Book Review

Julie L. Sloan is Adjunct Professor of Historic Preservation at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Historic Preservation, where for nine years she has taught stained-glass restoration. She is a trained preservationist and president of McKernan Satterlee Associates Inc., a firm of leading stained-glass conservation consultants in the United States. Through her role as an educationalist and her numerous articles in publications such as Professional Stained Glass, Stained Glass Quarterly, the PSG Restoration Report and others, she has pioneered many of the currently-accepted standards of stained-glass restoration in America.

Although this book is written from an American perspective, it is a timely and relevant guide for all producers, owners and custodians of stained glass in Australia. The age and condition of Australia's stained-glass heritage is very similar to that of America, the main exception is the considerably greater amount of medieval stained glass in American museums and private collections.

In her 225 page book, Sloan deals mainly with the preservation and conservation of stained glass from the 19th century onwards. She does, however, refer to and discuss problems associated with medieval stained glass; although, this is primarily for the sake of comparison, and highlights the different approach required for analysing and treating the younger stained-glass heritage of America.

The book is clearly and logically set out and is supported by 52 black and white illustrations. In most instances the quality of the photographs is adequate to illustrate the point or the process described in the text. There are, however, a few photographs with definition so poor that the advantage of their inclusion is debatable. The book is indexed, contains an extensive bibliography and is well referenced throughout.

The first part of the book deals with theory and professional practice. The terms 'conservation', 'preservation', 'restoration' and 'repair' are clearly defined at the outset, which is very helpful, as these terms are often confused and interchanged in practice. Sloan puts forward a 'Basic Conservation Philosophy'; a broad code of ethics which is in line with the established international criteria of bodies such as the International Institute for the Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works (IIC), the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), UNESCO, the Corpus Vitrearum and the Census of Stained Glass in America. She stresses the need for a more particular conservation philosophy for each individual project which would form the basis for contracts between owners and conservation studios. All aspects of this are carefully discussed and set out in point form as a ready guide. Also included in this section of the book is a brief but critical look at the technical history of stained-glass restoration worldwide – a woeful tale!

In the second part of the book, Sloan deals in detail with materials and processes. A full chapter is devoted to each of the following: glass; cames,

Conservation of Stained Glass in America: A Manual for Studios and Caretakers
Author: Julie L. Sloan
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Alison McMillan

Alison McMillan is a tutor in Glass Studies at Monash University in Melbourne. She specialises in glass painting and currently runs the Goldfields Glass Studio at Castlemaine, Victoria.

putty and structure; glass paint; cleaning; documentation; and protective glazing. These are areas which should be of as much concern to current stained-glass designers and craftspeople as they are for conservationists. Sloan points to the costly or near-impossible maintenance consequences of using certain techniques and ‘gee-whiz’ materials, merely for short-term gains. Manufacturers of materials used in the making and installation of stained-glass windows would also benefit from more understanding in this area.

There are few articles and even fewer books which deal with the conservation of 19th century stained glass. In this publication Sloan makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the problems, both ethical and practical, faced by all those engaged in the design, production, maintenance, conservation, preservation and restoration, guardianship, historical documentation and artistic review of stained glass of a period relevant to Australia’s heritage. The conservation needs of a huge amount of valuable stained glass in Australia has to date gone unnoticed. ‘A stitch in time’ is sorely needed, and Sloan’s book is a valuable resource for those who are prepared to accept the challenge.