



At left, scribe marks etched in an assembling bench. Colors were indicated by letters and symbols and pieces then cut and fitted over the design. At right, the 14th century panel in Girona Cathedral, Spain.

When medieval glass artisans planned their stained-glass windows, how did they do it?

In a way, it was like putting together a puzzle.

After they made the glass, they cut it and placed bits of their glass product over designs which they created on a board (just as if they were working on a puzzle).

If the artisan wanted to incorporate details, like shadows, he painted on the glass and then fired it. Firing the glass would make those hand-painted additions a permanent part of the work.

This image depicts such a process which was used for the Girona Cathedral (located in the city of Girona, in northeastern Spain, which is north of Barcelona).

Curators, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, give us more details about how those medieval artisans assembled their beautiful glass works:

*To assemble the window, pieces of colored and painted glass are laid out on the design board, with the edges of each piece fitted into H-shaped strips of lead (comes).*

*These comes are soldered to one another so that the panel is secure. When a panel is completed, putty is inserted between the glass and the lead comes for waterproofing. The entire composition is then stabilized with an iron frame (armature) and mounted in the window.*

Have you wondered, parenthetically, why we call the glass in these gorgeous windows “stained glass?” There is actually a reason for it.

Artisans used a silver stain, which they often applied to the side of windows facing outside. When the artisans fired their glass, that silver stain turned a different color, typically yellow, which ranged from gold to lemon.

Beyond that, glass makers also painted on their glass works, staining the glass before it was fired. Those methods, from medieval times, are still used today.

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