

Feature





Churches often exude a mystical atmosphere. This feeling is intensified when the sun streams through high, stained glass windows. The interior of the church transforms into a sea of light and colors. Since June of last year, visitors to the Church of the Virgin Mary (Marienkirche) in Frankfurt an der Oder have once again been able to feast their eyes on such a magnificent sight.



Large windows with Small Cracks

The church's Medieval stained glass windows were restored on site after Russia returned the looted treasures to Germany. Six of the 117 windows are still awaiting their return.

Valuable Cultural Property Returns to Germany





When Soviet troops occupied parts of Germany after World War II they requisitioned a fair amount of cultural property whose location was kept highly secret. Russian cultural officers took the three windows from St. Mary's back to Leningrad, current-day St. Petersburg. The windows were regarded as missing until an art historian discovered them in the warehouse of St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Russia and Germany agreed to a return of the looted art. Nevertheless, the return was plagued by delays, as the Russian Parliament was against it. It wasn't until 2002 that a law was finally enacted which enabled the return of the windows of the Church of the Virgin Mary to Frankfurt an der Oder.

Rare images of the Anti-Christ. The three, 12-meter-high chancel windows date back to 1360–1370 and are among the most important Medieval glass paintings. The middle window represents the life of Jesus Christ. It is flanked by the so-called creation window, which depicts the creation of the world. The third stained-glass window shows the

Left: Restorer Sandra Meinung tests the effect of the restored decorative images in front of a church window.

Right: The motif shows the birth of the Anti-Christ.





A well-oiled team: (from left) Restorer Sandra Meinung from Erfurt, team leader Gerlinde Möhrle from Bonn and Nicole Sterzing from Gotha work on the 111 individual areas of the three Medieval chancel windows.

Anti-Christ, God's opponent, who during the Middle Ages was the symbol of the apocalyptic atmosphere that prevailed at the time. Art historians agree that this depiction of the Anti-Christ is unique in the world. Discussions are still being held today as to whether this image belongs in a house of God.

Skill for art. When the sun shines above the city on the Oder River, the valuable stained glass windows retell their centuries-old tales in brilliant colors.

When clouds move in, the scenes are obfuscated and somber figures cast their spell on visitors. This effect is attributable to the labor-intensive, detailed work of restorers who judged the condition of the windows as acceptable upon their return to Germany in 2002, but who still faced some major challenges. Two of the window tables were half destroyed and had to have special glass from Bavaria added to them. Missing pieces and cracks in the glass as well as centuries-old corrosion required much skill and expertise.

A peek into a different world. A special workshop, where the last pieces of the historical glass art are slated to be returned to their original glory very soon, was built in the church for the restoration work. Like so many times before, this is where Erfurt-based stained glass specialist Sandra Meinung can place the images on the light table, where the colored glass is sharply distinguished from the black lead meshwork and the Bible figures. Even the smallest of damage is revealed here. Hairline tears and corrosion damage on the glass surface can be magnified up to 400 times under the *Stemi SV 11* stereo microscope from Carl Zeiss. Tiny

fractures look like quarries underneath this microscope. In the microscope's bright field, restorers use filigree tools to put these individual pieces together again.

People and technology for art. The stereo microscope is supplemented by a surgical microscope. Carl Zeiss provided this equipment, urgently needed to inventory the damage, at special prices. But thanks to their dedication and generous donations, citizens and companies also did their part in returning the windows to the church – rebuilt in 1992 – after the intensive restoration work in the chancel was done.



Does the window fit? Glazier Marco Schitteck mounts a copy of the decorative image for test purposes.

The details



"The Scream"

A spectacular case of art theft occurred in Oslo in the summer of 2004. The paintings "The Scream" and "Madonna" by Norwegian painter Edvard Munch were stolen from the Edvard Munch Museum while the venue was open to the public. Two years later the world-famous paintings were found: with scratches, tears and spots of moisture.

Art conservator Gry Landro from the Munch Museum in Oslo examined and restored "The Scream" with the aid of the specially modified surgical microscope OPMI Senser/S7 from Carl Zeiss. This highly exacting work required a very high degree of magnification and very good illumination. The surgical microscope performed well on both accounts. Unfortunately, despite the most careful of restorations, not all damage could be repaired on the painting.