



Local News

Pieces from war now art for peace



Originally published January 10, 2008 at 12:00 am | Updated January 10, 2008 at 12:52 am

Shards of colored glass, found amid the destruction of war, take on new life as a visual prayer for peace at an unusual exhibit opening...

By [Jack Broom](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

Shards of colored glass, found amid the destruction of war, take on new life as a visual prayer for peace at an unusual exhibit opening a seven-week run Saturday at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma.

The glass bits from bombed-out churches in Europe were gathered by the late Frederick McDonald, a Seattle-born Army chaplain who traveled with Allied forces in the final stages of World War II. In “Remembered Light: Glass Fragments from World War II, The McDonald Windows,” the bits McDonald collected have been incorporated into 25 pieces by 13 artists working in glass, ceramic, vinyl and copper.

“Fred loved the idea that this might be a traveling exhibit. We even fantasized about it going to Europe some day,” said glass-designer artist Armelle Le Roux of Oakland, Calif., who coordinated the project and produced half the windows.

McDonald died at 93 in 2002, living to see about a dozen of the pieces completed and six more designed.

The “windows” range from about a foot square to 44 inches tall. They were built to be included in the renovation of a Spanish-mission-style chapel in the Presidio at San Francisco, the city where McDonald lived the last two decades of his life. But that \$6 million project is still at least two years away.

“In the meantime, we don’t really have an interest in just keeping them in storage,” said Paul Chaffee, executive director of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio, based in the

former military camp that is now part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

At the Tacoma exhibit, a short introductory video includes tape of McDonald shot early in the project. Despite his strong conviction that Hitler and Nazism needed to be stopped, McDonald said he was profoundly affected to see how war can obliterate the efforts of mankind.

McDonald mailed the glass shards home in packets to his mother in Seattle. Acquaintances say McDonald, an Episcopal priest, had the idea that if he had his own church one day, he'd have the bits made into a stained-glass window.

Instead, he kept them in a cardboard box for more than half a century until the subject of stained glass came up by chance in a 1999 dinnertime conversation at the San Francisco retirement home where he lived.

One resident contacted a stained-glass studio, which sent Le Roux to meet McDonald. "He was amazing," said Le Roux. "He was the kind of person who had an incredibly journalistic memory of detail, but also a very caring, very human approach."

McDonald's detailed memories, captured in his 465-page memoir, prompted Le Roux to suggest individual art pieces be made for each site the glass came from.

The shards McDonald collected make up a small portion of each piece. In one, three notes on a musical scale are formed by pieces he picked up in a synagogue, a Protestant chapel and a Catholic cathedral in Verdun, France. In another, yellow glass bits from a church in Holland depict headstones in a cemetery of war dead.

Nancy Parsons McDonald, a niece of McDonald's in Lakewood, Pierce County, said her uncle would have been thrilled that the windows' first stop after the opening display in San Francisco is in the Puget Sound area. "He was from Seattle and he loved it up here," she said. "I think he would be overwhelmed by how this project turned out."

Chaffee, at the interfaith center, conferred with McDonald often in the project's early phases.

"He was a man of peace and appreciated peace," Chaffee said. "His hope was that light would shine through these again despite the bullets."

Jack Broom: 206-464-2222 or jbroom@seattletimes.com