

STAINED GLASS... THE PAINSTAKING

Brightness is of primary importance in the world of stained glass. For stained glass windows exploit the interaction of the physical factors of light — for example, the light levels striking the window throughout the day, and the intensity of the light. One could say that the art of stained glass is the art of painting with light itself.

Where did this art have its origins? The art forms of mosaic and enameling were the parents of stained glass. Earliest known record of the technique, or an instruction manual, if you will, is in the early 1100s.

Briefly, a full-size drawing of the window was painted onto a table, showing the divisions between the varying areas. Pieces of glass the appropriate colors were chosen and

cut more or less to size. The edges were then cut away in small sections until the proper shape was finalized, leaving room for the lead sections that would eventually join them together. Design details were then painted directly onto the glass, with final assembly beginning in one corner and continuing to conclusion. After assembly, the joints were soldered and putted to protect the seams from moisture.

Significant refinements occurred in the 14th Century, most notably the ability to produce glass in colors never before possible. The artists began to use the technique of shading to accentuate areas they felt most important. Indeed, they began to cross over into the world of the true painter.

Although windows have been

noted in early texts dating to the 4th Century, pictorial windows per se are only in evidence from the 9th Century. Although a window was partially reconstructed in Germany, which shows the head of Christ, the first complete window dates back to the very early 12th Century. When Romanesque and Gothic architecture were in vogue, stained glass windows became very popular. As to who invented the concept, it seems safe to say the art form is indigenous to Western Europe, although prior to the 12th century things are a bit sketchy. Production of windows on a significant scale began in France, England, and Germany in the 12th Century. In France, a major achievement is the rebuilding of the choir of the Abbey of Saint-

Denis, 1150-1155. Fragments are all that remain, but it is clear they are the culmination of the Romanesque stained glass period.

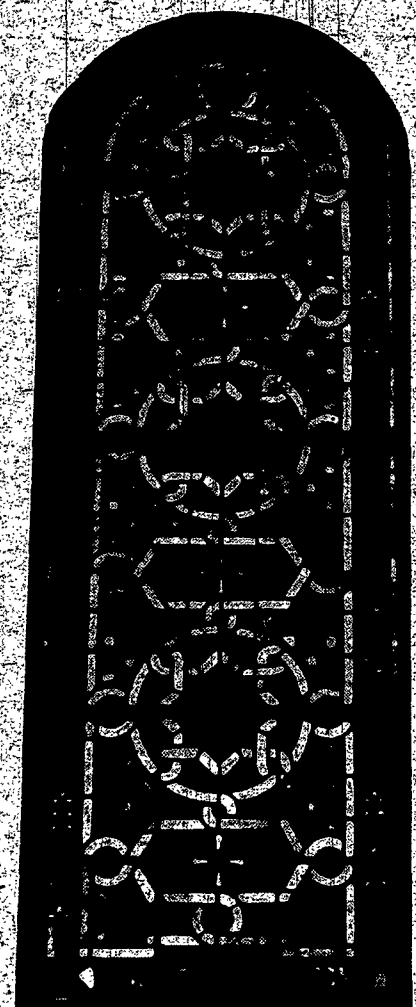
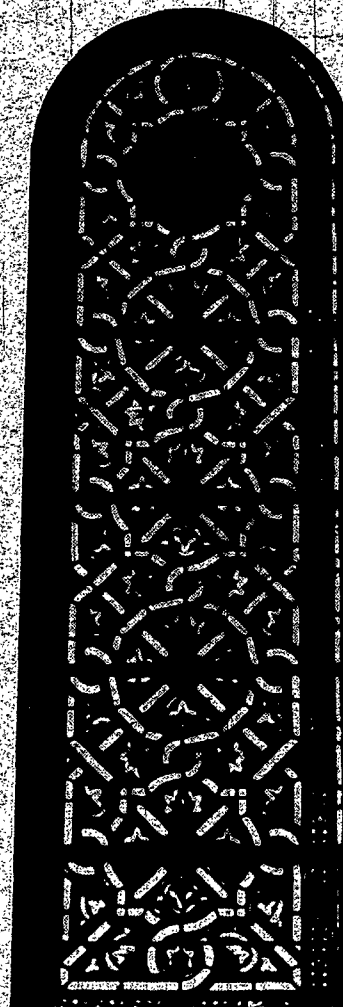
In Germany, the outstanding example of the art is the series of five prophets in the Cathedral of Augsburg (circa 1125.) England is less fortunate, in that only fragments of 12th century windows survive. The finest example remaining is the series of figures of the descent of Christ from Adam, in Canterbury Cathedral (1178-1200.)

In the 13th Century, the grisaille window surfaced. In this type of window, the clear glass is painted with designs and constructed into a geometric pattern. But even more startling, areas of clear glass are left

untouched, allowing pure light to stream through. This is certainly a departure from the early works, where deep, heavy color was the order of the day.

Between the 14th and 19th Centuries, improvements continued to be made, and styles changed, as they have in all art forms.

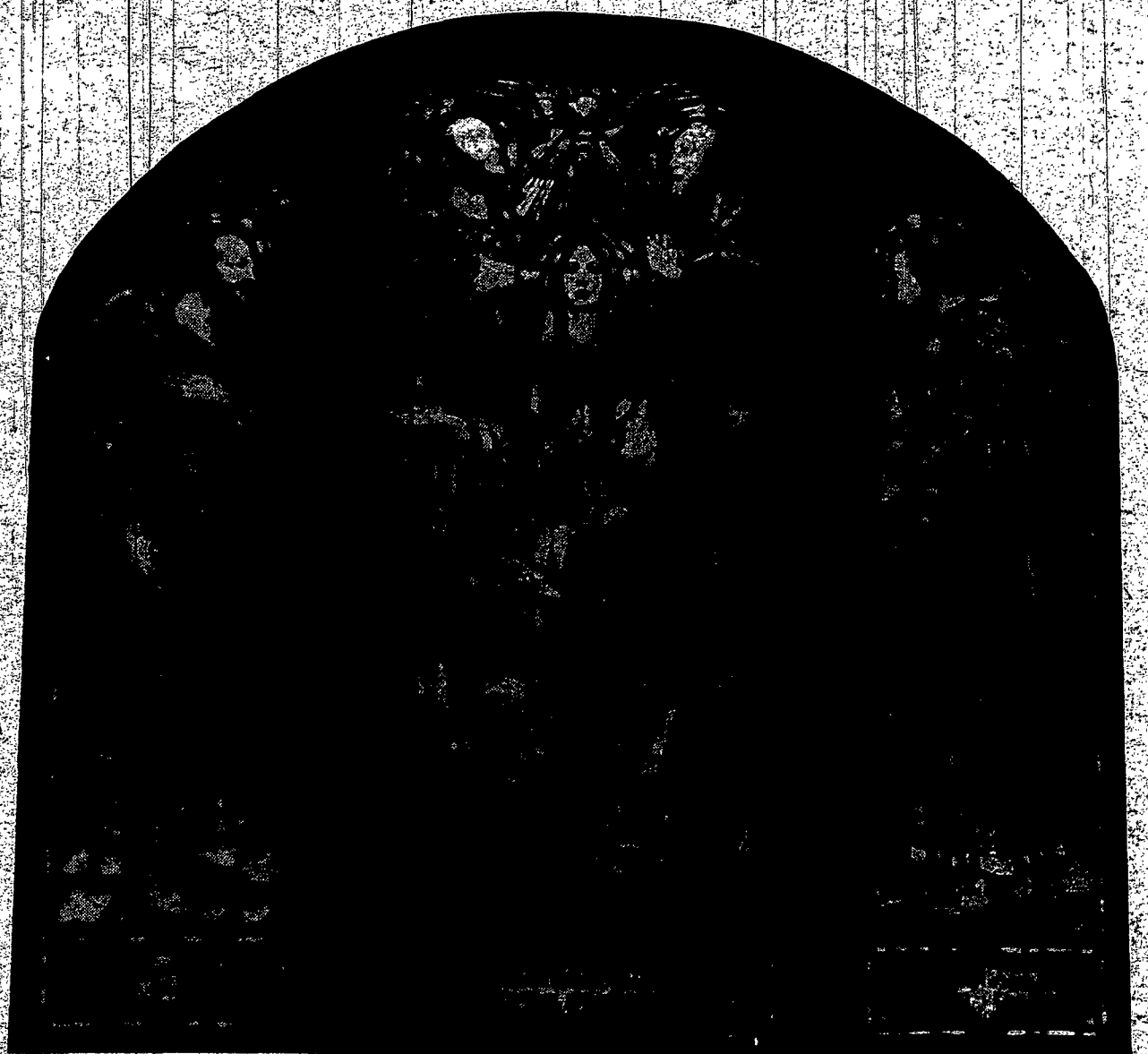
The Gothic style, which achieved prominence in the early 14th Century, was replaced by a new Renaissance style in the late 1400s. Another school of influence rose in the early 1500s, when the Flemish style emerged, in short — a trend toward realism. At this same time, in Italy, the Renaissance style prodded the artists into producing windows of immense detail, concurrent with the renewed in-



These windows, from St. Monica, left, and St. Francis Xavier, Rochester, right, are dramatically similar. St. Peter and Paul Church, Rochester, extreme left, counts this as among the most interesting of its windows.



This window at St. Monica Church, Rochester, is quite uncomplicated, but notice the texture of the glass in the lower half.



Tri-sectioned window above is from Holy Rosary Church, Rochester. Small area at bottom gives names of donors, each panel having a different patron.