



## THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Museum of Russian Icons presents *Icons & Retablos: Images of Devotion*  
March 2—August 27, 2023



CLINTON, MA – The Museum of Russian Icons presents *Icons & Retablos: Images of Devotion*, March 2—August 27, 2023. This exhibition, created in collaboration with New Mexico State University, will explore and compare Orthodox icons and Mexican retablos, devotional works of art with similar themes but different materials, styles, and iconographies.

Orthodox icons, typically made with egg tempera on wood panels, feature a stylized representation of the divine against a golden background, symbolizing the intangible and mysterious world of heaven. Icons, an integral part of worship in the Orthodox Church, offer us a glimpse of the divine and transcend ordinary, earthly reality.

Retablos, on the other hand, are religious images painted in oil on industrial pieces of tinfoil. They depict an idealized likeness of the divine against blue skies, symbolizing truth and heaven, and facilitating a human connection with God and the saints. This unique and richly varied artistic tradition flourished in Mexico during the nineteenth century.

Guest curated by **Dr. Elizabeth Calil Zarur**, the exhibition will shed light on the understudied iconographic and ideological contrasts between icons and retablos, contextualizing the traditions of devotion in Latin America and the Eastern Orthodox world through comparative artistic methodologies. Despite their differences, the mutual influence and inspiration of Eastern and Western Christian art is apparent in both icons and retablos.

The exhibition is grouped into four themes: the joy of the Annunciation; the loving tenderness of the Mother and Child; the suffering and death of Jesus on behalf of humankind; and documented miracles, or ex-votos. This installation encourages visitors to compare these sacred paintings and to explore these two styles of devotion through diverse materials, themes, and artistic expressions. All of the exhibition text & materials will be available in English and Spanish.

The Museum of Russian Icons and the University Art Museum at New Mexico State University (NMSU) are caretakers of two significant collections, both portraying religious subjects which conform to theological principles and traditional iconography. The Museum of Russian Icons is home to the largest collection of icons outside of Russia; while NMSU maintains the largest collection of nineteenth and twentieth-century Mexican tin retablos of any U.S. museum.

### **ABOUT ICONS AND RETABLOS: CREATING SACRED SPACES**

Icons, from the Greek “eikon” meaning “image or likeness” are sacred paintings of heavenly beings and biblical events. Orthodox Christian icons are displayed in churches on a screen, called an iconostasis, which separates the main part of the church from the altar. In the Orthodox tradition, the home is seen as a satellite of the church. Icons are placed on a shelf in a prominent place known as the “icon corner” or “beautiful corner,” reserved for personal and family prayer.

The Spanish word retablo was derived from the Latin term “retro tabula” for “behind the altar.” It was originally used to designate elaborate wood screens placed behind the main altar displaying sculptures and paintings of saints and other images of devotion. However, in nineteenth-century Mexico, sacred images painted on tin and displayed on home altars were also referred to as retablos. Largely created by self-taught artists, these paintings were used primarily by the Mexican people as objects of veneration in their homes or placed at pilgrimage sites as votive offerings.

Artists of both icons and retablos often remained anonymous with the goal of rendering the image of the divine with simplicity, clarity, and emotional stimulus to piety. Historically, these images were not seen as art but as a means to connect heaven and earth.

### **ABOUT THE CURATOR**

**Dr. Elizabeth Calil Zarur** holds a BFA in Printmaking and Drawing, an MFA in Fiber Arts, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy of Art. During her 30-year career teaching art history at New Mexico State University and Wheaton College in Massachusetts, she published extensively and curated several exhibitions. Her research focuses on the arts and culture of Latin America and Portugal with the publication of books and articles on the nineteenth-century Mexican retablo, the colonial architecture and religious rituals of Brazil, women artists in baroque Portugal, and the feather art of the Indians of Central Brazil. She has curated several national and international exhibitions accompanied by comprehensive catalogues; and attended conferences and delivered lectures in Brazil, Portugal, Mexico, and the United States.

## ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM AT NMSU

Located in Las Cruces, New Mexico, the University Art Museum's mission is to serve as an academic environment for the critical analysis of visual art while making culturally relevant and conceptual practice accessible to the New Mexico State University and surrounding regional and border communities. The UAM actively acquires and stewards a permanent collection of contemporary visual art, houses the country's largest collection of Mexican retablos, and facilitates educational programming aligned with the teaching missions of both the Department of Art and NMSU.

## ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The Museum of Russian Icons preserves and exhibits one of the world's largest collections of Orthodox Christian icons, bronze crosses, and Slavic folk arts. Spanning over six centuries, the collection showcases the development of the Russian icon from its Egyptian and Byzantine roots and explores the spread of Orthodoxy across cultures.

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 the largest collection of icons outside of Russia.

## MUSEUM HOURS

Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, 10am-4pm. Closed Monday–Wednesday.

Admission: Adults \$12, seniors (59+) \$10, Students \$5, Children (13-17) \$5, Children under 13 Free.

Follow the Museum of Russian Icons on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

Visit the website, [www.museumofrussianicons.org](http://www.museumofrussianicons.org), home of the online collection (including research papers on individual icons), a virtual tour of the Museum, the Journal of Icon Studies, and the British Museum's Catalogue of Byzantine and Greek Icons.

Image credits: *Mother of God of Sign*, Anonymous, Russia. 1800, Collection: Museum of Russian Icons  
*Soul of Mary (Our Lady of the Incarnation)* Anonymous, Mexico, Nineteenth Century, Collection: NMSU/UAM University Museum of Art.

The Museum of Russian Icons vehemently condemns the military aggression on the sovereign country of Ukraine.

We stand with the courageous citizens of Ukraine and Russia who oppose this senseless act of war.