

FANTASY IN GLASS

Portrait of a local artist

By Kristen Manieri, OWSL

ROBERT LENNOX IS AN ARTIST THROUGH AND THROUGH. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO FIND A STORY ABOUT A BURNT-OUT EXECUTIVE TURNED BOHEMIAN HERE. NOR WILL YOU FIND A STARVING ARTIST STORY EITHER.

No, this is a story about a man who was born an artist, has always been an artist, and for more than three decades has led a wonderful life, creating and restoring stained glass art in public and private spaces all around the country. And now he calls Oviedo home.

Robert was born and raised in Staten Island, New York, in a home that was constantly buzzing with creativity and artistic indulgence. Most nights his home was filled with the laughter of ladies taking his mother's ceramic classes. It was in this environment that the artist in Robert emerged. By the age of 10, he became a stained glass

apprentice, and by 12 he sold his first piece of stained glass art. Robert continued to sell his stained glass pieces throughout college, which more than covered his tuition to the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. Five years later, in 1989, he opened his gallery/studio in Staten Island, where it still thrives today.

Robert splits his time between his New York studio and his "jungle studio" here in Oviedo, where he lives with his wife, Tammy, (also a talented stained glass artist), and their daughter, Ellie. Designed and built by its previous owner, this studio is an artistic refuge of spectacular proportions. A multilevel structure made entirely of wood, it is completely screened, allowing the warm breeze to constantly drift through the studio.

It is here that Robert and Tammy teach their weekly stained glass art classes. People at various levels of skill and experience gather here to learn and create. Their work is astounding.

Even the novices create beautiful sun catchers, quickly graduating to much more challenging and intricate pieces, like full windows.

It may come as a surprise to many that with enough training, practice and patience, most people can produce fairly good stained glass art. In a time where scrapbooking has increased in popularity, it's clear that many people are craving an artistic outlet. As Robert puts it, "Stained glass

Robert has worked on some important restoration projects including the historic Trinity Church near ground zero in Manhattan. Left: Robert and an apprentice ply his craft, stationed on scaffolding outside the church.



Robert began his career at the age of eight when he worked as an apprentice. Today he divides his time between a studio in New York and here in Oviedo.

is a good option for the 'nonartistic' amongst us." He explains it's more of a skilled-based art than painting or sculpting. Have a look at many of the pieces created by students at this studio and you'll see that this art form isn't as daunting as you might have thought.

That's not to say that stained glass work is easy. One only needs to visit the Morse Museum in Winter Park to view the world's most comprehensive collection of the works of Louis Comfort Tiffany, including many of the famous Tiffany lamps that have made this collection so popular. Here you'll appreciate the craftsmanship that goes into choosing, cutting and assembling each tiny piece of glass.

Unlike hobbyists, stained glass artists conceive their design and then draw upon advanced engineering skills to assemble a piece so that it's not only appealing but functional as well. The artists draw upon existing light, capturing it and enhancing it to create works that use the surrounding natural light as part of their masterpieces.

Churches and cathedrals are great examples of this use of light. The next time you visit a church, notice how the stained glass is used not simply as a decorative touch, but to create the



Above: Robert installs the finished work above the Creedon home entryway. Left: Richard and Ginger Creedon in their Seminole Woods home. "We wanted an original design," Ginger said. "He gave us a timeless piece of art that we will enjoy for many years."

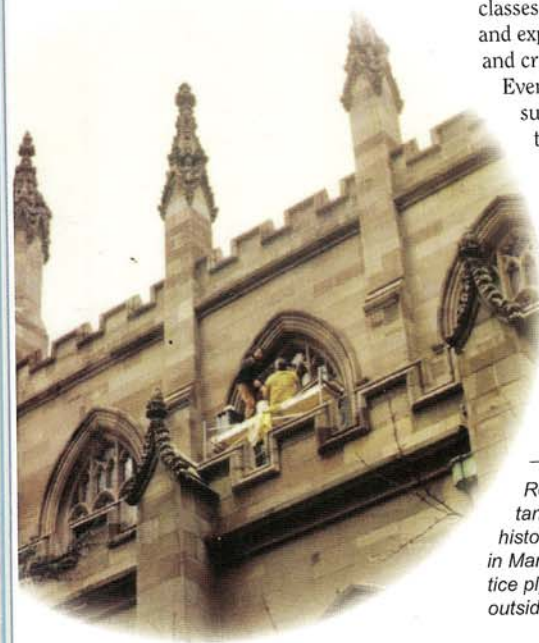
experience of having a divine light enter the building. Artists such as Robert work intentionally to add to the mysticism and sacredness of these holy places.

In fact, Robert is no stranger to working in churches and cathedrals; he has created and restored stained glass in literally hundreds of religious sanctuaries around the country, including the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Locally, he recently restored a damaged chapel at Saint John Vianney for the Orlando Archdiocese and the Fountainhead Baptist Church in Oviedo.

Robert also creates custom pieces in residential areas. With the home building trend moving more and more to the cookie-cutter variety of home design, many people are looking to add personal and distinguishing features to their homes. Stained glass is becoming a popular option for people wanting to enhance a dining room or foyer, or for those seeking to create some privacy.

Geneva residents Ginger and Richard Creedon commissioned Robert to create a stained glass insert for the Palladian window over the door at the entrance to their home and were very pleased with the finished product. They wanted a distinctive design that would add character to their home and capture the essence of their property, which they refer to as "Holly Waters." The name came about from the East Palatka Holly that is found in abundance around their home in Seminole Woods.

"Before Robert started the project, he did a lot of research,"



Ginger said. "He even went so far as to purchase a sample of the plant so he could study its intricacies more closely." After months of effort and several meetings to discuss the finished design, Robert began the cutting and fabrication of the glass.

The semicircular insert was commissioned in December of 2006 and installed in the Creedon's home last May. "I wanted to create a timeless piece and distinctive work of art that symbolized the natural beauty of their property. It was an original concept and design and the Creedon's input was important. I am very proud of this work, especially because it will be part of a family's home for many years."

Though the tradition of stained glass art can be traced back through centuries, it's relatively new in this area. Robert Lennox wants to change that. Through his work and his classes, Robert intends to add as much as he can to the artistic fiber of this community.

When you meet him, you'll be inspired by the incredible energy and steadfast commitment he brings to his art. But what will most inspire you is the opportunity to meet someone who has built a life around his passion. Robert is living his dream, and there is a peacefulness and easiness about him that rubs off on those around him. What a great addition to a community already rich with culture and interesting people. Oviedo welcomes Robert Lennox.

View Robert's portfolio at www.stainedglassimagery.com. Learn more about stained glass classes by e-mailing ladylennox@cfl.rr.com. ♦ 01152



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