



MEDIEVAL STAINED GLASS MEDALLIONS.

Two stained glass panels, a French roundel of the early thirteenth century and an English quatrefoil medallion of the early fourteenth century were acquired for the Felton Bequest in 1921 by Mr. Frank Rinder. Both medallions represent periods at which the art of stained glass attained its greatest perfection.

The rapid development of stained glass painting in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century was closely connected with the rise of gothic architecture. The gothic cathedral may be described as a shell of glass, supported by a light stone frame of soaring shafts. Its structure symbolized to medieval man the ascent from the material to the immaterial. The stained glass windows played an essential part in this symbolism: their subject matter told the story of human salvation, the rise from the human to the Divine; their light, filtering through the jewel-like colours suffused the cathedral interior with a mystic glow which filled the beholder with the feeling of entering a space "not quite of this world".

During the best periods the rather special technique of stained glass painting was in full accord with its principles of design. Briefly, the main features of this technique were the staining of the molten glass by adding to it ingredients of metal, e.g., cobalt for blue, copper for red, etc. (the latter was in fact not stained but flashed in order not to lose its translucency). Thirteenth century glass was often uneven in thickness and consistency, a technical defect which added to the richness and variety of its colour, and its radiation of light. Small sketches of the design, perhaps made by book illuminators, were then brought up to the scale of the future window and the different glass panes or quarries would be cut from this cartoon. These quarries were, in thirteenth century glass, very small (about three to four hundred to a square yard) really like so many brilliant jewels in their lead-setting, which prevented the colours from converging into one another. The leading would emphasise the main outlines of form and give boldness and vitality to the design. Finer details like hair, facial features etc. were painted on to the glass in a black or brown enamel pigment. These tracelines, sometimes calligraphically fine, were often strong and bold, similar in effect to the leading. Against the pressure of wind the large leaded surfaces of glass needed some rigid re-inforcement, which was provided by iron rods cemented into the masonry of the frame. This framework of vertical, horizontal, diagonal and curved rods was called armature, and contributed with its manifold medallion shapes (roundels, lozenges, quatrefoils, etc.) essentially to the richness of the overall design and to the ordered arrangement of the complex range of the interrelated episodes of the narrative.

Our French roundel is such a medallion, part of a large window. The inscriptional fragment, FANVS, very likely part of Stephanus, does not refer, as one might assume at first thought, to the archdeacon and arch-martyr St. Stephen. No representation of the martyr St. Stephen in any way resembling our roundel is known to me. This saint was either shown as being stoned, or with the attributes of his martyrdom, i.e., the martyr's palm and a stone or stones. The iconographical features of the roundel lead me to believe that the Stephanus represented here is the royal Saint, St. Stephen of Hungary, who died in 1038 and was canonized in 1083. An anonymous painting of the early 18th century in the Vienna Gallery, very likely based on an older tradition, which I am unable to trace because of the lack of iconographical standard works in Melbourne, depicts the royal Saint receiving the apostolic crown sent to him by Pope Sylvester II. This description tallies well with the scene represented in our panel, although the crown depicted is not identical with the famous St. Stephen Crown.

The English medallion (see cover design) illustrates the refined and matured Indian summer of stained glass painting of the first half of the fourteenth century. Gothic art has become more elegant and more worldly; its stained glass, more refined in technique and design, has lost the vigour of the classic thirteenth century. It is at this time that purely secular and heraldic stained glass begins to appear, and in our quatrefoil medallion we have an excellent example of this type and one of the earliest examples of portraiture in stained glass known to me. It represents Sir John de Hardreshull and his wife holding a shield charged with the family arms (Sir John fought on the side of Edward II in the battle of Boroughbridge in 1322;

he died in 1365). The lighter and cooler colours and broken tones, especially the golden yellow, produced by flashing with silver-yellow stain, are very characteristic of fourteenth century stained glass.

Medieval stained glass with its deep luminosity, its vigour and economy of design has many affinities with some trends in the arts of our own time and has in fact profoundly inspired the cloisonne technique of a number of great modern artists such as Gauguin and Rouault. Some contemporary stained glass design, especially the work of Rouault at Assy, contains the promise of a revival of this great and almost lost art, which we may hope will extend to this country, perhaps not untouched by the inspiration of the treasures of the past in our midst.

FRANZ PHILIPP.

STAINED GLASS ROUNDEL, *French, 13th century, 17¼ in. diam.*
Felton Bequest.





MARY, Woodcarving, German, c. 1490, Height 4 ft. 4½ in. Felton Bequest.



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, Alabaster carving, English, 15th century, Height 2 ft. 5¼ in. Felton Bequest.

In the St. John the Baptist the Gallery possesses a singularly important example of English alabaster carving. The saint is wearing a robe of camelskin with hoofs and skull still attached. The execution shows the conventions which alabastermen carried from the early gothic period into the 15th century: the corkscrew curls of hair and beard, the slanting heavy-lidded eyes and deeply carved long toes and fingers. The sharply accentuated "profile" of legs, fingers, folds and curls brings to mind the delicate rib-work of gothic architecture. Like all gothic sculpture, the figure was originally coloured and gilt, and faint traces of blue on the robe, of red on the lining and gilding on the lamb's flag remain. White, red-centred flowers decorate the background.

The formalized nature of the English alabaster figure contrasts vividly with the softer, more realistic nature of German woodcarving of the late gothic period. The Virgin Mary and a figure of St. John also in our collection stood originally on the outside east wall of a small church in Karlstadt, near Mayence. Faint traces of red underpainting and of the covering blue may still be seen on the robe. The group has been attributed to the workshop of Hans Backofen, who worked in and around Mayence and died in 1509.

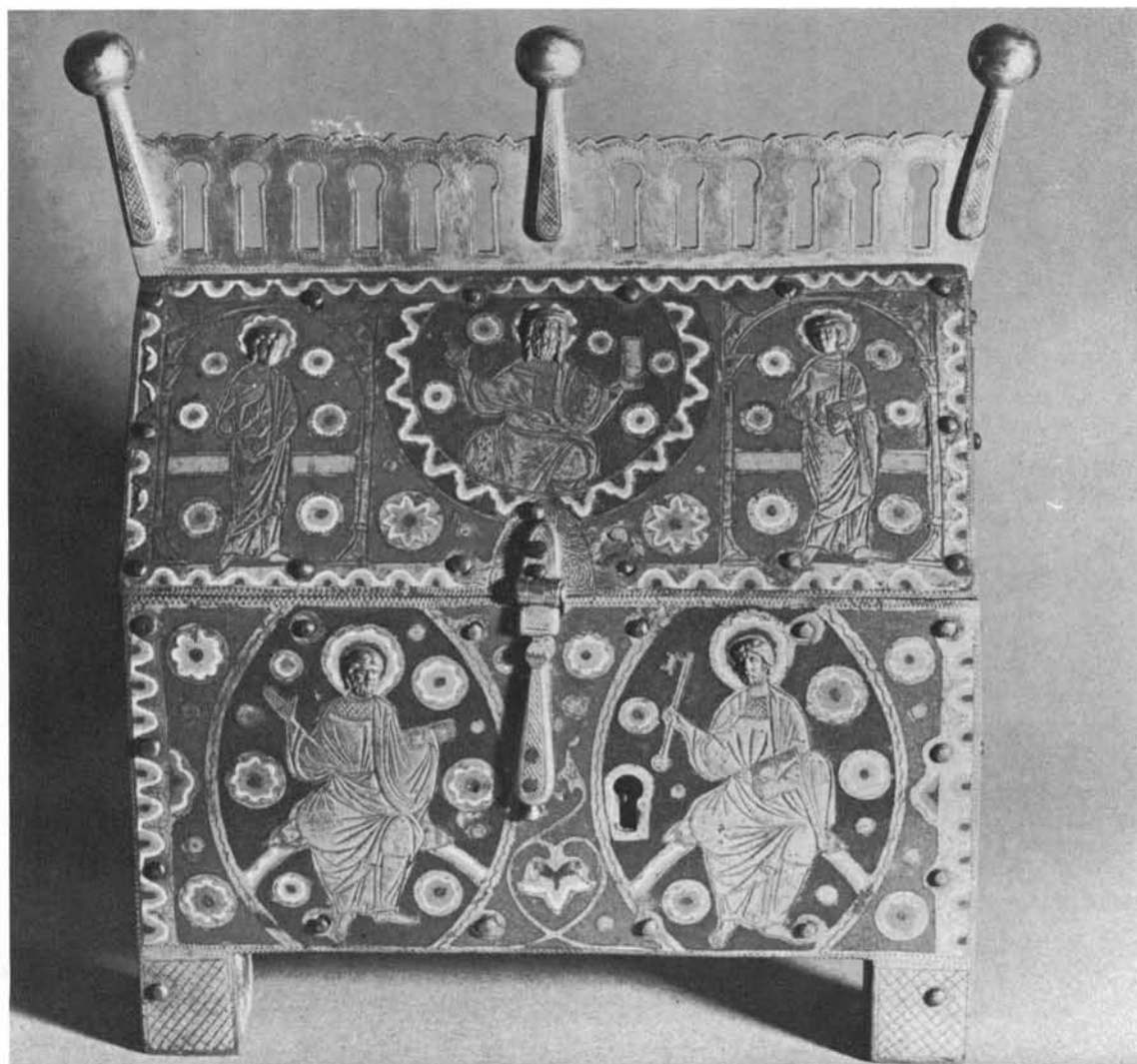
The Reliquary Chest or "Chasse" is a heavy wooden box, lined on the outside by copper plates. In the distinctive Limoges manner, the figures of Christ and the Apostles are formed by the copper and are engraved and gilt. The heads, executed in high relief, were added separately. Flat cells have been cut in the remaining copper ground and these have been filled with a dark blue enamel adorned in turn by rosettes in light blue and green, each with a dark red centre. A band of turquoise blue appears behind the standing Apostles on the cover, and a gothic leaf and bud ornament may be seen between the mandorlas below on the casket. An unusual feature is the circular three-quarter mandorla surrounding Christ.

Limoges enamels were inspired in the eleventh century by Byzantine examples; Limoges workshops developed their own technique of champleve enamel (as opposed to the Byzantine technique of cloisonne enamel) but the combination of the shining gilt metal with the brilliant colour retains an effect of eastern richness.

URSULA HOFF.

CHASSE, CHAMPLEVE ENAMEL, LIMOGES, 13th century, Height 8¾ in., Width, 9½ in.

Felton Bequest.





GEORGES ROUAULT,
CHRIST ON THE VEIL OF
ST. VERONICA, Oil on
canvas, 28½ in. x 20¼ in.

Felton Bequest.



MASTER E.S., ST. VERONICA,
Engraving, 15th century.

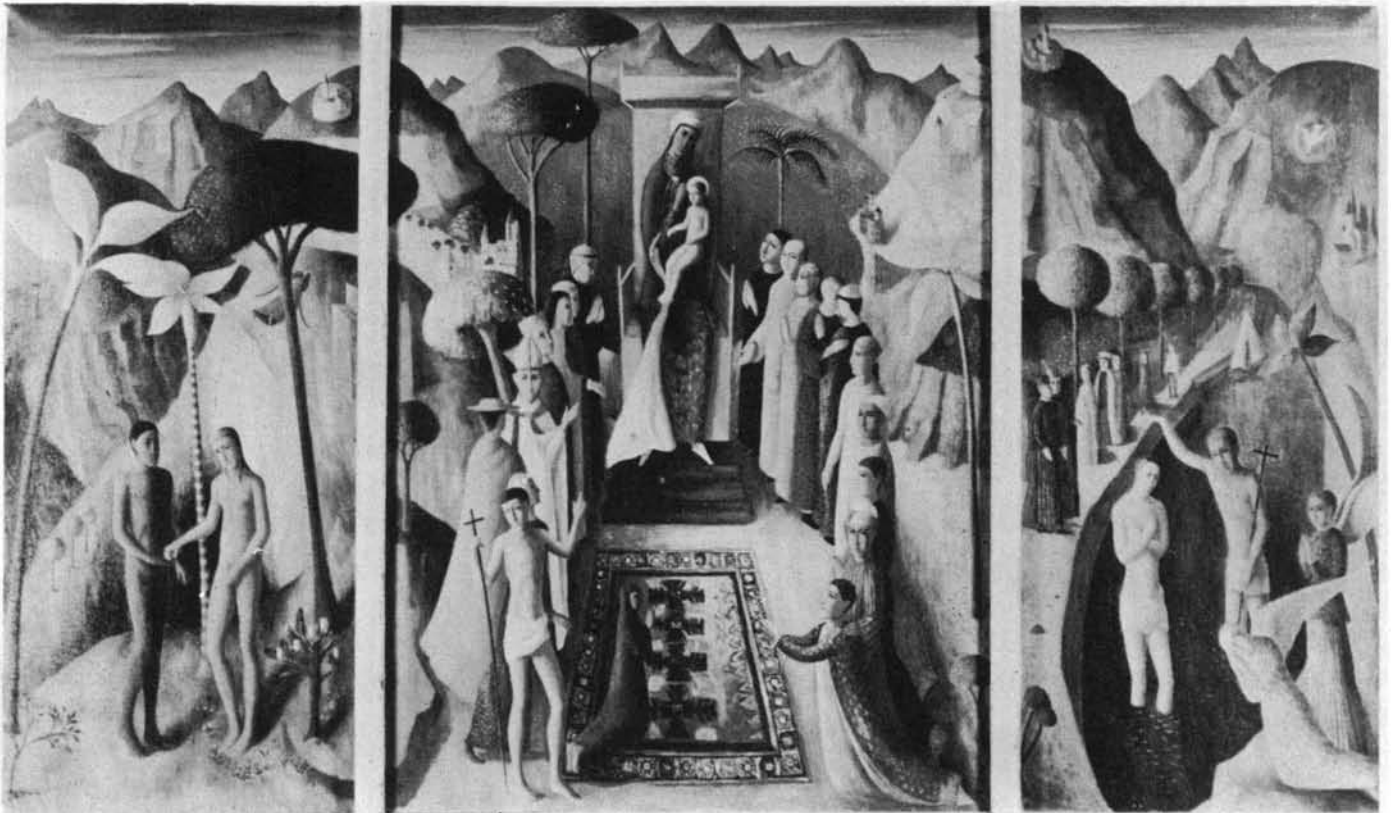
The works of the Frenchman Georges Rouault and the Australian Justin O'Brien reproduced here represent vastly different trends in religious art of the present day. Rouault's Christ on the Veil of St. Veronica has a disturbing, challenging effect on the spectator. It is akin in style to medieval stained glass painting. The strong black outlines encasing the simplified shapes of cheeks, nose, forehead and chin recall the "leading" of church windows. The poignant contrast between the colours and the dark lines, the bas-relief-like quality of the surface, the broken texture of the paint all enhance the tragic intensity of the face. Suffering is expressed not only pictorially but also symbolically; Rouault has shown the Head of Christ according to the story of St. Veronica. The Saint approached Christ on the Road to Calvary and offered Him her veil with which to wipe His brow; as a recompense He left the imprint of His face on the veil. (A traditional representation of the theme by a German medieval master is inserted here.) Professor Anthony Blunt has pointed out that Rouault's religious art is the work of a man "imbued with the spirit of proselytization". Rouault wrote: "My only ambition is to be able some day to paint a Christ so moving that those who see Him will be converted".

Justin O'Brien's calm lyricism stands in strong contrast to Rouault's tragic expressionism. O'Brien became a fervent admirer of primitive Italian and Byzantine painting during his years of service in World War II. The Fall in the Garden of Eden to the left, the Baptism in the Jordan to the right and the Enthronement of the Virgin in the centre form an altarpiece which was awarded the Blake Prize of Religious Art in Sydney in 1951. The fastidiously elongated figures are arranged in a decorative design, which is planned with geometric clarity. Brilliant hues of colour combine to effects of unusual variety and intensity, and lend a quality of paradisal splendour to the scenes.

URSULA HOFF.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN, THE VIRGIN ENTHRONED, Oil on canvas, 3 ft. 9 in. x 6 ft. 2½ in.

Felton Bequest.



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Iron Tenebrario	Spanish, 16th century	Felton Bequest

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It is with deep regret that we record the death on 7th April, 1952, of Mr. Herbert Wade Kent, who held office as a Trustee of the National Gallery and as Honorary Curator of Oriental Art since his appointment in 1938.

Mr. Kent presented his collection of Chinese Art to the people of Victoria, and in recognition of the gift and of his long service, the Gallery which houses the Chinese Collection bears his name.

National Gallery Lunch time talks will be given as follows: May 8, Dr. Leonard Cox on "Chinese Ceramics Throughout the Ages"; June 12, Mr. Arnold Shore on "Who Hears What?"; July 10, Mr. Daryl Lindsay on "The British Water Colour Exhibition".

The following publications and reproductions are on sale at the Swanston Street entrance:

Catalogue of the Gallery (5/-). Catalogue of Selected Masterpieces with 30 illustrations (1/6). Gallery Guide (6d.). Six large coloured reproductions of the following pictures: Buvelot, Waterpool at Coleraire; Roberts, Shearing the Rams; Lambert, Sergeant of the Light Horse; Cameron, Durham Cathedral; Pissarro, Boulevard Montmartre; Sisley, Hills behind St. Nicaise; Monet, Vetheuil (25/- ea.). A selection of small reproductions of varying sizes including Christmas cards.

Cover Design in this issue is a Stained Glass Quatrefoil Medallion English, 14th century, Felton Bequest.