



HELEN WHITTAKER MA, AMGP ARTIST STATEMENT

I began to specialise in stained glass while studying three-dimensional design at the University of Sunderland. Although I was initially attracted to contemporary design techniques, I quickly became aware of the importance of older, traditional skills - more usually associated with conservation and restoration - for the role they could play in my designs. I gained knowledge and understanding of both traditional and modern ideas of design and how important it is to recognise the relativity of the word "original". It always seems possible to identify traces of the traditional or old in new pieces of artistic work.

The second phase of my education as an artist was an MA in the Department of Visual, Islamic and Traditional Arts at the Princes of Wales' Foundation (formerly the Prince of Wales' Institute of Architecture). A strong emphasis was upon the practical and theoretical aspects fundamental to the artistic traditions of both East and West. I had the opportunity to explore the role of geometry in design - something intrinsic to both cultural traditions.

In 1998 I joined Barley Studio in York which is under the direction of Keith Barley, UKIC Accredited Conservator, FMGP, ACR. The company provided a platform for me to put into practice a diverse range of skills comprising conservation, restoration and the design and creation of stained glass windows.

In each commission I carefully consider the environment which the piece will occupy in the building, including the colour and style of the architecture, adjacent windows and other features, as well as the requirements of the commissioning body. This could mean discussions with an individual customer or require a teaching and learning process involving a much wider community.

Geometry provides the underlying structural process of my work and is also a valuable element for its symbolism. In my designs, I combine ideas inspired by ancient craft traditions and contemporary imagery in both figurative and abstract forms. In respect of meaning, each theme is researched from historical, socio-political, psychological, theological and philosophical perspectives. My aim is to challenge the imagination and stimulate the mind to embark into a spiritual journey.

Helen Whittaker
STAINED GLASS
& SCULPTURE