



The Work of Scott Parsons at Our Lady of Loreto Church

By Kenneth von Roenn

As an architectural glass designer and having owned a glass studio, I always felt that in order to design stained glass windows it was essential to understand the materials and techniques so as to design with these in mind. This is what I was taught and what I emphasized to design assistants, collaborators, and clients.

This was driven by a love for the materials and techniques, but most importantly from a pride in all that I had learned from others over the years.

I have recently come to realize after all these years that I was wrong.

So what caused this abrupt change in understanding?

It was brought about through seeing and thinking about the work of a visionary artist and its execution by supremely talented artisans, namely Scott Parsons and the artisans of Derix Glasstudios particularly Karl Heinz-Traut and Rahmami Schulz in their roles as fabrication managers and Olaf Hanweg for the

painting and Roman Olichowski for the acid etching/shading for Our Lady of Loreto Church in Foxfield, Colorado.

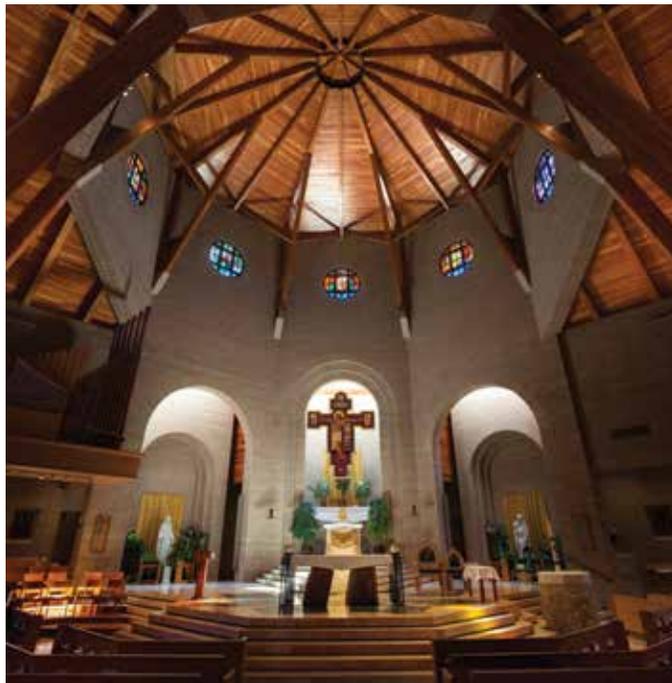
But first a little background on my previous knowledge of Scott's work: when I first saw the publication of the windows for Gloria Dei in Sioux Falls, South Dakota that Scott had designed, I was surprised at the sophistication of the imagery, as well as with the mastery of the craftsmanship. Here was an artist that seemed to have just appeared on the scene with no

previous glass projects to study for clues as to how his work had evolved to this level of proficiency, and especially with such visual potency. But then I saw the Loreto windows being fabricated at Derix, and I became even more perplexed when I learned that this was only his third project. How could an artist with limited experience in glass create work that was so

unique and original? What was especially surprising was that this imagery obviously was not derived from a stained glass tradition, or even a hint at any contemporary glass influence. This was a completely new type of imagery in glass. One that was visually rich, filled with subtlety, nuance, uniquely composed and structured as well exuding a vibrant energy.

Yet, I kept coming back to the question: How could an artist working in other media, with no perceived knowledge of glass working, achieve this degree of assured sophistication?

These questions took me in search of some answers, and what I learned was surprising in its simplicity. But it was contrary to what to what I had come to learn as being the only authentic way to design stained



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Scott Parsons, **Angels**, Our Lady of Loreto Church, Foxfield, CO

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Interior view of Our Lady of Loreto Church, Foxfield, CO



glass. This understanding was a lesson firmly rooted in the history of stained glass, particularly its demise in the 18th c. and its resurrection in the 19th c. The publication of two independent books by Charles Winston¹ and Violet le Duc², in which Gothic glass working techniques and the fundamental principles of designing which were adopted, and adapted, by artists and artisans, such as William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and Charles Connick. They, along with other artists and studios, revived an art form long pronounced to be dead, infusing it with a renewed vitality, and established a new foundation, one that was built upon these ancient principles.

The lesson that I drew from this historical evolution was clear to me, or so I thought: understand and respect the materials and techniques of the medium in order to express them honestly in a design.

I began to understand from seeing the Loreto windows in fabrication at Derix that there is a different approach: one which is extremely important for the growth and expansion of our art, as we will see, or so I hope.

I saw from the Loreto windows how the vision of an artist from another medium could be eloquently expressed through the skill, experience, and especially the creativity, of artisans fabricating the work. I learned that for this to occur there were two vital components to a working process between the artist and the artisans: understanding and trust.

The relationship between artisans and an artist is crucial for a successful project, for it requires a complete and thorough understanding of the design, and especially of the artist's intentions, by the artisans. For only by understanding a design and what the artist aspires to achieve can artisans decide how best to accomplish these objectives. It is also essential that the artist trust in the abilities of the artisans, but most importantly in their understanding of the design. Scott has said, "I think perhaps in some way it was to my advantage to not understand how difficult the things were that I was asking Olaf and Karl to do for me. And I also need to say Olaf totally gets it too. There is a synchronicity there. We go into the spray booth and he puts on Schiller (a German electronic group), and it is magic that happens." This collaboration between artists and artisans is nothing new, but with imagery as complex and novel as Scott's, it requires a unique combination of vision, experience, imagination, passion, and tenacity to bring it to fruition by all of the contributors. It is also important to mention the role of the Derix studio, not only for this project, but for the great many of theirs that I have seen, for Derix has refined a system in which the artists and

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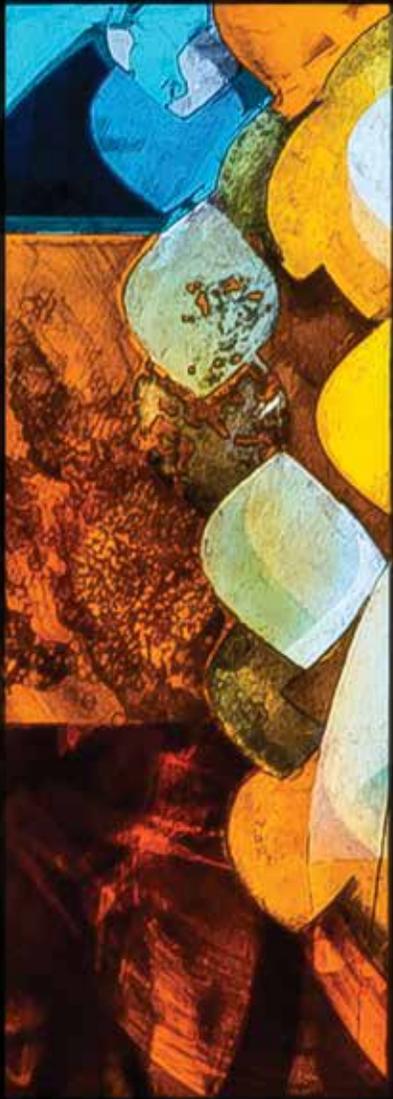
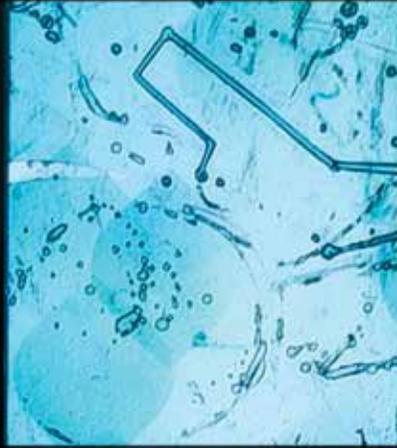
Scott Parsons, **Thrones**, Our Lady of Loreto Church, Foxfield, CO

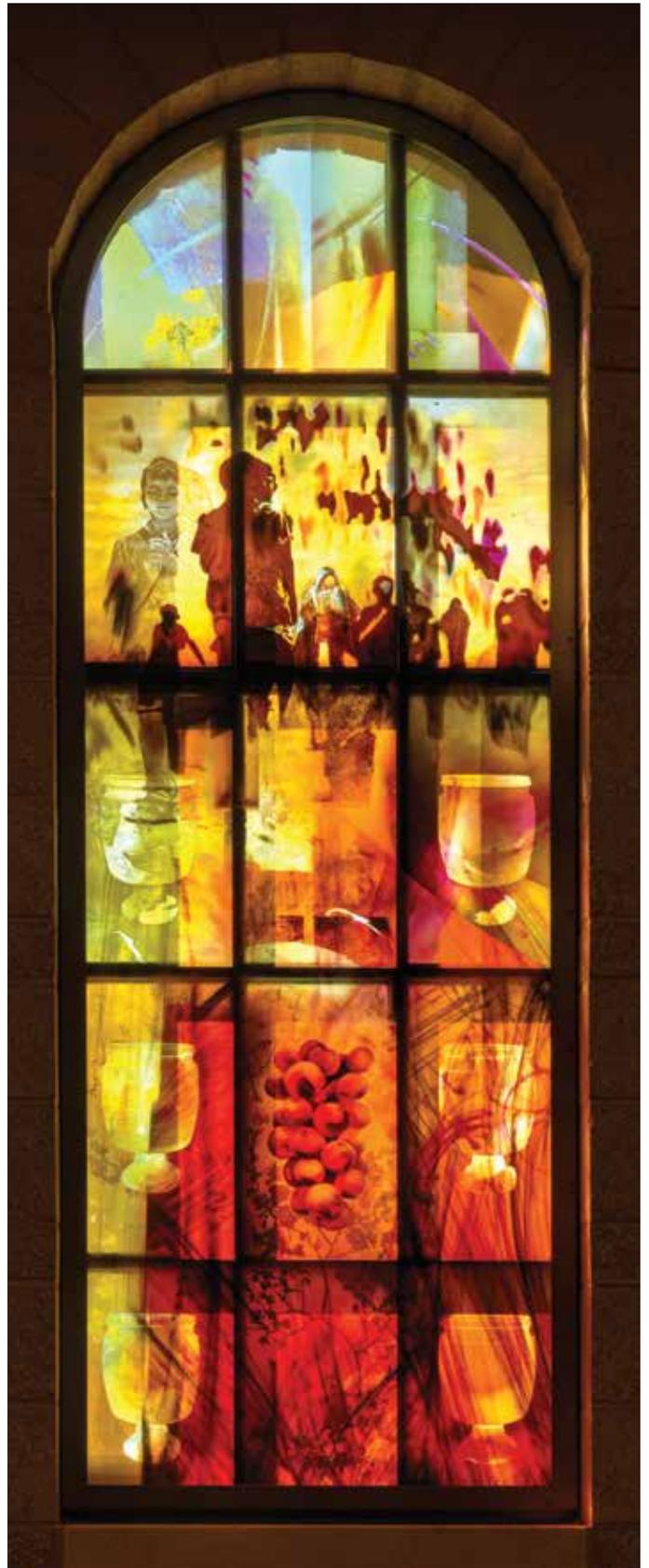
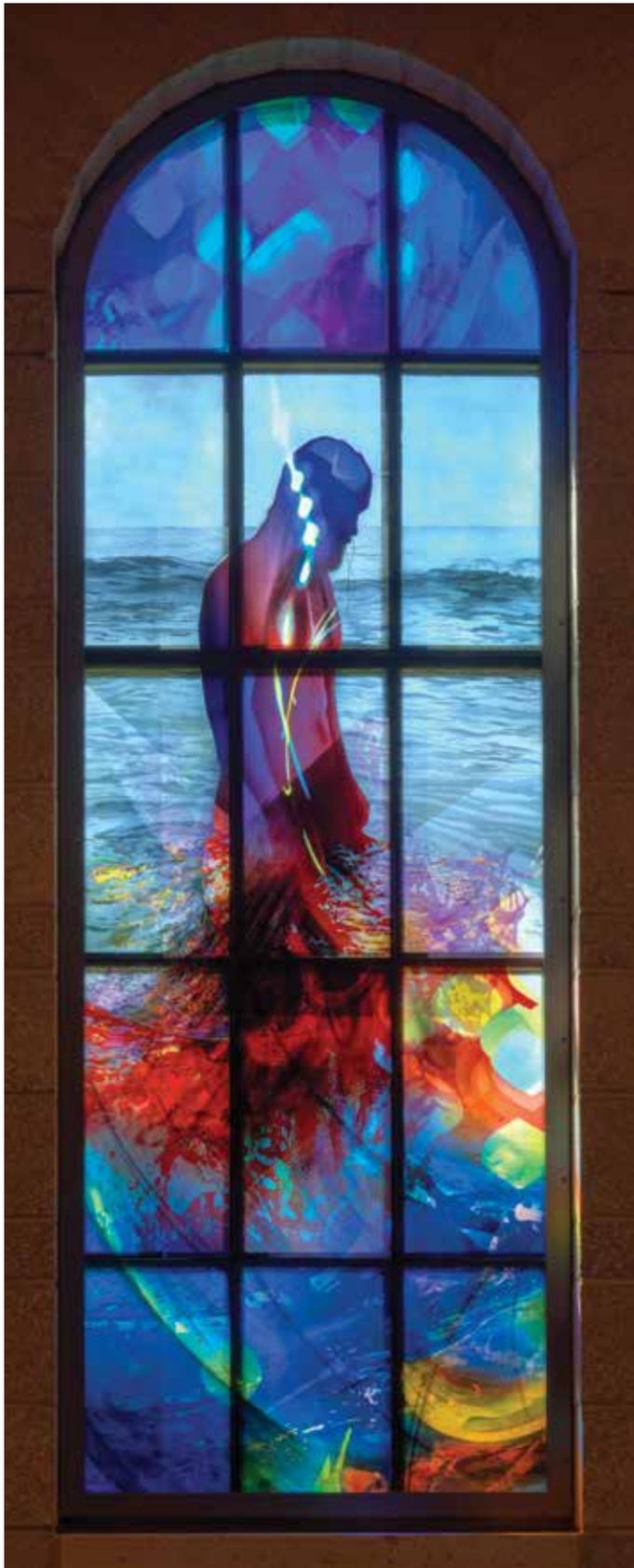
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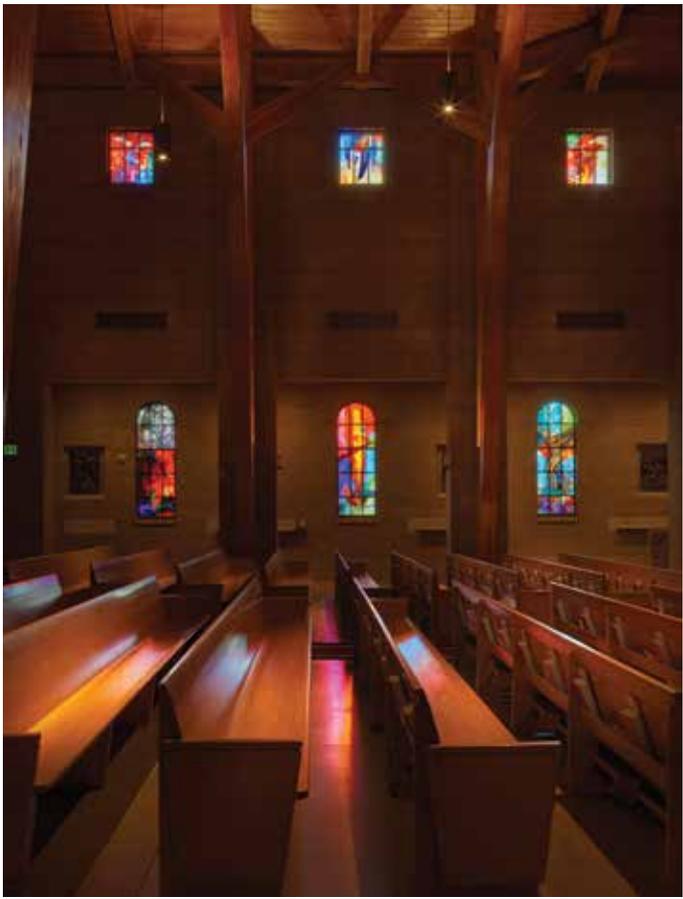
Scott Parsons, Six windows at Our Lady of Loreto Church, Foxfield, CO



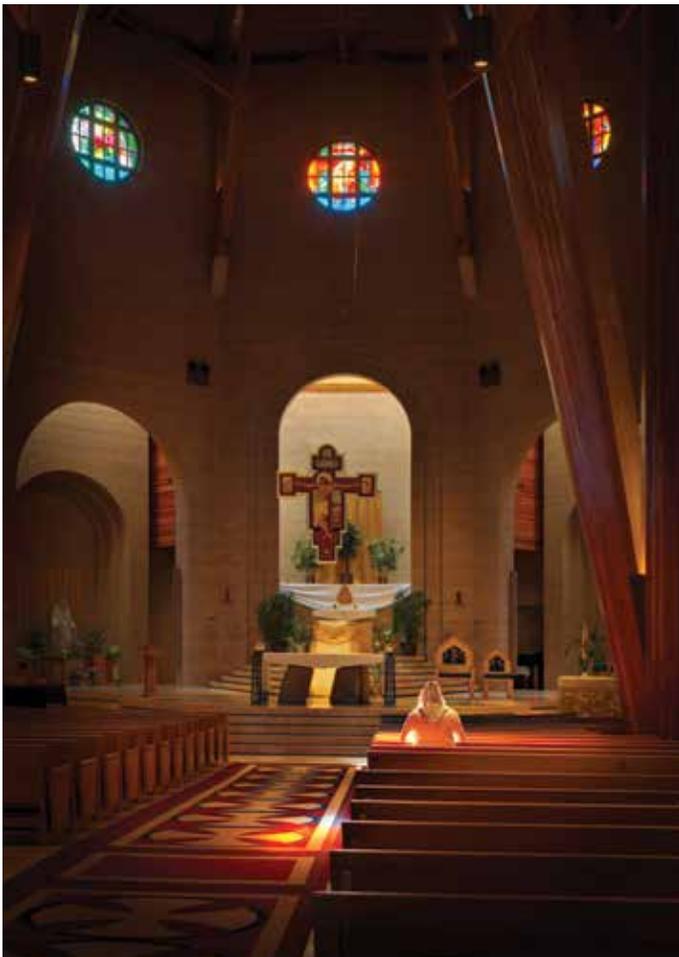
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THESE PAGES:
Left to right: Scott Parsons, **Baptism, Beatitudes, Gethsemane**, and interior views, Our Lady of Loreto Church, Foxfield, CO

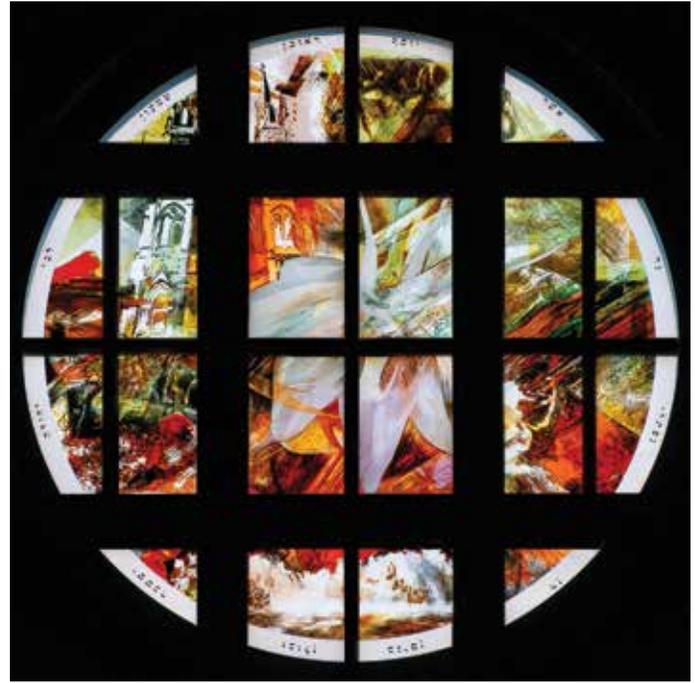
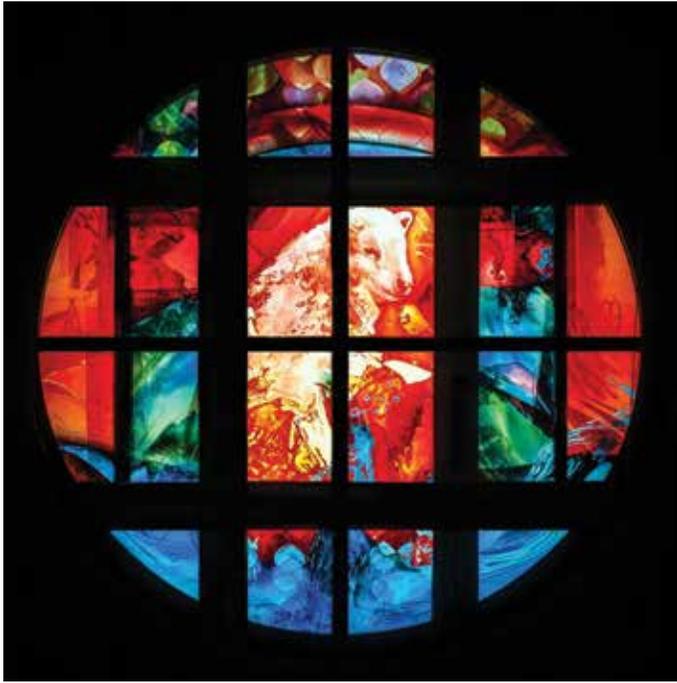


the artisans work closely together with the complete support of the studio.

After thinking about this project, Scott's background, and the role of artisans brought about two realizations. First, is the role of artisans as creative contributors who can provide more than just a material manifestation of an artist's design for glass art. With the expansion of technical capabilities over the past few decades, artisans have been able to contribute a wider range of expression that can elevate a design, as well as introduce additional qualities, such as luminosity, which give a work a broader visual vibrancy. In this capacity, artisans become co-creators in some ways, which is essentially what collaboration is about. This type of relationship has been common to many other mediums throughout history, though stained glass artists have often bemoaned the limitations of their craft. Renaissance stained glass is an apt example, for the glass artists of the time aspired to emulate the effects of paintings, borrowing its compositional devices, such as perspective, to achieve a mutual objective, namely pictorial illusion. However, the lead lines and reinforcing bars belied these attempts of dimensional illusion by drawing a viewer's vision to the front surface of the picture plane, which was contrary to the intent of a volumetric composition by the artist.

THESE PAGES:
Top, left to right: Scott Parsons, **Spring, Summer, Lamb on Throne**, and **Wedding**; Bottom: interior view, Our Lady of Loreto Church, Foxfield, CO

PHOTOS, THESE PAGES: COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



The second realization that I had was that with these new technologies and materials combined with the advanced abilities of artisans, artists in other media are now able to design work that can be fabricated faithfully. Once again, Scott Parson's comment, "I think perhaps in some way it was to my advantage to not understand how difficult the things were that I was asking Olaf and Karl to do" is particularly pertinent to this point, for it implicitly suggests that there is a degree of freedom of expression for an artist because they don't have to worry with how an effect can be achieved. This is not new as some significant glass projects have been created by artists from other media, such as Matisse, Leger, Chagall, Albers, etc., though it is important to note that these works fit well with traditional stained glass techniques and materials, so there was not much of a stretch in the translation.

From all of this I arrived at the recognition that what we see in Scott Parson's work is a wonderful example of how an imagery from a new medium, digital/graphic arts, can be expressed in glass through a blend of artistry, artisanship, material, and structure. This demonstrates an opportunity for artists working in other media to explore the potential of glass. Glass can provide new qualities and characteristics to an artist's work, which is apparent in looking at Scott Parson's windows at Our Lady of Loreto.

The important aspect of architectural glass being art that is designed by artists from other media is that they bring a fresh perspective to the medium, as we see in Scott's work.

From these works, our medium will grow in two ways. First, it will evolve artistically through new types of imagery and new approaches to the application of glass art in constructed environments. Second, with the exploration of glass by artists from other arts, architectural glass art will gain an acceptance and recognition as a viable, and relevant, contemporary art form.

At this point in its history, our architectural glass art could certainly benefit from an infusion of new influences. Scott Parson's work demonstrates an opportunity for the medium to grow from the work and influence of artists outside of the glass tradition. Scott's work has changed my way of understanding our medium, which after all these years is a wonderful discovery.

Notes

1. Charles Winston, *Memoirs Illustrative of the Art of Glass Painting*, John Murray, Abermarle Street, London, England 1865
2. Violet Le Duc, Eugene-Emmanuel, *Dictionnaire raisonne de l'architecture francoise du XI au XII siecle*, A. Morel & cie. 1861-75

Kenneth Frederick von Roenn, Jr. holds a master's degree in architecture from Yale University. He has executed hundreds of projects nationally and internationally, including the world's largest glass sculpture, which crowns the top of Wacho Bank in Charlotte, NC. His work has been published in numerous books and design magazines. ■

