

# The Conches Glass Museum:

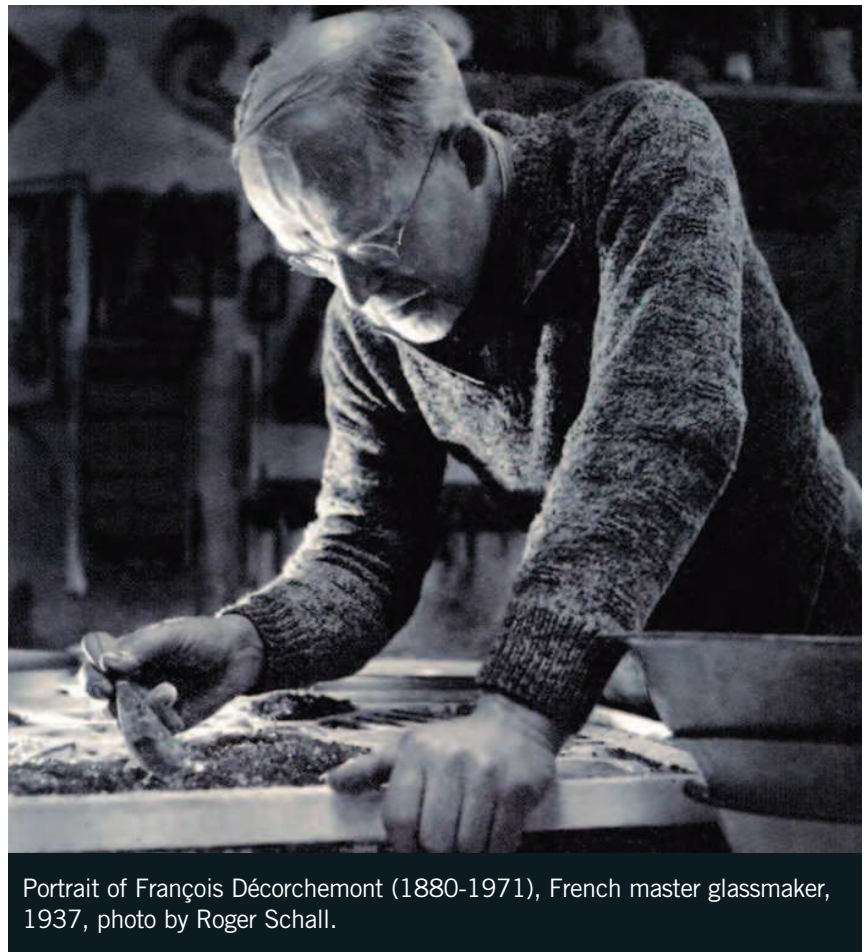
## its creation, collections and future

Eric Louet, Conches Glass Museum

Founded in 1996 by the city of Conches to conserve a set of François Décorchemont's pâte de verre stained glass windows, the Conches Glass Museum has since expanded. Collecting glass from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the museum's glass collection is divided into three themes: Art Nouveau until the 1950s, stained glass in the twentieth century, and contemporary works. After being around for over twenty years, a new museum is being built and its doors will open in 2021.

### Conches in Normandy

Conches is a small town with approximately 5,000 inhabitants, located about a hundred kilometres west of Paris. Before the end of the twentieth century, there was nothing that



Portrait of François Décorchemont (1880-1971), French master glassmaker, 1937, photo by Roger Schall.

predisposed the city to open a glass museum.

Conches does have a church that has magnificent stained-glass windows from the sixteenth century, but except for a few fragments of one of its windows which was damaged in 1842 and now conserved at the museum, all its windows are still in place.

There also was a glassworks in the forest surrounding Conches, called the Beaubray glassworks, where flat glass and household glassware was produced between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Unfortunately, except for a few glazed fragments from the melting pots and a few bottles, the archaeological material found was insufficient to warrant opening a glass museum.

So, it was more recent history, the artistic personality of François Décorchemont, a master glass artist from the twentieth century, that caused the city to open a glass museum

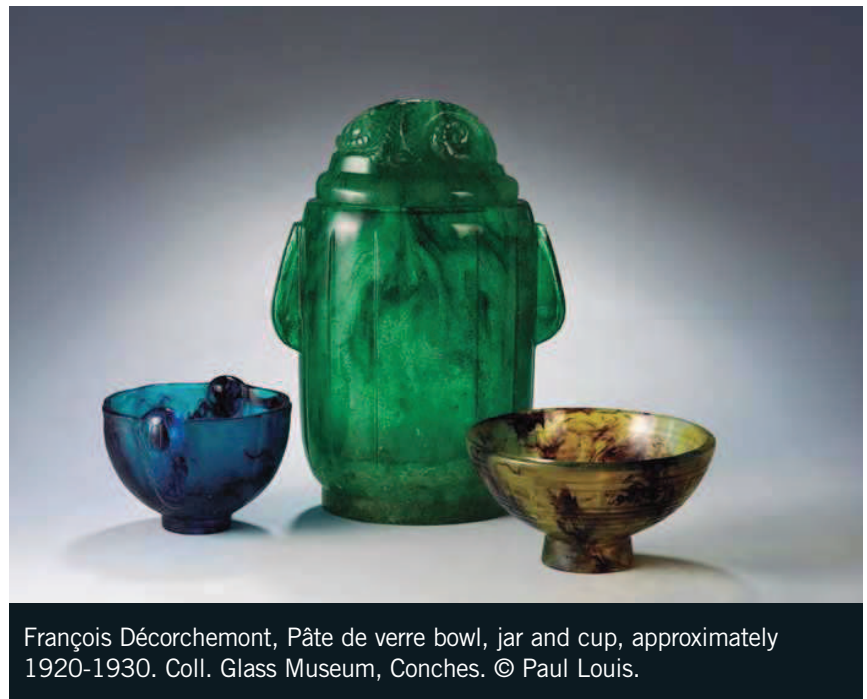
### **François Décorchemont (1880-1971), a pâte de verre artist**

François Décorchemont was born in Conches, where he lived and worked for his entire life. He was one of the artists who contributed to reviving pâte de verre at the beginning of the twentieth century. He started by producing thin and embossed

pâte de verre artworks progressing to adapting the technique of melting bronze in lost wax casting to pâte de verre and producing thicker and more transparent objects. After the 1929 Crash, Décorchemont began producing stained glass windows made from pâte de verre with cement joints, alongside of his other work. To this day, his technique and aesthetic results have still not been equalled. Most of his stained-glass windows were commissioned by churches in Normandy.

Aware of the interest in this glass artist, born in Conches, the City consequently decided to create a glass museum at the beginning of the 1990s.

*Décorchemont began producing stained glass windows made from pâte de verre with cement joints, his results have still not been equalled*



François Décorchemont, Pâte de verre bowl, jar and cup, approximately 1920-1930. Coll. Glass Museum, Conches. © Paul Louis.





François Décorchemont, pâte de verre stained glass window *Monuments de la ville de Conches*, (Monuments in Conches) 1962. Coll. Glass Museum, Conches. © Siloé.

### Our first acquisitions

The history of the museum actually began in 1992, when the City decided to acquire one of Décorchemont's stained glass windows from the private grade school Saint-Foy de Conches, dating back to 1934 called Christ Teaching Children. The artist had donated this work of art to the school for its catechism room. In the following years, the City also acquired other stained-glass windows produced by the artist.

In the same year, 1992, the City of Conches also decided to help two contemporary glassmakers from Conches, Etienne and Antoine Leperlier, who are François Décorchemont's grandsons. In 1981 these two glassmakers had restarted their grandfather's kiln and began production of Pâte de Verre objects. They quickly realised there was not enough room in Décorchemont's old studio and that it was poorly adapted to modern production techniques. They decided to relocate and to help them open their personal studios in pâte de verre production, the City of Conches decided to purchase contemporary works of art from each of them. Thirteen pâte de verre sculptures were thus acquired in four years.

In 1996, the City of Conches opened a museum with François Décorchemont's stained glass



Antoine Leperlier, pâte de verre sculpture *Evidence de la pierre*, (Stone evidence) 1992. Coll. Glass Museum, Conches. © Paul Louis.

windows and the Leperlier brothers's pâte de verre objects to exhibit these recently acquired works of art.

### Contemporary glass

Beginning in 2000 and for nearly ten years, the museum only organised temporary exhibits of contemporary glass artists and acquired some of their works, purchasing them directly from these artists.

This series of exhibitions began with contemporary French artists or those who were working in France, such as Jean-Claude Novaro in 2001, Etienne Leperlier in 2004, Erich Schamschula in 2003, Alain Bégou in 2004, Yan Zoritchak in 2005, Jean-Pierre Umbdenstock in 2006, Matej Négréanu in 2007, Bernard Dejonghe in 2008, Raymond Martinez in 2009, Isabelle Monod in 2011, and Vladimir Zbynovsky in 2013.

*In 1996, the City of Conches was able to open a museum with François Décorchemont's stained glass windows and the Leperlier brothers's pâte de verre objects*

All these exhibitions resulted in many acquisitions, allowing the museum to establish a collection representing contemporary French glass creations. These acquisitions do not only include French works of art, but there were also several donations and acquisitions outside of these temporary exhibitions. This afforded the museum the ability to purchase works of art by contemporary artists working in other countries such as Lubomir Arzt and Eva Fiserova in Slovakia, Diana Hobson and David Reekie in Great-Britain, Joel Philippe Meyers in the United States and Bertil Vallien in Sweden.





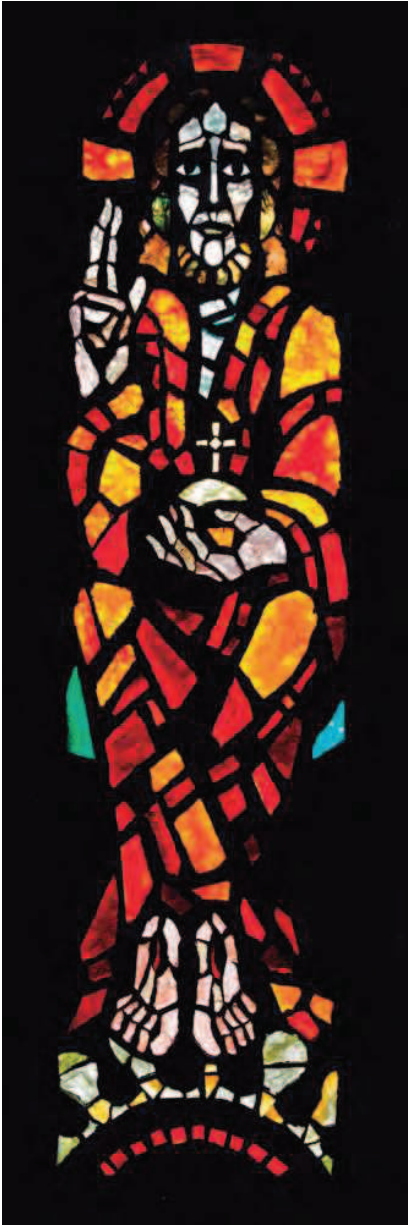
Yan Zoritchak, optical crystal sculpture *Fleur céleste* (Unearthly flower), 1992. Coll. Glass Museum, Conches. © Michel Wirth.

*The extension of our museum's scientific target area to include these new domains was made possible thanks to help from the collector Barlach Heuer*

The development of the museum, however, could not be limited to contemporary glass creations, as our collections of François Décorchemont's pâte de verre, dating back to the first half of the twentieth century, would become too isolated. As of 2010, it was proposed to open the museum's collection to other domains in the history of glass arts, also linked to the personality of François Décorchemont.

### Twentieth century stained glass

We decided to focus on twentieth century stained glass windows as François Décorchemont's work spanned the 1932 to 1970 period. In addition, since most of his stained-glass windows was made from pâte de verre with cement joints, we started to investigate modern and contemporary stained glass windows, where cement joints replaced lead ones. That led us to exhibit works of Henri Guérin (1929-2009) in 2010, followed by works of Gabriel Loire (1904-1996) in 2014. Lastly, we focused on stained glass windows from the twentieth century more generally speaking, with religious windows by the Hébert-Stevens studio dating from the 1930s and civil Art Déco windows from the Manufacture Schneider.



Gabriel Loire, glass panel stained glass *Le Christ en Majesté*, (Christ in Majesty) 1950. Coll. Glass Museum, Conches. © Siloé.



Manufacture Schneider, Vase and bowl, approximately 1925. Coll. Glass Museum, Conches. © Paul Louis.

### From Art Nouveau to 1950s design

François Décorchemont led us to focus on the domain of stained glass, and the career of this artist born in Conches also led us to look at other artists using *pâte de verre* (Henry Cros, Gabriel Argy-Rousseau, Amalric Walter, etc.) as well as, more generally speaking, all types of glass arts from the Art Nouveau era to the 1950s designs.

The expansion of our museum's collection, to include these new domains, was made possible thanks to help from the collector, Barlach Heuer. In 2012, the museum hosted a collection of Schneider glass, including approximately two hundred objects collected over a forty-year

period by this collector and his friends, Laurence and Jean-Pierre Serre. After this event, the collectors donated three Schneider glass objects to the museum. Since that time, Barlach Heuer has donated nearly a hundred and fifty glass objects dating from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1950s.

Amongst these are Art Nouveau glass objects from French and Bohemian studios: Gallé, Muller, Reyen, Loetz, Palme-Koningetc. Others come from the inter-war period: Aristide Colotte, Jean Sala, Henri Navare, André Thuret, etc. And finally, others include the production of French crystalworks from the 1950s, and in particular Daum and his famous stretched crystals.



### A new glass museum for 2021

Though our collections are still quite modest, about five hundred works of art, the space we have in our current museum does not allow us to exhibit all of our collections and present a coherent and balanced exhibition of the three themes that influence our museum's development.

For a while, we thought about enlarging the current museum onto a vacant lot next to the building. That would have allowed us to have a modern building. But we finally decided that the current museum was too far from our city centre, and that expanding the museum would not contribute to the attractiveness of our municipality. That is why we decided to install the future

museum in an old but well-located building, which is a former hospital created in 1860 on the site of the former Benedictine abbey in Conches. By locating to this historic site, we could to bring the museum back to a place filled with memories, in a venue where the intellectual and artistic life of our town grew during the previous centuries, and last but not least, in a venue near the historic city centre and the other museum in Conches, which conserves our town's historic collections.

This building has a main body, facing south, and two symmetrical wings. It has a floor area of 1,200 m<sup>2</sup>, on two floors, which will cater to visitors and house our exhibitions (there are also 600 m<sup>2</sup> of storage areas in the

basement of a modern building right across from it). This building also has a chapel across from the main entrance, which is very interesting as it is decorated with stained glass windows from the painter and glassmaker Duhamel-Marette and François Décorchemont. Lastly, the Neo-Gothic furniture in this chapel was produced, when it was created, by Jean-Edmond Laumônier, François Décorchemont's grandfather.

The museographical path of the permanent collections in this new museum will be shown on a 600 m<sup>2</sup> area. It will present our collections in a chronological manner, without however forgetting a few thematic approaches, which will begin on the first floor by a gallery opening onto four rooms: the Art Nouveau glassware room; the Art Déco glassware room, the François Décorchemont room, and the Schneider room. After that, in the continuation of the first floor gallery, the museographical path will have a collection of stained glass windows from the twentieth century in one wing of the building, before continuing on the ground floor with glass arts after the Second World War, the revival of glass in the 1980s, and contemporary glass sculptures.

The new museum is expected to open in the spring of 2021.