

The Glass Landscape in the South Carolina Aquarium

An Installation by Ellen Mandelbaum



Glass Landscape by Ellen Mandelbaum, exterior view.
Photograph by Timothy Hursley.

by Richard Gross

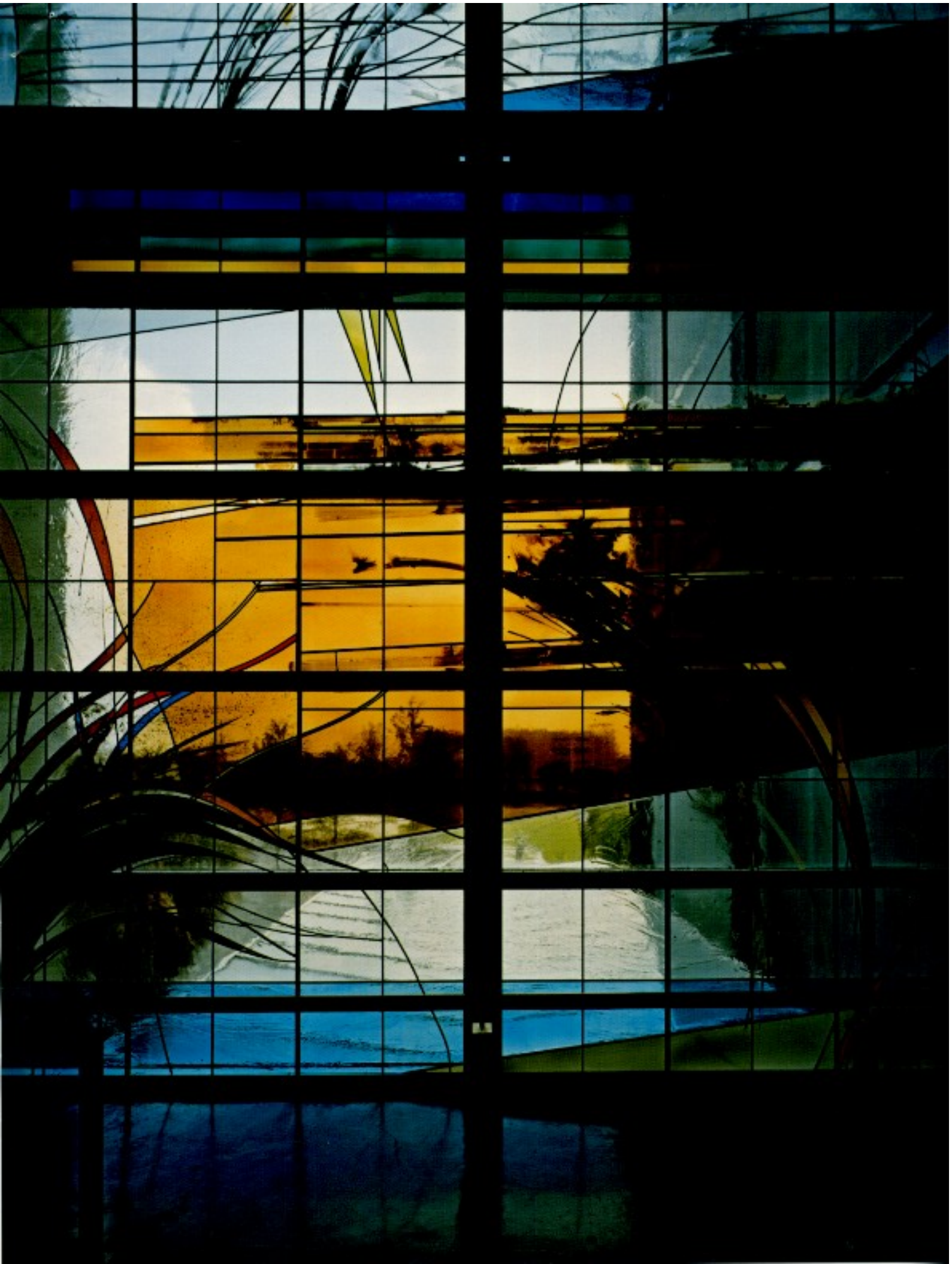
South Carolina is home to a diverse aquatic system that ranges from mountain streams to the Atlantic ocean. The elements of this biosystem are represented in Charleston's new aquarium; they are also represented in the 18' by 30' art glass installation created by artist Ellen Mandelbaum for the South Carolina Aquarium.

"I see it as a handsome hand-made glass art work commanding the large space," said Mandelbaum of the installation. "Glass is the membrane between the inside and the outside. This is something that people can enjoy."

The installation itself is designed to be open and flowing; it depicts the journey of water as it flows from the mountain top, through the salt

marsh and finally returns to the ocean. The window incorporates silkscreening and painting; the glass used was chosen to enhance the composition by allowing a view of the landscape, dramatic sky and the city of Charleston behind the window.

The aquarium is also arranged to follow the journey of water from the mountain top to the sea. Visitors





approach the facility under the art glass installation and continue up a long ramp towards the Cooper River end of the building. They enter the building opposite the stained glass installation and ride an escalator upwards to experience the upper portion of the window — “The Mountain,” which is best viewed from this level of the aquarium. The aquarium’s mountain waterway exhibits also begin here. The window is meant to serve as a poetic, artistic introduction to and summary of the facility.

Left: *Glass Landscape* (lower section). Photograph by Timothy Hursley.

Above: *Glass Landscape* (upper section). Photograph by Marilyn Ott.

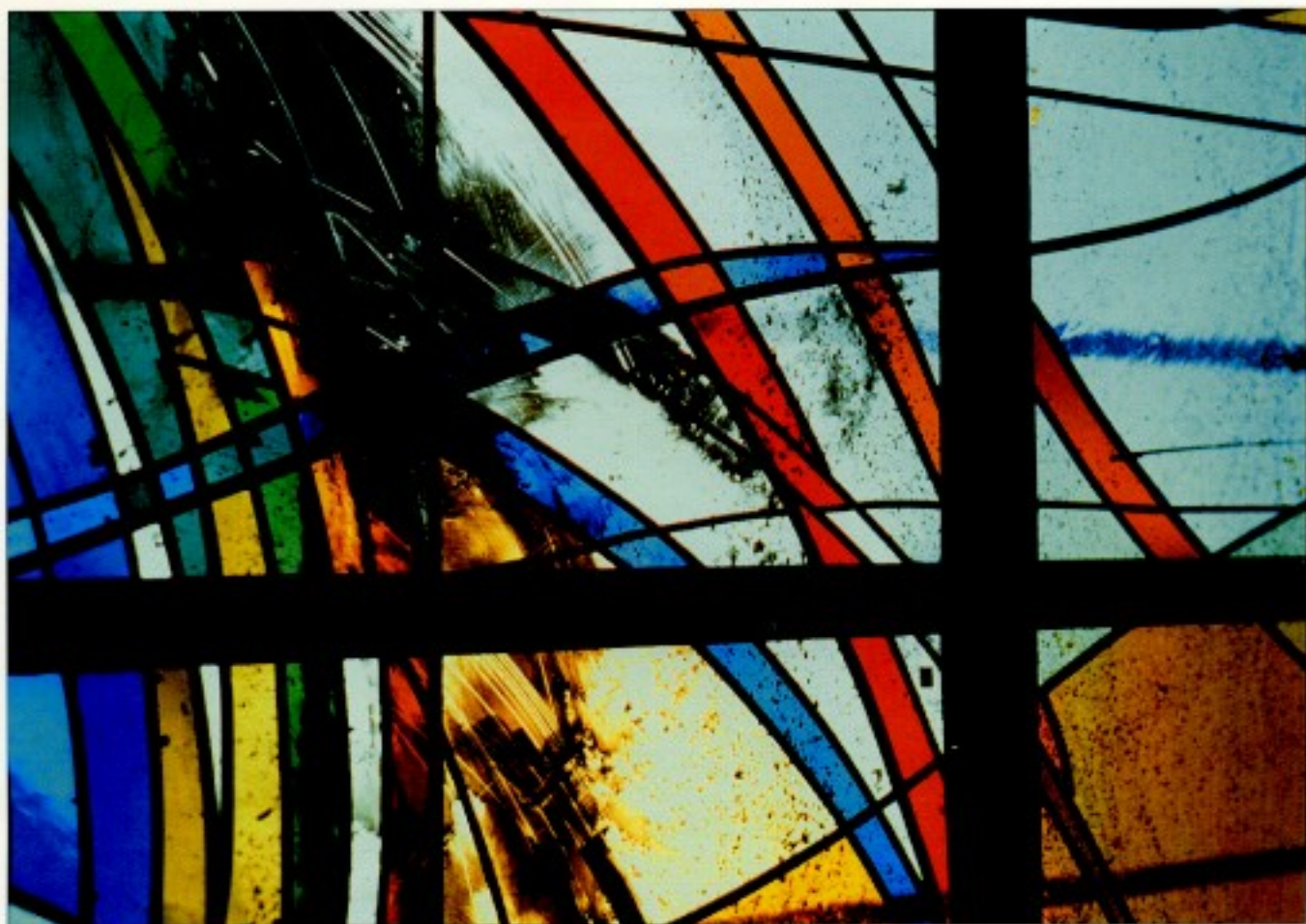
There are five major regions of the Southeast Appalachian Watershed in South Carolina: the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Piedmont, the coastal plain, the coast and the ocean. Of course, each of these regions changes with the change in seasons. Mandelbaum made trips to South Carolina to sketch and paint in preparation for the design of this installation.

The cycle of seasons is represented in *Glass Landscape* with a series of color changes — a color chord of cycles — including the shift of gold to green and deep blue to light blue. The window is fabricated from Lamberts glass, which Mandelbaum selected at the factory. The moun-

tain is silkscreened from a painting by Mandelbaum and the hand-painting in the window is the result of Mandelbaum’s trips to sketch the landscape of South Carolina.

Mandelbaum said that this installation is bigger than any she has done before it. It was vital in this project to maintain a sense of spontaneity in the window to depict the flow of water while overcoming the technical challenges such an installation presented.

One of the challenges Mandelbaum had to overcome was working on this window in chunks of time. She fabricated the window at the Mayer of Munich studios with the help of Mayer studio craftsmen.



Glass Landscape (detail).

The South Carolina Aquarium is a non-profit, self-supporting institution devoted to the understanding and conservation of South Carolina's natural aquatic habitats.

The South Carolina Aquarium is located at the edge of the historic Charleston Harbor on the Cooper River. Two-thirds of the building projects over the water, and the building's decks offer visitors views of the dolphins, ships and landscape of the Cooper River and Charleston Harbor.

Mandelbaum said that she selected the Mayer of Munich studio because of its reputation and its ability to handle a fabrication project of this scale.

"It was interesting working with them," Mandelbaum said. "The paints there are not exactly the same as what we have [in the United States]. I was able to talk to Mr. Bernhard [a Mayer master glass painter], and he would get me the paints I needed."

"The aquarium is a different world for stained glass. I think people were a little bit surprised. But, there's more than one side to stained glass," Mandelbaum commented.

Ellen Mandelbaum is an award-winning glass artist whose achievements include the American Institute of Architects IFRAA *Religious Art Award of Excellence* for Adath Jeshurun Chapel Windows, 1997; *Modern Liturgy Magazine's* "Visual Art Award of Excellence" in 1987, 1989 and Honorable Mention in 1996; the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture *Awards for Stained Glass Design* in 1987 (Philadelphia) and 1986 (Berkeley); and The Stained Glass Association of America Associates' Exhibition "Judge's Choice" (First Prize) in Toronto, 1985.

