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## THE FUNCTIONING AND DEVELOPMENT OF KIRSCH & FLECKNER'S WORKSHOP IN FRIBOURG DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1991, the Swiss Centre for Stained-Glass Research and Information (now Vitrocentre Romont) received a donation from the graphic collection of the Fribourg workshop Kirsch & Fleckner, consisting of more than 1700 works (cartoons and models).

The workshop was active from the end of the nineteenth century until 1938, when Vincenz Kirsch died. This collection was pre-inventoried in the late 1990s by Augustin Pasquier, a former collaborator of the Centre. In 2015, we extended this work with the intention of understanding not only the way the workshop operates but also its development during the first years of its activity, through an in-depth study of the works. The aim of this article is to present the first results of this research, focusing on some artists who collaborated with the workshop.

### CREATION OF THE WORKSHOP AND FIRST ASSOCIATION WITH MEHOFFER

The glass painter Ludwig Greiner from Germany settled in Fribourg in 1891, opening his own stained-glass workshop. After only three years, he handed the business over to his young employee, Vinzenz Kirsch. Born in Germany in 1872, Kirsch had been apprenticed there and then moved to Switzerland, where he worked in Adolf Kreuzer's workshop in Zurich. In 1891, he settled in Fribourg, where he was hired by Greiner. When he took over the workshop, Kirsch was only 22 years old and decided to take on an associate: his compatriot Karl Fleckner. He hadn't any training in glass painting but had done an apprenticeship in a cardboard factory in Germany. They decided that Fleckner would assume the administrative

role, and Kirsch the artistic one. During the first years, the stained-glass workshop team was very small: only one employee and one apprentice.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, there were very few active stained-glass workshops in Fribourg and a lot of opportunities for expansion in the trade. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century stained-glass windows production in the French-speaking part of Switzerland was dominated by Zurich workshops, such as those of Friedrich Berbig, Johann Jakob Röttinger, Adolf Kreuzer and Karl Wehrli the elder and his son Jakob Georg.<sup>2</sup> During its four years of activity, at the end of the century, Greiner's workshop had represented a very modest part of this trade. In the spring of 1895 the workshop Kirsch & Fleckner was invited to participate in an international contest for the creation of stained-glass windows for the nave of the collegiate church and future Cathedral of Saint-Nicholas in Fribourg. On June 15 1895, Vinzenz Kirsch wrote a letter to the committee, to explain to them that the workshop could not participate in the competition because they had not enough money to pay an artist to create the sketches [Fig. 1]. However, they suggested that they could realize the stained-glass windows based on the drawings of the winner, committing themselves to

<sup>1</sup> A. PASQUIER, 'Du savoir faire du verrier: L'atelier Kirsch & Fleckner', in *Jozef Mehoffer: De Cracovie à Fribourg, ce flamboyant art nouveau polonais*, Fribourg, 1995, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> E.M. SCHEIWILLER-LORBER, '...gemäß den Regeln und Gesetzen der Ästhetik und der christlichen Kunst...': *Johann Jakob Röttinger: ein Glasmalerpionier im Dienste der Historismus*, Bern, 2014, pp. 26–27, 217–222.





1. Kirsch & Fleckner's letter to the committee of the collegiate church of St Nicholas, Fribourg, 15 June 1895. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont (archives Kirsch & Fleckner)

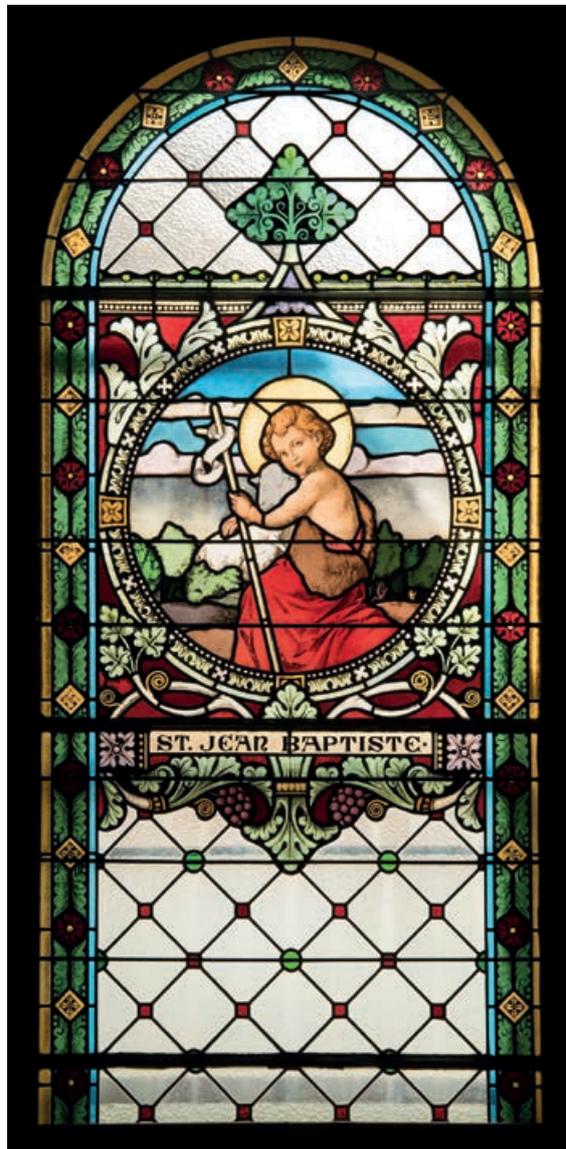
providing high-quality work.<sup>3</sup> Despite the lack of experience and the youth of the workshop this proposal was accepted and Kirsch & Fleckner were put in charge of making the stained-glass windows that were created by Józef Mehoffer for the cathedral, a huge work that continued over almost 40 years.<sup>4</sup> This letter, written one year after the opening of the workshop, is essential to understanding the workshop's history, because it lays down the foundation for its functioning. Until Vinzenz Kirsch's death in 1938, the atelier worked mainly with self-employed artists, who designed preparatory drawings for stained-glass windows the workshop was ordered to make. Looking at the total number of creations from the workshop, only a few of the works were designed by Vinzenz Kirsch, and most of them were created during the first years of their activities. We could assume that very quickly, the two young bosses understood the issues they had to consider. At the beginning of the twentieth century, stained-glass creation found itself at a crossroads. Mehoffer's stained-glass windows had opened up new artistic possibilities, and the Kirsch & Fleckner workshop understood that they were following a path they could not take alone.

<sup>3</sup> H. VON RODA, *Die Glasmalereien von Józef Mehoffer in der Kathedrale St. Nikolaus in Freiburg i.Ue.*, Bern, 1995, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.



2. Raymond Buchs and Kirsch & Fleckner, *St. John the Baptist and lamb*, 1897, Überstorf (Fribourg), church of St John the Baptist. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont (archives Kirsch & Fleckner)

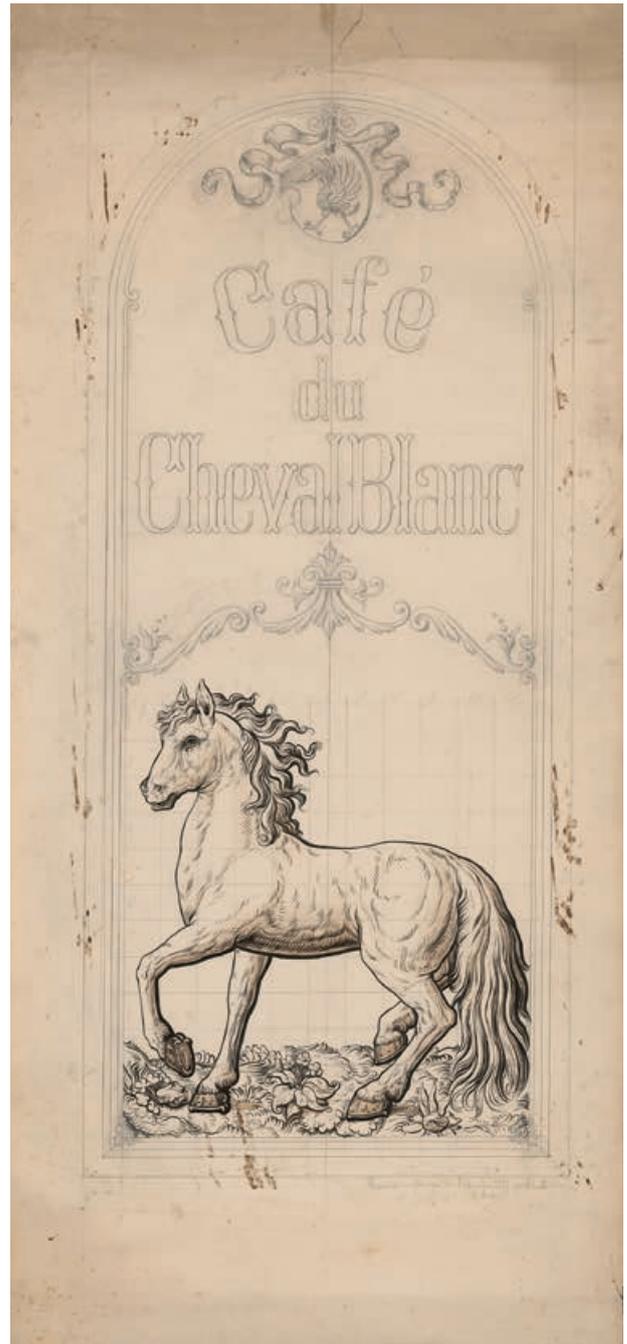


3. Raymond Buchs and Kirsch & Fleckner, *St. John the Baptist and lamb*, 1911–1913, Onnens (Fribourg), church of St Andrew. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, H. Fischer

Despite being a good designer, Vinzenz Kirsch was clever enough to know his own artistic limits. Therefore the workshop chose to create partnerships with young artists overflowing with curiosity and talent and attracted by novelty. The realization of Mehoffer's first windows was immediately successful. The workshop was rewarded with a gold medal for the Window of Martyrs at the 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris.<sup>5</sup> This partnership with Mehoffer was an exceptional business card for the workshop, and led to a great number of works being ordered in the canton of Fribourg, as well as in others parts of Switzerland and outside the country.<sup>6</sup> According to the needs of the workshop and the artists' time and resources, the workshop mainly worked with young independent artists, who were just beginning their careers and were about to start taking up stained-glass art.<sup>7</sup> The first artists who collaborated with the workshop were Raymond Buchs (1878–1958), Jean-Louis Fortuné Bovard (1875–1947), Jean-Edward de Castella (1881–1966) and Henri Broillet (1891–1960). A large part of the stained-glass windows created by Kirsch & Fleckner have so far not been identified with or attributed to an artist.

#### COLLABORATION WITH RAYMOND BUCHS

The first local artist to work with Kirsch & Fleckner was Raymond Buchs. He had close ties with the workshop because he had been there as an apprentice between 1894 and 1897. He may have been involved in the development of Mehoffer's first three stained-glass windows in Fribourg at the end of his apprenticeship.<sup>8</sup> From 1898 onwards, he lived in Germany and worked there in different workshops. At the same time, he studied at the schools of Applied Arts in Berlin and Dresden, then in Paris. He returned to Berlin where he headed a graphic arts atelier from 1906, with which he became very successful.<sup>9</sup> Mehoffer's stained-glass designs had only a minor influence on Raymond Buchs. Thanks to them, he discovered Art Nouveau, a style that he developed in his graphic work in Berlin and in the stained-glass windows he created there. But this influence is much more discreet, or nonexistent, in his religious creations in Switzerland.<sup>10</sup> The first certified stained-glass window from Buchs with Kirsch & Fleckner dates from



4. Raymond Buchs, *Project with a horse for the White Horse Café*, 1897, Bulle (Fribourg). Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

1897. He created the two roses for the church Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Überstorf. They represent John the Baptist with the lamb [Fig. 2] and Joseph with the Child Jesus, both signed and dated by Buchs. Perhaps they are his end-of-apprenticeship work. Done in a historicist style, the motifs were taken from model books that he might have found in the workshop.<sup>11</sup> We have discovered a lot of stained-glass windows in the canton created on the same models,

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> A. PASQUIER, 'Du savoir faire du verrier', pp. 103–104 (as in note 1).

<sup>7</sup> A. PASQUIER, 'Le fonds d'atelier Kirsch & Fleckner et le vitrail catholique suisse de 1900 à 1914', *Dossier de la commission royale des monuments, sites et fouilles [Art, technique et science: la création du vitrail de 1830 à 1930]*, 7, 2000, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> P. RUDAZ, 'Les années de formation 1878–1911', in *Raymond Buchs : 1878–1958, peintre*, Fribourg, 2001, pp. 13–14.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 15.

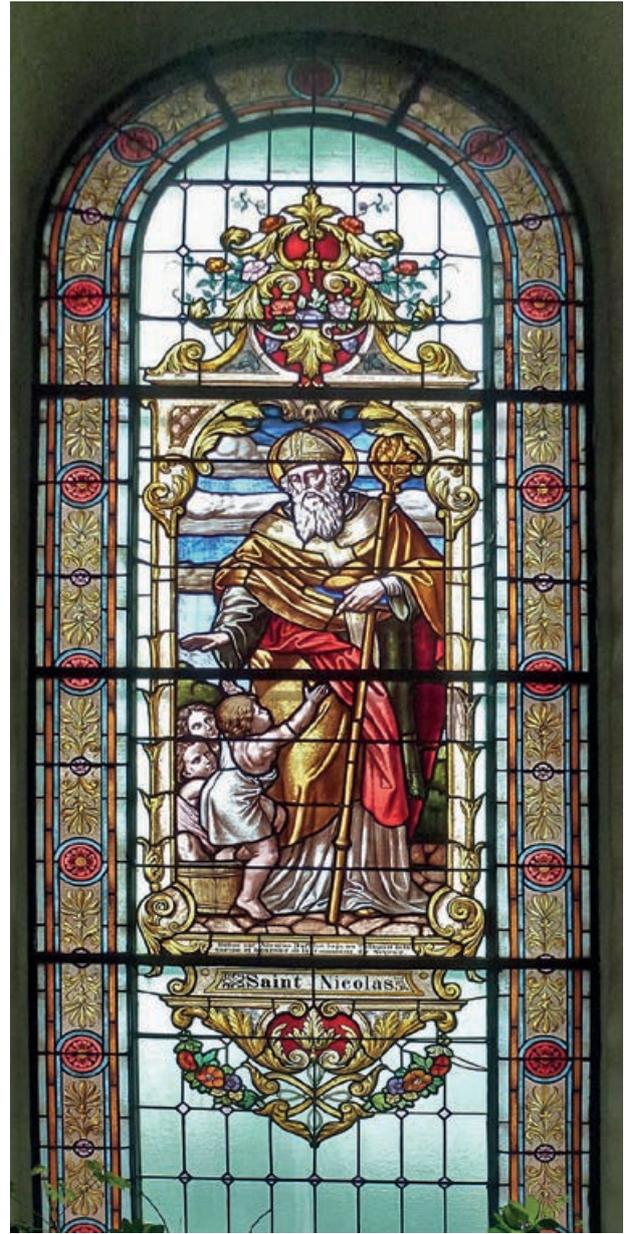
<sup>10</sup> P. RUDAZ, 'Le vitrail: peinture sur verre et art nouveau', in idem, *Raymond Buchs*, pp. 19–23 (as in note 8).

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, it was not possible to find these model books, which were probably thrown away.



5. Raymond Buchs, *Project with a peasant for the White Horse Café*, 1897, Bulle (Fribourg), Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

especially for the representation of saints. These patterns were reused numerous times by Buchs and other artists for stained-glass windows in several churches. A good example of this reuse can be observed in a stained-glass window in the church of St Andrew in Onnens, where we can see the same character in the medallion [Fig. 3]. The two small works depicted here already show Buchs' drawing qualities, such as his delicacy and his dexterity in drawing vegetal motifs. Buchs was also in charge of realizing non-religious projects for the workshop. The same year, he created sketches for glass engravings for the doors of the White Horse Café in the city of Bulle in Gruyère. One of



6. Raymond Buchs and Kirsch & Fleckner, *St. Nicholas of Myra*, 1904–1906, Neyruz (Fribourg), church of The Immaculate Conception, Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

them shows a majestic horse, sideways, with the name of the restaurant written on an arch above [Fig. 4]. Another one presents a peasant in the traditional clothing of Fribourg, called 'Bredzon' [Fig. 5]. The stained-glass window unfortunately doesn't exist anymore, but the doors still exist and show the same middle part in glass. After a visit there, we discovered that in the centre of one of the front doors there is a contemporary engraving on glass which is similar to that of Buchs. The horse is nearly identical and in the same position. Above, the name of the restaurant is written in a similar font. We can assume that it was inspired by the original design.

## THE STATUS OF THE ARTIST

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Buchs lived and worked in Germany but his collaboration with Kirsch & Fleckner continued and even increased.<sup>12</sup> Between 1904 and 1906 he created sketches for the stained-glass windows of the parish church of Neyruz. They are all historicist stained-glass windows depicting saints. Two sketches for the nave's windows are signed and dated by the artist. The two windows in the choir were made two years earlier: one represents St. Nicholas of Myra [Fig. 6] and the other Joseph and the Child Jesus. Both are signed with the monogram of Vinzenz Kirsch, and at the bottom of the second one, there is the workshop's signature. However, from a stylistic point of view, there is no doubt about their attribution to Buchs, as we can see with the cartoons [Fig. 7]. This Kirsch monogram, in addition to the workshop signature, raises questions about how the authorship of a stained-glass window is determined. We have found several examples where, as in Neyruz, although he was not the author of the sketches, Kirsch wrote his monogram on the window in addition to the workshop signature. With the exception of two little windows from Überstorf dating from 1897 and a decorative window for a school in Fribourg dating from 1912, all the other stained-glass windows from Buchs are signed only by the workshop and/or by Kirsch. Was this a way for Kirsch to take credit for drawings not done by him? Or was it normal for him to sign them because he was probably the one who, in the absence of Buchs (who was in Berlin), painted the design on the glass? We are inclined to prefer this second hypothesis but the question is nevertheless intriguing. We have noticed that on several bills, the name of the artist is not indicated, since he was paid by the workshop and not by the customer. Archival research in several church parishes produced the same result: the artist is never mentioned on the documents. The 'virtual' absence of the name of the artist in the creative process (except for some signatures on sketches and cartoons) illustrates that he was considered to be an employee. This seems contradictory, because Mehoffer became the figurehead of the workshop when, in 1900, he was asked to create a stained glass for the front window of the workshop. His name, unlike that of Buchs, was not omitted, but proudly shown.<sup>13</sup> It seems obvious that the status of the two artists was not the same.

## WORKING METHODS

Another example is interesting in helping to understand how Buchs worked. It's the most important of stained-glass ensembles by Buchs in his native village, Jaun, created between 1908 and 1910 in association with the one at Onnens which was realized just afterwards, in 1911–1913.

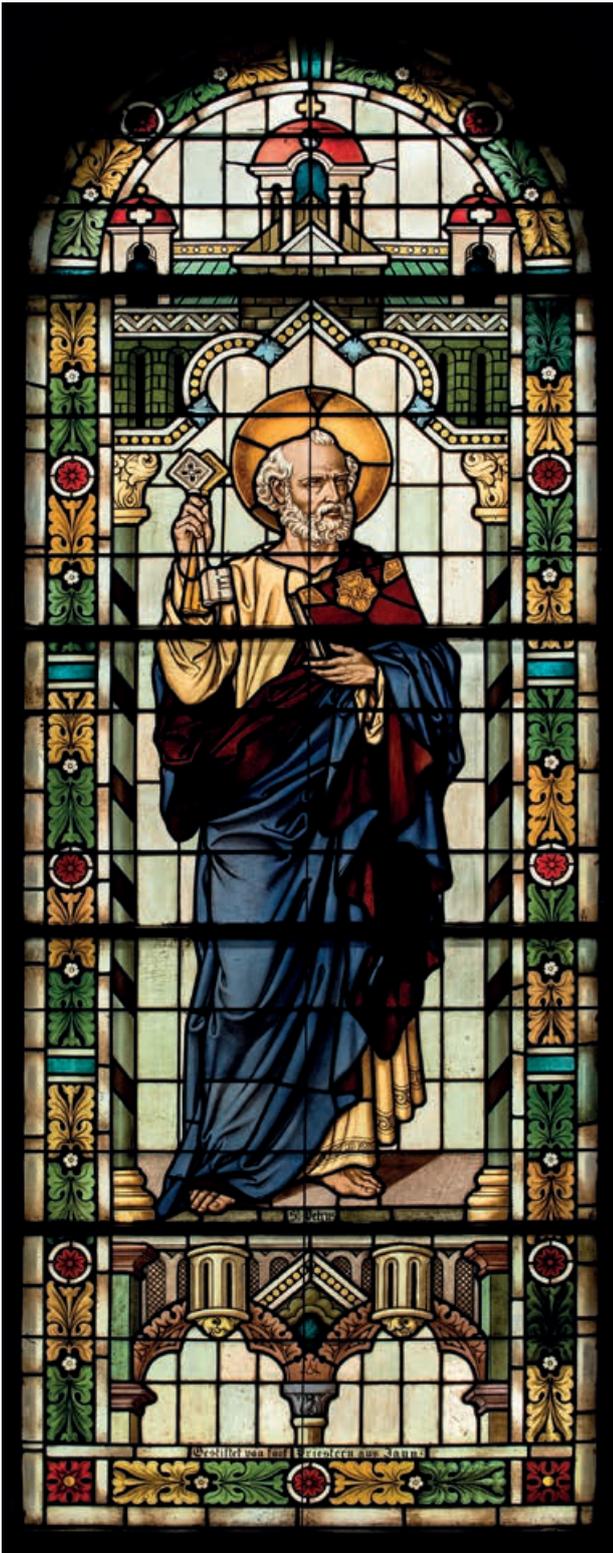
<sup>12</sup> P. RUDAZ, 'Le vitrail: peinture sur verre et art nouveau', pp. 19–23 (as in note 10).

<sup>13</sup> A. PASQUIER, 'Du savoir faire du verrier', pp. 103–104 (as in note 1).

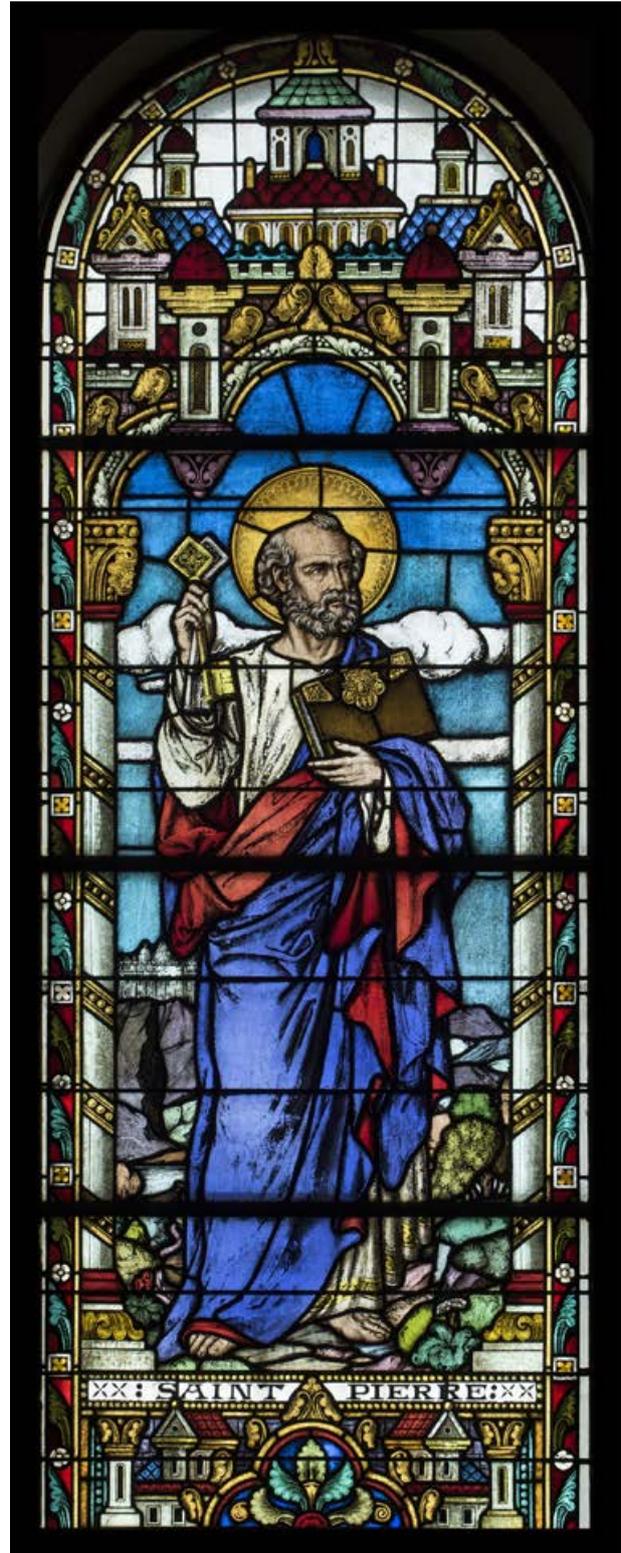


7. Raymond Buchs, *St. Nicholas of Myra*, 1904, project for the window of the church of Neyruz. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

In the parish church of Jaun two saints surround the axial window: Saint Peter and Saint Paul are both under an architectural canopy and in front of a white background [Fig. 8]. At Onnens, in the choir, the two saints are identical [Fig. 9]. The examination of the cartoons in the holdings of the workshop allowed us to understand that the projects created for Jaun were reused at Onnens [Fig. 10]. Both saints are exactly the same size. Recently we discovered in the graphic collection two cartoons illustrating the background for the windows from Onnens with landscapes and the contour of the saints [Fig. 11]. Behind



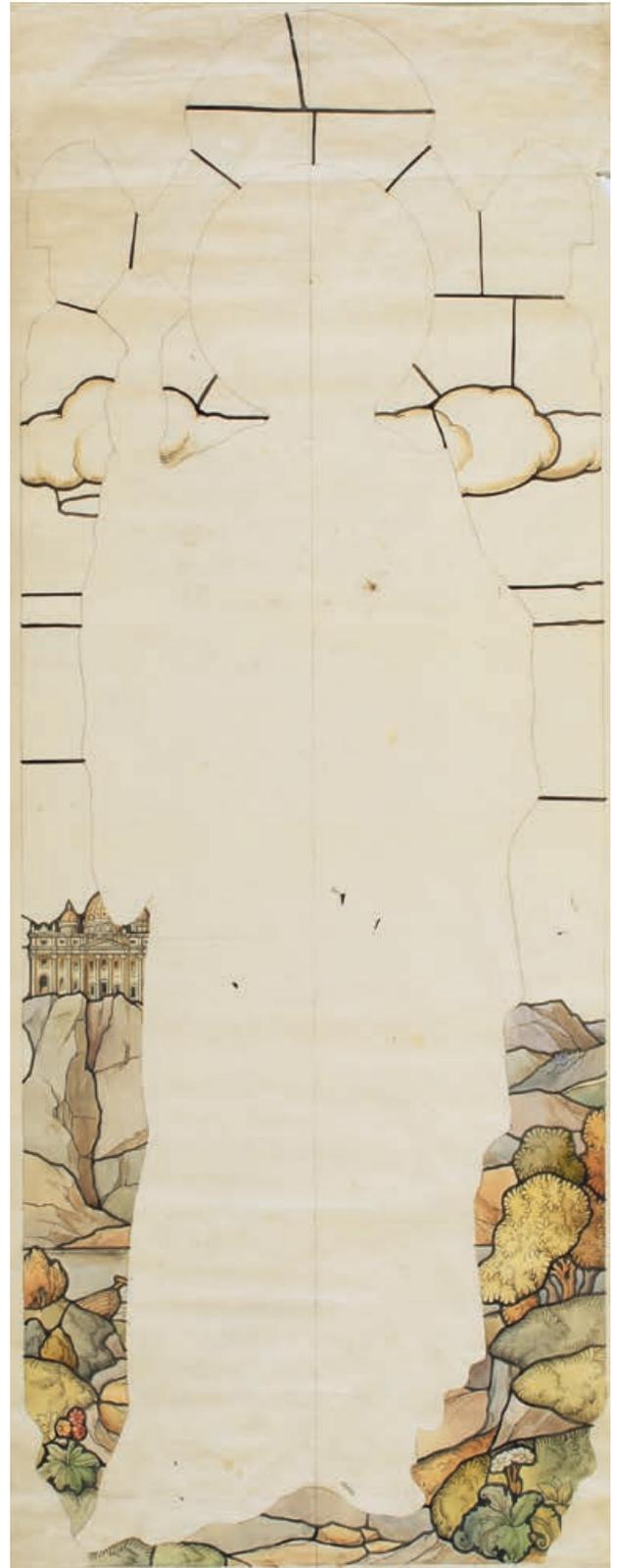
8. Raymond Buchs, *St. Peter*, 1908–1910, Jaun (Fribourg), church of St Stephen. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, H. Fischer



9. Raymond Buchs, *St. Peter*, 1911–1913, Onnens (Fribourg), church of St Andrew. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, H. Fischer



10. Raymond Buchs, *St. Peter*, 1908–1910, project for the windows of the church of St Stephen, Jaun and church of St Andrew, Onnens. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, Y. Eigenmann



11. Raymond Buchs, background for the window with st. Peter, 1911–1913, project for the church of St Martin, Onnens. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, Y. Eigenmann



12. Fortuné Bovard, *Christ in glory above the ancient church of Cugy*, 1907, project for a window of the church of St Martin, Cugy (Fribourg). Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, Y. Eigenmann

St. Peter (to the left) we can see Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Behind St. Paul we can distinguish the ruins of the Acropolis in Athens, with the Parthenon. The example of these cartoons shows an interesting way of working. Reusing the same cartoons for the figures and only creating new backgrounds is a way not to waste time. The twenty stained-glass windows at Onnens are the last work done by Buchs on stained-glass. According to information transmitted by his granddaughter, Mme Suzanne Wechsler,<sup>14</sup> it seems that the artist suffered too much from tensions with the parish authorities and wished to distance himself from that world.

#### AN EXAMPLE OF COLLABORATION: JEAN-LOUIS FORTUNÉ BOVARD AND THE CHURCH OF VUISTERNENS- DEVANT-ROMONT

More or less during the same period as with Buchs, the workshop collaborated with another talented artist: Jean-Louis Fortuné Bovard. Probably born in Fribourg, he received, like Buchs, an excellent artistic education in Geneva, Basel, Munich and Paris. Bovard was likely Eugène Grasset's student at the Guerin school in Paris from around 1900 to 1903. He was apprenticed between 1891 and 1904, perhaps in Greiner's workshop or at Edouard Hosch's in Lausanne. In 1904, he moved to Lausanne and opened his own studio about 1907.<sup>15</sup> He created several stained-glass windows for Kirsch & Fleckner as well as for Chiara's workshop in Lausanne.<sup>16</sup> The ensemble of stained-glass windows in the church of Cugy in Fribourg, which was the subject of Augustin Pasquier's thesis,<sup>17</sup> was one of Bovard's most important works with Kirsch & Fleckner [Fig. 12].<sup>18</sup> The realization of the stained-glass windows for the church of Vuisternens-devant-Romont, in 1906, is a really interesting case which allows us to understand the functioning of the workshop. Four windows in the choir were executed by Kirsch & Fleckner, based on Raymond Buchs' drawings. For one of them, representing Saint Joseph and Christ [Fig. 13], we possess two sketches. The first one is signed by Raymond Buchs, and corresponds

<sup>14</sup> We are very grateful to Mrs. Suzanne Wechsler, Raymond Buchs' granddaughter, for sharing many items of information and archival materials relating to Buchs and preserved at her house in Bern.

<sup>15</sup> A. PASQUIER, *Les vitraux de l'église de Cugy: conçus par l'abbé Edouard Gambon, élaborés par l'artiste Fortuné Bovard, réalisés par l'atelier Kirsch & [et] Fleckner: art néotemporaliste dans la République chrétienne du canton de Fribourg, en 1907*, PhD diss., University of Fribourg, 1999, pp. 54–57.

<sup>16</sup> C. HOSTETTLER, *L'Atelier P. Chiara – Lausanne: un producteur de vitraux domestiques au début du 20e siècle*, (Mémoire de Licence inédit), PhD diss., University of Lausanne, 2001, pp. 35–36.

<sup>17</sup> A. PASQUIER, *Les vitraux de l'église de Cugy* (as in note 15).

<sup>18</sup> A. PASQUIER, 'Du savoir faire du verrier' (as in note 1).

to the first step of realization [Fig. 14]. The second one, which can stylistically be attributed to Fortuné Bovard [Fig. 15], represents a second phase with modifications. We can imagine that the customer was not entirely satisfied with Buchs' design, and asked the workshop to make some changes. It seems to have been easier to ask Bovard to make these corrections because Buchs was in Berlin at the time.<sup>19</sup> The choice of involving two different artists in the creation of one stained glass reveals a very particular way of collaboration. As in Neyruz, the name of the artist is not mentioned on the window, whereas the workshop signature is perfectly visible on another window of the choir. Without the two cartoons, nobody could have imagined that Fortuné Bovard had also been involved in this work. This case also raises the question of how much consideration and visibility, except for the case of Mehoffer, the artists appointed received during the first years of the workshop's activities.

#### TWO ARTISTS INSPIRED BY MEHOFFER: JEAN-EDWARD DE CASTELLA AND HENRI BROILLET

Another artist from Fribourg, though born in Australia, began to work with Kirsch & Fleckner a few years after Raymond Buchs. His name was Jean-Edward de Castella. He trained in the *Ecole professionnelle des arts et métiers* (School of Arts and Crafts) in Fribourg at the same time as Buchs, with whom he became friends. In 1899, he began his studies in Munich at the Academy of Fine Arts until in 1902 he moved to Paris.<sup>20</sup> Back in Fribourg, he was appointed by Kirsch & Fleckner to create, between 1903 and 1906, some sketches for the church of Saint-Michel in Heitenried. In the choir, three windows and particularly the axial window [Fig. 16] show that the young Castella dared to free himself from the conventional forms of historicism, to steer himself towards modernity in which his future style would blossom. Revealing a great force, this axial window was inspired by Mehoffer's first stained-glass windows in Fribourg Cathedral. This inspiration is revealed by the choice of bright colors but also by the multiple juxtaposition of tints and shades. Several panels of the stained-glass windows in the nave show characteristics which prefigure very well the artist's way to master human figures. This will mark his artistic identity from the beginning of the 1930s. In 1922, Castella created projects for stained-glass windows of a church of Plasselb. He worked with the same guidelines used in Heitenried but went further. One of the best examples is the stained glass dedicated to St. Christopher [Fig. 17]. He makes a very



13. Raymond Buchs, Fortuné Bovard and Kirsch & Fleckner, *St. Joseph and the Christ*, 1906, Vuisternens-devant-Romont (Fribourg), church of Notre-Dame-de-La-Nativité. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, H. Fischer

meticulous grisaille work in order to give volume to elements and an extraordinary monumentality to his structure. His only purpose is to draw the attention of the spectator to the faces and glances of both protagonists. The composition, which is without any useless artifact, reinforces this intimacy with the spectator.

In the early 1930s, Castella moved towards a crisp line and a simplification in colored effects without betraying the style of his beginnings. Two small stained-glass windows in the little chapel of Richterwil Castle illustrate this evolution [Fig. 18]. The bodies and the faces are drawn with an important economy of line without losing their power. The artist uses colors with the same economy to enhance his statement. The red body of Christ and the green faces of the angels serve the desired overall effect. These compositional principles will be recurrent in his

<sup>19</sup> P. RUDAZ, 'Le vitrail: peinture sur verre et art nouveau', pp. 19–20 (as in note 10).

<sup>20</sup> F. ARNAUD, F. PAJOR, 'Couleurs et lumières, de Melbourne à Fribourg', in *L'église Saint-Pierre à Fribourg*, Fribourg, 2008, pp. 54–55.



14. Raymond Buchs, *St. Joseph and the Christ*, 1906, project for the church of Vuisternens-devant-Romont. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

stained-glass creations until his last windows, which date from the middle of the century.<sup>21</sup>

In 1916, Kirsch & Fleckner attracted another young artist from Fribourg, 25-year-old Henri Broillet. He was a student in Munich and then at the School of Sacred Art

<sup>21</sup> In particular, he created the very important stained-glass cycle of the Church of Saint-Pierre in Fribourg with the workshop of Alfred Kirsch (son of Vinzenz) between 1941 and 1945; Ibidem.



15. Fortuné Bovard, *St. Joseph and the Christ*, 1906, project with modifications for the window of the church of Vuisternens-devant-Romont. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

in Paris, where he worked under the direction of Maurice Denis.<sup>22</sup> The workshop asked him to create sketches for all the windows of the Church of St. Pierre & Paul at Villars-sur-Glâne [Fig. 19] in Art Nouveau Style. We can clearly see the influence of Mehofffer, mainly in the way Broillet uses colors. He lays out the premises of what will be his strength as a stained-glass window creator. He reveals a very clear composition combined with highly contrasting tones. In using a rich panel of vivid colors and by playing with different shades, he obtains a great intensity in his drawing. Six years later, Broillet realized four stained-glass windows for the choir of a little church in Saint-Aubin. Following the principles developed at

<sup>22</sup> Service des Biens culturels, 'Les artistes du Groupe de St-Luc', in *Le Groupe de St-Luc*, Fribourg, 1995, p. 52.



16. Jean-Edward de Castella, *St. Michael fighting the dragon*, 1903–1906, project for the church of St Michael, Heitenried (Fribourg). Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, Y. Eigenmann



17. Jean-Edward de Castella and Kirsch & Fleckner, *St. Christopher*, 1922, Plasselb (Fribourg), church of the Immaculate Conception. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont



18. Jean-Edward de Castella and Kirsch & Fleckner, *Pietà*, 1931, Böisingen (Fribourg), chapel of Richterwil Castle. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

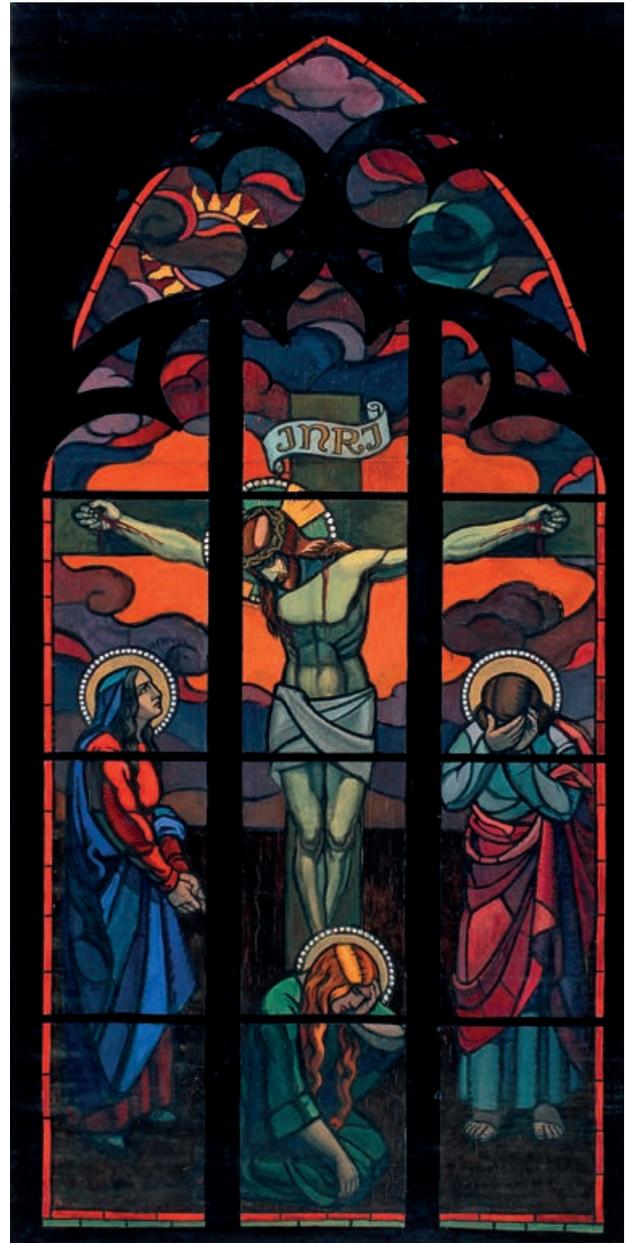


19. Henri Broillet and Kirsch & Fleckner, *St. Michael*, 1916, Villars-sur-Glâne (Fribourg), church of St Peter and Paul. Photo: Vitrocentre Romont

Villars-sur-Glâne, he used here strong chiaroscuro which reinforces the dramaturgy of the scene [Fig. 20].

#### CONCLUSION: THE EVOLUTION OF THE WORKSHOP IN ITS WAY OF COLLABORATING WITH ARTISTS

The examples of these four artists, collaborators with the Kirsch & Fleckner workshop since its inception, clearly illustrate the artistic vision of the founders. Modernity was initiated by Mehoffer's first stained-glass windows in Fribourg Cathedral. Buchs, despite being the most traditional



20. Henri Broillet, *Crucifixion*, 1922, project for the church of St Aubin, Saint-Aubin (Fribourg). Photo: Vitrocentre Romont, Y. Eigenmann

artist among the four, and representing the transition between the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, frees himself from a monotone historicist style and soon starts to show a productive imagination. From the beginning, Bovard, Broillet and Castella choose the way initiated by Mehoffer but with their own sensibility and intentions.

The signature situation evolves too. The artist's signature occurs only very rarely in Buchs' and Bovard's stained-glass works. After 1915 it becomes normal for the artists to sign their own work. Signatures can frequently be found on Castella's and Broillet's stained-glass windows. In our opinion, we can see here a change in the

workshop's mentality. The workshop's owner recognised that the artists and their diversity could have a great potential to boost the workshop in the trade in French-speaking Switzerland and beyond. Thanks to its ability to use the strengths of their artists, Kirsch & Fleckner became one of the most important workshops in Switzerland. Initially considered as anonymous employees, artists were later granted the status of valuable collaborators whose names should be proudly displayed. The representatives of the new generation, such as Castella and Broillet, asked for better visibility through their signatures on the stained-glass windows and also asked, in addition to their painting career, for artistic recognition in the field of stained glass.

## SUMMARY

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Keywords: workshop, artist, stained-glass windows, cartoon, church

The detailed study we have been carrying out since 2015 on the graphic background of the Fribourg workshop Kirsch and Fleckner, comprising more than 1700 works (cardboard boxes and models), has enabled us not only to understand its functioning but also its development during its first years of activity.

Opened in 1894, the workshop was granted the following year the mandate to produce Józef Mehoffer's stained glass windows at Saint-Nicolas Cathedral in Fribourg. Winning a gold medal with one of its glass windows at the 1900 Paris Universal Exhibition was a great opportunity which enabled the workshop to win many contracts not only in the canton but far beyond.

While Karl Fleckner was in charge of the administration, Vinzenz Kirsch, who had a solid background as a glassmaker and was a talented draftsman, managed the artistic part. During the first few years, he created several glass cycles, but then, based on his experience with Mehoffer, he preferred to call on young artists from the region who were open to artistic innovation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the workshop began a successful collaboration with four of them: Raymond Buchs, Fortuné Bovard, Jean-Edward de Castella and Henri Broillet. Usually the workshop would obtain the requests and propose the projects to the artists. Their talent and artistic personality would not only forge the workshop's reputation, but also allowed it to develop a very efficient way of working to respond to many requests.