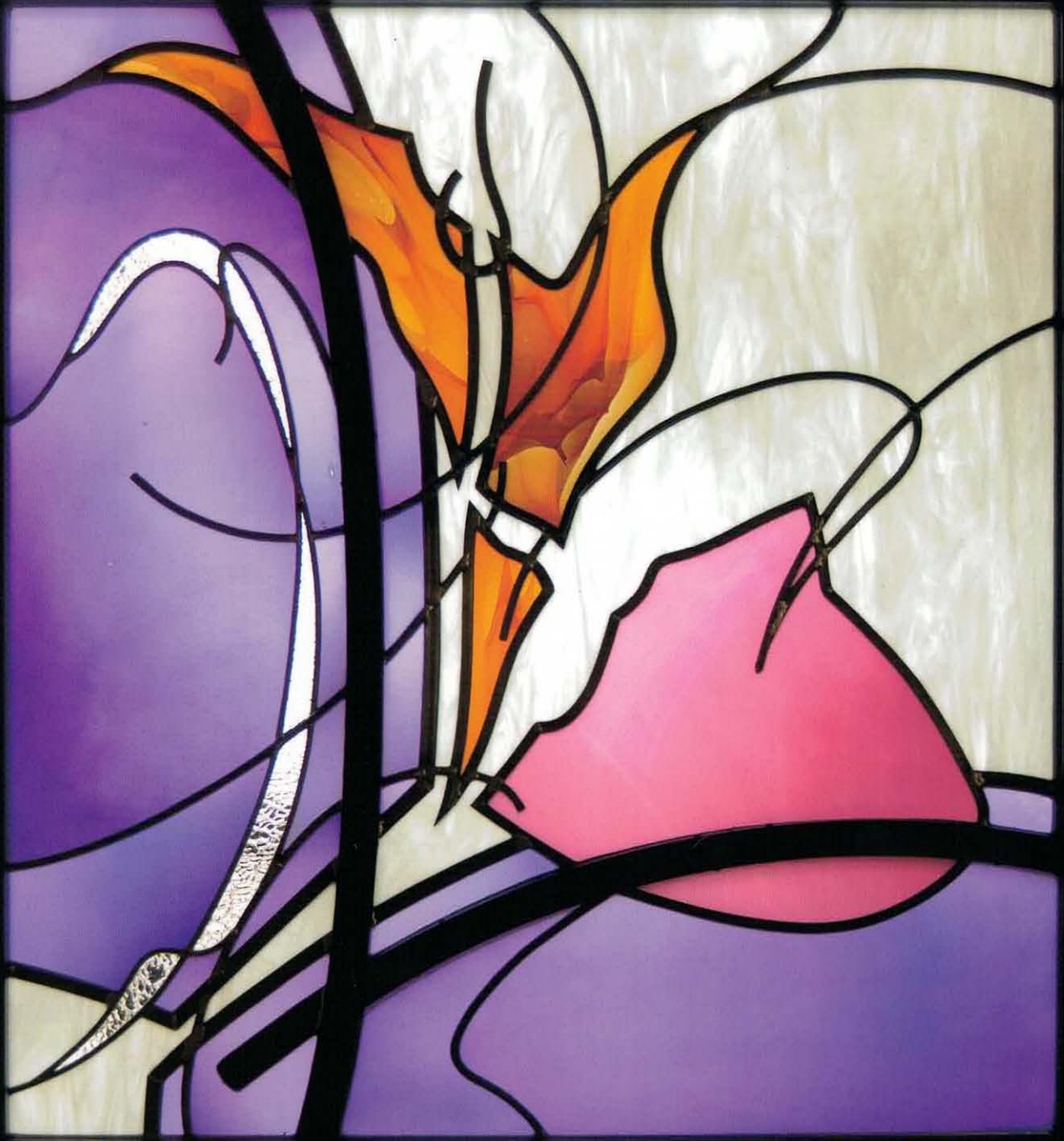


# STAINED GLASS

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# Peru State College Commission

by Cindy and Bob Kessler



Kessler Studios recently completed two projects for the Peru State College Main Library in Peru, Nebraska. The first phase was a Percent for Art commission, and the second was requested after completion of the first.

Percent for Art programs promote the use of artwork in certain public buildings, requiring that approximately one percent of the construction budget be used for architecturally integrated artwork. In the case of Peru College, the renovation of a beautiful, historically significant building into a new, high-tech campus library triggered a Percent for Art "Call to Artists."

From a short list of four artists, Cindy and Bob Kessler of Kessler Studios were awarded the commission for their two-part proposal. A series of five stained glass panels would depict the historical uses of the building, each titled according to the story within: "The Chapel," "The Gymnasium," "The Science Building," "The Art Department" and "The Roller Rink." A stained glass

*Seasons*



*Fall*





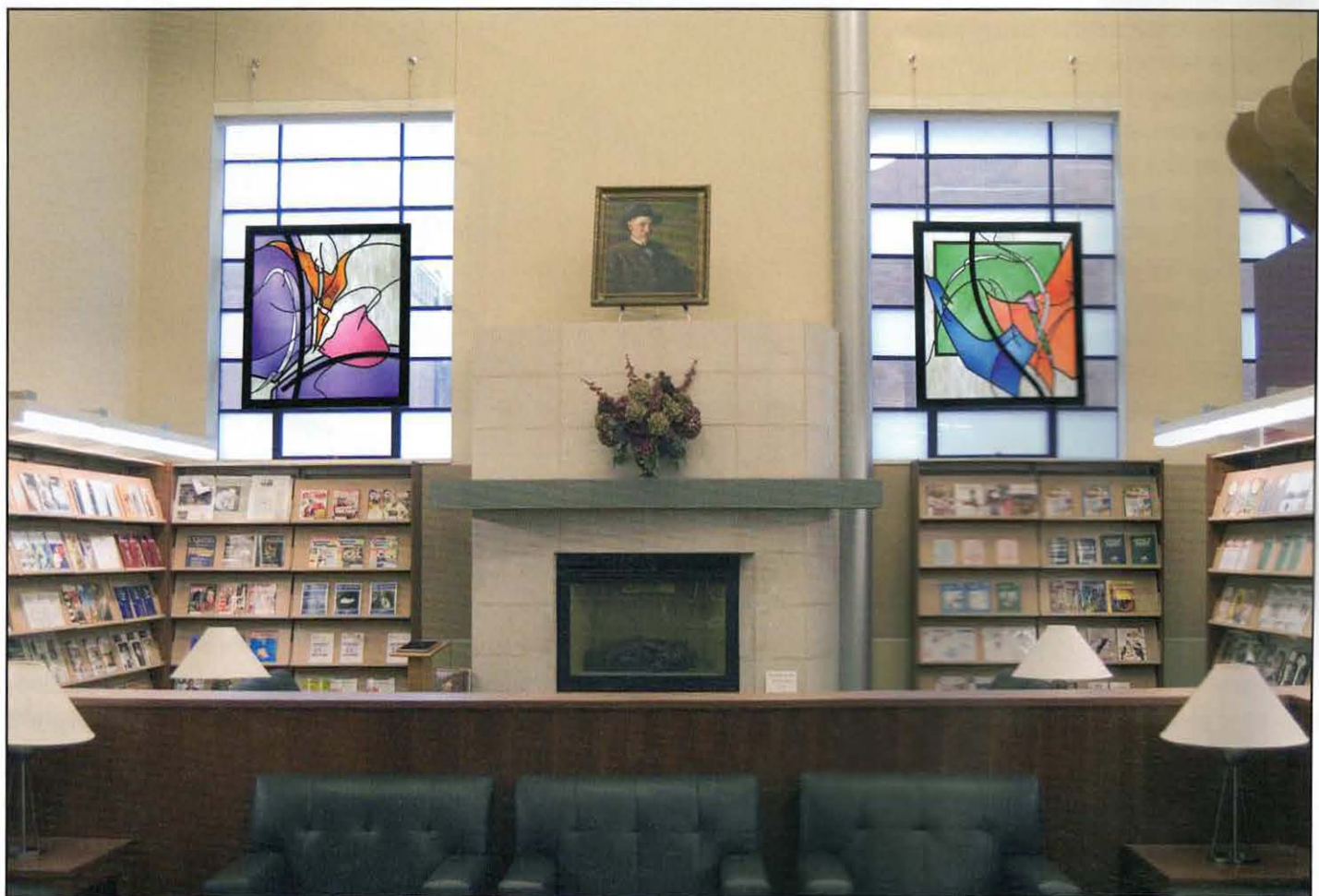
*Spring*



*Summer*



*Winter*



*Chapel and Gym*



triptych would speak of the college experience as an academic and personal journey, titled "The Journey." Both proposals were presented to the committee using highly realistic maquettes, with the art glass designs being reproduced on translucent acetate.

The old building afforded the main library an open, expansive floor plan, with a high vaulted ceiling more than two stories overhead. The new, ultra-modern interior details contrasted tastefully with the classic architectural elements of the historic building. Large windows with original true-divided-lites, graced three of the room's four walls.

Although the exterior glazing provided a wonderful abundance of light, the mullions created a distracting backdrop for stained glass. The solution was two part. First, the art glass panels were suspended out from the existing windows, providing a separation between the two. Second, the glasses in the artwork would have to be either opaque or obscuring of the visual distraction beyond.

A large percentage of German-made Lamberts glass was used, especially the opals and opaks, which add a thin layer of white on the back, rendering it opaque. Being mouth blown — as it has been for centuries — every sheet of glass has a gentle shading variation that adds subtle interest. The smooth richness of Lamberts colored glass was paired with a slightly streaky white, made domestically by the Spectrum Company. For the triptych, a grid of glue-chip bevels was added to the palette of glasses.

The five historical panels, 56" tall x 51" wide each, and the three triptychs, 58" tall x 114" wide each, were installed into custom frames made by the J. Sussman Company. The frames combined Sussman's standard 200x Series with a 2" tubular border member for strength. Mullions within the artwork,



*Detail of hanging system before panel placement.*

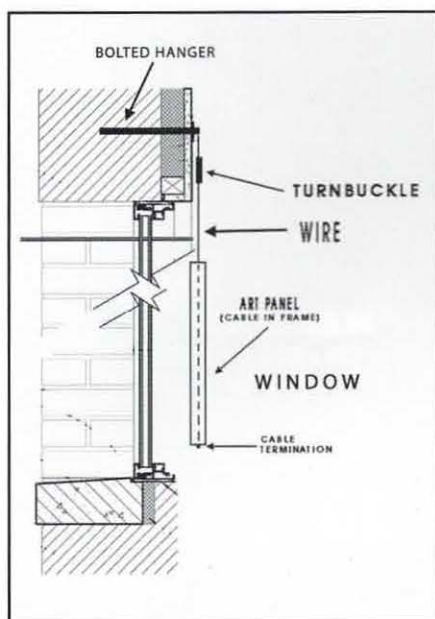
whether curved or straight, integrate seamlessly into the designs.

The individual panels were then prepared for hanging. Holes were drilled in the exterior tube stock to receive the cabling system that would suspend the panels in front of the windows. Bob had to quickly educate himself on the world of architectural cabling, of which many manufactures originate in the world of

ship rigging. The hardware available is elegant, extremely strong, durable, and expensive. The suspension system used stainless steel cables with swage end caps and adjustable turnbuckles to allow for leveling the free-hanging windows.

Suspending the stained glass panels in front of the existing windows created a unique challenge, as there was no ready means of support. For the five





*Hanging System*

eastern windows, holes were drilled through the interior partition wall into the brick substructure. Epoxy resin was injected into the holes and a threaded rod embedded. A simple decorative cap hid the raw edge of the hole, and a welded ring hung off the rod. Finally the support cables were attached to the rings and the windows leveled using the turnbuckles.

The southern panels needed a more complex engineering solution, and the Kesslers installed two 4" x 6" x 24' aluminum beams to serve as supports for the triptych frames. These beams straddled existing roof trusses and were modified to connect together at the peak of the roof with a structural bolt (with a backup support plate at the lower ends, where they rested on the trusses). Once the beams were in place, the triptych frames were hung using a similar setup of threaded rods, welded rings, and stainless steel wire and hardware. A laser level assured that the three frames aligned perfectly.

Six different lead profiles, ranging from 1/4" to 1" wide, were used to accent the various graphic elements in the designs. The lead came was high-alloy

restoration grade from the G.A. Avril Company in Cincinnati, Ohio.

### *Using Symbology to Tell a Story*

When Cindy designs a window, her goal is two-fold: to create art that can be appreciated on its own merits as well as something that can have an inner meaning, if the viewer wishes to learn of it. This is true of the Peru College windows, which can be enjoyed as colorful accents to the interior of the Library or "understood" to be abstract representations of complex concepts.

For example, here is what the Kesslers wrote to describe the southern triptych windows: "The stained glass panels in this part of the building are titled 'The Journey,' because enrolling in a college is an educational journey to improve life, to make dreams come true. The college experience is one of transition, of challenges, and of self-discovery. It is a journey that shapes futures and forever becomes a part of who you are.

"A college education is accomplished one step at a time. It may start with a grant that makes the journey possible, finishing a given school year, passing a particularly tough class, or completing a series of prerequisites before moving on to chosen classes. These milestones along the way, these segments of the whole that must be passed through, are represented by the blue forms. The yellow/orange shapes suggest students moving from one milestone to the next. The lines that sweep whimsically throughout the design, both the lead lines and the rose-colored wisps, represent the flurry of activity inherent in the college experience. There are social activities to be savored and clubs to join, together with the monumental tasks of logistical planning and life-juggling that is so necessary to achieving your academic goals.

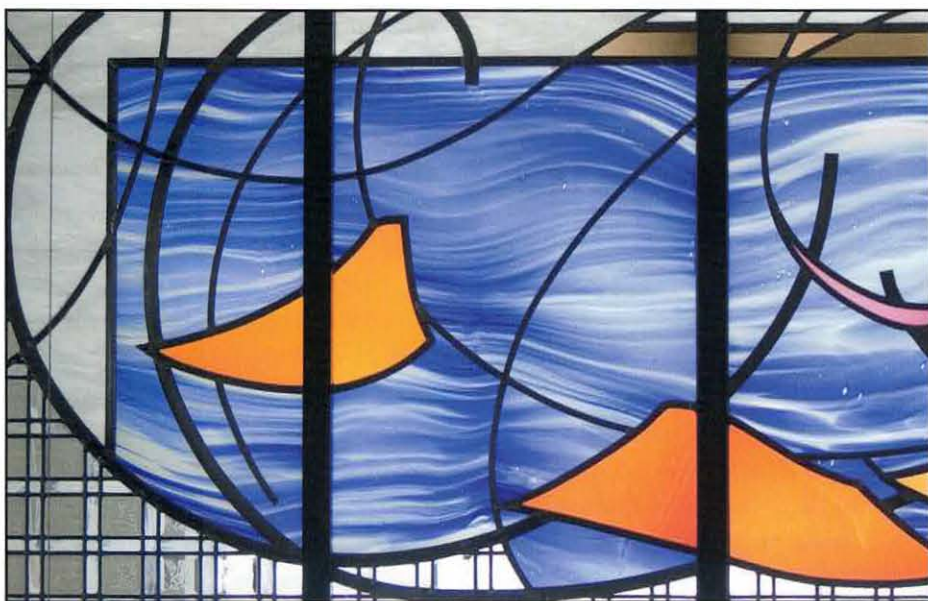
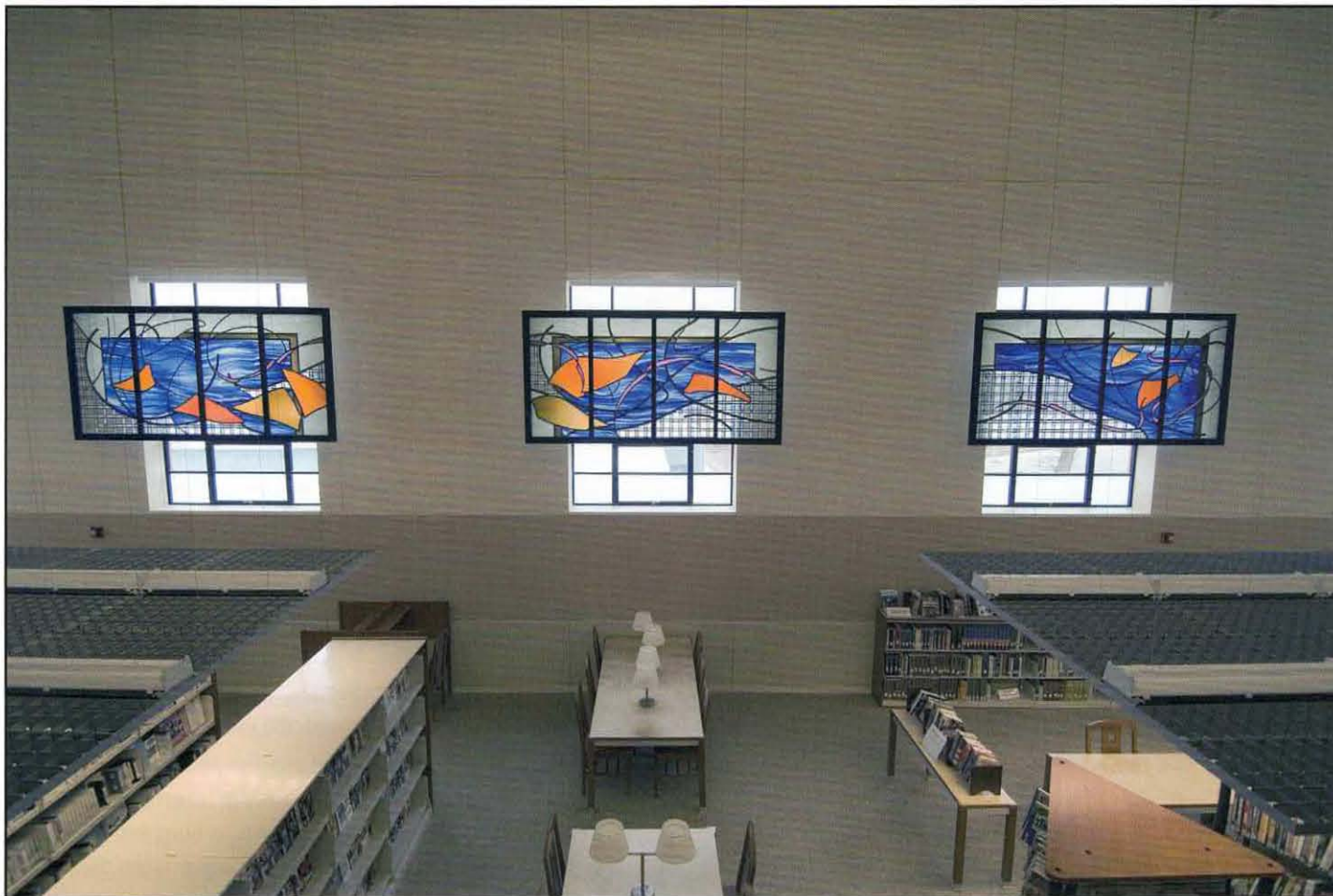
"The colors within 'The Journey' are also inspired by Nebraska's natural environment. The state is blessed with

wonderfully vast skies, the source of memorable sunrises and sunsets. That richness of color is reflected in the glasses used."

The five historical windows each covered a specific use of the building. One of the first was as a Methodist Chapel, and the historical series depicts this use. This is how the Kesslers explained the concepts behind the design, "The Chapel": "The foundation of this design is the two purple forms that represent the 'Holy Book,' a fundamental, guiding element for all faiths. Their shape and placement suggest that the Book is open. Their color is one of dignity and commands respect. Since fire is a universal symbol of spiritual significance, it is represented prominently with the orange form. The lines at the top of the fire represent the spoken word, the teachings, the means by which one's faith comes to burn with a passion in the soul. The white wisp that flows within the left purple form is symbolic of communing with a Greater Power. This may be the journey of a softly spoken prayer or connecting with the power of one's inner spirit. The pink form, with its opened seed/egg shape, speaks of spiritual renewal and new life, one of the many rewards of living true to one's faith. There is a pathway of white glass that flows diagonally through the colored forms. White is chosen because it is the color of purity and holiness. The panel reminds us that life is a journey, and of the importance of honoring the beliefs we embrace every step of the way, be they traditional religion or abstract philosophy."

After the work was completed for the Percent for Art commission, the president of Peru College asked the Kesslers to design another set of four windows for the western façade of the Library. He wanted these to depict the seasons, and Cindy created the "Seasons





*Above: The Journey series  
Left: The Journey left panel detail*

of the Campus.” Each panel is 56" tall x 51" wide, inside of a 2" square tube frame, just like the ones on the eastern side. These four windows hang above the circulation desk, starting with “Winter,” followed by “Spring,” “Summer,” and “Fall.” Again the

Kessler used white Spectrum as background glass and Lamberts opals and opaks as strong graphic elements.

It is always gratifying to be selected in a national competition, but it was especially satisfying to be asked back to add to the original body of work. The

freedom granted by the Peru State College to design work that was not locked into a literal style was perfect, and the Kesslers were grateful for the trust. It is their hope that the students and faculty will continue to enjoy the windows as works of art, both autonomous pieces and—with a little insight—designs rich in symbolism.