

Divine Light and Living Color: From Stained Glass to Transparent Walls

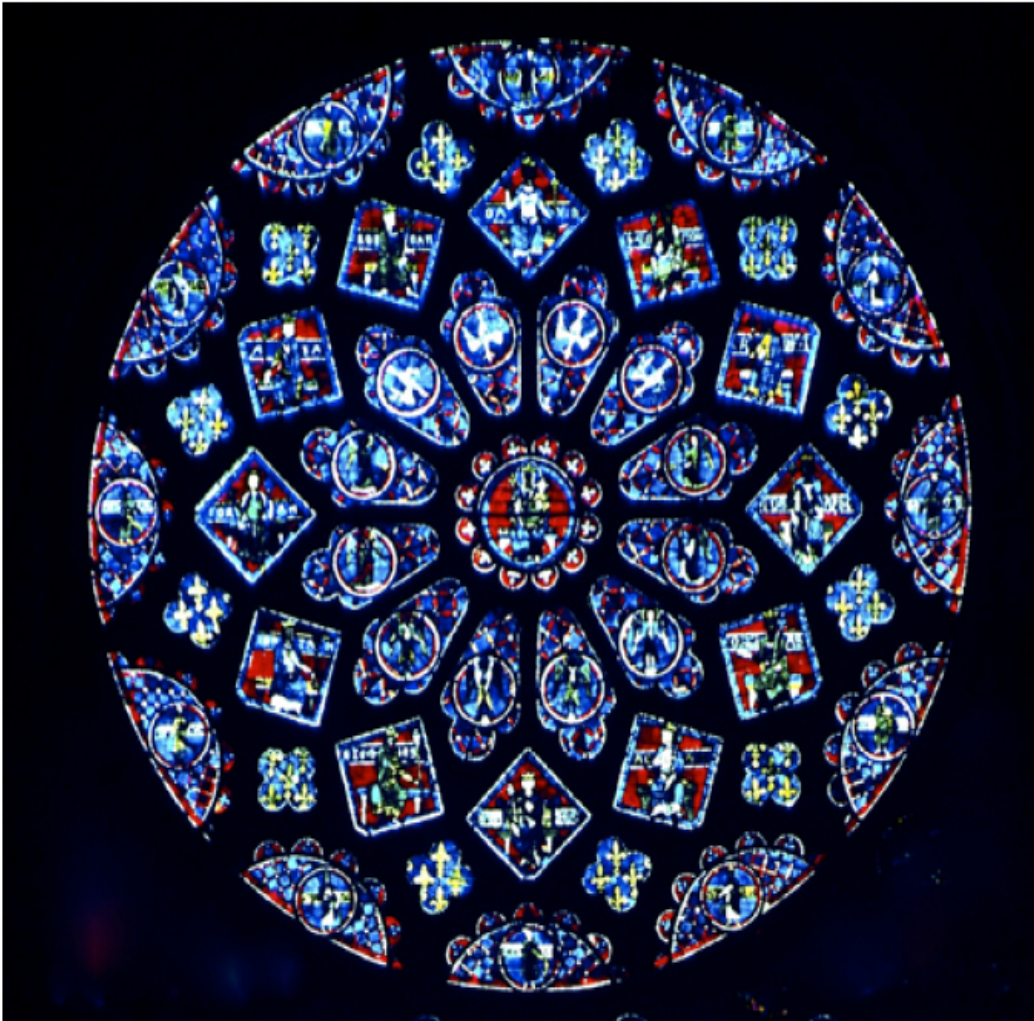
Van James, Honolulu, Hawai'i

One of the greatest artistic and technological advances of the Middle Ages was the stained glass window of the majestic Gothic cathedrals. With the structural development of the flying buttress and the rib vault, walls of glass became possible, letting a radiant flood of colorful light pour into the formerly dim interiors of medieval sanctuaries. Colored glass, in hues that are near impossible to match today, was created in order to transform the divine light of outer nature

(God the Father), allowing a kind of immaculate conception by means of the translucent colored glass (Holy Spirit), that gave birth to the diaphanous colored light (God the Son) within the sacred space. It was understood by the faithful that an artistic miracle was taking place within the house of God by means of the stained glass and transparent color. An illiterate population was enraptured by colorful pictures of the sacred legends radiating into the in-spired inner world of the cathedral. It was so startling a sense perceptible revelation, this transparent, luminous light and color, that it is ironic it should appear in a time historically referred to as the Dark Ages.

Perhaps the next most striking development that uti-

lized light in flashing black and white and later, colored images was the cinema, the motion pictures. No longer designed strictly for the spiritual uplifting of the soul, for religious purposes, this new technology primarily served the secular purpose of simple entertainment. A virtual window was illuminated on the wall of a darkened room. Enlightening a dark interior space, cinema brought the light of another world, in this case an artificial light, into the hearts and minds of people held fast in their seats. In a state of suspended animation and aesthetic arrest moviegoers left their wills at the door, participated not in worship, but experienced a wide range of emotions and were deeply moved by the flashing pictures and colored light stories.



Stained glass Rose window from Chartres cathedral's north transept.



Lighting up a screen—cinema, television, and computer technology bring the light of another world, an artificial light, into the hearts and minds of people held fast in their seats.

Today, we have the computer screen and smart phone providing us with the impulse of radiant light—again artificially generated—luminous in its shining forth, a virtual world of light and color. Also serving to entertain us, this shining play of colored images provides us with all kinds of information—it is information technology drawing us into other worlds. The computer screen is today's substitute stained glass window with a twist. It has become our portal into a virtual world of contemporary belief and has become our faithful window of data streaming. We put our faith into this tiny "window" of colored light every time we turn it on.



The computer screen is today's substitute stained glass window with a twist.

Why has there been and why is there still such an interest in transparent colored light? Is it secondary to the information, the entertainment, the spirituality that it carries? Or as the vehicle for all of these is this medium of transparent color the actual message? Where do we see transparent colored light in its most natural form and setting? In the rainbow! This is the archetypal appearance of transparent color. The rainbow is translucent, non-material, lacking in physical substance—it is see-through, transparent. Even though it appears as sense perceptible phenomena it is ephemeral, insubstantial, a doorway to the supersensible. The rainbow is featured in many origin myths as a bridge, a gateway, a

divine being, or a special sign, a "token of a covenant" between the spiritual and the physical worlds. In addition to the rainbow, the blue of the sky, the colors of the rising and setting sun, the changing hues of the clouds, the seasonal transformations of color in nature are all a revelation of living, ever-changing, non-material, transparent color.

"Color is the soul of nature and of the entire cosmos," declared educator, scientist, and spiritual researcher Rudolf Steiner. And it was Steiner, at the dynamic beginning of the modern era, as an inspiration to the 20th century

avant-garde art movement, that he suggested the importance of color transparency in painting.* Working at first in Berlin and Munich, then in Switzerland, Steiner developed plant pigments for a building he designed and called the Goetheanum, after the German poet and natural philosopher J. W. von Goethe. In this uniquely designed and revolutionary theatre, Steiner applied his plant colors specifically developed for their qualities of luminosity.

In describing this luminescence of color to a chemist, Steiner was disappointed that the chemist cited the recent invention of fluorescent colors by industrial paint manufacturers. The chemist had failed to see the nature of luminosity to which Steiner was pointing; not an electric, day-glow effect, but a subtle luster of light.

Although painting in glazes and the use of under-painting in order to achieve rich color values had been done since the Renaissance, Rudolf Steiner

led the way in early twentieth century theory and practice of transparent color for interior environments, uniting the



Transparent colored interiors and exteriors enhance the living environment by making tangible a more human atmosphere and a harmonious environment. Here are some lazured interiors by Chuck Andrade.



These examples of interior lazure wall paintings at the Honolulu Waldorf School in Hawai'i are by the author.

modernist exploration of rich colors free of figurative elements together with a transformed notion of the stained glass window. Just as artists like Kandinsky were breaking the naturalism barrier with freeform, vibrant, color in abstract painting Steiner was suggesting "painting out of the color" with plant pigments and transparent watercolor applications. This was not just artistic painting that could be hung on a wall but interior walls themselves that could show their radiance as broad translucent color. A painting hung on a wall creates a window into another dimension. But walls of transparent color open the entire room and break down the barriers (the walls) of confinement. Transparent color allows walls to dis-



This interior lazure wall painting at the Honolulu Waldorf School was done by Chuck Andrade together with the author.

appear, as it were, to lose their character of enforcing a fixed boundary and a spatial limitation. Such colored surfaces allow the soul to breathe beyond the limitations set by the physical wall. As a seer, Steiner explained how opaque painted walls were a hindrance to future human development because of their lack of transparency.* They couldn't dissolve the walls but only reinforced the boundaries. Beyond the physical aspect of such color, the formative forces and the sentient energy, the elemental beings of such colors lack anything to do with the three kingdoms of nature and therefore block a healthy human

evolution by eliminating one's contact with the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms. Healthy elemental beings and formative life forces weave within transparent color and foster a positive human development by means of contact with the kingdoms of nature. In other words, a healing energy or up-building vibration, a therapeutic life-force, flows through the wall surfaces that have been prepared with transparent color.

This is why many hospitals and clinics, schools and community centers, even factories, shops, restaurants, and homes have used transparent coloring, the lazure technique, to enhance their environments and encourage a healthy working and living place by way of the medium that is a message in itself-- transparent color.

Transparent colored interiors and exteriors enhance the living environment by making tangible a more human atmosphere and a harmonious environment. When walls breathe with color people likewise breathe. When walls become windows of transparent color an effortless relationship with the environment allows for greater communication, easier recreation, and accessibility to spiritual potential. Lazure wall painting is a further, healthy development, a bringing into ones own home and work place what former generations strove to realize for their own lives in the sanctity of stained glass colored light. With lazure painting a completely contemporary

yet thoroughly futuristic stained glass window effect spreads itself throughout one's entire space, releases one from the rigid authority of matter and frees one to experience "the soul of nature and the entire cosmos."

**Occult Features of the Stuttgart House, Rudolf Steiner. October 15, 1911, Stuttgart. See also Art Inspired by Rudolf Steiner, John Fletcher. 1987, Mercury Arts Publication, UK.*