Tradition in Transition
Russian Icons in the Age of the Romanovs

Seven hundred years of virtual isolation came to a halt when Peter the Great commanded the construction of St. Petersburg, the new capital for Russia, on a Baltic-shore swamp. Through this symbolic action, he opened "the window on the West." The resulting influx of ideas, notions, styles, fashions and ideologies altered the very fabric of Russian society and caused a pronounced influence on its most emblematic artistic expression—the religious icon.

Contrary to popular scholastic opinion, the icon did not degenerate and expire during the Romanov period—it simply evolved, suggests Dr. Salmond. "In the context of the times, none of these icons were considered national treasures. You can either view this as a decline, or you can say, 'My God, how interesting.'" Dr. Salmond, associate professor of art history at Chapman University, makes the case in favor of critical recognition.

Tradition in Transition: Russian Icons in the Age of the Romanovs is a visual and didactic exploration of iconography in flux. Icons from this period—vestiges of the Romanov dynasty—were traditionally viewed as inferior to those produced during the medieval period, or "Golden Age." Curator Wendy Salmond, Ph.D., has conceived an exhibition of 45 rare icons and oklads (decorative icon covers) that challenge this view.


Three Handed Mother of God, 1743


Christ Enthroned from Portable Iconostasis, 1700


Mother of God "Promise of Those Who Suffer", 1790 - 1795
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Organized by and currently on display at Hillwood Museum & Gardens, Washington, D.C., Tradition in Transition illustrates how icons from the Romanov period departed from tradition, and explains the emergence of decorative oklad. The exhibition offers fine examples, including Mother of God "Pledge of Sinners" and Iverskaia Mother of God, whose covers are made from precious metals and stones: gold, silver, filigree enamels, pearls, diamonds and emeralds. While these ostentatious covers would appear to indicate a dilution of spiritual value, Prince Alexei venerated these very icons during recovery from a hemophilia attack in the early 1900s, demonstrating an enduring spiritual attribution into the modern age despite the icon's gilded countenance.
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The icons in Tradition in Transition were selected from the collection bequeathed by Marjorie Merriweather Post when establishing Hillwood Museum & Gardens, the bequest by Madame Frances Rosso to Hillwood, and the Laurence A. Steinhardt-Sherlock Trust, which is on long-term loan to Hillwood. An understanding among all contributors to the exhibition releases these precious icons for travel to U.S. audiences for the very first time. The exhibition is available for booking starting in October 2005.

Text for panels and labels (to be produced by the hosting museum) explains the themes and provides vital information about the selected objects. The exhibition travels with pedestals and vitrines for easy re-installation in hosting museums. An informative and fully illustrated catalogue is available, written by Wendy Salmond.

"The Hillwood show, though small in number of works and exhibition space, succeeds in showing the many styles, influences and, above all, tensions resulting from conflicting religious and political changes. It's these tensions that fascinate the viewer and make the exhibition a pleasurable visual as well as intellectual challenge." - The Washington Times

Exhibition Specifications:

Tradition in Transition: Russian Icons in the Age of the Romanovs

Organizer:
Hillwood Museum & Gardens,
Circulated by International Arts & Artists

Participation fee:
Price upon inquiry

Contact:
Reid Buckley
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Contents:
45 icons, 2 manuscript facsimiles, exhibition catalogue

Curator:
Wendy Salmond, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Art History at Chapman University

Requirements:
High security, approximately 1,100 square feet

Availability:
October 2005
December 2007