



THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

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THE ART OF ALEXANDER GASSEL

May 20, 2018 – January 6, 2019



CLINTON, MA - The Museum of Russian Icons presents the contemporary paintings of Russian-American artist and designer Alexander Gassel, May 20, 2018 – January 6, 2019. Blending the avant-garde with traditional Russian iconography, combining ancient symbols with contemporary subjects, Gassel creates surrealist works that reflect his cultural heritage alongside his experience of life in America.

Gassel's painting style is derived as much from icon painting as it is from his discovery of the early 20th Russian painters such as Marc Chagall, Wassily Kandinsky, and Kazimir Malevich. During the Soviet period, Art Nouveau, Art Deco and other stylistic European trends were suppressed. Gassel (1947), who was born and raised in Moscow, describes seeing the works of Chagall and Malevich surreptitiously in storage areas of Soviet museums. Additionally, it was absolutely forbidden in the Soviet Union to exhibit contemporary religious paintings.

In his work, Gassel uses ancient techniques employed in the creation of icon paintings. He paints with egg yolk tempera, making his own color pigments by grinding natural stones and minerals, such as

malachite, cinnabar, or lapis into powder, which he then mixes with egg yolk. The artist often applies gold or silver leaf on the paintings.

ABOUT the ARTIST

Gassel graduated from Moscow Institute of Arts and Graphics in 1970 with an MA in Fine Arts. From 1970 to 1980 he worked at the Grabar Center for the Restoration and Preservation of Art in Moscow, restoring and copying medieval tempera paintings, as well as collecting and assessing icons that were being removed from churches across Russia and brought to Moscow for conservation and display. Influenced by this experience, the artist began to create his own original paintings – for the most part personal interpretations of Biblical events. At that time, it was absolutely forbidden in the Soviet Union to exhibit contemporary religious paintings.

Gassel immigrated to the United States in 1980 with \$10 in his pocket and no knowledge of the English language. He was not allowed to bring any of his artwork with him because by law no religious art could leave the country. He found work as a draftsman for a railroad company and painted on weekends. Eventually, he had an exhibition where he sold enough paintings to quit his job and once again work as an artist and icon conservator full-time.

RELATED EVENTS

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM: The Museum of Russian Icons inspires the appreciation and study of Russian culture by collecting and exhibiting icons and related objects; igniting the interest of national and international audiences; and offering interactive educational programs. The Museum serves as a leading center for research and scholarship through the Center for Icon Studies and other institutional collaborations. It is the only museum in the US dedicated to Russian icons, and it is the largest collection of icons outside of Russia.

Museum hours: Tue. - Fri., 11AM to 4PM, first Thurs of the month to 8PM, Saturday and Sunday 11AM to 5PM, closed Mondays.

Admission: Adults \$10, seniors (59+) \$7, Students \$5, Children (3-7) \$5, Children under 3 Free.

For more information please visit museumofrussianicons.org.