I read that since its founding in 1903, the organization has held a pattern of being flexible and always changing and adapting to the shifting trends affecting the industry. The leadership, organization, and magazine has adjusted itself many times over the years to address the issues of the times and the latest zeitgeist driving the country. In effect, information disseminated to the membership would be relevant to the issues of that day, from running a business and creating designs to keeping up with the latest techniques.

In Crosby’s writings on the Association’s annual window exhibit, he speaks of how people looked forward to those juried exhibits to see innovative uses and a “variety of modern techniques.” The exhibits traveled and were relevant to the artists, designers, architects, and students looking to see and to learn from others about new ways to communicate their art. Crosby spoke about the history of the past stained glass apprenticeship programs in the SGAA and the early beginnings of the stained glass school. Though teaching and apprentice programs weren’t anything new in European and some American studios, it had fallen away in the United States. Tried-and-true methods had declined. Many studios were cutting corners and producing slipshod work, and it became apparent that there was a need to set and teach agreed-upon standards in the stained glass field—hence the need for a stained glass school and revitalized apprentice programs.



The Value of Meeting Face-to-Face

While there is a continued tradition in the essential creation of the stained glass craft, today's modern world has brought some new additions into the process of this industry. Information comes at us faster than I feel we can assimilate it into our daily lives and work. We see others' artwork in Facebook postings, Pinterest, Houzz, and other social media sites. It is a virtual daily cornucopia of "eye candy" from which designers and artists can glean information. If we don't understand or know a technique, we simply google it, and in a few minutes we more than likely have the answer.

I am a member of so many glass groups on Facebook that I have very little time to offer more than just a glance at people's posts, let alone read more than a few lines describing their posts. They claim technology was developed to give us more leisure time, but it seems that all it does is consume more and more of our free time and distract us from real life.

The SGAA just completed its 106th annual summer conference in beautiful Portland, Oregon. To meet for 106 years means there's something that draws people to these conferences. To me, the annual SGAA conference gives us a chance to unplug, meet new friends, reconnect, and visit with our peers face-to-face to exchange information. It provides a "reset button" of sorts from the daily grind and gives attendees an opportunity to meet seasoned glass artists with years of knowledge who can encourage those just starting their journey.

Yearly exhibits still have their place, and seeing work up close and in person can never be replaced. A YouTube video cannot compare to taking a hands-on class from a gifted teacher, so workshops will always be an important part in learning new skills and techniques. In a world of instant "now," I personally enjoy the relevance of having tangible relationships with others working in my field of art. I like being able to e-mail or call someone after a conference who can relate to a problem I am having with a glass project and discuss the issues and solutions. These relationships go far beyond an annual conference. They last a lifetime. What has been will be again. What has been done will be done again. I hope to meet you at next year's 107th conference in Evanston, Illinois.

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Visit stainedglass.org to learn more about the Stained Glass Association of American and its programs.

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*Daydream Shade by Robert Cooper,
Jackson, Mississippi.*

