



Pers release Ars Lucis
July 2025

Ars Lucis – the Art of Light

A new player has recently joined the Flemish heritage organizations: Ars Lucis, center of stained glass. This is the brainchild of Joost Caen, professor emeritus of conservation-restoration (University of Antwerp), stained-glass artist and passionate collector of stained glass. To share his extensive knowledge and collection with the public and the scientific community, he founded the non-profit organization Ars Lucis in the spring of 2025. However, his ambition is great, because in the long term he wants Ars Lucis to become the number one knowledge center cum museum of stained glass in the Benelux.

World-class collection

The basis for this knowledge center and museum is already provided for. Since childhood, Joost Caen has collected stained glass, and everything related to this art discipline. Meanwhile, his collection includes not only stained-glass roundels, panels and windows, but also numerous (historical) books and publications on glass painting and related topics. All this is supplemented by archival material and historical glaziers' tools. As for the glass collection, the oldest item dates from the 13th century while the youngest is 21st-century. In short, taken together, the Caen Collection provides an overview of at least nine centuries of stained-glass art. In doing so, it is one of the most important private collections on architectural glass worldwide.

Although several items were made in France, Great Britain, Germany and Switzerland, most of the glass objects originate from the historic Netherlands, and mainly from the territory of present-day Belgium. This geographical focus is not without significance, for already since the Middle Ages, magnificent stained-glass windows of international repute were made in our region. For many centuries, stained glass was one of the most prestigious promotional gifts one could give or receive. The artists who designed and executed them stood at the top. For example, in the 15th-17th centuries, names such as Dirck Vellert (c. 1480-1547), Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502-1550) and Jan de Labaer (1603-1668) were on a par with those of Bernard van Orley (c. 1487/1491-1514), Lucas van Leyden (c. 1494-1533) and Pieter-Paul Rubens (1577-1640). What is more, these famous painters often collaborated with glass painters.

Of course, the Caen Collection does not only contain work after Vellert and fellow artists. Some other names to be found in it are Jan de Caumont (1577-1659), Gustave Ladon (1863-1942), Louis De Contini (1854-1905), Edouard Van Steenberghe (1889-1952), Jos Hendrickx (1906-1971) and Michel Martens (1921-2006). Just about every art



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movement is represented, including neo-styles, art nouveau, art deco, modernism, expressionism and contemporary experimental flat glass objects.

Promotion and revaluation of the art of stained glass

Today, people are hardly aware of stained glass and its great (art) historical importance. Moreover, it might come as a surprise to many that the Flemish Top Items List includes several stained-glass panels and windows (several of which are to be found in the Caen Collection). Therefore, one of the goals of Ars Lucis is to raise awareness around this art discipline. Ars Lucis wants to make everybody discover the beauty of stained glass and its history. This history not only parallels that of art and architectural history, but it also offers insights into political, religious, craft and sociological evolutions.

There is a lot to learn and to discover from the Caen Collection. This is why Ars Lucis gives much attention to research and offers researchers access to the collection. Other services are provided as well, such as giving advice and information on stained glass, historical clear glazing and their conservation-restoration. Furthermore, Ars Lucis can be called upon for workshops, lectures and other forms of education. As for further public events, Ars Lucis is committed to organizing and collaborating in exhibitions.

Future Dreams

The ultimate goal, however, is to establish a museum, making the collection and knowledge accessible to everyone. International examples such as the *Cité du Vitrail* in Troyes (F), the *Centre International du Vitrail in Chartres* (F), the *Vitrocentre/Vitromusée* in Romont (CH), *The Stained-Glass Museum* in Ely (UK) and the *Deutsches Glasmalerei-Museum* in Linnich (D) points to its possible relevance. In the Benelux there is no counterpart yet, although the foundation is already in place.




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Images

	<p>Joost Caen with stained-glass panel. © J. Willems.</p>
	<p>Noli me tangere N.N., France, church of Saint-Aubin, Montreuil-sur-Loir, c. 1210. Different shades of vitreous paint on tinted, blue, green, yellow, purple and pink crown glass, 68,5 x 31,5 cm (border included, which is modern).</p>
	<p>Floral motif (fragment) N.N., Low Countries (?), c. 1300. Different shades of vitreous paint on tinted crown glass, c. 6 x 4,8 cm.</p>



Saint-Barbara

N.N., Southern Low Countries or France, c. 1475.

Different shades of vitreous paint, silver stain and sanguine on tinted crown glass, 19,2 cm diameter.



Prior Jan Gaÿ and his patron saint

Pieter Coecke van Aelst, Southern Low Countries, Antwerp, c. 1540.

Different shades of vitreous paint, silver stain and sanguine on tinted and pot metal cylinder glass, 65,5 x 48 cm.



Personification of Spring

Atelier Lorin, France, Chartres (?), c. 1890.
Different shades of vitreous paint, two tints
of silver stain, various tints of sanguine and
enamel paint on clear cylinder glass,
49 x 42,5 cm.



Graph

Eduard J. Van Steenberghe & workshop Van
Gussenhoven & Van Wijck, Belgium,
Antwerp, 1930.
Window glass, American opalescent glass,
mouthblown glass and structured glass,
48,9 x 91,2 cm.



Animistic figure

Jos Hendrickx, Belgium, Antwerp, 1943.
Different shades of vitreous paint on tinted
and pot metal cylinder glass,
31,5 x 29,1 cm.