

# Kathy Jordan, Driven by Challenge

by Shawn Waggoner

Kathy Jordan is a woman who knows what she wants and how to get it. She thrives on competition, especially when the beneficiary of her energies is a worthy cause. This summer, as the chair of the American Glass Guild's (AGG) auction, she helped raise over \$32,000 to benefit the James C. Whitney Scholarship fund, which pays for tuition in stained glass studies. As both student and teacher, education has been Jordan's lifelong passion.

At 52, this breast cancer survivor and third-degree black belt in karate is a force to be reckoned with. Years of training and experience allow Jordan to compete successfully in what has traditionally been a male-dominated field. Over the past two decades, notable works have included restorations of Tiffany, LaFarge, Clayton and Bell, Lalique, and other historically significant stained glass windows. Collaborating with consultant Arthur Femenella, Jordan has restored stained glass at Princeton University and fire-damaged windows for St. Bernard's Episcopal Church in Bernardsville, New Jersey. Both projects received Historic Trust awards. Additionally, Jordan and Femenella conserved seven Tiffany angel windows for a project called *In Company with Angels*.

Though restoration painting is her forte, last year she painted and fabricated seven new windows for St. Joseph Church in Sea Isle City, New Jersey. The largest, a panoramic baptismal scene, measures 560 square feet. Charles Z. Lawrence, who created five windows for the Washington National Cathedral, designed the windows and selected glass for the project.

At home in Media, Pennsylvania, Jordan is simultaneously wife, mother, artist, and business owner. The success of her studio, The Art of Glass, Inc., rests upon her multifaceted talents in visual arts, historical research, technology, and entrepreneurship. Jordan and five employees have completed projects in churches and public spaces from Barbados to Maine, 95 percent of which are restorations.

Throughout her career, education via workshops and hands-on experience has kept her approach to glass fresh and informed. Her training is the beneficial by-product of many workshops, including a decade of Richard Millard's glass painting instruction held at his Antrim School in New Hampshire, intensive China painting study, and international master instruction. Her history at Antrim inspired Jordan to teach others by providing the same kind of camaraderie combined with intensive glass painting instruction.

"If I had gone to an art college or university when I graduated high school, I would not be involved in glass today. My education has been unconventional, but most certainly degree worthy."



*Investigative conservation of a skylight section from the U.S. Capitol in conjunction with Femenella & Associates.*

## From Tragedy to Triumph

In 2010, Jordan was inducted into the Springfield High School Artist Hall of Fame. Kathy Walsh, as she was known at the time, grew up in Springfield, Pennsylvania, as part of a family with deep community roots. While she was in high school, her dad was asked to join a group of his friends in painting lessons. He wasn't interested but suggested the classes to his daughter, and for the next five years Kathy took private art lessons studying anatomy and portraiture for 16 hours each week.

Jordan's teacher Robert W. Douglass was a successful illustrator who taught in Philadelphia and New York art schools and whose work was known in the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*. During the time she was studying with him, Douglass killed his wife and then himself. "It was devastating. I stopped painting or doing any art." Not long after, her first marriage ended, and a few short years later her father passed away when she was only 25. "I was completely lost."

Jordan's brother-in-law worked at Trimm Glass Company in Media, Pennsylvania, a commercial glass shop with an adjoining stained glass and picture framing studio called Classics. To help her get back on track, he suggested that Jordan interview for a job at the stained glass studio. "Talk about a life changing interview. I fell in love with glass, and I fell in love with the owner." Kathy and Clay Jordan have been married now for a quarter of a century and have a daughter, Catie. In 1987, shortly before Catie's birth, Kathy opened The Art of Glass, Inc. "It was unbelievable. When I met Clay I was emotionally bankrupt. He was responsible for introducing me to glass, which changed the course of my life."

"Discovering glass painting became the root of my passion for stained glass. Once I realized I could paint on glass, I knew it was something I would do forever. I realize now that the time I spent drawing and painting under Robert Douglass' tutelage has been invaluable. It is the foundation from which I work."



*Kathy Jordan's china painting.*

### From Student to Teacher . . . And Back Again

Although she has no formal stained glass training, Jordan has been a student for over two decades. "There was no place in the United States that had a degree program for flat glass. My education has been exhaustive and unconventional. It came in the form of workshops taught by national and international masters, as well as actually doing the work."

In October 2012, she completed studies at Swansea with Jonathan Cooke on silver stain and enamels. In March 2013, Jordan will study china painting with Andre Orr for two weeks in Tybee Island, Georgia, focusing on landscape work. "China painting is closely related to glass painting. Dick Millard encouraged me to seek out one of the best flesh painters in porcelain, San Do. China painting has taught me to render realistic flesh, and it reads in reflected and transmitted light."

When she's not taking classes, she's teaching them. "I love to teach; I was meant to teach. It is my way of giving back." Jordan's first taste of teaching came in 2002 as assistant to Nick Parrendo, who was conducting a stained glass workshop at Enders Island, a Catholic retreat in Mystic, Connecticut. Eventually, she began to teach her own sold-out glass painting classes at this idyllic location.

In 2005 she began assisting J. Kenneth Leap in his workshops. Once again her role as assistant evolved, and she became co-teacher. It didn't take long for Leap and Jordan to realize they had good chemistry as instructors, and the courses would be easier to teach by the two of them. Jordan, who owns a vacation home in Cape

May, arranges student accommodations. The class is held in the off-season during the month of October, and she rents the cottage next to hers as additional student housing.

"Ken Leap is one of the most generous human beings I have met in my life. There isn't a single thing he wouldn't share with the students. The two of us have that philosophy, and it's what keeps me working in glass."

"I wanted our class to feel the way Antrim felt to me with Dick Millard. I tried to mimic that experience. It goes beyond what you learn in the class to what happens outside of the class. At Antrim the students stayed at the same bed-and-breakfast and ate together in the morning. Dick fed us lunch, and we had dinners together. It was the kind of camaraderie where you're hanging out with glass painters all week."

This year's Leap-Jordan painting workshops were sold out, and Jordan is proud of the fact that some of their students hailed from working studios: Rambusch, Lamb, Attenhofers, and Heritage Glass. In May 2013, Jordan and Leap will host a master's class by Jonathan Cooke. (See Troy Moody's article about the first Cooke workshop in the January/February 2011 issue of *Glass Art*.) On her recent trip to England, Jordan met with David Williams and Stephen Bryne to discuss the details of their first American glass painting workshop hosted by Jordan and Leap. Jordan will also teach a glass painting workshop in Orvieto, Italy, August 2013 at Diego Tolomelli's school, IKO Studio.





*Kathy Jordan, The Chief's Wife, autonomous panel done with Reusche water-based medium.*

### Jordan's Personal Work

Jordan's *The Chief's Wife* is comprised of three 5-inch-square paintings that turn within the frame. "I love Native American faces. I am very drawn to that kind of portraiture and imagery." This trio was created as a demo for one of her classes. "You need to find your own style. When you look at my autonomous work, especially portraiture, you'll see my hand—very painterly and spontaneous. Most of the paint restoration work I do is labored, because I'm trying to replicate somebody else's style."

Jordan's Native American portrait on red flashed glass was painted with Reusche's waterbased medium. "It behaves like an oil but thins with and cleans up with water. It will dry if left out, but you can work into it for an extended period of time before drying occurs. I can work quickly and get a full range of value in one face, in one fire. This technique can be spontaneous and loose or controlled and refined, allowing the viewer to see tool marks, brush strokes, or none at all."

Jordan created *On Walden's Pond* in Debora Coombs' class from a sketch done previously in a life drawing class. "I used that face and created a little bit of a landscape to facilitate the techniques. The trees behind his head were painted with a crinkled baggie."

Coombs' class was an exploration of all the different textures possible with water-based medium. "Debora uses propylene glycol. The glycol exposed me to the possibilities that a water-based medium could offer, but it became problematic for me. It had a gelatinlike quality, and I wanted an oil feel. That is when I discovered that Reusche manufactured a water-based medium, Reusche D1368. It's what I use in the majority of my work, whether replicating turn-of-the-century faces and ornaments or painting autonomous panels."

All of Jordan's panels shown here have been donated to AGG auctions except *The Chief's Wife*, which remains in Clay Jordan's collection.



*Kathy Jordan, On Walden's Pond.*



*Kathy Jordan, autonomous panel done with Reusche's water-based medium, donated to AGG auction.*





*The altar at Barbados after completion.*



*Kathy Jordan,  
All Saints Episcopal Church's  
Chapel of Ease in Barbados.*

## Jordan's Restoration Projects

Currently, Jordan is restoring windows for All Saints Episcopal Church's Chapel of Ease in Barbados. The church was built for wealthy sugar farmers living in the hills. It was destroyed by hurricane and later fire. Its 100-year-old windows are suffering deterioration caused by lime, dust, and salt. Jordan has some windows ready to ship back and some windows that she needs to begin. "Funding can be a challenge for small churches no matter where they are, so I am working in phases." Located in the chapel, the main altar window housed five lancets. Jordan had to plate 55 pieces of flesh: faces, feet, hands. "I painted all the missing detail, in reverse, on a very thin slide glass, then plated the painted surfaces together." She also had to re-create the primary figure of Christ due to a large hole in the center of the window.

Some of Jordan's most exciting restoration projects were done in conjunction with Femenella. The two met in the early '90s when Femenella held a workshop on the premises of The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, where Tiffany windows were in need of restoration. This workshop was the catalyst for Jordan's decision to focus her career on conservation and restoration with a specialty in painting. "There is an unprecedented level of quality in design and glass painting that I am fortunate enough to work on through the restoration projects that pass through my studio. It is rare to see that level of exceptional glass painting in the windows that are made today. Working on turn-of-the-century stained glass is like going to a museum, borrowing a painting, bringing it back to your studio, and being able to practice on it. The painted glass has been my teacher."

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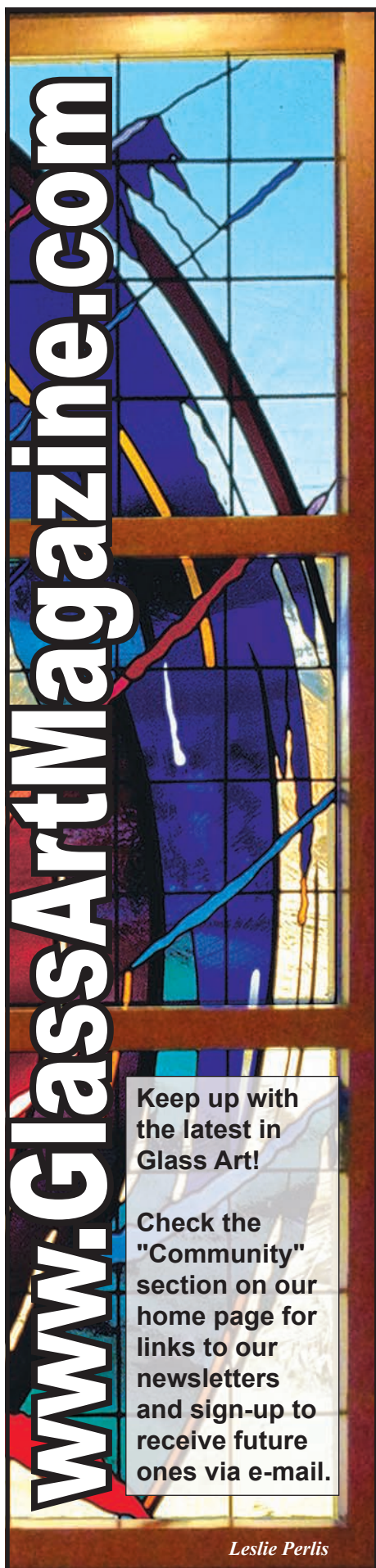
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*Leslie Perlis*



*Kathy Jordan, replication painting of the six kneeling angels within the oculus window of St. Bernard's, Bernardsville, New Jersey.*

Jordan has been working with Femenella for nearly 20 years. One of the most complex projects to date was the restoration at Princeton University Chapel, which earned a New Jersey Historic Preservation Award in 2002. The massive scale, 10,000 square feet of stained glass, combined with an aggressive schedule of 18 months, was a big undertaking for Jordan's studio. "At that time I employed 15 people, and we were under tremendous pressure with the schedule. If we fell two weeks behind, the university had the right to pull the project. Every week we had to project the work that was going to be completed and give a quality control report of the work that had been accomplished. We were the youngest studio on the team, but we kept the pace and did exceptional work, both of which I am very proud."

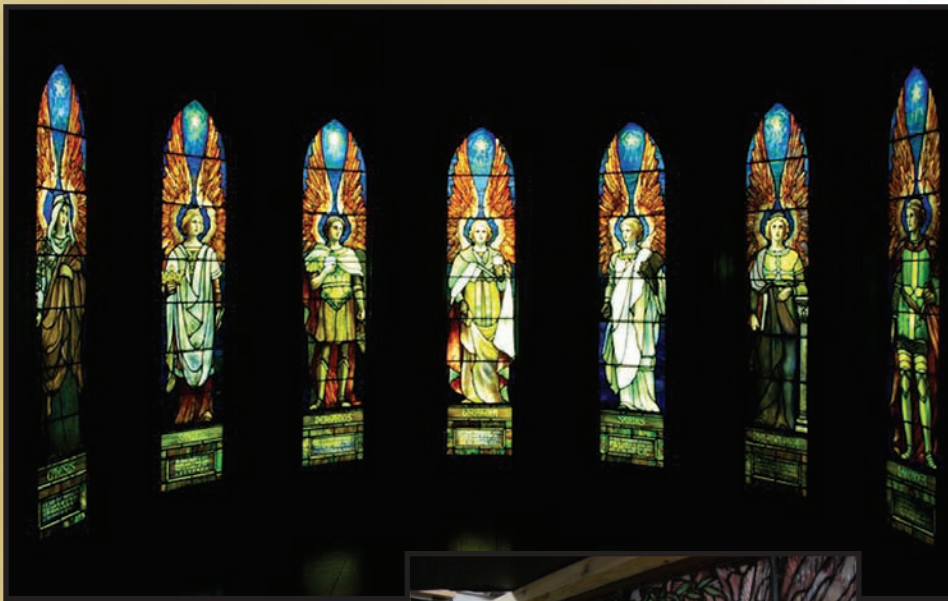
The Art of Glass was responsible for nine windows at Princeton. They include eight clerestory windows and one of the four "Christian Epic" windows in the choir titled *Divine Comedy*, designed and fabricated by Charles J. Connick Studios.

Another challenging restoration was carried out for St. Bernard's Church, Bernardsville, New Jersey. In October 2004, the church suffered a devastating fire that spread through the sacristy, organ case, and roof of the church building. The 1,000-plus-piece historic oculus window by Clayton & Bell was completely destroyed when heat generated by the fire inside the church forced the window to explode outward. The entire collection of 25 Kempe windows suffered fire damage as well. "I'll never forget the look on the faces of the committee who were charged with pulling the team together to restore their beloved church. Our first meeting was a teary one. I left with boxes of shards. But within the shards retrieved, we found a representation for every aspect of the oculus window, using the original glass to select glass palette, painting technique, and pigment color. Amazingly, we had enough information to replicate not only the flesh but also the painted detail of the fabric for the figure of Christ and the six kneeling angels as well.

"Painting flesh is my strong suit, and I felt the face of Christ was the appropriate place to start. As the project unfolded, I continued to study thousands of bits of broken glass. The research to replicate was painstaking. Sections throughout the window were completely lost. My drawing skills and knowledge of computer technology worked in concert. Photographs were scanned and enlarged to full scale. Guidance and encouragement flowed freely from my painting colleagues during that project. To date, it remains one of the most important accomplishments of my career."

More recently, Femenella and Jordan have both been an integral part of the restoration team for *In Company with Angels (ICWA)*. In 1903, seven Tiffany stained glass angel windows were commissioned as a gift from a Swedenborgian congregation to their sister church in Cincinnati, Ohio. The windows were saved when the church was torn down in 1964 for highway construction. The boxed, eight-foot-tall windows were stored in parishioners' garages and basements in Ohio and also in a barn on the grounds of the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos in West Chester, Pennsylvania.





Kathy Jordan, *In Company with Angels* on display.  
Photo by Arthur Femenella.

Once found, Jordan's studio inspected the windows. "Once I saw them, I realized immediately what an extraordinary collection they had. I recommended that the church seek the advice of Arthur Femenella due to the historic significance and his experience with Tiffany windows." The restoration was managed by Femenella and executed at Jordan's studio.

In 2007, *In Company with Angels* was incorporated with the mission to share with the greatest number of people the Tiffany window series, *Angels Representing Seven Churches*. The touring exhibition provides education about the historical and artistic significance of the works and their spiritual inspiration, while archiving their evolution and journey. Over the past five years, these windows have traveled to some of the finest museums and universities across the country. Jordan remains on the Board of Directors of ICWA.

"This amazing collection resided in my studio for well over a year, during which time it served as a teaching tool in conservation. It was inspirational to watch a church community, charged with its care, come together and make the decision to share its beauty and message with stained glass lovers across the country. The collection has been well received, and I am honored to be a part of its ongoing journey eight years later."

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More information about Jordan's glass art is available by visiting:  
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