



MICHAEL CROUSER

Into the Light

St. Paul artist Pat Benincasa brings a new dimension to stained-glass art.

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL pale amber glass ark emerges out of a stained-glass window of a green glass cypress tree, a cut glass waterfall, and textured glass casting watery reflections everywhere. ¶ This 12-foot work of sacred art—St. Paul visual artist Pat Benincasa's *Noah Window*—is displayed at St. Francis Lutheran Church in San Francisco, Calif. Rev. Ruth Frost calls *Noah Window* "sheer geometric ecstasy." ¶ Closer to home, Edina Community Lutheran Church member Dan Mason says the church's altar sculpture, *Alpha and Omega*, that Benincasa created has unified and focused his church's sanctuary. ¶ A painter since the 1970s, Benincasa, 51, started working in dimensional glass in 1995 after winning a national competition to design a skylight for the Minnesota Judicial Center. "That project helped me find my material," she says. "Light pouring through glass has the capacity to fill an existing space with color, texture, shadows, and movement. Yet it also magnifies a space's emptiness. I love the contradiction of light." ¶ The experience also rekindled Benincasa's childhood dream of creating sacred art. Scripture was where she found inspiration. "I looked for passages that used graphic, descriptive language," she says. "Places where the verse paints the picture." ¶ Benincasa is currently at work designing a piece based on Genesis. "There's a recurring theme throughout all sacred scriptures—the promise of light," says Benincasa. "Light keeps the darkness at bay. I want to create sacred art that keeps that promise alive." —NATALIE ZETT