

DRIEHAUS MUSEUM

ETERNAL LIGHT: THE SACRED STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS OF LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY EXPLORES GILDED AGE BEAUTY IN A 21ST-CENTURY LIGHT

Chicago, IL—April 24, 2019—This fall, the Richard H. Driehaus Museum will present *Eternal Light: The Sacred Stained-Glass Windows of Louis Comfort Tiffany*, focusing on the design and production of Tiffany’s ecclesiastical window commissions—and exploring these works in the context of both the art and social history of the period. At the heart of the exhibition are eleven outstanding, religiously themed windows made between 1880 and 1925 that demonstrate the signature designs, working methods, techniques, and production styles of Tiffany and his workshops. Works have been drawn from major public and private collections across the United States, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Neustadt Collection of Tiffany Glass, and the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art. The exhibition also includes a number of works that have not been on public view since the closure of the Richard H. Driehaus Gallery of Stained Glass at Navy Pier. Organized by the Driehaus Museum, *Eternal Light: The Sacred Stained-Glass Windows of Louis Comfort Tiffany* includes more than 25 works by Tiffany and his artists and will be on view from September 7, 2019 – March 8, 2020.

“*Eternal Light* looks without sentiment at the ecclesiastical windows of the Tiffany firm as rich reminders that America is ever-changing,” said Richard P. Townsend, Executive Director of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum. “Tiffany’s masterpieces tell stories of American entrepreneurship, of places of worship as community incubators, of our country’s evolving relationship to religion. This exhibition is not only about beautiful objects exceptionally crafted, it is also about the ideas and stories behind the windows: progressive technologies, designers, and patrons.”

Towards the end of the 19th century, as the social and economic climate in the United States shifted—driven by the wealth created through industrialization, internal migration following the Civil War, and an influx of immigrants—the nation’s religious views shifted, too. This was, in part, an appreciation for the country’s achievements and a desire to celebrate what many saw as divinely inspired success. By some estimates, thousands of churches were commissioned and under construction during this period, and with that building boom came a desire for each religious community to distinguish itself and its house of worship. Louis Comfort Tiffany saw this as an opportunity for business growth and drew on his firm’s technical prowess and innovations in glass-working, along with the creativity of the artists he employed, to meet these congregations’ needs.

“Creating a Tiffany stained-glass window was a complex process that required the skills of a designer along with many well-trained craftspeople,” said Catherine Shotick, curator of the exhibition. “Louis Comfort Tiffany employed numerous window designers and artists—notably Agnes Northrop and Frederick Wilson—and this exhibition sheds light on the stories of those individuals, as well as how their involvement affected the different window styles produced by the firm.”

Eternal Light: The Sacred Stained-Glass Windows of Louis Comfort Tiffany has three distinct sections. The first section, **Tiffany’s Process: The Making of a Stained-Glass Window**, examines the progression of an idea from design to finished product within the workshop’s Ecclesiastical

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Department. Presenting a number of drawings and colored illustrations, audiences will learn how Tiffany and his artists worked through a commission from its initial concept, to creating watercolor-infused examples that suggest how light will filter through the final, stained-glass product.

Included in this section are pieces by two of the workshop's leading designers Jacob Holzer (1858-1938) and Frederick Wilson (1858-1932). Holzer, who served as chief designer at the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company from 1890 to 1897, was a skilled architectural draftsman. His *Design for Chancel of Christ Church, Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, New York* (c. 1899) epitomizes his skill as both an architect and an artist, showing the depth of perspective necessary to understand the space to be built, while conveying its pre-production beauty. Wilson began working for Tiffany in 1893, and in 1897 became head of the Ecclesiastical Department. In addition to his strengths as an artist, Wilson's grasp of religious imagery is seen in the *Cartoon for Window, Saint Anselm, St. John's Chapel Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts* (1912).

The second section, **Tiffany and the Chicago World's Fair**, presents the marketing genius of Louis Comfort Tiffany and, in particular, the firm's successful efforts to promote its services to Christian congregations and their patrons. Expanding upon the traditional modes of advertising—such as placements in architectural and design magazines or promotional events when new church windows were installed and dedicated—Tiffany seized on a new opportunity for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The firm designed and built a chapel within its broader exhibition space, featuring elements such as 16 mosaic-clad columns; a 1,000-pound, 10-by-8-foot cross-shaped electrolier; a marble and white glass mosaic altar; a baptismal font; and several stained-glass windows. The goal was straightforward: demonstrate the splendor an individual or congregation could expect to see by commissioning work from Tiffany.

Several important pieces on view will convey to contemporary audiences the ornate and majestic nature of the Tiffany chapel. The first is an altar cross from 1891, commissioned and produced for a client in New York and borrowed by Tiffany for the World's Fair; standing more than four feet tall. The cross is made of gilt-brass, topaz, amethyst, and glass, and was designed to catch light from nearly every direction. The second is a monumental candelabrum, made in 1893, of bronze and molded glass. These objects are complemented by some of the marketing materials that give insight into the language that Tiffany used to sell his firm's specialties.

This section closes with the *Antependium* window (c. 1892-1893), a leaded glass work that closely mirrors the fabric antependium that would have been seen hanging over the lectern in the chapel. At its center is a white and green opalescent crucifix, enlivened by textured, swirling leading, and set against a background in rich crimson and purple glass that conveys a sense of a velvet-like texture. This window, which demonstrated Tiffany's skill to viewers at the time and possibly designed by Agnes Northrop, was sold off during the bankruptcy sale for Tiffany Studios and, for all practical purposes, lost. It resurfaced in the 1970s, when it was identified and subsequently conserved.

The final section of the exhibition, **Eternal Light: The Windows**, presents ten stained-glass windows and one chandelier, demonstrating—in glass—the incredible creative and artistic capacity of the

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Tiffany firm's Ecclesiastical Department. Spanning the firm's four decades of ecclesiastical commissions from churches across the United States, the windows demonstrate the Tiffany artists' ability to convey movement and emotion through stained-glass, as well as the Gilded Age's appetite for decoration.

Among the windows included in this section are:

- *Poppies and Passion Flowers Rapelye Memorial Window* (c. 1915) and *Lilies and Palms Underhill Memorial Window* (after 1895), both designed by Agnes Northrop and created for St. John's Episcopal Church in Jersey City, New Jersey to memorialize prosperous citizens of the town; each is approximately 4 feet by 2 feet. Despite being created more than fifteen years apart, they demonstrate the firm's artistic consistency and cohesion across two different commissioned pieces for the same church.
- *Christ and the Apostles* (c. 1890) is one of the largest works in the exhibition, measuring nearly 8 feet by 8 feet. Attributed to Frederick Wilson, the window is a triptych depicting Christ and 11 of his apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane. The presentation of the apostles' hands, feet and faces, all finely enameled, reflect the skill and artistry involved, allowing each figure to be seen as a distinct individual, set against a vibrant landscape of mottled and striated opalescent glass in shades of blue and green.
- *Ecclesiastical Angels* (1905), also designed by Wilson, is another large-scale work, also approximately 8 feet by 8 feet. The window honors ten women who were killed when their sleigh was hit by a train on a snowy night in February 1905. The memorial features two angels with opalescent rippled glass wings standing at the center of a three-part window and includes the names of those who died.
- *Charity* (1925) is the latest window in the exhibition; it is approximately 9 feet by 4 feet and is attributed to Frederick Wilson. It depicts Mary, a young Christ, and a young John the Baptist, all clad in colorful layered opalescent drapery glass robes. They are set in a landscape of pine and cypress trees, sky, and mountains, rendered in naturalistic shades of blue, gold, green, and mauve. It is paired with its preparatory drawing from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Eternal Light: The Sacred Stained-Glass Windows of Louis Comfort Tiffany will be accompanied by a full-color hardcover catalogue featuring illustrations of each work, as well as contextual and comparative plates. The catalogue includes historical context and commentary by exhibition curator, Catherine Shotick, a foreword by Richard P. Townsend, Executive Director of the Driehaus Museum, and an essay by curator and noted Tiffany scholar Elizabeth De Rosa, on the history, design, and production of sacred stained-glass windows at the Tiffany firms.

In addition to the exhibition, the Museum will present a range of different public programs exploring Tiffany and his workshops' history, as well as connections between this history and contemporary questions about artistic production, religiosity, and the socio-economic similarities between the Gilded Age and today. Programming will explore the problematic realities behind the beauty of the Tiffany firms' ecclesiastical commissions, such as the important—but often hidden—role played by women artists and managers like Clara Driscoll and Agnes Northrop; the complex relationship

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between Louis Comfort Tiffany and his workers; the history of the churches that house Tiffany windows, including their roles in civil rights and social justice movements; and a range of questions around how Tiffany and his artists appropriated and re-imagined different styles, materials, and techniques seen in countries and cultures elsewhere in the world.

Eternal Light: The Sacred Stained-Glass Windows of Louis Comfort Tiffany is organized by the Richard H. Driehaus Museum.

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About The Richard H. Driehaus Museum

The Richard H. Driehaus Museum explores the Gilded Age through the art, architecture, and design of the late nineteenth century to the present. The Museum was founded by Richard H. Driehaus, who oversaw the restoration of its home, the Nickerson Mansion. Mr. Driehaus—who has a long history of funding projects in the arts and culture, including historic and contemporary art, and with an emphasis on projects engaging Chicago institutions—subsequently gave the Museum its collection. Once known as Chicago’s “Marble Palace” and located just steps from the Magnificent Mile, the collection of period decorative arts is presented in an immersive experience within the Mansion. Temporary exhibitions organized by the Driehaus and its partners place the Gilded Age in context, as do vibrant educational and cultural programs designed to appeal to diverse audiences and illuminate the history, culture, and urban fabric of Chicago.

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