

CENTURIES OLD ART HIS JOB AND HOBBY

BY BARBARA PARTINGTON

A man living in a quiet street in Lakemba is continuing an art which has spanned at least nine centuries and is still as popular as ever.

Mr. Martin Vandertoorn, 38, designs and builds stained glass windows for churches and public buildings all over Australia.

Only a fortnight ago eight of his windows, each nearly six feet high and 20 inches across, were installed in St. Paul's Church, Bankstown.

Each depicts a period in Christ's life beginning with the nativity.

The last window is a translation into glass of Holman Hunt's famous "Light of the World" painting of Christ with a lantern.

The windows are in traditional style with glowing reds, blues and greens as the main colors. They are eight mosaics

of many pieces of glass wedged together by lead.

Mr. Vandertoorn is also installing nine small windows around the sanctuary walls depicting the symbols of nine saints.

Punchbowl has an excellent example of his work — a window in the sanctuary of St. Barnabas' Church made up from three large diamond shapes.

Trips interstate

In it, the worshipping apostles watch Christ's Ascension into a blaze of gold light.

Total measurement of the window is 90 square feet.

Mr. Vandertoorn has installed more than 300

stained glass windows throughout Australia in the last 17 years.

His most recent commission took him to Hughenden, 300 miles west of Townsville, where he installed eight windows, each 6ft. by 3ft., in the Catholic Church.

These, too, were traditional windows depicting Christ's life, and took about three months from design to installation.

Adelaide, Perth and Canberra have examples of Mr. Vandertoorn's windows and so has a little mission church in New Guinea.

One of his most unusual assignments was to make a portrait of Gladys Moncrieff, the singer, for the home of one of her friends.

The singer later rang to congratulate him on his work.

Mr. Vandertoorn's skill as an artist came into the limelight a few years ago when he made a rose window of 90 square feet for the Oxford Street, Sydney, Garrison Church.

Mr. Vandertoorn began drawing as a small child and did his first oil painting when he was 12 — tigers in a mountainous landscape.

He began art training at a technical college

in The Hague, Holland, his country of birth, and later spent three years at the Academy of Arts there.

He intended to be an oil painter, but his brother drew his attention to the skill involved in making stained glass windows and he went into apprenticeship at a studio in The Hague.

The Dutch love stained glass windows, not only in churches, but in all types of public buildings — town halls, railway stations and so on.

Army service

But Mr. Vandertoorn's career was interrupted by Army service.

He served six months in Holland and then 22 in Indonesia.

On demobilisation, he came to Australia to "have a look" before returning to Holland, liked it, married a Victorian girl and settled.

Mr. Vandertoorn joined John Ashwin and Company, artists in stained glass, a firm established in 1870.

Now he is proprietor of the firm with his headquarters in Benaroon Road, Lakemba, where he has a large workshop and an office behind his home.

At one time the com-

pany had 20 people working for it when leaded lights for houses were at their popularity peak.

Mr. Vandertoorn's future commissions include three windows for Concord — one for the Methodist Church and one each for the Church of England and Catholic Chapels at the Repatriation Hospital.

One of his ambitions is to visit Europe to find out what is happening in the art world there, especially in the art of stained glass windows.

• Mr. Martin Vandertoorn is pictured below cutting glass for a stained glass window. Behind him is a full-size drawing for a church window.



has turned vacant land at the
tale Avenue, off Stacey Street,
of disuse

The Window and the Artist

* St John's College was designed in 1859 by William Wilkinson Wardell, the architect of St Mary's Cathedral Sydney, St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne, and numerous prominent ecclesiastical and public buildings.

The chapel is a visual delight internally and externally. Stylistically, it is executed according to 14th century English gothic architecture. Its most distinctive features are the windows. Four were designed and executed by John Hardman and Company of Birmingham. A most generous donation has enabled St John's to install this the first new window in the College in more than fifty years.

In an endeavour to tap the best of local resources the College engaged the Crafts Council of NSW to run a competition for a design sympathetic to the existing windows and oversee the operation.

The winner of the competition, Mr Martin Van Der Toorn is a noted Australian designer of more than 600 windows. His triptych concept for the new More window is inspired by the themes of knowledge and discovery, vision and service, and compassion.

In the left hand panel More is seated with the 'Oxford Reformers', Colet and Erasmus, and in the right hand panel farewell his daughter Margaret. The central light reveals the public figure - More as Chancellor - holding a parchment with the great seal of England attached.

A stylised version of the woodcut from the 2nd edition of Utopia forms the base for the entire work.

St John's is delighted to have received this magnificent gift and is grateful to all those who have made it possible - its donor, the artist and the Crafts Council of NSW.

We pray that all who gaze on this window will be inspired by the saint it honours.

* St John's College,
University of Sydney

