



# IMAGES OF DEVOTION

Russian Icons from the DePauw University Art Collection

## INTRODUCTION

Initially conceived in the first century, religious icons have a long history throughout the Christian world.<sup>1</sup> The icon was not simply created to mirror the physical appearance of a biblical figure, but to idealize him or her, both physically and spiritually.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Western Christianity where religious art can be appreciated solely for its beauty and skill alone, in the Orthodox tradition, the icon becomes more than just a reflection – it is a vehicle for the divine essence contained within.<sup>3</sup> Due to the sacred nature of the icon, depictions of biblical figures became not only desirable in the Orthodox tradition, but an absolute necessity.

Religious icons were introduced to Russia during the official Christianization of the country under Vladimir, the Great Prince of Kiev, in 988. After this period, many regional schools developed their own indigenous styles of icon painting, such as: Pokov, Novgorod, Moscow, Suzdal, and Jaroslavl.<sup>4</sup> Upon Moscow's emergence as the religious and political capital of Russia in the sixteenth century, it cemented its reputation as the great center for icon painting.

The benefactor of this collection of Russian iconography, Earl Bowman Marlatt (1892-1976), was a member of the DePauw University class of 1912. After receiving a Ph.D. in philosophy at Boston University in 1929, he worked as a teacher, newspaper editor, poet, and professor of philosophy at Boston University and Southern Methodist University.<sup>5</sup> In 1931, DePauw honored Marlatt with an honorary Doctor of Letters.<sup>6</sup>

– Ashlyn Cox '18



*Christ with Twelve Apostles*

Russian Artist, Date Unknown

Tempera Paint on Panel

DePauw Art Collection: 1976.31.1

Gift of Earl Bowman Marlatt, Class of 1912

This painting, *Christ with Twelve Apostles*, portrays Jesus Christ reading a passage from the Gospel of Matthew to his Apostles.<sup>7</sup> Written in Old Church Slavonic, which is generally reserved for liturgical writings between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – the painting alludes to Matthew 11:28: “Come all whoever would take my burden onto himself.”<sup>8</sup> Modern versions of the King James Bible have translated this scripture as: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”<sup>9</sup>





### *Mother and Child*

Russian Artist, 1850-1900

DePauw Art Collection: 1990.9.64

Gift of the Robert O'Hair Estate

A common theme in Western painting, this particular Madonna and Child makes reference to “Kazan, Mother of God.” Written in Old Church Slavonic, the text appears beneath the depiction of the young Mary and baby Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Kazan is the capital and the largest city in the Republic of Tatarstan, Russia. The depiction presented is known as the “Elousa,” where the child presses his face close to that of his mother’s expressing tenderness and mercy.<sup>11</sup> The mother gazes out of the picture pensively while the child looks up at his mother in an effort to “convey an awareness of the fate of her son, a fate which is already ordained.”<sup>12</sup>

Both biblical figures are surrounded by an aureole – a field of radiance which appears to be emerging from the body and encircles it.<sup>13</sup> An aureole is usually reserved for those Persons of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>14</sup> The use has been extended, however, to depictions of the Blessed Mother as well.<sup>15</sup>

### *Resurrection with Two Angels*

Russian Artist, Date Unknown

DePauw Art Collection: 1976.32.1

Gift of Earl Bowman Marlatt, Class of 1912

Similar to a home expanding and contracting throughout the different seasons, art is not immune to temperature and weather changes. Humidity, specifically, is the enemy of wood panel paintings where the elasticity of the paint cannot withstand the movement of the wood, and thus, cracks in the paint layer are created, referred to as “craquelure.”<sup>16</sup> In an effort to counteract the bowing and shrinking of wood, historic art conservators placed wooden strips called battens or, in more complex cases, cradles, across the reverse side of a wooden painting as a constraint.<sup>17</sup> This intervention had an unintended effect, and it unfortunately caused internal stress which led to increased cracking, damage to the paint layer, and distortion of the front surface.<sup>18</sup> *Resurrection with Two Angels*, like many 18th and 19th century works, was reinforced with a batten structure, and thus was damaged by a split down the middle. Due to this damage, the work remains in climate-controlled storage until a professional conservator can make appropriate repairs.





## Two Saints

Russian Artist, Date Unknown

Tempera Paint on Panel

DePauw Art Collection: 1976.33.1

Gift of Earl Bowman Marlatt, Class of 1912

Nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox Christian icons display incredible continuity in their religious symbolism and techniques. The artist of *Two Saints*, like many Russian painters, began by using dark brown as a ground color. Next, highlights, shading, and lighted planes were created using reddish ochre, light brown, and pure white lead.<sup>19</sup> The eyes of the saints were rendered with special emphasis and force, in an attempt to recreate the illusion of life.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the round halos surrounding the heads of the saints were adopted by Christian artists to connote perfection, divinity, and holiness.<sup>21</sup>

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- 1 "The Sinsky Collection of Russian Icons," Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University Milwaukee, Wisconsin (December 3 1986- March 15, 1987): 4.
- 2 "The Sinsky Collection of Russian Icons," 5.
- 3 "The Sinsky Collection of Russian Icons," 5.
- 4 "The Sinsky Collection of Russian Icons," 5.
- 5 Wes Wilson, 'Earl Marlatt,' email, March 4, 1987.
- 6 Wilson, 'Earl Marlatt.'
- 7 Translation provided by Dr. Masha Belyavski-Frank, February 22, 2018.
- 8 Translation provided by Dr. Masha Belyavski-Frank, February 22, 2018.
- 9 KJV, Matthew 11:28
- 10 Translation Provided by Dr. Masha Belyavski-Frank, February 22, 2018.
- 11 Beth Williamson, *Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.
- 12 Williamson, *Christian Art*, 16.
- 13 George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 148.
- 14 Ferguson, *Christian Art*, 148.
- 15 Ferguson, *Christian Art*, 148.
- 16 Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, *Scientific Examination of Art: Modern Techniques in Conservation and Analysis (Sackler NAS Colloquium)* (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2003), 180.
- 17 Al Brewer and Colin Forno, "Moiré Fringe Analysis of Cradled Panel Paintings," *Studies in Conservation* 42, no 4 (1997): 212.
- 18 Brewer and Forno, "Analysis of Cradled Paintings," 216-18.
- 19 Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov, *Icons* (New York: Parkstone International, 2012), 10.
- 20 Kondakov, *Icons*, 7.
- 21 George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 149.