

Artist finds spirituality

Written By MARK PAVILONS

The work of a King artist pays homage to creativity and spirituality. In fact, this one piece of glass work will be on display as a complement to Austrian history.

World-renowned artist Ernestine Tahedl created a 2.5-metre metal and glass church window, capturing both classical and modern abstract designs. It was a modern resurrection of a piece uncovered in the 16th century tower of the Stift St. Florian monastery near Linz, Austria. Tahedl has been a special guest in the past and she was chosen to create something special for the church. During renovations several years ago, workers uncovered an original window inside a wall that hasn't seen the light of day in hundreds of years. It had to remain in place, but they wanted to bring the architecture back to life in some way.

That's where Tahedl came in. She began her career in stained glass and she submitted concept drawings, along with other contemporary Austrian artists, for a chance to recreate history.

Her designs were ultimately chosen and she spent a couple of weeks in a workshop in Vienna painting the panels and assembling the window. She decided to paint on the reverse side of the glass, which presented some unique challenges, even for such a seasoned artist.

She painted the panels on the floor, keeping in mind what the images would look like when viewed from the other side. She noted she had to approach it in the exact opposite way of a typical painting. It was challenging, but she admitted the process kept her fresh.

The piece is reflective of Tahedl's unique style and colour schemes. She used stronger, more vibrant colours to make the piece pop.

While she had a concept plan in mind, the piece took on a life of its own during the process. Not only does it look great, but it belongs in the basilica.

It was simply amazing to be part of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. To find a piece of 600-year-old history, recreate it and have it installed, is inspiring.

'I'm just thrilled,' she said.

The abstract design is based on Anton Bruckner's music. The composer, loved for his creativity and humility, played the organ at the church and is, in fact, buried in a crypt immediately below his favorite organ.

The facility is the home of St. Florian's Priory, a community of Canons Regular named after Saint Florian and one of the oldest operational monasteries in the world following the Rule of St Augustine. Composer Bruckner (1824-96) was a choirboy and later organist in the town.

The foundation of the old Gothic church dates back to Roman times, but the modern reconstruction of the basilical began in 1686. The monastery was first documented in 819. Since 1071 Canons Regular of Saint Augustine's order have been living there. Over the centuries the monastic building has adapted to the many changes in style. In parallel, the borough of St. Florian has become a well-known place in Europe. The church and grounds are considered to be among the most beautiful in all of Europe.

Tahedl paints while listening to the greats ? Mozart, Schubert, Strauss and of course Bruckner, who's considered to have written the most complex symphonies ever created.

The priory, and Catholic church, are reaching out to the public, and the younger generation to keep the faith alive. Through art and music, they hope others will embrace the tradition.

Tahedl said creativity and spirituality complement one another. In fact, music itself can be abstract in nature.

St. Florian preserves the very best of Austrian culture. Music, art and religion come together in regular music festivals. They have their own boys' choir, similar to the world-famous Vienna Boys Choir.

The facility is home to one of the best collections of medieval art, with glass, paintings and sculptures spanning the 13th to 16th centuries. Monks have also painstakingly assembled one of the oldest libraries in Europe.

The richness of this institution, Tahedl said, is simply breathtaking. The dedication of the monks to preserve art, history, music and literature is admirable.

That richness has become even greater, thanks to Tahedl's unique contribution.

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