



museum of arts and design

**MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN TO PRESENT MAJOR EXHIBITION  
OF WORKS BY WORLD'S LEADING STAINED-GLASS ARTIST**

*Brian Clarke: The Art of Light*  
September 17, 2020–February 21, 2021



Brian Clarke, *Flowers for Zaha*, 2016. Photo: Fraser Watson.

(NEW YORK, NY September 10, 2020) – From September 17 through February 21, 2021, the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) will present a major exhibition of works by celebrated architectural artist and painter Brian Clarke (b. 1953, United Kingdom). The first museum exhibition in the U.S. of Clarke's stained-glass screens, compositions in lead, and related drawings on paper, *Brian Clarke: The Art of Light* showcases the most considerable artistic and technical breakthrough in the thousand-year history of stained glass.

More than twenty stained-glass screens form the centerpiece of the exhibition. Begun in 2015, these works are described by Clarke as “the expression of ideas that started forming in my mind in the 80s. They possess a cinematic drama that, until now, we haven’t had the technology to express.” Produced using advances developed with and for them, the works dispense with the dividing lead support that has been a necessary component of stained glass through most of its existence. Merging the traditional techniques of glassblowing with the artist’s decades of exploration of the medium of glass, the screens are Clarke’s major independent work of the past four years.

*“Brian Clarke: The Art of Light* is about emotional intensity, about the ability of material and light to explore what it is to be human. Two broad themes are brought out in the two galleries, both of which relate to the extraordinary times we are in,” said Paul Greenhalgh, Director of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and curator of the exhibition. “The gallery of works in lead are to do with mortality, with memory, grief and loss. The associated suite of Night Orchid paintings adds a physicality to the room, a sensuousness that embodies the cycle of life, death, and rebirth that is fundamental to nature. The gallery of glass screens collectively generates a euphoria and sense of hope. While each screen has a specific subject matter, the transillumination – the flow of colored light – has a spiritual sense of optimism. Taken as a whole, the exhibition is about life and loss, about the closeness of joy and grief in these strangest of times.”

Consistently, Clarke has pushed the boundaries of stained glass, both in terms of technology and its poetic potential, in tandem with his investigations in painting. His practice in architectural and autonomous stained glass has led to successive innovation and invention in the fabrication of the medium and, through the production of leadless stained glass and the creation of sculptural works made primarily or wholly of lead, he has radically stretched the limits of what stained glass can do and express.

“There is a world that can only be seen through stained glass. It is like no other. The range of experience I can deliver through it is greater than anything I’ve known in my life,” Clarke said. “Many of the greatest artists have been intensely involved with stained glass – Mondrian, Matisse, Albers, Cocteau, De Kooning, Le Corbusier, Richter. I believe the medium has the potential to have the same kind of uplifting impact on our urban engagement as it had on architecture in the 15th century. I want to surpass the Middle Ages, not equal them. This exhibition demonstrates that stained glass has an authority and potential to deal with every human condition.”

He continued, “The history of art and the history of architecture and design are linked like siblings. Modernity wrenched them apart, celebrating portable art as a monetized market and distancing design and architecture into isolated worlds of their own, with interaction between the disciplines moving from creative collaboration into arbitrary acquaintance. MAD are committed to supporting the healthier, challenging relationship between the arts and I fully behind them in this.”

The exhibition’s more than 100 works, completed by Clarke over the last two decades, will be arranged thematically at MAD. In the light-filled fourth floor gallery, Clarke’s impressively scaled, free-standing screens will immerse visitors in exuberant, saturated colors. By contrast, the fifth floor will display the artist’s earlier leaded works, striking a more somber and contemplative chord. The dual presentation of work and materials in relation to light or its absence reinforces central themes in Clarke’s practice, such as morality, modernity, and memory.

“Brian Clarke is widely recognized as the most significant artist working in stained glass in the contemporary world. Clarke is also recognized as an important painter, and his painterly sensibility underpins the whole of his output. He also regularly works in sculpture, ceramic, metalwork, and mosaic,” said Greenhalgh. “Ultimately, this vortex of activity contributes toward

his central goal to produce ‘total works of art,’ which combine all aspects of the visual arts to transform the architectural environment. This exhibition is the first leg of an international tour. It explores the culture of stained glass, and repositions it as a medium of vital importance in the twenty-first century.”

Accompanying the exhibition is a 286-page catalog from HENI Publishing, featuring an introduction by Norman Foster, renowned architect and founder of Foster + Partners, an essay by Greenhalgh, and more than 200 commissioned photographs. Additionally, a full slate of public programs during MAD’s fall season will leverage the exhibition’s content and themes and will include virtual talks with the artist and key collaborators and collectors of his work, and a director’s screening of the documentary *Colouring Light: Brian Clarke—An Artist Apart* (2011) with Mark Kidel.

### **EXHIBITION CREDITS**

*Brian Clarke: The Art of Light* is organized by the Sainsbury Centre in association with the Museum of Arts and Design.

*Brian Clarke: The Art of Light* is made possible by presenting sponsor DAVID YURMAN with major support from Klara and Larry Silverstein and Michele and Marty Cohen, and Simona and Jerry Chazen.

### **ABOUT BRIAN CLARKE**

Brian Clarke (b. 1953, Oldham, Lancashire, England) is the world’s most widely recognized stained-glass artist. His meteoric rise to prominence in the late 70s—buoyed by the energy of the Punk movement—was as a painter and polemicist championing the integration of art and architecture. Described by Andy Warhol as “the most glamorous artist to come out of England since the sixties,” Clarke lived and worked in New York in the 80s and 90s, where he produced some of the most significant developments in his work. Clarke’s commitment to total art has developed into a Renaissance engagement with multiple media, from painting, sculpture, ceramics, mosaic and tapestry to sets for opera, the ballet, and stadia. His reputation is based on installations and individual works, ranging from intimate to monumental in scale, for hundreds of projects worldwide. Practicing in sacred and secular spaces, he has collaborated on projects and proposals with Zaha Hadid, Norman Foster, Arata Isozaki, Oscar Niemeyer, Renzo Piano, Future Systems, and other leading figures of Modern and contemporary architecture. Clarke’s work is represented in international public and private collections including the Tate, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Bavarian State Painting Collections, and the Sezon Museum of Modern Art, and has been the subject of exhibitions at international museums including the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; Munich Stadtmuseum; the Centre International du Vitrail, Chartres; the Corning Museum of Glass, USA; the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Germany; and Vitromusée, Romont. He lives and works in London.

### **ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN**

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields and presents the work of artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill. Since the Museum’s founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum’s curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving twenty-first-century innovation, and

fosters a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design. For more information, visit [madmuseum.org](http://madmuseum.org).

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