

Stained Glass Working

Mel Geary's life with stained glass as told to Patchwork by Mel Geary.

Interviewed by Mike Smith and Jon Curry in the spring of 2003

Mel Geary is an artist who was born in 1929 in St. Paul, Minnesota. As a child, he was interested in color and light, which led to a career in designing stained glass.

Mr. Geary became interested in the art of stained glass in 1948 and his passion only escalated from there. In 1998, Geary moved to Bloomsburg and almost instantly became a hit in the art scene. He lives and worked out of his studio in town. Some of his work can be found in churches and galleries around town, but some of his pieces are even in other countries.

PATCHWORK: There's a lot of windows and stuff in here

GEARY: It's natural light and color. I was already an artist... and the light comes manufactured, I just design it. If you have any artistic talent at all, that's the thing about designing. I'll go to the house, the initial contact is by word-of-mouth. Someone told someone that I do this, and I'm sitting there looking around at ideas of what can be done. I guess it is very time efficient. The transparency of the light or the schematics let's put it that way. It's mostly light panels, you might say, the prisms of color called curtains of color. It could be a whole wall of color. All my life, I did a lot in New York. The glass that's manufactured, the glass that I use in my designs, there's these big warehouses. I can go there to pick out the glass

PATCHWORK: What do you think is your most famous piece?

GEARY: The most famous piece... for 3 penthouses in Manhattan. The guy wanted the same plan. I mean he wanted the same plan. Because they moved three times and every time they moved, they wanted a new stained glass. And then they went out of business. They told me they went and got as much as they could out before the auctioneer came [chuckle] So I gathered some of the pieces back and then some of the pieces they were going to have to sell.

PATCHWORK: OK, so where can your artwork be found?

GEARY: Mostly out in the Midwest and you know like Ohio and Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana. In fact that piece right there in front of me is from Indiana. And it wasn't just flat glass, it was glass about an inch thick and you cut it and break it vaguely the shape that you want and you chip it with a little hammer. It's almost like when you're making a diamond, they facet it to make the color move around? Well, that's what I had to do with this. I made this one myself.

PATCHWORK: Was that really hard to make?

GEARY: No, no this was easy [chuckle] It's sort of like casting. You know like casting? Once you draw a design. And then you shape these pieces and you lay them flat, but first you put some kind of sand or gravel to adhere to the glass. Ok, first you put the sand and then you put these blocks in and then you pour the color that you want. You can make different colors. It could be black or white, tan or whatever and then you let it set, and just before you let it set if you want to change the color you take your dye and you sprinkle it on. And then that's it, it becomes a panel. It's more like a wall than a window. After you put all of your ingredients in to make the panel, it becomes the consistency of cookie dough, or pancake batter. Just before it hardens, you can sprinkle things into it to change the color like sand or glitter and that adheres. So then it sets. you let it set over night. One piece I did it was the biggest piece that was ever done that big in this country. It was approximately four feet by eight feet were the panels. I did 35 of those and each piece weighs about 125 pounds.