



THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

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THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS PRESENTS *WRESTLING WITH ANGELS: ICONS FROM THE PROSOPON SCHOOL*

July 19 – October 27, 2019

CLINTON, MA – The Museum of Russian Icons will premiere *Wrestling with Angels*, an exhibition of forty-six luminous contemporary icons by sixteen iconographers from the Prosopon School of Iconology and Iconography, July 19-October 27, 2019. Exploring the recent renaissance of this ancient tradition, the exhibition will feature icons by the founder of the Prosopon School, Vladislav Andrejev, along with works by master iconographers, instructors, and apprentices.

Visitors to the exhibition will encounter the icons as they would within an Orthodox church, beginning with depictions of events and persons from Hebrew scripture that would be found in the narthex (or vestibule); and continuing with icons that would surround the congregation in the nave including images of Jesus and his mother Mary (known in the Christian East as the *Theotokos*, Greek for “God-bearer”). The exhibition concludes with icons that would be found on or behind the iconostasis (the screen or wall that separates the nave from the altar), including icons of the principal feasts of the Christian liturgical year as well icons of mystical subjects that point to the second coming of Christ.

Wrestling with Angels is a reference to the first icon on view, a work depicting the mysterious wrestling match between the patriarch Jacob and an unidentified stranger as described in Genesis. After struggling all night without prevailing, Jacob insists on a blessing before he will relinquish his hold on the man. Although the stranger will not disclose his name, he renames Jacob as Israel (Hebrew for “he who contends with God”), inspiring Jacob to exclaim “for I have seen God face to face and my soul has been delivered.” Not only the inspiration for the title of the exhibition, it is an apt image for the timeless universal struggle between humankind and the mysteries of the unknown.

A centerpiece of the exhibition is the *deisis* (Greek for “supplication”), a group of five large icons with *Christ in Glory* at its center. A *deisis* is a prominent image on an iconostasis and depicts the Theotokos and John the Baptist on either side of Christ interceding on behalf of humankind and often flanked by other saints. The *deisis* in this exhibition includes portrayals of Saints Gregory Palamas and Gregory the Theologian, whose mystical theology is central to the Prosopon School’s teaching.

Another group of icons forms the *Synaxis* (Greek for “assembly”) of the Archangels, which surround a large icon of the Logos Emmanuel, an image of a youthful Christ as the *Logos* (Greek for “word”) through whom God “spoke” creation into existence. This is he who Christians also call *Emmanuel* (Hebrew for “God with us”), as foretold by Isaiah. The depiction of Christ with wings is rare but not without ancient precedent, evoking the movement of God with, and within, the faithful.

ABOUT THE PROSOPOON SCHOOL

Since its founding in 2000, the Prosopon School, among the first American schools of iconography, has introduced thousands of students worldwide to this sacred art of the Christian East. The artistic discipline of iconography (Greek for *eikon*: image and *graphos*: writing) is the means through which students are introduced to the larger discipline of iconology: the exploration of what it means to have been created *in the image and likeness* of God. The Prosopon School accomplishes this by breaking the process of creating an icon into distinct technical steps and associating these with the theology and teachings of the Orthodox Church, especially those of the early Church Fathers.

The Prosopon School endeavors to be a living continuation of the tradition of icon-writing. With reverence for the ancient prototypes, its iconographers practice the art form within the canon of Orthodoxy as a living tradition informed by the school’s American experience. Prosopon icons can be recognized by their depth and luminosity, achieved through careful layering of transparent glazes of pigment. This can only be achieved using the traditional medium of egg tempera and natural pigments on painstakingly prepared wood panels. Another characteristic of Prosopon School icons is the prismatic highlights that do not follow a rigid system or formula but are intuitive and gestural. Prosopon icons may seem extravagantly colorful when compared to the limited palette of ancient icons (an aesthetic enabled by 21st century globalization and the availability of pigments the ancient iconographers could not access).

"Prosopon" is a word encountered many times in the Greek Bible. In one of its most common usages, it expresses the aspect of God turned toward the world—his “face.” In the realm of iconology, which is the attentiveness to the image of God, "Prosopon" can be used to indicate the perceivable revelation of God.

ABOUT THE PROSOPOON SCHOOL FOUNDER

Vladislav Andrejev was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1938 (at that time, Leningrad). After studying at the Tavrishesky School of Art and the Moscow Polygraphic Institute, Andrejev became interested in religious art, which was dangerous to practice openly during the Soviet era. His search for a deeper meaning in life and art led him on solitary travels in the Russian wilderness, including the Carpathian and Caucasus mountains, where Orthodox monk-recluses lived in hiding, and to encounters with the monk-iconographer Abbot Alipiy of the Pskov Caves Monastery.

Andrejev and his family emigrated to the United States in 1980, where American cultural, artistic, and religious pluralism allowed him to devote himself to iconography. In 1985, Andrejev was persuaded, reluctantly at first due to his limited command of English, to teach at the School of the Sacred Arts in New York City. When the school closed, Andrejev became an itinerant iconography teacher, accepting invitations to teach at other cultural institutions and churches across the United States. On July 4th, 2000, the Prosopon School was named and blessed by Archbishop Peter (L'Huillier) of New York and New Jersey, and the support of Theodosius, Metropolitan of all America and Canada (OCA). Appropriately, the 4th of July is not only the birthday of Andrejev's adopted home; it is also the feast day of great Russian iconographer and saint, Andrei Rublev.

ABOUT THE PROSOPOON COLLECTION

The collection of icons has been assembled by iconographer, Prosopon School instructor, and collector Lynette Hull. While icons by the hand of Prosopon School iconographers adorn churches, chapels, and private homes across the country, this exhibition expresses Ms. Hull's desire to share the arresting beauty and vibrancy of the Prosopon School with the larger public.

RELATED PROGRAMMING

2019 PROSOPOON SCHOOL OF ICONOGRAPHY INTENSIVE COURSE

Monday, August 5 to Saturday, August 10, 2019, 8:30am – 4:00pm.

Museum Members \$900, Nonmembers \$995

Vladislav Andrejev has been teaching iconography since 1985, during which time thousands of his students have been introduced to the ancient art of icon writing. Over the years, Vladislav's iconographic technique and teaching method developed into a distinct school of painting and interpretation. The Museum of Russian Icons is hosting the renowned Prosopon School of Iconology for an intensive six-day course on icon writing. Working with Prosopon faculty, participants will study the techniques of painting icons, including transferring of the image, applying the gold leaf, and the use of egg tempera paint. Students will use natural materials and the traditional multi-step process to paint their own icons of Archangel Michael. Previous students can make special arrangements with the instructor to paint another subject for their icon workshop. Throughout the course, students will be introduced to iconology, iconic symbolism, and the theological and philosophical basis of each step. No previous artistic experience is required. The course takes place in the Museum's Auditorium.

Please note that formal instruction ends each day at 4:00pm, but students may need to spend additional time to complete the lesson and be prepared for the next day. The Museum will open each day at 8:30am and close to students at 5:00pm sharp. The tuition includes 36 hours of instruction over six

days and includes all materials including the board, pigments, and gold leaf. 50% deposit is required to reserve your space.

WHY WRESTLE ANGELS? WHO'S ASKING?

TALK WITH EXHIBITION CURATOR LYNETTE HULL

Saturday, September 28, 2019, 1:00–2:00pm

Members \$6, Nonmembers \$12

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: Tuesday–Friday, 11am to 4pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11am to 5pm. First Sunday of the month: free admission! 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. Follow the Museum of Russian Icons on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).