

# Protection of Visual and Architectural Heritage Based on the Implementation of the Living Museum Concept in the Cracow Stained Glass Factory

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*Protection of Visual and Architectural Heritage Based on the Implementation of the Living Museum Concept in the Cracow Stained Glass Factory*

This article focuses on the concept of a living museum based on the Stained Glass Factory in Cracow. It examines how such a museum can integrate elements of real life into the exhibition, creating a unique experience for visitors. By examining the intersection of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary engagement strategies, the paper delves into the potential of revitalising cultural heritage. The study investigates the impact of such a concept on preserving and promoting the rich legacy of stained glass artistry, providing insights into the viability and enriching potential of this concept for both the local community and visitors. The conducted research also aims to trace the historical significance of stained glass in Cracow's architecture and how the museum concept affects the dissemination of this knowledge.

Keywords: living museum concept, stained glass factory and museum, museum architecture, experience for visitors, visual heritage

## Introduction

The living museum concept aims to create a more immersive and memorable experience for visitors, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of history and culture. The concept of a living museum refers to a type of museum that goes beyond the traditional role of preserving and displaying artifacts or exhibits. Instead, a living museum aims to recreate and immerse visitors in a particular time period, historical event or cultural setting by incorporating live demonstrations, interactive activities and a dynamic environment. The goal is to provide a more engaging and authentic experience for visitors, allowing them to actively participate in the historical or cultural context. The term “living” reflects the idea that these museums bring history or cultural heritage to life in various ways. Living museums can cover a wide range of themes, from historical periods to specific cultural traditions. The goal is to provide a more engaging and memorable experience for visitors, fostering a deeper connection to the subject matter and a better understanding of historical or cultural contexts.

There are many possibilities for implementing these solutions, discussed by cultural organisations,<sup>1</sup> scientists,<sup>2</sup> curators and museum workers.<sup>3</sup> The initial manifestations of the modern concept of a living museum originated in the form of the living history museum.<sup>4</sup> Scott Magelssen describes examples of institutions that practice “costumed interpretations” at reconstructed or restored sites that portray specific historical periods for educational purposes,<sup>5</sup> categorising such activities as “Living History Museum”. These actions are intended to imitate reality, although in such cases it is a kind of performance activity.<sup>6</sup> In this aspect, the concept of a living museum can be categorised as a form of theatre. Costumed historians bring history to life by engaging in interactions that forge connections with the social, cultural and political aspects of the past. Living history sites employ two distinct forms of costumed interpretation: first-person and third-person interpretation.

In first-person interpretation, the costumed historian embodies a particular historical character, adopting speech patterns, mannerisms and attitudes relevant to that character. As interpreters represent historical figures from specific time periods, their interactions with the public are confined by the knowledge and perspective of their designated character and historical era. This is an effective method used to bring history to life at museums and at historic sites.<sup>7</sup>

Third-person interpretation frees the costumed historian from the constraints of embodying a specific historical character or time period, allowing them to maintain a comprehensive understanding of both the past and present. Instead, they portray a specific gender, profession or social status. This implies that they never try to adopt a character persona and openly recognise their role as a contemporary museum or park guide. In this scenario, the costume is treated similarly to an employee uniform. The primary benefit of third-person interpretation is that interpreters can comfortably explore a wide range of topics without being constrained by the necessity to stay in character.<sup>8</sup>

Living history museums provide a closer connection to the human aspects of our shared history.<sup>9</sup> By engaging with real individuals, we gain a deeper insight into the lives and skills people experienced. These museums offer a glimpse into the past, making the exploration of living history an enjoyable way to learn about bygone eras. Today, living history is closely associated with social history, delving into the lives of ordinary people and everyday experiences.

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. The Modern living museum: some reflections and experiences. In: *Museum International*, Vol. XXVII, 1975, No. 2, pp. 51–89.

<sup>2</sup> PAN, Ying, HE, Li, SHI, Ying. Practice of “Living Museum” in the Traditional Architecture Culture Protection and Renewal in South Fujian. In: *Applied Mechanics and Materials*, Vols. 209–211, 2012, pp. 98–102.

<sup>3</sup> MUZAINI, Hamzah. Rethinking the living museum concept “from below”. In: *Journal of Cultural Geography*, vol. 38, 2020, No. 1, pp. 81–101.

<sup>4</sup> ANDERSON, Jay. *Time Machines: The World of Living History*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> MAGELSSSEN, Scott. *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance*. Toronto: The Scarecrow press, inc., 2007, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> MAGELSSSEN, Scott. Living History Museums and the Construction of the Real through Performance. In: *Theatre Survey*, vol. 45, 2004, No. 1, pp. 61–74.

<sup>7</sup> ROTH, Stacy Flora. *Past Into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation*, Michigan, University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> ANDERSON, Jay. *Time Machines...*, p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> ROMO, Anadelia. *Brazil's Living Museum Race, Reform, and Tradition in Bahia*. USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

In Europe, open-air museums serve as natural venues for living history programmes.<sup>10</sup> These museums showcase everyday tools and recreations of daily life within historical architecture. The outdoor surroundings often feature period-appropriate plants, animals and architectural settings that align with historical themes. Interpreters, attired in period costumes, either act out roles or present information in the first or third person, offering insights into the past. Museums of this type create a certain visitor experience.<sup>11</sup> Through first- and third-person narratives, along with costumes and props, the aim is to deliver the best possible experience of visiting the museum.

However, when considering creations of this type, it is important to take into account the concept of authenticity. The word authentic itself can first of all be considered, accordingly with different aspects of its definition, as referring to something of indisputable origin or simply something that is not a copy. Nevertheless, relating authenticity to heritage is a multi-threaded issue.<sup>12</sup> Heritage evolves, practices change and social perception becomes different. Designating something as authentic cannot mean anchoring it in the past in order to prevent change and evolution. The concept of authenticity is also discussed by exhibition curators.<sup>13</sup>

The museum may be considered as a type of frame that is frozen at some point of development. In such a museum we will see a given space, and it can be interesting in many aspects. However, it is always a frozen slice of time, like a still life, which is static and viewed from a given distance. We might see some architectural space, for example a factory, its contents or other artifacts. But is it an “authentic” factory without the people who work in it? A factory is a dynamic place, workers talk to each other, artists create and people come and go. Certain elements move or break, and there are characteristic sounds and smells. A museum space is perceived through all human senses: we watch and we listen, but it is best when visitors can engage other senses, including touch and even smell. A museum that we can categorise as living should engage as many senses as possible. In these aspects, the dynamics of change in a museum can be compared to those of a living organism that is evolving:<sup>14</sup>

Every piece of knowledge is kept alive by continuously replacing the old with the new. In this respect, the museum, understood as a hub for the institutionalized negotiation of knowledge, might be regarded as a living organism. To perform their function and in the very process of renegotiating their internal and external relationships, museums themselves undergo a process of change, in interaction with and relation to manifold stimuli both exogenous and endogenous. These stimuli include the acquisition of new data, new scientific hypotheses and results, new objects, new instruments of inclusion and public engagement, new research, new juridical and administrative rules, organizational forms or arrangements as well as the new needs, ways of accessing the museum, and contextual knowledge generated by different types of publics.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> RYCHNOVÁ, Lucie, MATURKANIČ, Patrik, SLOBODOVÁ NOVÁKOVÁ, Katarína, PAVLIKOVA, Martina. Open-air Museums: The Future of the Presentation of Spiritual and Architectural Heritage. In: *Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo*, vol. 10, 2022, Is. 1, pp. 5–18.

<sup>11</sup> BERNARD, Elisa. “Living Museums” and societal change: The National Museum of Palermo between the 1860s and the 1950s. In: *Mare Internum*, vol. 14, 2022, pp. 9–25.

<sup>12</sup> WOOD, B. A Review of the Concept of Authenticity in Heritage, with Particular Reference to Historic Houses. *Collections*, vol. 16, 2020, No. 1, pp. 8–33.

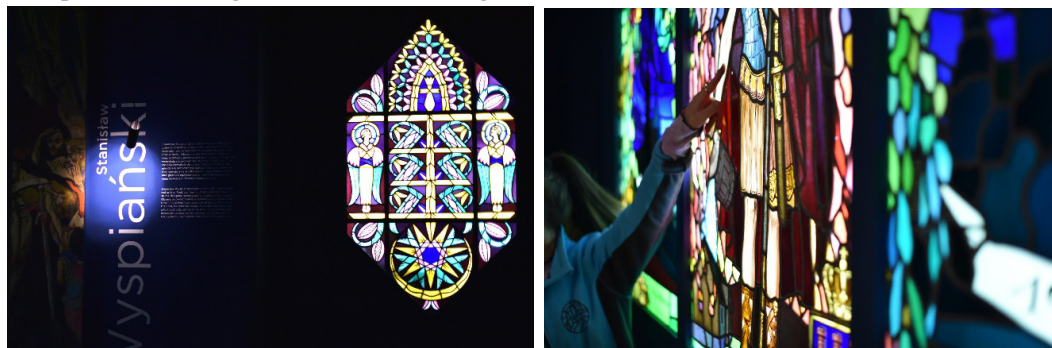
<sup>13</sup> VENTURINI, Anna. Constructions of Authenticity at Scottish Historic House Museums. *Collections*, vol. 16, 2020, No. 2, pp. 139–161.

<sup>14</sup> BERNARD, Elisa, CATONI, Maria Luisa. Museums as Living Organisms: Temporality and Change in Museum Institutions. In: *Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 26, 2022, pp. 109–139.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 113.

## Visual and Architectural Heritage

In sacred architecture, stained glass began to appear primarily from the tenth century, becoming an inseparable part of temple decorations and an important element of visual heritage.<sup>16</sup> In the following centuries, in Gothic times, the area of windows in churches was gradually increased. Larger windows with stained glass led to more light-filled and impressive interiors in structures such as cathedrals. The intricate designs and vibrant colours of these windows were not just beautiful to look at, but they also often told stories, serving a didactic purpose. The construction of new temples and the renovation of existing ones contributed to the spread and rising standard of stained glass art.



**Fig. 1 and 2:** *Impact through visual activities on the recipient in the stained glass factory and museum in Cracow.* Photograph by author, 2023.

Stained glass has become an element that satisfies the natural human need for beauty, not only in sacred architecture. An example of such decoration is the stained glass windows in Cracow tenement houses that have been created over many years. They decorate gates and front gate transoms, as well as important public buildings.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that achievements in this field are artistically extremely diverse. The presentation of several stained glass artists and their achievements is always a choice dictated by both the scope of the study and the author's subjective feelings. However, light is always an essential element. Through the action of light, the stained glass window affects the viewer in a special and multi-threaded way.<sup>18</sup> The play of light and shadow is also used as a means for the transmission of ideas in the stained glass factory and museum in Cracow (figures 1 and 2).

## Stained Glass Factory in Cracow

The Workshop and Stained Glass Museum stands as the longest-running establishment of its kind in Poland, situated within the original building constructed specifically for the Stained Glass Workshop. Founded in 1902 by Władysław Ekielski and Antoni Tuch, it has become a leading company in the field of stained glass. In 1904, the company was joined by Stanisław Gabryel from Żelanka Żeleński, an architect who took over the plant in 1906. In 1907, he registered the plant as a general partnership as “Krakowski Zakład Witrażów, Oszkleń Artystycznych i Fabryka Mozaiki Szklanej S.G. Żeleński” – the common abbreviation

<sup>16</sup> ŻYCHOWSKA, J. Maria. O współczesnych witrażach sakralnych. In: *Saeculum Christianum*, vol. 10, 2003, No. 2, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> PAWŁOWSKA, Krystyna. *WITRAŻE KRAKOWSKIE w kamienicach mieszkalnych i obiektach użyteczności publicznej z przełomu wieków XIX i XX*. Kraków-Legnica, Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Witraży ARS VITREA POLONA. 2018, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> OSTROWSKI, Piotr. *Wyspiński. Spełnione dzieło / A vision realised*. Kraków: Fundacja Muzeum Witrażu. 2021.

being “S.G. Żeleński”. In the following years the plant quickly gained artistic and financial recognition, and its products reached not only Cracow and Galicia, but also other regions of Poland and European countries, and even America. Stanisław Gabriel Żeleński transformed the plant into a large company, winning awards at international exhibitions. The plant building at Aleja Zygmunta Krasieńskiego 23 was designed for the effective production of stained glass on a larger scale. The most outstanding Polish artists of the early twentieth century collaborated with the Stained Glass Factory in Cracow. It was here that the most outstanding works of Polish stained glass art were created.

In the process of creating stained glass, apart from the project itself, establishing cooperation between the artist and the workshop is crucial. The cooperation of the designer with the craftsmen and the studio where the work is created is an essential element to properly reflect the artist’s intentions. Outstanding Polish designers, such as Wyspiański, Mehoffer, Bukowski and Frycz, have repeatedly emphasised the importance of this cooperation in a well-equipped studio. This not only enables the designer’s intentions to be faithfully implemented, but also gives the author the freedom to make changes to the design while creating the work.

The stained glass windows from the plant were used to decorate, among others, the Franciscan church in Kraków (Blessed Salome and St Francis of Assisi, designed by Stanisław Wyspiański) and Wawel Cathedral (including Józef Mehoffer’s stained glass windows).<sup>19</sup> The studio received numerous orders for the production of works of art, such as Wyspiański’s Apollo Chained and Mehoffer’s Vita Somnium Breve. Among the countless stained glass windows created for secular buildings, the following are worth mentioning: the State Bank in Mendoza, Argentina (1909, designed by Jan Bukowski), the seat of the Technical and Industrial Museum in Cracow (1913, designed by Wojciech Jastrzębowski), Miejska Kasa Oszczędności in Cracow (1932, designed by Józef Mehoffer) and the Savings Bank in Bielsko (1938, designed by architect W. Gartenberg). The plant appeared in its own pavilion at the General National Exhibition in Poznań (May–September 1929). This pavilion was honoured twice with visits by the President of the Republic of Poland, Prof. Ignacy Mościcki. Żeleński’s plant was awarded the highest distinction for its exhibits, the Grand Gold Medal.<sup>20</sup> Stained glass windows were also made for many tenement houses, villas and manors in Cracow and other cities, which constituted an important input to their visual and architectural heritage. Żeleński contributed to the development of the company, gaining customers both in Poland and abroad. His efforts resulted in artistic and financial success, as evidenced by numerous awards at international exhibitions. After Żeleński’s death in 1914, the plant was run by his wife, Iza Żeleńska, and then by their descendants until the end of World War II. Today, the plant houses the Stained Glass Workshop and Museum, founded in 2004 by Piotr Ostrowski.

The Stained Glass Factory in Cracow played a key role in shaping Polish visual culture, which retains its unique artistic character to this day. However, currently stained glass art is not as popular as it used to be, which means that the number of orders for stained glass windows is much smaller. For this reason, functional transformations in the spirit of the living museum concept have allowed this place to retain its character. The interiors have not been changed for years, and what’s more, stained glass windows are still produced here in a classic form (figures

<sup>19</sup> NOWAKOWSKA-SITO, Katarzyna. *Między Wawelem a Akropollem. Antyk i mit w sztuce polskiej przelomu XIX i XX wieku*. Warszawa, Historia pro Futuro, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> KRAKOWSKI ZAKŁAD WITRAŻÓW (1929). *Krakowski zakład witrażów oszkleń artystycznych i fabryka mozaiki szklanej w Krakowie S. G. Żeleński*, Cracow, accessed December 1, 2023. <https://bc.radom.pl/dlibra/publication/35208/edition/34121/content>, pp. 12–13.

3 and 4). Visitors have the opportunity to witness artists in action and immerse themselves in the ambiance where such prominent figures as Wyspiański and Mehoffer brought their projects to life.



**Figs 3 and 4:** *Cracow Stained Glass Factory in 1936*<sup>21</sup> and *nowadays*<sup>22</sup>

The concept of a living museum is combined with many different forms of visit (table 1).

**Tab. 1:** Possible types of museum visit in Stained Glass Factory and Museum in Cracow

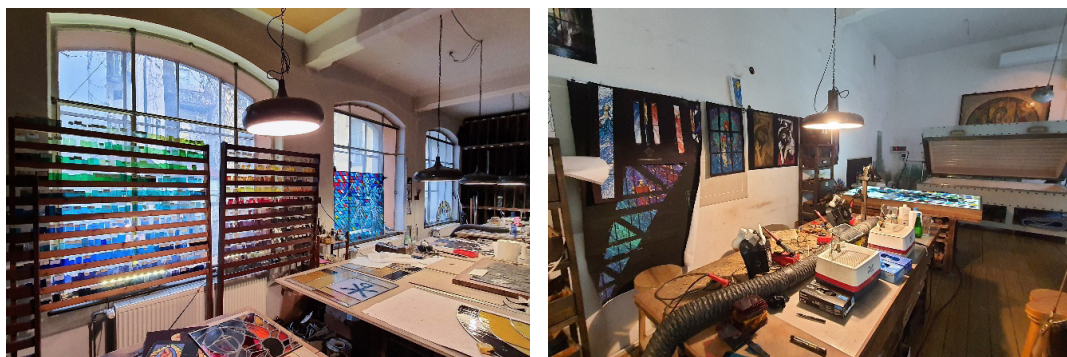
Visit type	Museum role	Visitor activity
Guided tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating the public about stained glass art and its significance;</li> <li>• Fostering a greater appreciation for stained glass art, encouraging visitors to recognise its historical and artistic value;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe the intricate process of crafting stained glass, from design to cutting and assembly;</li> <li>• Learn about the different styles, periods and themes represented in the collection;</li> </ul>
Museum lessons for secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactively lecturing on a selected topic, prepared specially for young people;</li> <li>• Creating a dynamic and engaging atmosphere during lessons;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch films, solve riddles, learn unknown facts;</li> <li>• Ask questions and seek clarification about specific aspects of stained glass art;</li> </ul>
Art workshops for organised groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving encouragement to appreciate the artistic significance of stained glass pieces;</li> <li>• Facilitating interactive learning experiences, encouraging participants to ask questions, engage in discussions and interact with the exhibits;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the symbolism, religious or cultural themes and unique artistic expressions found in the artworks on display;</li> <li>• Gain a deeper understanding of the historical context and significance of stained glass art and its role in architectural and cultural heritage;</li> </ul>
Stained glass workshops for organised groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing all necessary materials, including hand-blown stained glass;</li> <li>• Organising live demonstrations by skilled artisans, showcasing the step-by-step process of creating stained glass.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try hand at stained glass techniques under skilled artisanal guidance;</li> <li>• Gain an understanding of the craftsmanship involved in creating these intricate artworks.</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> Accessed December 1, 2023, <https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/64885:1/>.

<sup>22</sup> Photograph by author, 2023.

Thanks to the museum, the building has retained its former, classical function. Therefore, the concept of a living museum contributes to the preservation of the architectural heritage in the form of a factory building and the promotion of the visual heritage of stained glass art. Through the concept of a living museum supporting the factory's activities, the plant is still operating and is able to fulfil possible orders for stained glass art.

The Stained Glass Museum in Krakow is a cultural institution that offers visitors the opportunity to learn about the history, production techniques and meaning of stained glass. The tour consists of two parts: visiting the stained glass workshop and visiting the stained glass gallery. Due to the concept of a living museum, visits are only possible with a guide. The museum is the place of daily work of stained glass artists who create new stained glass windows (figures 5 and 6).



**Figs 5 and 6:** *Visitors observe real process of crafting stained glass, from design to cutting and assembly in the Stained Glass Factory in Cracow.* Photograph by author, 2023.

The stained glass studio at the Stained Glass Museum in Krakow is a place that impresses with its architecture and functionality. The interior layout is adapted to the needs of stained glass artists. All tools and materials are easily accessible and the space is well ventilated. Large windows provide natural light, which is essential for creating stained glass windows. The room in which the stained glass gallery is located has been specially designed to display the works in the best light. The stained glass workshop at the Stained Glass Museum is a place that combines tradition with modernity. During the tour, we observe the sequential stages of creating a stained glass window, from concept to final implementation in a real stained glass factory. The guided tour lasts approximately one hour. The guide shows the group the workshop and talks about the history of stained glass, its production techniques and the most important representatives of stained glass art. Visitors have the opportunity to observe how employees make stained glass. Techniques and methods of execution are presented. Participants go through all the basic stages of creating stained glass: from cutting glass to framing and soldering, observing the work of experienced artists. Then, visitors move on to subsequent rooms containing the museum's collections.

Shortened workshops may be held after the tour. The workshops take place in a historic factory, which has been a place where beautiful stained glass windows have been created for over a hundred years. Workshop participants have the opportunity to work under the supervision of experienced stained glass artists who will teach them the secrets of this beautiful craft. Each workshop participant receives all necessary materials, including hand-blown stained glass. Under the supervision of an instructor, participants will make their own small stained glass

window, which will be a great souvenir from Cracow. The workshops are intended for people of all ages, regardless of experience. This is the perfect opportunity to learn the secrets of stained glass art and create something beautiful with your own hands.

Implementing museum lessons for high school students involves creating a learning experience that is both informative and engaging, tailored specifically for young students. The approach begins with interactive lectures on selected topics, designed to capture students' attention and deepen interest in the topic. For example, a session on stained glass art would not only present facts but would actively engage students through a dynamic atmosphere. This can be achieved by incorporating multimedia elements such as videos that provide visual and contextual background on the techniques and history of stained glass. Additionally, the inclusion of exercises such as puzzles related to the lecture content encourages critical thinking and remembering information. An important element of these lessons is the opportunity for students to ask questions and seek explanations. This not only helps to resolve any misunderstandings, but also promotes interactive dialogue between teachers and students, making the learning process more personalised and effective. By integrating these elements, museum lessons for high school students can transform traditional lectures into an engaging learning experience, supporting both educational enrichment and lasting interest in art. The most important element is that these activities are carried out in the artists' specific work spaces. Classes are conducted by a team of experienced artists, so it is also an opportunity to stimulate creativity and develop manual skills.

Stained glass workshops for organised groups are not only an opportunity to create beautiful works of art, but also to learn about the history and tradition of stained glass. Workshop participants will learn how stained glass is made, what the different techniques of making it are and what the most famous stained glass works in the world are. Workshops at the Stained Glass Museum are an ideal opportunity to acquire new skills (figures 7 and 8).<sup>23</sup> The workshops are based on live demonstrations conducted by qualified craftsmen who present the step-by-step process of creating stained glass. Craftsmen meticulously illustrate every step, from initial design and glass selection to precise cutting, assembly and routing of glass elements. This detailed demonstration highlights not only the technical skills required, but also the artistic vision and careful planning of each element. After the demonstrations, participants can try their hand at stained glass techniques under the supervision of craftsmen. This hands-on experience is invaluable because it allows participants to directly engage with the craft, feel the texture of glass, practice cutting techniques and assemble their creations. Throughout the process, craftsmen provide individualised feedback and support, helping participants overcome challenges and refine techniques. At the end of the workshops, participants gain in-depth knowledge of the craftsmanship involved in creating stained glass.

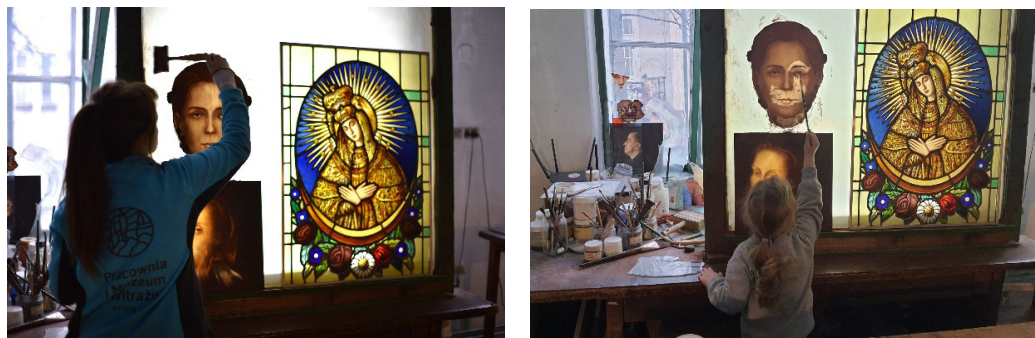
The museum also has its own separate stained glass gallery. When entering the museum building, we are on the ground floor next to the staircase. This is the main communication core between floors. Going up, we reach the first floor, where the museum rooms begin. If visitors go downstairs after entering the building, there is an art gallery on the floor below. It is available for free and is a separate space. Stained glass windows from various periods and styles are presented here, under the artistic direction of Piotr Ostrowski. In addition to the permanent exhibition, temporary exhibitions are organised. Works that interpret the art of stained glass in a modern and multi-threaded way are presented here. Temporary exhibitions are very diverse.

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<sup>23</sup> *Workshop and stained glass museum*, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://muzeumwitrazu.pl/en/>.



The elements presented in the gallery enter into a dialogue with space. Through the effects of light and shadow, glass elements create spatial impressions.



**Figs 7 and 8:** *Workshop space in the Stained Glass Factory in Cracow.* Photograph by author, 2023.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the living museum concept in the Cracow Stained Glass Factory stands as a compelling example of the preservation and promotion of visual and architectural heritage. By seamlessly blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary engagement strategies, the living museum concept at the Stained Glass Factory creates a unique and immersive experience for visitors.

The Stained Glass Factory, with its roots dating back to 1902, played a pivotal role in shaping Polish visual culture and contributing to architectural heritage. Despite the decline in popularity of stained glass art in contemporary times, the living museum concept has breathed new life into the factory. By maintaining its classic form and offering a range of visitor experiences, the museum ensures the preservation of both the architectural heritage of the factory building and the visual heritage of stained glass art. Cracow Stained Glass Factory, with its living museum concept, exemplifies a dynamic approach to heritage preservation. By embracing change and adapting to modern expectations,<sup>24</sup> the factory continues to contribute to the cultural richness of the region. The living museum not only safeguards the architectural heritage of the factory building but also ensures the continuity of stained glass artistry by engaging and educating visitors. As a living organism, the museum evolves and thrives, becoming a vibrant hub that will sustain the legacy of stained glass craftsmanship for generations to come.

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