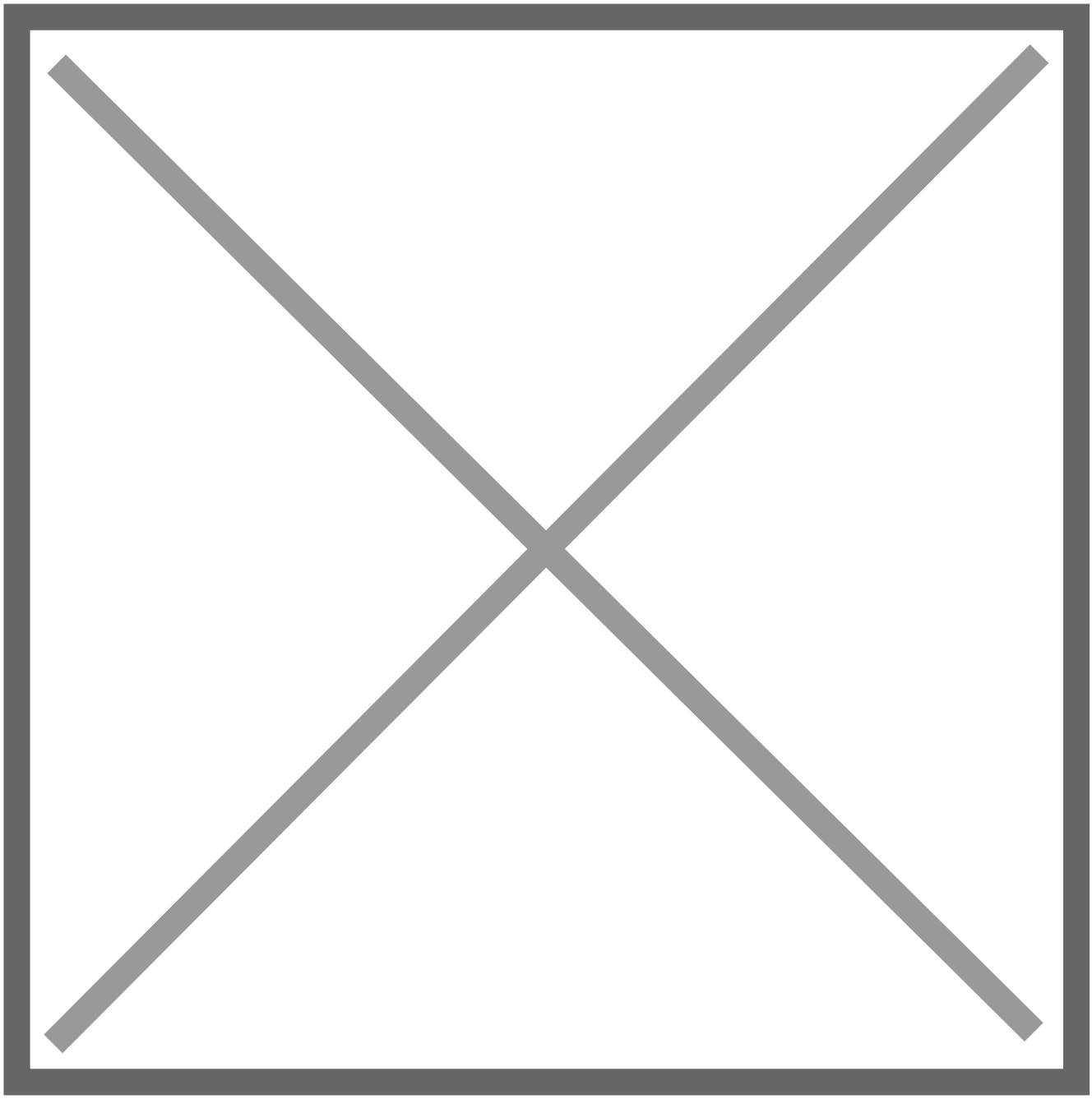
Culture
Explainer



Models of the six contemporary stained-glass windows designed for Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris are seen on display at the French capital's Grand Palais of the Champs-Elysées in an exhibition titled "In One Breath," which opened Dec. 10, 2025. They will be exhibited until March 15, 2026, and are to be installed in the cathedral by the end of the year. (OSV News/Courtesy of the Grand Palais)

Caroline de Sury

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The models for six new contemporary stained-glass windows planned for Notre Dame Cathedral are now on public display in Paris following months of intense national debate.

Critics argue historic elements should not be removed, while supporters say the new windows honor tradition and reflect the living faith of the Church today.

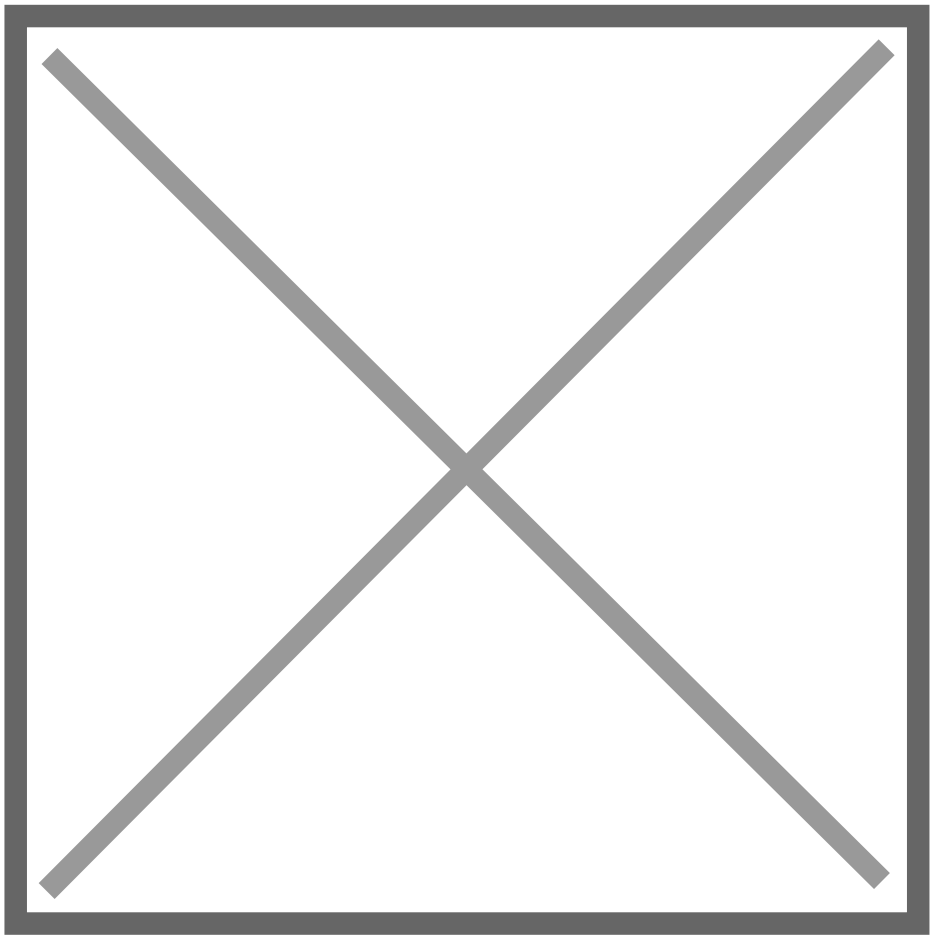
The works, designed by French artist Claire Tabouret, are featured in the exhibition "In One Breath" at the Grand Palais through March 15. Since Dec. 10 visitors have flocked to the vast white gallery where the work is displayed along with sketches and other preparatory items.

Tabouret, a 44-year-old French painter of international renown, lives between France and Los Angeles. Her stained-glass windows models depict the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and the Virgin Mary, as described in the Acts of the Apostles. Prints on display are figurative works nearly 23 feet high and 13 feet wide.

The theme of Pentecost was chosen for the stained-glass windows by the Archdiocese of Paris and Archbishop Laurent Ulrich as part of a new educational program designed by the chaplains of Notre Dame to help visitors discover the foundations of the Christian faith while exploring the cathedral. This journey takes

them from Genesis to the beginnings of the Church, through Christ's death on the cross, symbolized by the crown of thorns, which is in a reliquary located in the central chapel of the cathedral.

Tabouret, talking to France's RFI radio, said, explaining the theme chosen, that "at this time, magnificent gatherings take place between people, despite their differences. This theme is reflected in six key moments. This is something we discover here at the Grand Palais, in a scenography where we truly see the horizontal dimension of the story unfolding before our eyes."



Claire Tabouret, a 44-year-old French painter of international renown, who lives between France and Los Angeles, is pictured in an undated photo. She designed six contemporary stained-glass windows for Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris that are on display at the French capital's Grand Palais of the Champs-Elysées in an exhibition titled "In One Breath," which opened Dec. 10, 2025. They will be exhibited until March 15, 2026, and are to be installed in the cathedral by the end of the year. (OSV News/Courtesy of Aleksey Kondratyev)

The stained-glass windows are currently being made in Reims, in France's Champagne region. They are to be installed by the end of the year in the iconic cathedral, which reopened in December 2024 after the fire in April 2019. The Simon-Marq workshop responsible for this project is famous for having created Marc Chagall's stained-glass windows in the Gothic cathedral of Reims, once the coronation site of the kings of France.

Tabouret's designs will replace six of the seven windows on the south aisle of the cathedral, originally designed by 19th-century architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.

In response to a request from the Archdiocese of Paris, Tabouret has strived to "stay as close as possible to the narrative" of the story of Pentecost, as she explained in the written presentation she made for the Grand Palais, "so that this story can be understood by as many people as possible."

The exhibition sequence clearly traces the breath and fire of the Holy Spirit to a diverse humanity, echoing both the birth of the Church and the global solidarity that rebuilt Notre Dame after 2019.

The stained-glass project has sparked much controversy since its announcement in 2023 by President Emmanuel Macron. On July 11, 2024, members of the National Heritage and Architecture Commission, which reports to the Ministry of Culture, expressed their support for the project, but they objected to the fact that they were to replace those designed by Viollet-le-Duc.

Some French Catholics echoed these reservations. "Claire Tabouret is definitely a great artist," art historian Pierre Téqui wrote in the Catholic weekly magazine La Vie in December 2024. "But the space that we must joyfully offer to contemporary creation must never be at the expense of the old," he added. "Contemporary art must succeed the past, accompany it, add to it, but that does not give artists the right to take the place of our elders."

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The reluctance of some Catholics also stemmed from Macron's involvement in the project, as head of state, which owns the cathedral. It was a statement from the Presidency of the Republic that announced the choice of Tabouret on Dec. 18, 2024,

after reviewing 83 applications featuring the biggest names in the art world.

The statement specified that the president and the archbishop of Paris, "after consultation, had given a favorable opinion on this choice." Over 323,000 people have signed a public petition in opposition to new stained-glass window designs for Notre Dame Cathedral. Launched by La Tribune de l’Art, it denounces the planned changes, saying, "The president of the republic has decided on his own, without any regard for the heritage law or Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, to replace the stained-glass windows."

Despite these opinions, the project has been carried out, with one of the reasons for the exchange given that Viollet-le-Duc's windows, called "grisailles," are simply transparent panes decorated with geometric patterns and colorful interlaced designs. Their purpose in the past was to let light into a very dark cathedral. But the light that now floods the chapels of Notre Dame makes this use less essential today.

In the highly popular exhibition's illustrated album, Philippe Jost, president of the public institution Rebâtir Notre Dame, highlighted Tabouret's talent in "renewing the figurative representation, rooted in a multilayered tradition, of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, which for many believers is an essential dimension of their faith." For him, this is "a fair, convincing, powerful and moving representation of the mystery of Pentecost."

Once installed at Notre Dame, the new stained-glass windows will cover an area of 1,300 square feet, or just under 5% of the cathedral's 27,000 square feet of stained-glass windows from all periods. They are scheduled to be inaugurated on Dec. 8, exactly two years to the day that the cathedral reopened to the public in 2024.