

## TRANSLUCENT EXEMPLA

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The exhibition includes ten stained-glass panels and three design drawings for stained-glass panels, all related to justice themes. Between ca 1450 and the wave of iconoclasm in the mid-16th century, the use of stained glass, until then mostly known from large church windows, became more widespread in the Low Countries. Popular with the upper echelons of society, decorated glass was now also used for buildings housing public services and guilds, and for the houses of wealthy *burghers*. These stained-glass panels often appear in paintings of the interiors of houses and buildings by Early-Netherlandish painters. Fragile though they are, many of these objects have been preserved, pointing to the considerable scale on which they were produced.

In most cases, their original location is unknown, although the themes they depict provide some indication of their original settings. Typically small and round, this type of stained-glass window was nearly always part of a series, and they were generally private commissions. The examples in this exhibition are likely to derive from such a context and may have been part of a wider decorative programme for a public building such as a town hall or a *vierschuur*, in which they would have fulfilled a didactic function as well as a decorative one, alongside other artworks such as paintings and sculptures.

Although there are only a few windows for which we know the design or the image on which it was based and although they were rarely signed, we know who the main designers were: Pieter Coecke van Aelst, Maarten De Vos, Lambert Lombard, Jan Swart van Groningen, Maarten van Heemskerck and Dirck Vellert.

Most designers did not decorate glass themselves, apart from Dirck Vellert (CASE STUDY 3.2) and Dirck Crabeth, one of whose designs is included in the exhibition (CAT. 60). Three of the glass panels included are attributable to the artists Pieter Coecke van Aelst (ILL. 33 & 34 / CAT. 61 & 67) and Pseudo Aert Ortkens. Pseudo Aert Ortkens, Dirck Crabeth and Jan Swart van Groningen (CASE STUDY 3.2) are represented with a number of design drawings. Two of the panels and the drawing by Jan Swart van Groningen depict the story of Cambyses (CHAPTER 3 & CASE STUDY 3.2). Pseudo Aert Ortkens, an artist from Brussels who may have worked in Bernard van Orley's workshop (ILL. 32 / CAT. 26), designed a window pane depicting Herkinbald cutting his nephew's throat while on his deathbed (ILL. 31 / CAT. 36 / CHAPTER 2). The glass panel was part of a series titled 'The history of Herkinbald the Just'.

Another panel attributed to this 16th-century Flemish artist shows a scene from the story of Susanna and the elders (ILL. 32 / CAT. 26 / CHAPTER 2). It is this story that has yielded the largest number of decorated stained-glass panels and design drawings. The Pseudo Aert Ortkens versions constitute a large part of the extant works on this theme. It appears the series consisted of four panes, each depicting a different scene from the story: The elders spying on Susanna, Susanna falsely accused, The judge questioning the elders, and The stoning of the elders. This was also how the story was depicted on the monumental fireplace at the Liberty of Bruges (CHAPTER 2). This four-panelled series (many other thematic series were much more elaborate) was probably 'the cheap option' and was therefore a more frequent occurrence in private homes. The panel on



ILL. 30

**Anonymous, *Unidentified Scene***

ca 1525–1540, stained glass, diam. 22.5 cm, Southern Germany, Private Collection



ILL. 31  
**Pseudo-Aert Ortkens, *Herkinbald Kills his Nephew***  
 ca 1490–1530, drawing, diam. 245 mm, Brussels, Koninklijke  
 Bibliotheek van België, Print room



ILL. 32  
**Pseudo-Aert Ortkens (attributed to),  
*Susanna Accused by the Elders***  
 ca 1475–1540, stained glass, diam. 23.7 cm, Brussels,  
 Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België

display here shows Susanna being falsely accused. The judge, sitting on his bench and holding his staff of office, is listening to both sides of the story.

Two panels focus on the story of Zaleucus (CHAPTER 2). The one from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (ILL. 17 / CAT. 28) contains a clear reference to the son's adultery, in a scene in the background. In the foreground, father and son are both having an eye gouged out. The other panel depicts the moment when Zaleucus sacrifices one eye in order to save one of his son's (ILL. 35 / CAT. 29)

A rectangular stained-glass panel attributed to Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502–1550) shows a judge flanked by two men (ILL. 33 / CAT. 61). Judging by their clothing, one is a wealthy gentleman, the other a poor farmer — a theme we also encounter in the justice scene of the *Last Judgement* from Maastricht (ILL. 2 / CAT. 6 / CASE STUDY 1.2). A moralising inscription along the bottom exhorts the judge to be just in his verdicts. Another panel portrays the inscription 'all goes wrong when fools are in charge and wise men are not allowed to speak'. The central figure is holding a rolled up, possibly legal document

(ILL. 34 / CAT. 67). Is the suggestion that the dignitary seated under the canopy is a judge and therefore a fool? During the first half of the 16th century, van Aelst ran a busy workshop in Brussels, where he created paintings and designs for (mostly) tapestries as well as stained-glass windows and architectural designs. No signed window designs have been preserved, however, so the attribution is made purely on stylistic grounds.

Dirck Pietersz. Crabeth's design for a rectangular glass panel similarly depicts a (corrupt?) judge being approached by a rich and a poor man (CAT. 60). While the poor man kneels diffidently before him, the judge, seated on his bench, turns his head towards the man putting coins down next to him. Whether the judge will be tempted by them is anyone's guess. Crabeth is one of the few artists of whom we know that he not only designed windows but also painted them. He had a particular penchant for rectangular panels, following Jan Swart van Groningen. The judge in an anonymous panel of a similar design, dating ca 1525 (ILL. 36 / CAT. 63), is clearly not averse to the gold coins. Unusually, this judge is depicted holding a pair of scales in his right hand that are tipped by the weight of the

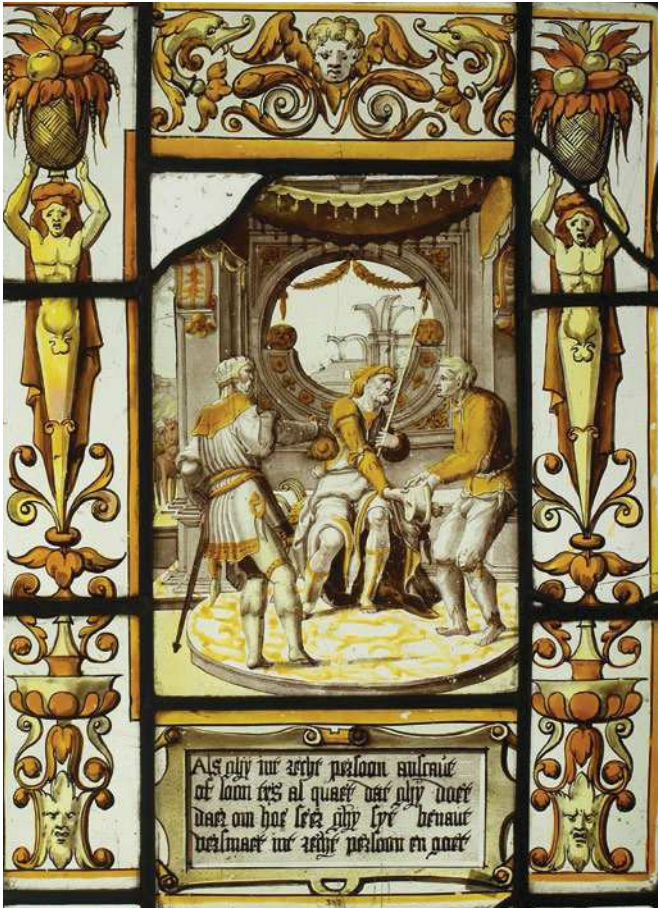
coins from the rich man. Astonished, the judge watches how the tip of his sword 'melts' like wax and folds over.

It is not always clear what the exact meaning of an image is. An anonymous panel, possibly from Antwerp, shows a scene in which in the foreground, four men are gathered around a table on which lie coins and a purse (ILL. 30 / CAT. 63). They are having a conversation and some are pointing at the purse. The central figure holds a judge's staff of office. Two of the four have doffed their hats as a mark of respect for a person of higher social status. Have they come to plead a case? Through an open door we glimpse another scene taking place in the background. Here the man with the staff of office is sitting on a throne. In front of him are two men, possibly the same men as the two standing at the table in the foreground. The judge is leaning his head on his right hand. Is he asleep? Whenever Justitia was depicted as asleep, the implication was that injustice had free play. Or is he, like Alexander the Great in the *Thronus Iustitiae* series (CASE STUDY 2.1), holding his hand by his right ear as a sign that he is listening and wants to enable each parties' argumentation? Like most of these objects, this glass panel was probably part of a larger (as yet unidentified) series.

One small rectangular panel shows us two naked ladies, one with a sword pointing downwards, the other holding a book (CAT. 68). From a text behind them we learn that these ladies are Justitia and Veritas. However, they are not depicted as virtues. Behind Justitia is a man showering her with coins from two purses, while a lock on Veritas' mouth prevents her from speaking. When corruption strikes, justice is powerless (the sword resting on the ground) and the truth cannot be revealed. This less than positive depiction of justice may point to a private rather than a public setting for this window. Slightly unorthodox depictions were popular in the intimate setting of a private home. However, they retained their moralising function, as becomes clear from examples in this exhibition.

#### LITERATURE

Husband 1995; Ritsma van Eck 1999;  
Tiedeman 2009.



ILL. 33-34

Pieter Coecke van Aelst I, *Allegory of Just Judgement*

ca 1525-1550, stained glass, 67.4 × 54.5 × 3.2 cm and 66.8 × 54.2 × 3.3 cm, Ghent STAM



ILL. 35

**Anonymous, *The Judgement of Zaleucus***

ca 1525, stained glass, diam. 22.5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



ILL. 36

**Anonymous, *The Corruptible Judge***

ca 1525, stained glass, diam. 23.3 cm, Southern Germany, Private Collection