



John La Farge (1835–1910), opalescent glass triptych. Left: St. John the Evangelist; center: Christ Preaching; right: St. Paul, ca. 1889. Each lancet, 115 x 34 in.

A HOMECOMING FOR LA FARGE

Along with the usual important American paintings and sculpture on display at the *Boston International Fine Art Show* (BIFAS) this November, there will be something else, a beautiful work of art that has found its way home back to Boston after a long absence—a stained glass triptych by John La Farge (1835–1910). The windows, created by La Farge around 1889, were gifted to Boston College this past September by art dealer William Vareika and his wife Alison.

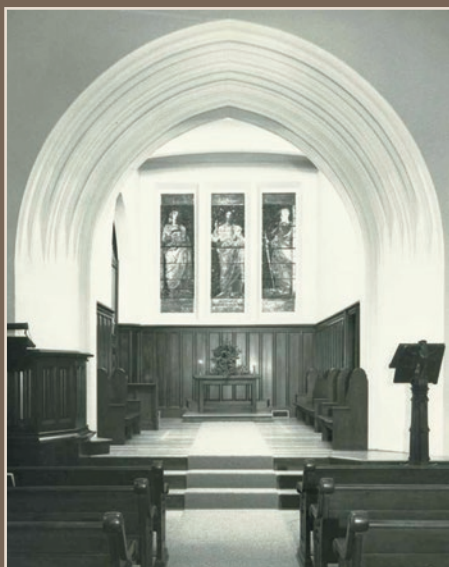
The Vareikas gave the windows, depicting St. John the Evangelist, Christ Preaching, and St. Paul, to Boston College's McMullen Museum to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the college and the

20th anniversary of the museum. At BIFAS, the three windows, each measuring 115 by 34 inches, will be shown in light boxes on the outside wall of the William Vareika Fine Arts booth in order to bring attention to a fundraising effort to restore and permanently install them in the McMullen Museum. The Christ Preaching window will be partially restored to illustrate the dramatic change in appearance after conservation.

Vareika originally came upon La Farge's work in 1971 as a sophomore Political Science Pre-Law major at Boston College, while taking the one art history course he studied as part of a liberal arts core curriculum. By chance, the topic for the course term paper occurred to Vareika while in the La Farge-decorated Trinity Church, Boston, where he practiced daily transcendental meditation during lunch breaks from a part-time job in the nearby Boston Public Library. Vareika's professor encouraged him to expand his La Farge research and in 1974, during his senior year, that work brought him for the first time to Newport, Rhode Island, where the artist had lived and worked. Again by chance, Vareika learned that a La Farge-decorated Newport church building had become endangered just as he arrived in town. He postponed and later abandoned law school plans to lead an effort to save and preserve the murals and stained glass windows in this church. He has lived in Newport ever since, where he operates an art gallery specializing in American art, including the work of La Farge.

Thirty years after his first La Farge preservation campaign, Vareika organized a crusade to save a collection of 13 La Farge stained glass windows from a convent chapel in Fall River that was scheduled for demolition. He was instrumental in helping to facilitate the acquisition of this collection by Salve Regina University in Newport, which built a chapel in 2010 to house the glass treasures.

"I learned of the availability of the Boston College windows last fall," says Vareika. "We bought them from the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst, Massachusetts, where they had hung in their church since the 1920s. The Amherst Society voted to sell the windows for four reasons: the Christian symbolism was determined to be inappropriate for Unitarianism; the windows needed costly restoration; church building expansion was required and funds were required for construction; and the only place to expand the building was through the wall where the windows were installed."



Clockwise from left: La Farge's windows inside the Amherst church; Amherst church where the windows hung from the mid-1920s to 2013; The Roxbury church where the windows were originally installed in 1889.

According to Vareika, La Farge originally designed the windows in 1889 for the All Souls Unitarian Church on Warren Avenue in Roxbury, Massachusetts, a part of Boston. That year is important for La Farge as it was when he was received the French Legion of Honor medal, mainly due to his accomplishments in stained glass. The windows were moved to Amherst when the Roxbury church building was sold to another denomination in the mid-1920s.

"Like with my earlier Salve Regina University project and the Newport Congregational Church

project in the 1970s, my motivation with the Amherst triptych was to keep the La Farge decorative scheme intact," says Vareika. "My proposal pledged to keep the three intact and to gift them to Boston College, a Catholic Jesuit institution where the windows would be appreciated for their ecclesiastical subject matter as well as important works of art. St. John was a great writer. St. Paul was a great missionary. Christ Preaching symbolizes the teaching mission of a Jesuit university."

Vareika believes that the Christ figure is nearly identical in one of the famous Trinity Church, Boston,



La Farge windows. LaFarge's son and namesake, John La Farge (1880-1963), was an important Jesuit priest. So, all aspects of the project came together quite well.

"Bringing the windows back to Boston, where they had originally lived, was an interesting goal," says Vareika. "As with the two earlier preservation crusades, the Amherst-BC project seemed destined and once again fate has placed me in the right place at the right time, as it had many years before in a sophomore art history course at Boston College as part of a liberal arts curriculum." ■