Despite the title, *The Birth of Eve* is not a religious image, but it undoubtedly references Eve’s creation myth in the book of Genesis. Schaechter employs Eve as an archetype, or an ancient, recurring image that retains the power to evoke powerful responses from modern viewers. The biblical Eve, whose disobedience formed the basis for humankind’s original sin, is abandoned for Schaechter’s Eve, who heads—guiltless, Adam-less, and full-tilt—toward her own lusciously imagined Garden of Eden.

This woman’s birth, into a field of sumptuous, riotously colored flowers, awaits her. By exploiting the formal elements of color, light, and pattern in the area of the garden—in which the profusion of flowers repeats as a complex pattern horizontally across the panel—Schaechter achieves her goal of creating an image of maximum sensual and aesthetic beauty.
King of Maggots  1983  
Private collection

Schaechter completed this panel—the earliest in the exhibition—when she was twenty-two years old. It was partly inspired by the artist’s interest in transi tombs, a style of carved stone tombs made in the late Gothic period in Europe in which the entombed figure was depicted as a decaying and often gruesome corpse, in its transition from life to death. These figures also found form in illuminated manuscripts as memento mori, warnings or reminders of death.

The image below from the Book of Hours of René of Anjou is directly referenced in Schaechter’s panel. The crown worn by the corpse signifies death as the great equalizer. As Schaechter captured in her sketchbook from the period: “King of Maggots...Even royalty succumbs to maggots [and] becomes food for worms.”

Unknown French artist
Memento mori page in the Book of Hours of René of Anjou, about 1410
Illuminated manuscript
British Library
Schaechter’s creations take shape from a multitude of sources filtered through her unfettered imagination. The title of this work, *Nedotykompectomy*, is a word Schaechter invented based upon the 1907 novel *The Petty Demon* by Russian author Fyodor Sologub. In that story, Nedotykomka is the name of a demon that torments the main character to the point of insanity.

In Schaechter’s panel, a disembodied and godlike hand plucks a tiny figure (or demon?) from the head of a bleeding, restrained man. The artist’s interest in the Russian novel converged with the inspiration provided by one of her favorite paintings at the time, Hieronymus Bosch’s depiction of a lobotomy, *The Cure of Folly, or the Extraction of the Stone of Madness*.

Hieronymus Bosch

*The Cure of Folly, or the Extraction of the Stone of Madness*, 1501-1505

Oil on oak panel

Museo del Prado, Madrid
The Knot  1989  
Collection of the artist

A woman, a man, and two decomposing corpses are chained together in a macabre dance, surrounded by flowers and Disneyesque birds. The female figure throws her head back in an ecstatic smile.

Is this construction of interlocking human figures a rumination on romantic love, a harsh critique of the institution of marriage, or an evocation of the whims of time, loss, and the cycle of life and death? The artist has said, “I’ve always been interested in ecstasy along with agony…. I’m always interested in how women, girls, and how people mutate pain into pleasure.”

Schaechter had just completed The Knot—her largest and most ambitious work to date—when it fell in her studio, breaking every piece of glass in the top half of the image. The very next day, the artist, known for her tenacity, set back to work, disassembling the panel and remaking every broken piece.

The Knot (preparatory drawing), 1989  
Collection of the artist

This drawing provides an inside look into the artist’s early process to develop her composition for the stained-glass piece The Knot, hanging nearby.
Rape Serenade  1990
Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody

The clown, an archetypal figure Schaechter has always found more terrifying than humorous, shows up throughout her work. It is at its most nefarious in Rape Serenade. Evil clowns seeped into popular culture in the 1980s, with the news coverage of the conviction of “Killer Clown” serial murderer John Wayne Gacy and the publication of Stephen King’s popular novel about a murderous clown, It.

Schaechter’s disturbing content depicted in beautiful translucent color was meant to challenge the viewer’s expectations of stained glass. Other artists of the 1980s and 1990s were similarly interested in transgressive images that forced viewers to confront long-standing expectations for art and culture. Rape Serenade was made in the midst of the culture wars of the period, as the NEA came under fire for supporting controversial artwork, such as Andres Serrano’s Piss Christ.

Andres Serrano
Piss Christ, 1987
Photograph

Rape Serenade  (preparatory drawing), 1990
Collection of Claire Oliver
Awe at the power and beauty of the natural world and our place within it has engaged Schaechter throughout her career. In *Caught in a Flood*, humans struggle to stay afloat against the sublime power of churning, seething waters. Inspired by the technical challenge of representing a fluid substance like water in stained glass, Schaechter also found the spirit of this work in the mournful song “Marian” by English gothic rock band Sisters of Mercy, in which the drowning narrator sings, “In a sea of faces, in a sea of doubt ... In the wake of this ship of fools I’m falling further down.”

Both *Caught in a Flood* and *Rape Serenade* were made as a suite of four panels on disasters, both natural and man-made, for the 1990 *Glassworks* exhibition at the Renwick Gallery. This was the artist’s first big break at the age of twenty-nine.
Humanity’s indulgences are on display in a derelict room with torn wallpaper, bare mattresses, and a tangle of bodies. Schaechter has long been interested in questioning the traditional limitations of the biblical concepts of virtue and vice. Reflecting her more subjective interpretation, Schaechter’s title and image create a more ambiguous picture of what constitutes virtue as raucous revelers engage in sexual encounters, and evidence points to the excesses in smoking, drinking, and eating.

Drawing from art historical sources, this panel is based on Bronzino’s *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid*—an Italian mannerist painting Schaechter has always disliked—and the format of traditional three-part (triptych) medieval, Christian, and Renaissance altarpieces.

![Virtue Triumphs (preparatory drawing) 1991](image)

**Bronzino**

*An Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, about 1545

Oil on wood

National Gallery, London

**Virtue Triumphs** (preparatory drawing) 1991

Collection of the artist
Lucifer Poops 1993
Collection of Curt Broad and Carol Stirton-Broad

An irreverent play on Rodin’s *The Thinker*, Schaechter’s *Lucifer Poops* embodies the artist’s subversive humor and wit. In her hands, even Lucifer is subject to ignoble truths. Everyone poops, even the prince of darkness.

The framing device of using small, seemingly unrelated yet detailed images to surround the main image is one the artist borrowed from medieval manuscript paintings. The border images here come from different and disparate sources. On the right-hand side, the dog with a pie slice for its head comes from a book the artist had when she was younger on how to take care of one’s braces.
Schaechter’s empathy for the ugly side of the human condition has been consistent throughout her career. In Murder and Child, she plays out the trope of the unruly, hysterical woman with a display of the most abhorred act of female violence: infanticide. Here, the mother’s confused face is similar to that of the clown in Rape Serenade.

Schaechter recalls a book about female serial killers—often caretakers like nurses or mothers—published during this period. In the case of new mothers, hormonal imbalances can be unpredictable and catastrophic; postpartum depression is a heartbreaking condition that many women suffer without support or understanding. Additionally, this piece was completed a year after a woman’s right to control her reproductive future was litigated in the 1992 Supreme Court case Planned Parenthood v. Casey. As is often true, Schaechter’s work conflates and reinterprets multiple cultural sources.
Schaechter chose to celebrate the life of her deceased cat, Didi, with a New Orleans-style jazz funeral. As a lifelong animal lover and doting owner of many cats throughout her life, the artist inexplicably did not bond with Didi in life. This panel was made as atonement for her lack of grief at the cat's passing.

Drawing from Russian images like this one of a cat funeral conducted by a procession of mice, Schaechter made linoleum-cut images of mice in small, medium, and large sizes, and printed them onto the glass using vitreous paint. This piece is unusual in Schaechter’s body of work as she typically favors the copper-foil technique to assemble her glass panels, rather than the older leading technique she used here.
I’ve Trampled a Million Pretty Flowers  1995
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with funds contributed by the Women's Committee and the Craft Show Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1995

During the 1990s, the artist was in a band and writing music as well as making her stained glass. A song would sometimes inspire the creation of a panel, as happened here, or vice versa. Despite the joy music gave her and the important role it continues to play in her life, ultimately Schaechter gave up making music to focus entirely on stained glass.

Here, large, fleshy flowers are strewn across the black-and-white grid of this panel. I’ve Trampled a Million Pretty Flowers is one of the earliest works to highlight the imaginative flora that will come to populate much of Schaechter’s stained-glass universe. These “pretty” flowers are both beautiful and disquieting. In the 1980s, scientists had begun, in earnest, to develop genetically modified plants. By 1994, the year before this piece was made, the first commercially available GMO plant, a tomato, was approved for consumption by the FDA.
**Self Portrait  1995**
*Collection of Colleen and John Kotelly*

In *Self Portrait*, a childlike clown clutches her lollipop with a grin as she teeters away from a flaming car wreck. This image came to Schaechter in a flash of inspiration, unlike most of her other images, which evolve and take shape through her creative process. Although Schaechter does not like clowns, she also describes herself as a clown, in that she likes to make people laugh. So while this is not strictly a self-portrait, the artist relates to the character in this work.

Around this time, Schaechter began to experiment with cutting up her images with a grid or other patterned surface. Here the body of the girl is divided by the lines of the grid while the car is not. In *I've Trampled a Million Pretty Flowers* (nearby), the grid does not cut through the figure or the flowers.
Hexagonal pieces of glass form the foreshortened tiled floor on which lies the prone figure of the dead bank robber. Presumably having been shot during his escape, the bank robber’s body is surrounded by the implements of his misdeed: his note, mask, money bag, gun, and the keys to the getaway car complete the still life composition.

To achieve this complex tiled floor, Schaechter asked a graphic designer friend to use CAD design software to create a hexagonal grid, as the artist did not yet have her own computer. Each piece of glass then had to be painstakingly cut, have its edges wrapped in copper-foil tape, and be soldered to neighboring pieces. Schaechter’s technique is laborious by design.
Slut of the Year 1998
Collection of Claire Oliver

Schaechter’s imagery explores current and historical associations made between women and physical weakness, passivity, beauty, sexual availability, and nature. In vibrant red and deep blue, a woman on her hands and knees is exposed by a small clown who pulls open a curtain. Flowers on the stage indicate a favorable reception by the audience, yet the woman—naked except for her shoes, lace gloves, and stockings—hangs her head in shame.

The intimacy and vulnerability of Schaechter’s figures, placed in situations and conditions that test their moral fortitude or physical endurance, are more apt to make viewers uncomfortable than to excite them. Here the subject, all on grim display, is spectacle, the consumption of women’s bodies, and their exploitation. The viewer is indicted and found guilty.
Autobiography  1999  
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Art by Women Collection,  
Gift of Linda Lee Alter  

This humorous piece was made for an exhibition of artists’ self-portraits for which Schaechter decided to create a unique contribution, a completely fictionalized autobiography. The project was intentionally both funny and exploratory. Multiple vignettes, created using photo stencils, hint at the potential dramas and traumas, real or imagined, in the life of a little girl. At the center of the panel, the girl stands in the middle of a beautiful field of flowers, wringing her hands as she imagines a bomb dropping on her head.
The Patron Saint of Circus Apes Day Parade  2000
Museum of Arts and Design, New York, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Collections Committee and the Windgate Charitable Foundation, 2006

This is the first work for which Schaechter employed the digital imaging program Photoshop to develop and design a complex composition. Here she began by scanning images of toys from a Dover clip art book of old toy catalogs, altering and arranging the figures into a parade of demented animals and sideshow clowns.

The subject matter and title grew out of the song “Who Do You Think We’re Coming For?” by her friend and musician Andy Prieboy, about the corruption of the music business. The visual language of the lyrics appealed to the artist. These lines served as a kernel of inspiration for this panel: “Diggin’ Elvis cause he’s funny/Crucified him for the money/Made him patron saint of circus apes jumpin’ through the hoops.”
Schaechter elevates transgressions of appropriate female decorum to high art. Here, the artist shows a young girl in a beribboned dress and veil, lying on the floor and violently vomiting up a puddle of flowers. In contrast to the traditional wedding night ritual, Schaechter’s panel depicts a deflowering of a different kind, playing on the association between female and nature and complicating the consummation between male and female.

Schaechter takes the personal—her thoughts about her own upcoming nuptials at the time—and makes it universal. The artist was influenced by her friend Susan Hagen’s Green Woman sculpture, a variation on the Green Man—an ancient art historical motif of a man’s face made of greenery and leaves that sometimes sprout from his mouth. Such archetypal figures continue to appeal to Schaechter for their power to carry universal human concerns across time and space.
In her drawing process, once Schaechter settles on a face or head she wants to develop further, she experiments with the position and posture of the figure. This is evident in these six small drawings.

After Schaechter scans the head and figure she likes best into Photoshop, she alters the image, here adding digital imagery of flowers and liquid pulled from online sources. Schaechter makes continual modifications—scaling up, printing out, additional drawing on top of the printed image—until she is satisfied. The drawing then serves as the basis for the final glass piece.
A Ship on Her Shoulder 2002
Private collection, Palm Beach, Florida

Schaechter engraves her images into flash glass, a handblown sheet of clear glass with a thin layer of brightly colored glass on one side. One of her most significant innovations is the use of a flat diamond file, which she began using in 2002 to achieve soft tonal transitions. A Ship on Her Shoulder is an example of her early mastery of this extremely effective but also physically taxing technique, which she achieves with many small but firmly applied repetitive motions of the file over the glass.

The origin of this image came from Schaechter’s humorous take on the classic Art Test, the art school advertisement, found in the back of comic books, that promised to judge one’s artistic abilities. Ultimately, Schaechter’s figure morphed into a female pirate who carries a ship (chip?) on her shoulder.

![Art Test image; Judith Schaechter, Drawing inspired by Art Test pirate, about 2002]
The figure in *Big Bang* stands upon what the artist describes as a little “planet of doom” in the process of exploding. A bird flying up and away is attached to the hand grenade in her chest, its pin about to be yanked out. In the other direction, the woman is drawn down by a tiny fetal clown attached to her by rope. She is tethered and threatened from multiple directions.

Schaechter’s images are personal and universal, with figures designed to connect with her life and experiences as well as with viewers across time. The absence of specific details that can lock an image in time, such as clothing, is an intentional omission.
Donkey Ducky Dream  2003
Lindemann Collection, Miami Beach, Florida

Schaechter has looked to the work of comic book artists for their skill and attention to overall design and their use of speech or thought bubbles. In Donkey Ducky Dream, the viewer sees the chaotic dreams of this young child taking shape in the wild creatures of the artist's imagination. To create the shapeshifting immediacy of the child's dream imagery, Schaechter pulled drawings directly from her sketchbook, transferred them to photo stencils, and sandblasted the drawings onto the glass.
When Schaechter made this work, she said she may have been thinking about “Botticelli’s Venus and cycloramas and octopus erotica and how lovely turquoise looks next to fire engine red,” but in retrospect, she may also have been writing her own ending for Lars Von Trier’s tragic 1996 film, Breaking the Waves. The diversity of sources is typical of Schaechter’s creative output:

Botticelli’s iconic Birth of Venus—a painting Schaechter admires for its “weirdness”—was the only reproduction she had ever hung in her studio.

Cycloramas were a nineteenth-century American phenomenon in which long, continuous paintings covered the interior walls of circular buildings, providing an immersive experience for visitors. The left and right edges of Schaechter’s panel form a continuous image. If the piece were rolled like a tube, the waves would match, and the two sea creatures would form one octopus.

“Octopus erotica” is a reference to a print by Hokusai called The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife. In the Japanese woodblock tradition of shunga, featuring erotic imagery, Hokusai’s print depicts a sexual encounter between a woman and an octopus.
Specimens  2004  
Collection of Lisa Sinclair and Alex Skora

Thousands of bizarre yet adorable creatures populate the artist's doodles and sketchbooks. Here, in a tight and colorful grid, fifty-four specimens fill fifty-four jars, evoking perhaps the strange contents of one of Schaechter's favorite places in her hometown of Philadelphia, the Mütter Museum. As a medical museum, its unusual collection features anatomical and pathological specimens and antique medical equipment. At the time she was making Specimens, Schaechter's friend and the Mütter Museum's director, Gretchen Worden, was dying. The artist intended to share Specimens with her friend but didn't get the chance.

Hemophilia  2004  
Mint Museum, Windgate Fund and funds provided by Rick and Dana Davis, DAVIS STEEL & IRON, 2005.34

As an artist who works with glass every day, Schaechter bleeds from cuts rather regularly, yet she has always been somewhat afraid of blood. Hemophilia, a genetic disorder that causes prolonged and often life-threatening bleeding after an injury, is sometimes referred to as “the royal disease” because it afflicted a number of European royal families, including members of the Romanov dynasty in Russia. While she was making this work, Schaechter was thoroughly engrossed in that history as she read about the fall of the Romanov dynasty. The heir to the throne, Alexei, struggled with hemophilia, for which his mother sought treatment from the self-proclaimed mystic and healer Rasputin. In the oval at the top of the panel, an image of a hand taking another's pulse was pulled from an old medical text.
He’s Haunted  2005
Collection of Geoff Isles

When Schaechter made this work, she was reading and thinking about Russian culture and history, as she was with Hemophilia (nearby). He’s Haunted pulls from both the popular musical Fiddler on the Roof and a book the artist was reading at the time, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s The Idiot. That book’s titular character, Prince Myshkin, whom the artist described as the classic “dreamy poet boy,” was the model for this figure.

Schaechter, who hates the snow, appreciates the soft pastels and clear light of winter. In order to achieve these aesthetic qualities, she incorporated oil paint, an unusual medium in her practice.

Three engraved layers: head and bust of a figure
Collection of the artist

Schaechter describes how, as a younger artist, her small light table forced her to stack pieces to make room to work. She became excited by her ability to alter imagery by layering. Over time, layering has become central to her work, sometimes stacking as many as five pieces of engraved and painted glass to achieve her desired effect.
**Three engraved layers: head and bust of a figure**

Collection of the artist

Schaechter describes how, as a younger artist, her small light table forced her to stack pieces to make room to work. She became excited by her ability to alter imagery by layering. Over time, layering has become central to her work, sometimes stacking as many as five pieces of engraved and painted glass to achieve her desired effect.

These three pieces of glass demonstrate her innovative approach to using a flat diamond file to engrave multiple layers of colored glass. This time-consuming process allows Schaechter to achieve her nuanced, rich tonalities.

This photo shows the three layers of engraved glass stacked to form one image.
Botanical drawings  2017
Collection of the artist

These fully rendered, imaginative botanical drawings show Schaechter’s exceptional draftsmanship. The artist scanned them into Photoshop and manipulated them into the large, complex composition *Wild Life* (below).

Judith Schaechter
*Wild Life*, 2017
Stained-glass panel
48 x 44 inches
Private collection
This brilliant, strange, and evocative image captures Schaechter’s commitment to color and pattern, her familiarity with art historical sources, and her unique ability to combine beauty with ugliness to access the realm of the grotesque.

In *My One Desire*, a partially nude, crowned figure sits between two elaborate decorative variations on traditional stained-glass cathedral rose windows. On her lap, in a pietà-like pose (the traditional pose of Jesus’ body lying in the lap of his mother Mary after the Crucifixion), lies a deceased unicorn. This image is based on a unicorn tapestry series beloved by Schaechter’s mother and familiar to the artist since her childhood.
Agnus Dei 1 2007
Collection of the artist

Agnus Dei 1 was a technical experiment. In depicting the chandelier, Schaechter wondered if she could create near photographic imagery in her work by layering glass in a manner similar to color separations in printing. Using Photoshop, Schaechter created photo stencils for sandblasting three different pieces of glass. The result is a chandelier that looks more pixelated than photographic.

You Are Here 2008
Collection of the artist

In You Are Here, Schaechter creates and locates the image of a nude woman—with the grass-covered earth below and the starry, celestial sphere above—at the center of her own universe.

For decades, Schaechter has taught classes and workshops around the world. While teaching at the Northland School of Glass in Scotland, Schaechter visited a wind farm where she and others lay down beneath the windmills and night sky. While contemplating the vastness of the universe, Schaechter thought of a class she took at Rhode Island School of Design many years earlier taught by her most influential teacher, Dirk Bach. He described art as a tool to help an individual identify as a microcosm within the macrocosm of the universe. The artist, at a turning point in her personal life, depicted a serene, promising scene of awakening or rebirth.
Schaechter came across a YouTube video of Klaus Nomi performing the aria “The Cold Song” from Henry Purcell’s opera *King Arthur*. This video captures the last performance of a singer, known for his incredible voice and otherworldly stage presence, before dying of AIDS in 1983. As the character Cold Genius in the opera, Nomi sings:

What power art thou, who from below  
Hast made me rise unwillingly and slow  
From beds of everlasting snow  
See’st thou not (how stiff) and wondrous old  
Far unfit to bear the bitter cold,  
I (can scarcely move or draw my breath)  
Let me, let me freeze again to death.

Schaechter was so moved by Nomi’s story and interpretation that she was inspired to make this work. Her insistence upon resolving this panel to her satisfaction led her to remake it four times.
Sin Eater  2009
Collection of David Mittleman, MD, and Michael Duquette Fowler

In some traditional societies, sin-eaters took on the sins of the deceased. The concept of sacrifice is familiar to Schaechter. Her artistic philosophy is infused with a grit, tenacity, and commitment that is evident in each piece of glass she touches:

One of the most important things in my work is to include a lot of details, many of which must seem very decorative. I do things people might not understand, appreciate, or even notice merely to make the piece impossibly difficult. I feel the need to prove I am willing to go to all lengths to make the piece as hard as possible to execute. It feels incredibly important to embellish the living hell out of it merely to demonstrate that this thing is so terribly important, so incredibly worth it to me—so it should be worth it to you, looking at it.
Writhing on a chaise lounge, grasping her head as her legs splay open and her dress slips down below her breasts, this figure seems consumed by her environment. The settings for Schaechter’s figures, though, are not realistic spaces but reflections of the interior state of the character. Her figures close their eyes, not to shut out the world but to better “contemplate what it means to be alive and right at the crossroads of the material, sensual world and the fantastical inner Omniverse.”

Long interested in the comingling of ecstasy and agony, Schaechter’s work acknowledges a woman’s sexual desires while insisting upon her spiritual value. The figure’s ecstatic pose and grimace reference Bernini’s famous baroque sculpture *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*.

Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680)
*Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1647–1652
Marble
Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome
Photo © User: Dnalor01 / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-3.0.
The Battle of Carnival and Lent  2010–2011

In 2010, Schaechter began an ambitious site-specific installation of seventeen stained-glass windows at the historic Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. The context of the penitentiary, which functioned as a prison for over a century, inspired the artist to explore collective ideas and feelings about crime, punishment, imprisonment, and repentance. The cathedral-like domed ceilings, proportions, and stone construction of the prison were an ideal setting for Schaechter's medium of stained glass. The windows were temporarily installed at the prison through 2012.

The Battle of Carnival and Lent, the largest window of the installation, took the artist over a year to complete. It contains over ninety-six figures: human, animal, and imaginary. It was made to be viewed from below, as it was installed in the transom at the end of cell block 11.

Schaechter's work has long demonstrated her respect for her art historical ancestors. Her imagery aligns her with the long tradition of grotesquerie and the absurd going as far back as the ancient world. The Battle of Carnival and Lent, inspired by Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s 1559 painting of the same subject, is Schaechter’s twenty-first-century vision of the struggle between humanity’s best and worst impulses. Reflective of the artist’s spirit and wit, and fitting the context of the penitentiary, Schaechter takes this timeless struggle and recasts it “as a prison riot ... [or] a street fight ... [or] a smackdown between the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Cardinal Virtues.”
This figure was originally installed in cell block 14 of the Eastern State Penitentiary as part of the *Weeping Chorus*, which comprises three figures representative of the sorrow and struggles of family members (mother, daughter, sister) left behind by their imprisoned loved ones. The thin vertical central panel on *Sister* was the original work installed at the penitentiary. Later, Schaechter created the decorative panels on either side of the figure. These are filled with traditional stained-glass quarries (diamond-shaped pieces) and her recognizable kaleidoscopic patterns.

The pose of the figure in *Sister* references Jesus on the cross, as well as Phan Thị Kim Phúc, the nine-year-old Vietnamese girl photographed in 1972 as she fled, with third-degree burns, from a napalm attack on her village in Vietnam. This photo by Nick Ut—named by *Time* magazine as one of the one hundred images that “changed the world”—captures the brutal horrors of war and, like Schaechter’s image, forces us to confront its devastating impact upon innocent bystanders.
Schaechter’s brightly colored panels feature dark and mysterious narratives that nevertheless feel familiar. Like something from Grimm’s fairy tales, the young girl wearing a wolf’s fur sleeps in the snowy woods, oblivious to the crows that circle her from above. Like a revised Little Red Riding Hood, this girl who wears the skin of a fearsome predator is a survivor.

*Feral Child* is notable for the artist’s improvisation with the layers of glass, seen here in the horizontal swath of birds. With a general sense of what she wanted the area to look like, but lacking a cartoon outlining a specific image, Schaechter engraved each piece section-by-section with three layers of pink, blue, and red glass.

Pieces of improvised engraving on the three layers from *Feral Child*, 2012.

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*Feral Child* (preparatory drawings) 2012  
Collection of the artist
While tooling around online, Schaechter found a satirical 1599 engraving that delighted her and inspired *A Play About Snakes*, a work she describes as “a giant celebration of obsessive and compulsive craziness.” In the historical print, the corruption of the Catholic papacy is represented by a pyramid of entwined serpents in which the largest snake wears the papal crown.

For her snakes, Schaechter looked to eighteenth-century field guide images of snakes. She used Photoshop to pull out the snakes she liked, and she designed her own intertwined and repeating pattern, like that of a Celtic knot or a print by M. C. Escher, an artist she admires. When her pattern was complete, she printed the image and redrew every snake in black and white. After a few more steps of image manipulation, she translated it into color as she selected and engraved the layers of glass.
New Ghost  2014
Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY, Partial and promised gift,
Adele and Leonard Leight Collection, 2015.8.3

This ghostly astrological figure floats in the night sky above the
sparkling lights of a city, as if seen through the window of a plane. The
city depicted here is Berlin, Germany. Berlin was chosen not for any
significant symbolic reason but simply because it was the city with the
highest resolution digital photo Schaechter could find online.

Horse Accident  2015
Collection of Robert and Vera Loeffler

When Schaechter is satisfied with a figure, she will scan it into Photoshop
in order to brainstorm potential scenarios and settings, numbering
sometimes into the hundreds. In this instance, the figure from Horse
Accident was in limbo for four or five years before Schaechter found her
proper resolution.

Here the figure is surrounded by a verdant pasture filled with the flowers,
greenery, and insects that populate Schaechter’s imagination. Using two
layers of glass and paint, the red glass layer has black paint and yellow
silver stain, and the blue glass has black and pink paint. Both sides of
each layer of glass are engraved, painted, and engraved again. This
garden area is one of the most heavily manipulated in all of Schaechter’s
pieces—another example of the artist trying new things and refusing to
take a formulaic approach to her work.
In the cosmologies of many cultures, the universe consists of three tiers—the known surface of the world, the world below the water, and the world in sky and space. Similar to the painting revealed on the exterior of Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Schaechter’s imagery references the creation of the world, when the waters were separated from land, and the earthly paradise, called Eden, was created.

As she frequently does, Schaechter locates the female form against the backdrop of the natural world, here in the center of the universe. There is a helpless innocence to her figure (and that in *The Life Ecstatic*, nearby, as they are the same) that almost feels newborn, as though she is in the fetal sac or about to emerge into the world of the flesh.

Hieronymus Bosch, *Third Day of the Creation of the World*, painted on the closed doors of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych, 1490–1500
Oil on oak panel
Museo del Prado, Madrid
Here, the figure that lies prostrate in *Three-Tiered Cosmos* floats vertically, suspended within the form of a large red “You Are Here” or Google map pin. This piece captures themes that have touched Schaechter’s work throughout her career: the female experience, the need to locate oneself within a larger reality, and the profusion of decorative imagery.
The artist titled this piece *Immigration Policy* as she was working on the image shortly after President Donald Trump was elected in 2016. The abandoned dog, sinking ship, freakish critters, and deformed flora all portend a fearful and tumultuous future.

While the imagery may speak to the artist’s fears of the future, the style and form reflect her medium’s roots. Schaechter has said that “over the years, I got a lot more jazzed about looking at the actual history of the medium of stained glass and my work reflects that inspiration.” Schaechter’s central image takes shape in a painted roundel surrounded with diamond-shaped quarries, a traditional format used commonly in English stained glass.

Another historical source of inspiration was an image from the German Renaissance apocalyptic illuminated manuscript *Book of Miracles* (published by Taschen in 2014) in which a doglike creature drowns. Schaechter’s version incorporates a sinking ship, implicating humans in this dog’s distressing situation.
**The Florist** 2017  
**Courtesy Claire Oliver Gallery, Harlem, and the artist**

This work and Schaechter’s earlier *Nature* play on the artist’s interpretation of German philosopher Immanuel Kant’s writings about the differences between nature (flowers growing out of the ground) and culture (cut flowers). The artist sees flowers cut and arranged for display as inherently sad, as they are destined to die. The woman in *The Florist* wilts and sags with as much flourish as the flowers that surround her, despite the two elements having been conceived separately.

There is a self-referential or meta quality to this work as the artist meticulously engraved convincing images of glass vases onto a flat glass surface. Schaechter is always cognizant of her medium of glass and the explicit and implicit meanings it can express.
Beached Whale—one of what Schaechter has called her “environmental collapse screeds”—features a whale, dead and belly-up, with an incriminating man-made net wrapped around its body. In the seventeenth century during a period of political instability for the Dutch Republic, images documenting the beaching of whales were widely disseminated and interpreted as bad omens. Here, Schaechter’s own political, cultural, and environmental anxieties take shape in her beached whale picture: a sperm whale straight out of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is stranded in a landscape appropriated from the 1859 painting by the American artist Martin Johnson Heade, *Approaching Storm*.

The curtain motif, one Schaechter has used over the years, is here similar to Charles Wilson Peale’s 1822 self-portrait, as he lifts a curtain to show off his collection. In *Beached Whale*, Schaechter lifts the curtain to expose what she fears are the results of exploitation of the planet. In an otherwise distressing scene, Schaechter masterfully manipulates the inherent qualities of glass in her composition—an opalescent glass for the atmospheric sky and her engraved layers for the decomposing whale’s mottled skin—to maximize its beauty across time and place.

*Beached Whale* 2018
Courtesy Claire Oliver Gallery, Harlem, and the artist

Jacob Matham (Netherlandish, 1571–1631)
*Beached Whale*, 1598
Engraving.

Charles Wilson Peale (American, 1741–1827)
The Artist in His Museum, 1822
Oil on canvas
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Sketchbook 10, started 1994
Sketchbook 13, started 2002
Collection of the artist

I do not have “ideas” for pieces. I literally draw them out of my head and, on the occasions they don’t burn up in the earth’s atmosphere before hitting the ground, I can use them as the basis of an art project.

JUDITH SCHAECHTER
This film was created by Floating Home Films for the Memorial Art Gallery and *The Path to Paradise: Judith Schaechter’s Stained-Glass Art*.

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