

First Things: Curatorial Notes

Overview / Concept

The exhibition title is inspired by a quotation from C.S. Lewis:

“You don’t get second things by putting them first. You get second things by putting first things first.”

Applied to the ecclesiastical arts, the intention of this exhibit is to distinguish the fine art involved in the design phase from the crafts employed in the execution of the end projects.

Composition, figure work, and styles are emphasized in these renderings and cartoons rather than the materiality of the stained glass, mosaics, statuary, and furnishings which followed.

Selection of Works

Works were selected to showcase the range of media designed for (glass, tile, wood), the styles employed (classic, Byzantine, contemporary) and the clientele served (Catholic, Protestant, nondenominational), as well as the scale and volume of work, from intricate renderings to heroic proportion cartoons for dozens of works.

The selection was limited to projects that have been executed (with two exceptions), although not all renderings exhibited were the final version selected for fabrication by the client.

An emphasis was placed on works installed in Virginia so that viewers from the area would have an opportunity to visit the ‘second things’ in situ. However, distant projects are also featured, in order to convey the fact that the artist has designed locally for a national clientele that stretches from Washington, DC to Washington state, with significant patronage throughout the southeast, in Georgia, Florida, and Alabama.

The front gallery is christological and approximately chronological, beginning with the Visitation and proceeding clockwise to the Nativity, the Ministry of Christ, his Passion, Crucifixion & Resurrection, and his Reign of Glory. The second gallery presents Angels, and the third gallery holds a smattering of Saints and Furnishings, with some samples of executed works in glass and wood.

Viewer Relationship

Breaking curatorial norms, detailed designs are framed alongside working drawings which are hung high and unframed, in order to create a feeling of walking in to the studio where there are always numerous projects of dissimilar styles in various stages of development and fabrication, with scale renderings matted for presentation in the same room as cartoons on pulleys two stories up. The viewer may notice folds, paint splashes, tears and tape on some of these larger works, as they have been shipped, spilled on, and mended during the fabrication process.

In an effort to encourage viewers to visit the ‘Second Things’ throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, a free map is available which lists over fifty churches with Dixon creations on permanent display.

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