

Domsteinchen. Old and new from Trier

CITY HISTORY · October 18, 2020

Shards from Trier become a memorial work of art

How a broken church window became a work of art for peace

In 1945, an American military chaplain in Trier collects broken glass from the church of our Lady. Decades later, the fragments are turned into a work of art that reminds us of peace. It can be seen high above the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.



View from Grabenstrasse to the cathedral and the Church of Our Lady.

This is how Frederick McDonald saw Trier in 1945. (Photo: Friedel Thörnig)

In March 1945 Trier is like a ghost town. Large parts are in ruins, only a few people still live in the houses. The stars and stripes are blowing over the Hotel Porta Nigra, **units of the 3rd US Army captured Trier in a coup d'état on March 2nd at night**. A few days later, Frederick ("Fred") McDonald (born September 20, 1908 in Seattle) takes a look at the sights of Trier - or what is left of them. McDonald is a military chaplain at the headquarters of the approximately 900,000-strong **12th Army Group** under the command of Lieutenant General **Omar N. Bradley**, who fought their way from Normandy to Trier.

The way through a destroyed Europe

Everywhere on his way through England, France, Belgium and Germany, McDonald found death and destruction. "Nobody can imagine what it is like to go through this devastation where nobody else is," McDonald later recalled. The experience of war simply wiping out that which defines humanity, shapes the Anglican clergy, who, as a man of God, also saddened the number of "destroyed church spiers" on his way through England, France, Belgium and Germany. "There was glass everywhere, and I took a bunch of these broken pieces that had been blackened by the bombing explosion. The shards represented something deep, something to be remembered".

Remembered Light



On March 8th, his path in the wake of the 12th Army Group also took him to Trier, where the top US military officials **Eisenhower**, **Bradley** and **Patton** were guests the day before. Eisenhower, commander-in-chief of the Allies in Europe, awarded the conqueror of the city with a medal for his deed. The military chaplain is drawn from the US headquarters to the old Roman city, which has been badly damaged by the war.

The fallen cross in the Church of Our Lady



Above and below: Frederick McDonald on March 8, 1945 in the devastated Church of Our Lady in Trier (images courtesy of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio)

"American soldiers combed through the heaps of rubble that were once buildings and churches," McDonald later recalled of his stay on the Moselle. His way leads him to the center of the city in front of the double church, consisting of the cathedral and the **Church of Our Lady**. The outer walls of the Gothic Church of Our Lady are still standing, "but the wooden doors were blown open." A sign in English forbade entry, so the American army command wanted to protect important works of art from ending up as souvenirs of American GIs. "I went in and thoughtfully looked at the cross on the floor and the statue of the Mother of God, who looked down at her prostrate son." The scene in the bombed and badly damaged Church of Our Lady touches the Anglican clergyman deeply. McDonald, who had toured Europe and Germany before the war and was always interested in architecture and especially glass art,



He has done this before in Coventry, London, Périers, Coutances, Verdun, Metz, Thionville, Malmedy, Dinant, Bastogne, Maastricht and Aachen. And so it will do after his visit to Trier in Cologne, Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Berchtesgaden and Biarritz. He sends the broken pieces home by post, neatly labeled. Perhaps, the military chaplain thinks, the broken pieces could be worked into a memorial window somewhere. They are only small fragments. But: "It is so often a little thing that a flood or memories can bring back in the head."

Then the war ends. Fred McDonald celebrates a memorial service with the generals of the Allied High Command on May 8, 1945, in which he preaches of the pain of the war and of the sadness of what has happened. "The reward that remains is peace." NBC even broadcasts the sermon in the US.

An idea that took decades

For 54 long years, the broken glass has been lying in a cardboard box in McDonald's house as witnesses to the destruction of the Second World War and McDonald's journey through Europe. Including the 43 broken glass from the Liebfrauenkirche. The well-traveled, urbane and adventurous clergyman is now 90 years old. One evening at a meal at home in San Francisco, Frederick McDonald told his astonished guests the story of his collection of broken glass and his idea of a memorial window. One of the dinner participants, Jean Wright, turned to a glass art studio near San Francisco.

A French glass painter, [Armelle LeRoux, works there](#) . She meets with McDonald, the two become friends. LeRoux talks to the retired clergyman, writes everything down, looks at the fragments of the windows - the "McDonald Memorial Peace Windows Project" was born. LeRoux becomes a curator and selects a team of 13 artists, donations are collected. First of all, the idea is to create a single window out of the broken pieces.



The shards from the Trier Liebfrauenkirche. (Image: The Interfaith Center at the Presidio)

Remembered Light: Broken things become art



In old age, Fred McDonald tells artists the story of his broken pieces. (Image: The Interfaith Center at the Presidio)

But the many individual stories and details, which the gifted narrator McDonald remembers decades later, inspire the glass artists to take a different approach: For every place where McDonald has collected broken glass, the old broken glass and new materials create a glass picture that McDonalds artistically reproduces stories that he has told the artists over and over again for three years.

Frederick McDonald dies on March 9, 2002. Another five years after his death, his idea of a memorial project finally becomes a reality. From Frederick McDonald's World War II fragments and memories, internationally known glass artists have created 25 glass works of art that artistically address topics such as loss, devastation and the pursuit of peace.

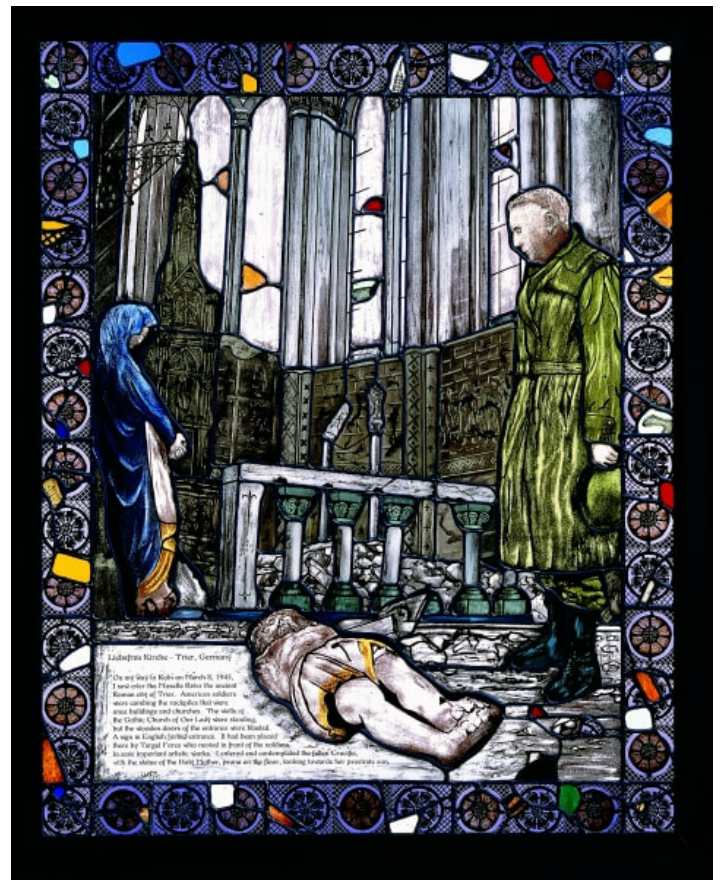
Together, the works of art form the exhibition "**Remembered Light: Glass Fragments from World War II, the McDonald Windows**". The American glass artist Peter K. Eichhorn worked the old shards from Trier's Liebfrauenkirche into a glass picture showing McDonald looking at the fallen cross in Trier's church on March 8, 1945

An American from Trier creates a glass picture from Liebfrauen shards

The special thing: **Eichhorn** himself was born in Trier and learned his craft and art at the **Binsfeld glass workshop** in Saarstrasse. "Born in Trier and raised, it is an honor to be involved in this project and to work with shards from the Church of Our Lady," writes Eichhorn about his work with the fragments from the **Trier Church**, "I hope this commemorative artwork us helps to see more clearly what people went through during the war. With mutual understanding and respect, changes remain possible. "

Eichhorn's stained glass window made of blown glass with the incorporated 43 shards from Trier is around 92 by 114 centimeters. The works of art can be seen permanently in the **Presidio Chapel** in San Francisco high above the Golden Gate Bridge.

The chapel belongs to the **Presidio Interfaith Center**, an interfaith organization that also does peace work. A good place for the remains of the church windows destroyed by bombs, which show that war and destruction can also turn into peace and art. With heartfelt thanks to the Interfaith Center at the Presidio in San Francisco for the kind permission to use the images.



The glass picture created by Peter Eichhorn shows McDonald in 1945 in the Liebfrauenkirche. The shards are incorporated into the picture. It is one of 25 works of art in the "Remembered Light" exhibition. (Image: The Interfaith Center at the Presidio)

Tags: [Trier](#), [Third Army](#), [Omar Bradley](#), [Frederick McDonald](#), [Our Lady](#), [Our Lady's Church](#), [Our Lady](#), [1945](#), [World War II](#), [WW2](#), [Remembered Light](#), [glass art](#), [Interfaith](#), [Presidio](#), [San Francisco](#), [Treves](#), [McDonald](#), [chaplain](#), [Chaplain](#), [Episcopal Church](#), [Main Post Chapel](#), [Eichhorn](#), [Peter Eichhorn](#), [Binsfeld Glass Art](#), [Gothic](#)



WRITE A COMMENT

Comments: 4

Silvia (Sunday, October 18, 2020 1:46 PM)

Great report, I am always thrilled about the valuable historical contributions!

Anna (Sunday, October 18, 2020 2:23 PM)

2

A great story. What a shame I didn't even know about it when I was in San Francisco in 2016!

Simon (Tuesday, October 20 2020 11:48 am)

3

Nice story, which I have never heard of, although I have everything in books on the history of Trier at that time!

Christine Gindorf (Sunday, April 04 2021 12:04 PM)

4

I am totally touched by this story: In connection with a church service on the subject of "Shards" I told it to my seniors in the BBT senior center in Trier and gave them a card with Peter Eichhorn's window; that caused a lot for them, and where I get goose bumps now: A woman who was sitting right next to me said: "I was 16 years old at the time, a few others and I cleaned up there in Liebfrauen, swept up broken pieces - I don't know who gave us the job".

Personally, I would like the exhibition to be shown in Trier - preferably in Liebfrauen, of course!

Many Thanks!

5

Surname: *

Entry: *

The [data protection declaration](#) applies . *

* Required fields



 [Connect to Twitter](#)

Shards from Trier become a memorial work of art

SUN 18 OCT 2020

[READ MORE](#)

[4 COMMENTS](#)

75 years ago: Americans liberate Trier

SUN 01 MAR 2020

[READ MORE](#)

[3 COMMENTS](#)

75 years ago: The forgotten battle near Zerf

SUN 23 FEB 2020

[READ MORE](#)

[0 COMMENTS](#)

Grach Pascha or how a Trier saved the Ottoman Empire

TUE 11 JUN 2019

[READ MORE](#)

[2 COMMENTS](#)

[Imprint](#) | [Data protection](#) | [Sitemap](#)

[Log In](#)