

Interrupted Waterfall

“When one is painting a waterfall it should be so painted that there are interruptions but no breaks.’ In this matter of ‘interruptions but no breaks,’ the brush stops but the spirit (chi) continues; the appearance of the flow of water has a break but the idea of it is uninterrupted.”

from the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, translated from Chinese and edited by Mai-mai Sze.



Every stained glass window imposes its own set of unique requirements upon the artist. Some require that the outside view be blocked, others demand the view be enhanced; some must dim the light, while others are light and airy, to admit as much natural light to the interior as possible.

Some windows, particularly in secular settings, are required by their owners, the artists' client, to coordinate with existing interior elements, and other windows are allowed free reign. Regardless of the specific, individual, criteria, the setting and the client's desires must always be taken into consideration, evaluated and resolved. Some artists are able to meet those challenges with seeming aplomb, while other artists struggle to devise solutions that 'work' within set confines.

Among the criteria with which New York artist Ellen Mandelbaum grappled, to produce a window for the office of the Executive Director of the Genesee Center for Arts in Rochester, was a rigid mullion system that seemingly precluded a smoothly flowing, open design.

"I had an excellent client who liked my work and I had



artistic freedom," Mandelbaum says of Goldee Hecht Meyer, the Executive Director. "Once I figured out that the mullions, of my frame, could overcome the happenstance horizontal and vertical mullions, of her window, I could enjoy the full height of the window by painting something also tall: a waterfall.

"I remembered the resonant description of an interrupted waterfall from the *Taoist Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* which I had selected for a memorial to my aunt. I have painted other waterfalls recently (an opportunity afforded by a big kiln), Mandelbaum says.

At the top of the panel, the artist painted a flat Dutch landscape on an opak so dense that she almost painted it in oils on canvas. This blocks the arch of the real window opening, so she painted an arch with vitreous glass paint.

The artist also bore in mind the Western exposure with its requirement for some degree of transparency in the lower window. Differences in transparency and translucency of the glass are critical to how well the design conveys its mes-

sage. Glass, in the upper portion of the work, blocks out the outside view and more transparent glass, near the bottom, allows the view to be seen. The panel, mounted in a custom made cherry wood frame from Hiawatha Craftsmen of Minneapolis, Minnesota, stops short of the absolute bottom of existing window to allow the window to be opened, bringing the real world inside.

The landscape imagery is represented with vitreous glass paint, but at the foot of the waterfall, she used German style stripes into which she set jewels, rondels and lenses, alluding to water and bubbles, while allowing the brushwork to indicate the water's motion.

"My task was to keep it interesting and open in feeling, because it is the only window in the room," Mandelbaum concluded about her highly painted work. Ω

'Interrupted Waterfall' was shown in December, 1992 at the Second Floor Gallery, New York City, in cooperation with the Art and Architecture Committee of the American Institute of Architects, New York Chapter.