

Marguerite Gaudin, 82; her talents shine through stained-glass designs

By Andy Wallace
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Marguerite Gaudin, 82, a stained-glass artist who spent nearly 60 years designing windows for the Willet Stained Glass Studios, died Sunday at her home in Chestnut Hill.

She joined the Willet Studios in 1931, shortly after graduating from the Philadelphia College of Art. Until illness forced her to gradually curtail her work in recent years, she designed windows for more than 1,000 churches and secular buildings in all 50 states and five foreign countries.

Among her accomplishments were the last six windows in the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City and all the windows in the National Presbyterian Church and Chapel in Washington.

Ms. Gaudin also created the design for one of the largest installations of faceted glass in the world — the 30,000 square feet of walls for the Hall of Science at the 1964-65 World's Fair in New York.

"She was quite active and very productive," said E. Crosby Willet, president of the Philadelphia company. "She turned out double the amount of work of any of our other designers."

She also had a wry sense of humor that sometimes produced unexpected elements in solemn religious moments. In one window, for instance, the *Peanuts* character Schroeder plays Beethoven on his toy piano beside such luminaries as Palestrina, Luther, Bach and Ralph Vaughn Williams.

In one Garden of Eden scene, a cross-eyed worm pops out of an apple, and the oranges in a window at St. Luke's Episcopal Cathedral in Orlando, Fla., are marked "color added."

Those who knew her best described her as an attractive, strong-willed, independent and tremendously talented woman. Ms. Gaudin was tireless and exacting when it came to her work, but could be short-tempered with people.

"She was a very dynamic, opinionated lady," Willet said. "She had had strong likes and dislikes for people that could change from minute to minute, depending on what you did for her or didn't do for her."



Marguerite Gaudin

Virginia Mason Gifford, a friend who studied with her at art school, said Ms. Gaudin had been a pretty woman, about 5-foot-5 and slender, with curly, blond hair that she cut short in a "pineapple bob" because she didn't care for her curls.

Ms. Gaudin lived with her mother until her mother died in 1972, and afterward lived alone in the Chestnut Hill house.

"She was very dedicated to artwork and very much a loner," Gifford said.

Besides her art, she had two passions: cats and gambling.

She was known as a soft touch by all the cats in the neighborhood that appeared nightly on her front porch. "She fed them cream and things like that," Gifford said.

According to Willet, Ms. Gaudin lived for her once-a-month expeditions to Atlantic City with a bus group to play the slot machines. "She took \$700 with her, and when she spent that she got back on the bus," he said.

Ms. Gaudin worked from concepts — a Garden of Eden theme, for example — given to her by the Willets.

"The interpretation we left up to her," Willet said. "She would develop (the theme) in pencil, and we would look at it and determine scale and color, but she would tend to do it her way, and nine times out of 10 it

looked better than we imagined it."

She did all her work at home in a large studio that overlooked the flower garden she liked to putter in. "She had her things together and did not like to be disturbed," Willet said.

"Occasionally, she came to the studio to see work in progress, but as far as the making of the windows went, she had little interest," he said.

"She liked to do things quickly and precisely. She did not fool around with sketching. She did everything precisely in pencil, and when she put it in ink, she didn't want to change a thing.

"She was a remarkably fast worker," he said, "very focused."

But Gifford recalled that her friend would take the time to get it right when she had to.

Once, while a freshman in college, Ms. Gaudin created a 36-by-36-inch design that was made up of many minute elements. The teacher pronounced it great, except for the color scheme. Ms. Gaudin took it home and did the whole thing over that night — a feat that amazed the teacher and fellow students.

"She was very exact, very patient and tireless," Gifford said. "She would work all night till she got it right if she had to. But she loved it."

A graduate of West Philadelphia High School, Ms. Gaudin won the Distinguished Alumnae Award from the Philadelphia College of Art in 1960.

She was a former director and vice president of Willet Studios and the first artist/designer to become a member of the Stained Glass Association of America.

She was a skilled calligrapher, and she designed and made hundreds of illuminated commemorative awards that were presented to many famous people. Among them were Presidents Hoover, Eisenhower, Nixon, Carter and Bush.

Solo exhibitions of her watercolors were mounted at the Woodmere Art Gallery, the Philadelphia College of Art and the Philadelphia Art Alliance.

She is survived by a brother, Daniel, and cousins James Gaudin and George Cordeau.

A memorial service will be scheduled later.