

kunstmuseum basel

LUMINOUS FIGURES

Drawings
and Stained Glass
Paintings from
Holbein to Ringler

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Drawings and Stained Glass Paintings
from Holbein to Ringler

In the sixteenth century, small-scale stained glass paintings were a popular art form in southern Germany and Switzerland. They graced monasteries and churches, town and guild halls, and university buildings. Few of them are extant today, but numerous preparatory drawings have survived. Hans Holbein the Elder, Niklaus Manuel, and Tobias Stimmer were among the renowned artists of the time who created designs for stained glass paintings, an aspect of their oeuvres that is largely obscure today.

This exhibition reunites preparatory drawings and the final glass paintings. The works are valuable not only for their artistic quality, but also as documents of cultural history. Institutions such as the Swiss estates (now known as cantons), monasteries, and guilds as well as individuals commissioned stained glass paintings. Donating one was a widely recognized act of social communication, lending representative expression to alliances, public offices, and honors. That is why virtually every glass painting features the donor's coat of arms. The subjects vary widely and include depictions of religious themes, personifications and allegories, scenes from working life, and motifs from Swiss history.

FROM DRAWING TO GLASS PAINTING

Stained glass paintings are rarely signed, making it difficult to attribute them to individual artists. In fact, we now know more about the draftsmen who supplied the designs than about the glass painters who executed them. That is why it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the stained glass painting was the actual work of art. It consists of separate glass pieces in different colors, on which the glass painter then worked with black vitreous paint and yellow stain; additional colors became available in the mid-sixteenth century. After firing in the furnace, the painting was inseparably bonded to the glass. In a final step, the pieces were assembled with lead comes to produce the picture.

A full-scale preparatory drawing served the stained glass painter as pattern. Some drawings that are finished in rich detail were intended for presentation to the patron. Others, which were used as templates in the workshop, often show decorative elements only on one side; the glass painter was expected to add mirror-inverted complements on the other side. Workshops gathered collections of drawings that were passed on from one generation to the next.

NIKLAUS MANUEL

The artist Niklaus Manuel (ca. 1484–1530), a native of Berne, is now best known as a painter, draftsman, and writer. The earliest works we attribute to him are preparatory drawings for stained glass paintings. They date from a period when small-scale glass panels were just becoming a popular genre. Some historians even speculate that Manuel worked as a stained glass painter himself. Swiss soldiers and seductive women are among his favorite motifs in these early works.

A remarkable drawing created in 1527 illustrates an episode from the Old Testament: King Joshua and the smashing of the idols. The subject was of particular relevance in light of the Reformation's critique of sacred images. As it happened, in Berne as elsewhere, paintings and sculptures were removed from the churches and destroyed in 1528. Stained glass paintings, however, were exempt from this iconoclastic purge, as they were not objects of cultic worship.

ANTONI GLASER

Basel had acceded to the Swiss Confederacy in 1501. To demonstrate its loyalty to the alliance, the city embellished the council room facing the market square in the newly erected town hall (the room is now used for meetings of the local government) with stained glass panels showing the coats of arms of the thirteen confederate cantons. These works are still in their original location.

The stained glass paintings were created by Antoni Glaser (ca. 1480/85–1551). He is the first glass painter in Basel to whom we can attribute an identifiable oeuvre. His stained glass paintings at the town hall and the single extant preparatory drawing exemplify the conventional schema for a «canton panel»: The coat of arms is flanked by two figures known as shield bearers. The heraldic design itself forms a pyramid, with a pair of shields angled toward each other beneath the imperial shield and crown as symbols of the cantons' imperial immediacy.

HANS HOLBEIN

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/98–1543) is the most prominent artist who contributed designs for stained glass paintings in Switzerland. Taking inspiration from the art of the Renaissance in Italy and Augsburg, he developed a distinctive visual language. What sets Holbein's designs apart is the use of architectures patterned on ancient models and the vivid illusion of depth. Low-angle views often lend the subjects a monumental aspect, and the deft use of chiaroscuro effects underscores their sculptural qualities. His extraordinary gift is evident also in the ingenious motifs and brilliant compositions.

Holbein's creations exerted a lasting influence on the art of stained glass painting that is unmistakable in the works of younger masters like Balthasar Han and Ludwig Ringler (both in room 3).

WORKSHOP PRACTISE

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/98–1543) probably drew his designs for Antoni Glaser (ca. 1480/85–1551), Basel's leading stained glass painter of his time. Records show, for instance, that Glaser created a glass panel based on Holbein's drawing featuring the *Terminus*, the device of Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Holbein's work inspired many artists, and the influence of his visual imagination, style, and drawing technique is clearly recognizable also in numerous preparatory drawings for glass paintings. These works are nonetheless not regarded as autographs; they were likely produced by someone in Holbein's workshop or his wider circle.

The copying of design drawings was widespread as well. Copies were often made in the glass painter's workshop, perhaps in connection with the various steps involved in realizing a stained glass panel. In other instances, preparatory drawings were replicated for reuse in subsequent projects. This practice was a major factor in the dissemination of Holbein's art.

ROOM 2

HANS SÜSS VON KULMBACH

For several decades around 1500, Nuremberg boasted a rich production of stained glass paintings. The glass painter Veit Hirschvogel the Elder (1461–1525) operated a thriving workshop in the city. The outstanding quality of his works is due in part to the designs he commissioned from painters based in Nuremberg including Albrecht Dürer, Hans Baldung, and Hans Süß von Kulmbach. With more than forty drawings – roughly a third of his entire extant body of drawings – Kulmbach is considered the most active creator of stained glass painting designs among the circle around Dürer.

Small circular and quatrefoil panels were especially popular in Nuremberg. The glass painter arranged the designs in various combinations for different projects. The framing images, in particular, were exchangeable and could be recombined independently of the central picture.

URS GRAF

Urs Graf (ca. 1485–1527/28) was one of the most idiosyncratic artists in sixteenth-century Switzerland. Like most of his works, the surviving preparatory drawings for stained glass paintings by his hand are set apart by their exceptional quality and satirical and piquant motifs.

Having been trained as a goldsmith in his native Solothurn, Graf probably moved to Basel in 1507/08. Before joining the local goldsmiths' guild in 1512, the young artist appears to have made a brief foray into glass painting; a document shows that he was in the glass painter Hans Heinrich Wolleben's employ. The signed fragment showing a young girl suggests that he may actually have plied the glass painter's trade.

DAVID JORIS

The Netherlander David Joris (1501/02–1556) was one of the most colorful figures among the stained glass painters of the sixteenth century. The leader of an Anabaptist sect, he was forced to leave his homeland and, in 1544, arrived in Basel, where he lived under a false identity. Joris is believed to be the author of various drawings and stained glass paintings that are thought to bespeak his roots in the Netherlands. Figures dressed in the style of the ancients and settings rendered with heavy foreshortening are the defining features of these works. However, it is not clear to which extent, or even whether, Joris was active as a creator of designs and perhaps also final glass paintings in Basel.

Joris's true identity came to light three years after his death, and he was posthumously put on trial and convicted. His body was exhumed and publicly burned together with his writings and portrait.

TOBIAS STIMMER

Tobias Stimmer (1539–1584) is generally regarded as the preeminent Swiss artist of the second half of the sixteenth century. He created wall and panel paintings and drew designs for woodcuts as well as stained glass paintings; the latter make up just over a third of his extant drawings.

Although Stimmer himself had no training as a stained glass painter, glass panels were manufactured in his workshop. It remains unclear to which extent the artist himself was involved in this work. He likely employed young stained glass painters for these tasks who stayed with him for a while during their journeyman years. Stimmer's works were widely noted by his colleagues and inspired an entire generation of artists. His influence is especially recognizable in the oeuvres of Daniel Lindtmayer (here in room 2) and Christoph Murer (room 3).

DANIEL LINDTMAYER

Daniel Lindtmayer the Younger (1552–1603), a native of Schaffhausen, was descended from a long line of stained glass painters. He, too, was trained in this craft but then spent his life working as a painter and draftsman. His graphic oeuvre includes around 240 preparatory drawings for stained glass paintings.

In 1574, Lindtmayer arrived in Basel, where he created a design for a «friendship panel». It shows Saint Luke, the patron of painters, surrounded by the coats of arms of four artists.

Years later, Lindtmayer contributed to a prominent project: a cycle of no fewer than sixty-seven stained glass paintings for Rathausen Abbey. The panels were manufactured by the Lucerne-based glass painter Franz Fallenter (ca. 1550–1612) based on designs by various artists. Both the drawings and the final glass paintings stand out due to their size and the unconventional lunette format.

CHRISTOPH MURER

The glass painter, draftsman, and etcher Christoph Murer (1558–1614) spent much of his life in his native Zurich. In 1579 – he was still traveling to complete his training – he executed a cycle of stained glass paintings based on his own designs for Leonhard Thurneysser (1531–1596). The panels were installed in Thurneysser’s home on the corner of Kohlenberg and Leonhardstrasse.

Murer’s original and richly detailed designs dramatize key chapters in Thurneysser’s life: a success story that began in Basel and spanned Europe, North Africa, and the Levant. Such sequences of pictures more typically illustrated the lives of rulers or saints. In this instance, however, the goldsmith, scholar, and entrepreneur Thurneysser chose the format to represent his own accomplishments. The resulting panels are unusual in their marked emphasis on the patron’s public image and self-promotion.

MASTERS FROM BASEL

Although Balthasar Han (1505–1578) was Basel’s leading stained glass painter for decades, we now know his art only from a single work that we can attribute to him with certainty: the panel showing the standard bearer of the Basel *Zunft zum Himmel*, in which the visual artists were organized. Han donated it together with his brother Matthäus.

Hans Jakob Plepp (1557/60–1597/98) settled in Basel in 1579. He made stained glass paintings based on his own designs: with more than two hundred extant drawings, he was one of the most prolific masters of his time. Many of his designs show scenes from the working lives of craftsmen.

Hans Brand (1552–1577/78?) was a painter; around twenty-five preparatory drawings for stained glass paintings by his hand have survived. «Double projects» – drawings that gave the glass painter a choice between two different designs – are a typical feature of his work. Other drawings show only one half of the panel; the glass painter would supply a mirror-inverted copy to complete the picture.

LUDWIG RINGLER

Ludwig Ringler (1536–1606) was the defining stained glass painter in Basel in the second half of the sixteenth century. His known oeuvre comprises around twenty glass paintings and forty preparatory drawings in which the influence of Hans Holbein (room 1) and the art of the Netherlandish Mannerists is clearly discernible. Ringler, Antoni Glaser (room 1), and Balthasar Han (room 3) are now regarded as the preeminent glass painters from Basel.

The imposing panel showing the standard bearer of the guild of woolen cloth and linen weavers in Basel is Ringler's finest work. Stained glass paintings of this sort were commissioned by officials of the associations for their guild halls, whence the term «guild panel». The interplay of linear and planar design elements shows the distinctive characteristics of stained glass painting to their fullest advantage.

UNIVERSITY – SCHÜTZENHAUS

The Basel glass painter Ludwig Ringler (1536–1606) played a leading role in realizing the two most significant stained glass painting projects of his time: the series of panels for the university and the Schützenhaus.

The University of Basel's centennial in 1560 was probably the occasion for the creation of a series of stained glass paintings. Donated by the university, its various faculties, and individual members, the works were installed in the new library building, part of the «Lower College» on Rheinsprung. The ambitious iconographic programs reflect the donors' erudition.

Between 1561 and 1564, the Basel riflemen's association built itself a new guild hall. The forty-three stained glass paintings commissioned for the building are among the most important surviving ensembles of such works from the sixteenth century. They were endowed by the cantons, members of the association, and private donors. Other stained glass painters beside Ringler contributed to this major project.

PROGRAM (in German)

Guided Tours

Sun 2.2., 1.3., 5.4., 2–3 pm

Mittwochmatinée

With Ariane Mensger, curator, et Pamela Jossi, glass conservator, Wed 12.2., 10.15 am–12 noon

Guided Tours with the Curator

With Ariane Mensger, Wed 18.3. and Wed 22.4., 6.30–7.30 pm

Rendez-vous am Mittag

Tue 11.2., 12.30–1 pm: Niklaus Manuel und der Bildersturm

Tue 18.2., 12.30–1 pm: Die Scheibenrisse Hans Holbeins d. J.

Tue 10.3., 12.30–1 pm: Leonhard Thurneysers Vita im Glasbild

Tue 7.4., 12.30–1 pm: Zunftwelt und Bürgerstolz

Tue 21.4., 12.30–1 pm: Glasgemälde für die Universität

Tours in situ «Glasgemälde in Basel»

With Martin Möhle, monument conservator, Canton Basel-Stadt

Registration → tours@kunstmuseumbasel.ch

Town Hall: Wed 18.3., 12.30–13.30 pm

Schützenhaus: Wed 22.4., 12.30–13.30 pm

Open Studio

With Pamela Jossi, glass conservator, Sun 5.4., 10 am–4 pm

The exhibition is supported by:

Peter and Simone Forcart-Staehelin

Stiftung für das Kunstmuseum Basel

Opening Hours

Tue–Sun 10 am–6 pm

Wed 10 am–8 pm

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