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Screens and Windows

Susan Stinsmuehlen-Amend is another major figure in the development of the autonomous panel. She also played a leading part in the Glass Art Society, as an early editor of *Glass* magazine, as a board member from 1982-86 and as president for the last two of those years, a pioneering role for a woman in the male-dominated field. Her work is most noted for its pop-culture mix of mediums and celebration of sometimes-crass materials, but she also executed a series of screens in the late '80s that are masterful graphic compositions in a more painterly Modernist style, as she began to move back toward her original field of painting toward the end of the century.

Stinsmuehlen-Amend (b. 1948) attended Hood College, Indiana University and the University of Texas. She was a partner and designer in Renaissance Glass Company of Austin from 1979-87, before moving to southern California. Her panels of the early '80s involved paint and collage, with the addition of glitter, jewels, foils, decals and tapes that she said were inspired by the decor of fast-food restaurants, hobby craft materials and tourist trinkets. Many of these pick up light and color with kitsch allusions, like John Torreano's "gems" and Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's tinfoil and glitter works around the same time. She said in an artist's statement, "My philosophy of 'Too much is not enough' accommodates the complex nature of the surface of my pieces as an unbiased approach to material allows almost anything to be glued, sprayed, tied and laminated to the glass plane. Glass is treated as if it were a shiny canvas 'painted with' textures that play with light."

Sometimes, as in *A Fancy Monitor* (1985), her layering, texturing, patterning accumulation approaches sculpture. On the other hand, the panels of her *Pro Rata Lyricism Screen* (1988) make their zigzag through space with a surface that's essentially flat except for a few roundels and button jewels, but the visual fracturing of surface is equally frenetic and the color scheme far more vivid than in the earlier work. As Suzanne Muchnic wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, these pieces "loudly proclaim her intentions of pushing the medium out of its pretty-object ghetto."¹

Narcissus Quagliata (b. 1942) came to flat glass after intensive training as a painter in his native Italy and at the San Francisco Art Institute (MFA 1968). He spent six years in the boondocks, painting in isolation, and then moved back to San Francisco. He happened to take a stained-glass workshop in 1974. Soon afterward, a friend commissioned a suite of windows for his house, and Quagliata was hooked. He did not focus on making autonomous panels. The integration of windows with architecture pleased him, and he opened a business making leaded glass for commissions. He didn't think that accommodating the needs of a customer had to be an artistic compromise.

In those days, though, he found the state of stained glass to be quite backward. "I felt that people were just doing Victorian curlicue windows or pseudo-Tiffanys. The material in its raw form is so painterly and so beautiful that I could not believe almost everything produced was like Victorian decoration. So I brought what I felt was my painter's world into glass. It was exciting to find something where I could really have an impact and shape a language."¹

Surprisingly, given his education in painting amid 1960s abstraction, Quagliata retained a deep interest in the human figure. He made leaded-glass panels of human silhouettes in the '70s and '80s. One depicted his recently deceased Zen teacher in outline, entirely filled by a starry

night sky (*Suzuki Roshi*, 1981). Another, rather more confrontational, image was his own profile in the act of committing suicide (*Stained Glass Suicide*, 1975). It included leaded lines imitating shattered glass, a maker's worst nightmare. Quagliata hoped to increase the emotional range of flat glass, bringing in subject matter previously deemed inappropriate.

He began to think that his silhouettes were too self-indulgent and not tied closely enough to actual observation. In the mid-'80s, he embarked on a series of large close-up portraits in leaded glass. By this time, he was collaborating with glassblowers in both the U.S. and Germany to produce flat glass that had some of the expressive qualities of paint strokes and washes of watercolor. In this, he was much like LaFarge and Tiffany almost a century earlier. Quagliata usually worked with transparent glass in his portrait series. He incorporated its variations and shifts in color both to describe the contours of the human face and to add a subtle expressive quality. In *A Man* (1984), several pieces of glass fade from clear to gray and back again. They describe the fall of light on the right side of the subject's face, and their imperfections recall the texture of skin. Clear sections add brightness to the portrait, as if the man were illuminated. *A Man* shows a few bits of independent lead lines creeping out on the glass, like a Kehlmann composition, but Quagliata concentrated more on the descriptive possibilities. In one portrait, he proudly noted that the eye alone required 54 pieces of glass.

Large architectural windows also interested him, and he has completed numerous commissions in America and abroad. Recently, he has explored painted and kiln-fired glass panels, reveling in the gesture and blending that's possible when the leaded line is abandoned. He has also produced large enamel-on-metal murals.

Sydney Cash had his first show at New York's Heller Gallery in 1979 and started the '80s doing the work for which he is remembered and at a peak of success in a career filled with

ups and downs. Slumping colored glass over wires, halting the process at just the right instant so that the glass drapes in elegantly fluid lines, and presenting this frozen moment theatrically mounted on black Plexiglas within a glass box, Cash created works of memorable beauty and kinetic expressiveness.

He had stumbled into glass a decade earlier. Born in 1941 in Detroit, he graduated from Wayne State University with a degree in mathematics. In college he started a business called Gargoyles, making cast reproductions of architectural carvings. He moved his business to New York and opened a shop in Greenwich Village (he sold it in 1970). When he rented a basement studio in lower Manhattan that had been part of a glass factory, it still held tons of discarded glass. He started bending sheet glass to make curved mirrors, learning as he went. An experiment with nichrome wire gave him the compatible structural line over which glass could be formed. He actually slumped for the first time in 1970-71 and had the objects mirrored by mirror-silverers in his neighborhood. When he did it with colored glass, the lines evoked dance. He had a show of this work in SoHo in 1971-72, but it passed unremarked.

When his glass became successful in the '80s he moved to the Hudson Valley and continued his work in this and other forms. In 1988 he began silkscreening computer-generated line patterns onto flat glass, creating objects as well as architectural-scale panels with optically kinetic patterns. The latter included a public-art commission for a New York subway station. Later works include autobiographic arrangements of figurines in glass boxes, and in 1996 he won a Felissimo Design award for *Diamond Bowl*, a footed elliptical bowl with a glittering drape of glass.