

Kiki Smith and Deborah Gans

Rose Window, Eldridge Street Synagogue » New York, New York



This window completes the Eldridge Street Synagogue. Other than this window, the restoration is an historical reconstruction of the 1864 building. There were no historical records of this window, which had been destroyed and replaced with glass blocks. After debate, the Eldridge Street Museum board decided to replace it not with a quasi-restoration but with something that could also take the synagogue into the 21st century.

The artists began with the premise that the window should be a meditation on the already highly ornamented interior that would stimulate visitors to reflect on where they were and provide them a vision relevant to the future. The organization of the window around a sacred six-pointed Star of David is taken directly from the domes of the room. The spiraling

structure of the ribs accentuate the figure of a dome; the cast-glass central star protrudes out into space as an oculus that draws in white light from its sides. The window is like a celestial dome rotated on its side.

While the motifs are taken directly from the room, the original techniques used give them a new presence. By laminating layers of traditional mouth-blown stained glass to large sheets of plate glass with silicon, lead was not necessary. Thus the web of lines that would traditionally be dark interruptions become cracks of light. The bronze-clad steel ribs likewise have a delicate presence despite the extensive loads they carry. Two layers of stained flash glass, each with its own hues and patterns of cuts, create complexity and depth.

Jury Comments

This commissioned piece replaces a rose window in the recently restored synagogue. This contemporary artwork of the constellation of the night sky is a beautiful installation. It captures the essence of the explosion of creation into the luminous sky, to the vast stretches of the cosmos. The rays that emanate are necessary ribbing that holds the window together. Masterful in terms of its execution, it is also profound in its communication. The work ties together the art and architecture of the building.



Artists

Kiki Smith and Deborah Gans

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Stained Glass Artisan and Fabricator

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Cast Glass Fabricator

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Frame Fabricator

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Structural Engineer

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