

46 pages 12, 372 words

# History of Art

## Panel Painting

### Setting the Scene

Yaroslav, the son of Vladimir the Great, the first Rus – Old Russian, embraced the Christian religion in 988. The following year the church of The Holy Wisdom built and consecrated. Yaroslav the Wise intended to create a rival city to Constantinople called Tsargrad or The New Rome in 990. He supplied the means to instigate the foundation of a truly great city of Novgorod to the young feudal state of Kievan Rus or Ukraine, eventually becoming, ‘The Mother of all Russian cities’, in 1037. His interests included all the arts; this prompted the recruitment of teachers and skilled craftsmen who were supplied by the Greek Emperor of Byzantium as a wedding gift... thereafter monks and monasteries blossomed and flourished. This was the start of a five-hundred year development of the Novgorod School with its Abstract Style of religious art. A Golden Age of religious panel painting, that in the latter half of the first millennium the subjects contained a considerable amount of gold leaf, outlining, background work, jewels, and halo. Art historians considered the art style and form, over the centuries, perfection - for religious expression... a style founded in Kiev, between the years 1350 – 1550. This historical account and instructional programme - the website and research project, applauds and celebrates that two-hundred-year period...

The move from Constantinople by the Eastern Church, away from the invading armies of Islam, and later the Ottoman Turks, transported the faith into Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and further still, into central Russia. This sectarian movement - the Eastern Church fleeing before the Islamic invasion, included skilled artisans, artists, writers, musicians – their social and religious culture, customs, and rites. These paintings

became the chief expression and symbol of Russian religious thought, and popular belief; they were primitive and mystical, and full of symbolism. The majority were small paintings on wood – convenient for home use. Those made for the church were approximately life size and painted on smoothed planks of wood, glued, wedged and ledged; a gesso covered surface, on a glue size. The gesso, of liquid plaster – gypsum, supported and held a colour pigment suspended in egg; in some instances, the work was *buon fresco* – colour pigment applied to wet plaster. Overtime, these paintings on panels became more than just religious paintings, becoming sacred, and The Russian National style of Art.

The style was Abstract - developed by ridged, formal, strict, and clear-cut shapes. Their line exaggerated, and emphasized by long and straight drawing, outlined in thick black, perhaps red, and white lines especially around the eyes to transfix the viewers gaze - by hypnosis. The subjects, they were mostly portraits, forehead, nose, hands, and feet applied in freehand – in a sketchy manner. The rhythm of the piece displayed by the emotions of the subject; they were expressive designs based upon life size pictures. The faces were long, with pinched, thin, noses dropping over the top lip... the foreheads, bulbous, with sunken cheeks, and lined features. There was an emphasis on the vertical, with elongated proportions, great delicacy of detail, the main shape lined in black, white, and red... and background work, jewels and halo in gold. The hues: bright and saturated, and overall, an emphasis on fine details, almost an over-emphasis, particularly on the features. A rhythmical composition, especially on the cloaks and shifts, with fine white crease lines – to emphasise the drawing. The robes painted in two colours their shapes and form outlined in thick black lines. Eyes, forehead, nose, fingers, and toe joints emphasized with fine white lines, *the ozhivki*.

The Christian Church throughout the ages has used religious pictures as an expression of faith and devotion... the subjects based upon the Nativity, Jesus, Mary, the Saints, Disciples, and certain Biblical stories. The art expressed the faith using a stylized configuration of line and form: the colours chosen for each aspect symbolized a particular

meaning; the abstract composition emphasized the pictures significance. This spiritual depth – achieved by religious art, was inherent within Byzantine culture and the Orthodox Church... eventually became a highly developed art form.

Primitive wall paintings occurred in prehistoric times and continued in all the different civilizations – including Egyptian, and Syrian – becoming, stylized to each particular culture. Wall decoration common in all Mediterranean countries - particularly Greek and Roman cultures – passed onto Christian church builders. Gradually the pictures showing human form changed, from side view to full frontal... eyes almond shaped and heavily outlined, hair combed up and hands expressive. As the Christian church decorators continued their art these frescos became further stylized – using shapes, forms and colours, passed down through the ages... purposely becoming metaphoric - to elicit certain feelings.

In the sixteenth century, during the reign of Ivan III, the centre of artistic life gravitated towards Moscow. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks precipitated the greater influence of the Moscow style, which became illustrative rather than iconographic. These later scenes depicted new science whilst drawing subjects taken from literature of the period. This freedom, from the more traditional style, allowed the artist to show the subjects emotion – expression, and the technique became highly finished. The frescos of Therapontov lead the way to pictures showing beauty, joy, concern, and drama.

Ivan IV [Ivan the Terrible], 1533-1584, assumed the title of Tsar of Muscovy. He had not only an interest in art but wished to maintain and decorate Moscow's churches. With the help of the church, lead by Metropolitan Makarie, Icons from outlying churches including those in Novgorod were appropriated. This act despoiled those churches, stripped them of their history, and inherited treasures. The artists and craftsmen fled ending up where the power base and money was, which was Moscow, firmly establishing the Moscow School.

Although the production of Icons continued, particularly by the Stroganov School, which produced miniatures, the old National

abstract style lost its importance. The golden age of the Icon, as a great art form, became extinct.

## CHAPTER I

Ancient History:- Cave Painting - Paganism – Judaism – Greco-Roman Wall Painting – Constantine – Christian Religion – Islamic – Mosques – Arabesque – Byzantine - Mosaics – Churches and Cathedrals - Eastern European History – Wooden Churches – Panel Painting – Project.

Paganism: Pre-Christian civilisations all developed and engaged in the practice of wall painting and tile lying. These frescoes and mosaics depicted scenes of their everyday life and times in a stylised fashion - primitive Egyptian, a style that helped shape Greco-Roman art.

Judaism, Hebraism: The foundation of Christianity and Islamism, a central authority vested in sacred texts. The religion based on a covenant with God and Abraham, the patriarch and progenitor... thought to have been the first monotheistic religion, founded 2000BC. The faith prohibits the making of images in any form thereby restricting visual arts... the setting out of their sacred books, calligraphy, stitching and weaving could be considered the religions fine art.

Christian, Western European: Formed in the first century, separated from Judaism by the declaration of the Saints, derived

from the teachings of Christ - proclaiming The Trinity... continued an existing art style that reverted to a more primitive form - as wall paintings. Later, developed several forms of visual expression developed over the centuries. Later split into two distinct civilisations, each with their own capitals.

Islamic: founded in the seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula. Believes Muhammad is the true Prophet of Allah. Scriptures revealed to other prophets – included Christ and Moses. Islamic art built mainly on the use of mosaics and tile laying – geometric patterns, vibrant saturated colours. This formal pattern transferred to the decoration of clothes, and to an outline of their wall paintings.

Christian Eastern Orthodox: developed in the ninth century, based on the Eucharist - a Christian sacrament of wine and bread ritually consumed... not accepting Immaculate Conception. A medieval art form developed from Greek wall paintings... leading into Byzantine mosaics and panel painting... the only religion that can claim an intimate style of its own.

This account, and accompanying project, is a celebration of panel painting... an art form that lasted a thousand years... Within that millennium, a two-hundred year period, 1350–1550, the Russian National Style developed.

*'The Virgin Mary', is the subject, chosen for this project; to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of panel painting as an art form.'*

The theory, deals with the history, selection of wood - including its proper seasoning, and all the stages necessary in the preparation and construction of a panel... it discusses the mixing

and application of animal glue size, the use of gesso – the plaster coat - how applied, describing the painting technique peculiar to working on gesso. It outlines the materials used, quantity, and prices, giving an idea of time taken and preparations necessary. It covers the difficulties experienced substituting materials, listing a limited selection of bench tools and details construction processes.

All practical skills are covered; past production techniques discussed in relation to today's. The project discusses why certain methods used, why particular colours chosen, and how the painted picture built-up. It points out some of the difficulties and simple errors the artist is confronted with... how to solve some whilst accepting others. I have declined to use modern materials where possible.

In trying to cover every practical eventuality and answer every question, I have to acknowledge the difficulty trying to emulate a style developed so long ago. I hope to prove that those artist/craftsmen deserved their high reputations and their place in history.

The ancient city of Byzantine, today's Istanbul, was founded as a Greek colony – its capital Megara, in 660BC. When the Christian religion was born, recognised, and accepted, its disciples and believers spread north along the Black Sea coast into Europe and the Ukraine.

The Russian people were not all descendants of Iranian tribes, for by far the largest core of Russian nationality is Slavic, people who inhabited the land between the rivers Dnieper and Dniester. All research, prior to written information, is based upon unearthing 'finds', for providing a time in history - toward building a picture.

The history of art relies upon wall paintings, artefacts, and pottery to give some sort of expression - style and feeling, of the community that produced them. Experts declare an opinion upon each new find fitting the disclosure into the existing picture.

Prior to the splitting up of the Roman Empire by Constantine the development of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman wall painting continued at a slow pace. These frescos, decorating either inner or outer walls of premier buildings, were painted on wet or dry plaster, and like all commissioned work assumed common features acceptable to the commissioner.

With the birth of Christ, and his later recognition, by the community and its leaders, as ordained... religious rooms and building were converted and later specially constructed. These early churches decorated according to common practice - for buildings of note, adopting the new religions Prophets, Disciples, and Saints, as fresco and mosaic subjects. These wall paintings, or frescos, and stone/pottery chips, remained static – with the building, needing another form to provide a transferrable more lasting surface for the artist and his materials. Painting onto a wood panel - covered with plaster, provides a sympathetic surface. These were transportable and adaptable, could form an altarpiece or screen.

The Art Style and Form evolved. The picture transcended, from a celebratory and decorative piece to spiritual intermediary – to act through prayer for the believer. The importance to the Eastern Christians of Icons was not planned or envisaged but assumed in time, as a longing for recognition and acceptance of all the suffering born - from wars, turmoil, and suppression.

In 395AD, the Christian Emperor Constantine divided The Roman Empire to create a Western half, based on Rome, and an Eastern half – based on Constantinople - named after its founder.

The Empire covered most of the coastline of the Mediterranean, and its islands, plus Italy and Greece, Turkey and Egypt.

On the death of Justinian 527-565, the eastern Empire called Byzantium maintained Anatolia – mainly Greece and Turkey. Twenty years later, during the iconoclastic controversy, the Greek Orthodox Church split from the Roman half.

The Byzantine Empire reached its height at the turn of the first millennium under the Macedonia dynasty. The Bulgars crushed this, led by Basil II. Islamic expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries reduced the Empire so that by the first part of the beginning of the first millennium Byzantium was still the largest Empire in the Christian world holding, to the east: Asia Minor – today's Turkey, part of Armenia and Cyprus; to the west Greece and the southern Balkans, the Aegean and Ionian Islands, Crete and two isolated islands. Thirty years later, with the death of Manuel I, only Greece, Crete, Cyprus, and part of Turkey remained. Byzantium was a medieval empire peopled by mainly Greeks, speaking the Eastern Slavic tongue - today's Ukrainians and Western Russians.

The Eastern Church, headed by the Ecumenical Patriarch, taught religious scriptures based upon the bible and the Nicene Creed – celebrates the Eucharist.

The eastern Slavs were introduced to this influence with their established art form when they were converted to Christianity. Embracing the new feudal state of Kievan Rus headed by their leader the Great prince of Kiev, Vladimir 980-1015.

Vladimir married Anne, the sister of the joint Emperors of Byzantium, Basil, and Constantine. As a marriage gift, he gave back the town of Kherson and received not only a bride but also many gifts including holy Icons. Returning to Kiev as a Christian, he converted the population and built churches to accommodate

the new religion. These churches needed architects, designers, artists, and building artisans... he enrolled these from Byzantine, sending suitable men in their place to be trained in all these arts.

This is where our story begins, with these craftsmen, in 1037 – when Harold Hardrada joined the Varangian Guard becoming their chief in 1043 and Vladimir's son Yaroslav Grand Prince of Kievan Rus assumed his father's position. It was Yaroslav's dream to make Kiev into a new Russian Constantinople [Tsargrad].

My representational Icon, on the front cover, is based upon the eleventh century mosaic by the Monk Olympus of Pechersk, laid to rest in the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom, Kiev. This was a period of great church building which became a social passion paid for by tithes. The second most important city was Novgorod on Lake Ilmen, east of Moscow.

The new churches some brick others wooden [another National Art form] required decoration, accomplished in the then traditional manner. The form took on a feudal and primitive style. The geometric patterns and human forms were richly coloured copying former work. It was a fresco-painting, mosaic-laying era of great importance, delivering a style developed by past traditions.

The decoration of walls, ceilings, and floors of religious buildings were considered as part of the National heritage ever since the Egyptian Empire. The archaic art style relied upon a broad outline to features and detailing. This seen on mosaics, tile work, frescoes, and wood panels. These decorative finishes were there to add beauty that declared the buildings importance. This continued throughout the ages until, in Greater Russia, after a period of self examination taking four hundred years, the Icon was officially approved, as part of the Holy Liturgy. This occurred about the same time that Yaroslav the Wise assumed

the title Great Prince, in the early part of the eleventh century. This marked the time of religious conversion and the building of many churches... a time of expansion and prosperity.

A high percentage of Russian churches displayed a particular design feature – became an art form in its own right. They were constructed of wood, being the most plentiful local material, showing all the structural rib work within the church interior. Although the exposed wood was rough and unfinished, had a naïve beauty not appreciated at first but eventually becoming accepted as an unique and valued part of the National heritage.

The lower sections of the walls were decorated by the erection of painted panels. This too became part of the design feature - as part of the religious experience. This was the beginning of the development of the Russian Orthodox Church, and their sacred pictures – Icons... this does not mean that all wall paintings were Icons.

Russian churches each had their own Patron Saints. The most important wall panels in each church depicted this saint - held special significance: good harvest, birth of a healthy child, healed certain illnesses, aided the traveller, blessed the home.

Vladimir's son Yaroslav founded the city of Kiev, in today's Ukraine, and the city church of Saint Sofia. For a period, Kiev was the capital of Greater Russia. If you travel north from Istanbul [Constantinople] to Nizhniy-Novgorod [Gorky] you will pass through the western province of Turkey, through Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, and the Ukraine, onwards... into central Russia. This was a packhorse route used by soldiers and merchants, from the Grand Prince's residence to the famous Imperial City.

There is a famous link between the Kings of England and Russia. King Harold I [Hardrada], son of Canute, fled from

northern England to Constantinople. There he wedded Elizabeth, daughter of Yaroslav, thereby becoming King of Norway. He later invaded England and killed Harold II, son of Godwin, just before William of Normandy invaded southern England 1066..., which resulted in Harold's death on the field of battle. Many of Harold men sought shelter abroad eventually making up the Varangian Guard... The Emperor's Guard, becoming one of The Immortals, based in Constantinople. Emperor Monomakh was crowned Metropolitan of Ephesus and later married Gytha, daughter of Harold who died in 1125, buried in the great church of Saint Sofia in Kiev.

The Icon became fully accepted as part of the Holy Liturgy after the struggles between the iconoclasts [those who thought it was idol worshiping] and supporters, who eventually won. By the turn of the first millennium, Icons were an accepted fact both justified and preserved. Icons are not idols but transfigurations. This was the start of the Byzantine period.

Many of the Icons displayed The Virgin Mary, mostly with The Christ Child. It was believed that The Incarnation was linked to The Virgin and the celebration of her feasts - those prayers to her afforded protection. Mary rises up her hands [Orans], in a powerful gesture of intercession. The Russian people receive the blessing of God's eternal Word. As Russia was almost continuously being raided – across her borders, it was natural that 'warrior saint' would also be venerated.

In this book, we are more concerned with the Greco-Russian Novgorod - abstract style, of the period 1350-1550. This National style is demonstrated by 'the champion of this style' Theophanous the Greek, and his pupil Andrew Rublev, 1370-1430. This era was about the same working period as Fra. Angelico, Uccello, and van Eyck's. There were other schools

namely Tver, Pskov, Vladimir-Suzdal, and Moscow, but art critics consider the Novgorod style the most unique.

Art historians and religious experts that the two-hundred-year period, were the most significant, in the production of Icons. It was not just a stagnant period adopting just one style but a progressive one perfecting the construction, preparation, and production, to a remarkable degree, of an art form.

By 1453, the light of the Byzantium Empire – of over a thousand years, had been extinguished; Byzantium was no more. Influence passed into Slav hands – to the northern people. Although political power forgotten its religious power survived in the Orthodox Church - of Eastern Europe... along with the Liturgy and Rituals... Its belief in the established art form continued unabated.

These inspirational steps from the austerity of Mount Athos to the Western art style remained close to the Russian state's power base. Religious art transferred from Greece - by way of Constantinople, to Kiev... thence to Novgorod – 250 miles east of Moscow. In early Russian history, the ruler's power resided in Kiev... it was then taken to Moscow, at the time of Rostislav in 1577.

Novgorod had a number of Greek artists teaching the accepted style. Two of them, Petrovits and Theovan, were the greatest, working there in the twelfth century. This was the start to Novgorod School employing a number of students. Fortunately, the school escaped the terrible subjugation by the Mongol invaders the next century allowing the style to develop further.

Before the end of the fourteenth century, Andrei Rublëf [Andrew Rublev] resided over the greatest Icon period. He had been a student of Theophanous. In this period of calm, the National style survived well into the next century. This was a

century noted for the development of 'Iconostas'. This was an ecclesiastical dividing wall separating the sanctuary from the body of the church... it had always been there but not of such proportions. By 1551, painters and students instructed and trained to model themselves on his work and ideas.

The Iconostas: a wooden screen with central doorway, highly carved, made of individual windows, in many tiers [to take panel pictures] stretching from wall to wall, ground to ceiling. It was a mighty barrier of golden mouldings, statues, drapery, jewels, and religious pictures. No word can express its magnificence and opulence. The windows were filled with panel paintings of all ages. Many of the old venerated works gave the new a passed on importance. Each part of the structure had its own importance; each tier named and respected ascending in order of inherent symbolic power. On the lowest level, The Holy Doors, with the place of honour, on the left, given to the Virgin, and on the other side of the door, the Pantocrator - Christ surrounded by scenes from his life – from Annunciation to Ascension. The second tier, known as the Deisus, the third the Festival tier, and the fourth the Prophets, finally the fifth, given over to God the Father. This brief summary refers to five tiers there are instances of seven.

It is difficult to describe the spiritual significance Icons held – by the peasantry of Eastern Europe and Russia, during the middle of the second millennium. They were more than just religious pictures or objects one prayed before. They held the most important centre of the home; it was if the Icon held the family's heart and body. It did not matter how perfectly painted the Icon was or how polished and dusted... for it had a being of its own. This may have been because it 'had been handed down' – had always been held in esteem and always would be – an

expression of religious thought and piety - as a matter of habit and acceptance – not questioned. However, it was more than that... ‘It was goodwill charm that gave promise to a better future’.

## CHAPTER II

THE EASTERN INFLUENCE:- Byzantium - Vladimir - Building Wooden Churches - Development of existing wall painting – Greek Influence - Frescos on plaster – Gesso - Egg Tempora – Panel Painting – The use of Ciphers – The new art style emerges.

Vladimir, becoming a Christian in 988, returned to Kiev and ordered the conversion to Christianity of all his people. Having received his religion from Byzantium naturally took their religious architecture and art back with him. This was done returning with Greek craftsmen and artists. These artists already had training, which was based upon a particular style. By the time, they reached Kiev and set up shop the art style had by then become highly stylized and formal in execution. There were dictated rules of work and particular forms encompassing representational symbols. The style used dynamic geometrical patterns and lacework in an expressive manner. The depicted human form: representational in style and clothed in drapery assuming elegant folds.

In the middle to late twelfth century, the construction of churches was at a feverous pitch catering for the mass of converts. The producers of panel paintings had to be organized to provide many panels, not just the obvious portraits of Christ, Mary and Nickolas but many other Saints who represented many aspects of human and natural life. A form and style soon

developed that would depict all the spiritual needs for the Icon to represent and at the same time could be produced relatively quickly and cheaply.

The most plentiful material was wood which however prepared was uneven – having a surface unfit to paint. Putting a plaster, a substance that the builders were used to dealing with, coating on the surface would give the required levelness and receptiveness. If this was painted onto a substance like rabbit skin glue that in itself would adhere to the wood's surface this would make plaster the obvious choice of surfaces... by also including the glue into the plaster gesso the chalk's particles would bind together giving it an even greater utility. This was the perfect surface, easy to produce, cheap to manufacture and provide a flexible hard surface.

The natural pigments suspended in water, providing a range of colours, would not when dry cling to the gesso surface, when dry would crack and fall off, without an additional binder. Eggs have been used throughout the ages to act as a binder for various mortars, plasters, and paints here was the perfect binder. Egg yoke gave that natural sticky addition to the water based paints that did not drastically affect the colour, mixing, or application. A final coat of boiled linseed oil and lavender gave the necessary varnish to protect the picture.

The National Style of the 1450s continued the evolution from early Byzantine to the Novgorod School. The egg tempera with a little chalk or gesso worked very much like acrylic paint. How much easier it was for the painter to follow an outline pounced or traced onto the panel without covering the guideline or pinned holes. How convenient, to not worry about detail when the addition of white highlights at the end of painting would produce these... and giving a broad outline with black at the end would sharpen up the picture and cover up any mistakes. As an

artist, this allows a concentration on other factors without being too fussy about bothering with fine detail. This abstract, mannered style was highly suitable for what was being asked of the painter. The result had to draw the congregation's notice – to be almost hypnotic. Having the style, content, colours dictated saved having to think about side issues. It was the mindset of the peasant population giving meaning to the splendour around him that mattered. Here was salvation and comfort from a cruel world – one that gave hope.

The painting style: the use of ciphers - of line, form, and colour - of unvarying tone. Later art schools used bright saturated colours on dark or gold backgrounds. The whole picture outlined and framed in black {nimbi} white [ozhivki] and gold. A great deal of maroon, and orange-red, on articles of clothing and furniture. The painters [atelier] were fully aware that their pictures were not representational - for they had the skill, and education to differentiate the difference. They chose this special form to stylize their work - to achieve a particular emotion in their public. Pedestal plinths and rock steps were schematic with their risers and treads tipping forward.

When Vladimir introduced Christianity into the Ukraine and Russia fresco wall paintings decorated the stone built churches. These painting were executed in the Greco-Roman style, similar to those in their temples and villas showing today – faces showing side view only and the eyes heavily outlined using flat paint without shade. The floors were laid with tile and mosaics – small cubes of marble, pegs of terracotta, coloured stone, broken china and pebbles. These floors were highly decorative and pictorial using the smallest of inlaid stonework. Both these art forms – frescos and mosaics, can still be seen in Egypt and Italy but the finest was in the Byzantine period.

## **CHAPTER III**

YAROSLAV: - Development of Kiev – Capital of Ukraine - The Eastern Church - Church of The Holy Wisdom – Novgorod – Abstract Style – National School – Outlined Drawing – Elongated Features.

Church of The Holy Wisdom, this, The Mother Church of All Russia, founded by Yaroslav, son of Vladimir the Great, the first Rus – Old Russian, to embrace the Christian religion in 988. The following year the church of The Holy Wisdom built and consecrated. Yaroslav the Wise intended to create a rival city to Constantinople called Tsargrad or The New Rome in 990. He supplied the means to instigate the foundation of a truly great city of Novgorod to the young feudal state of Kievan Rus or Ukraine. His interests included all the arts; this prompted the recruitment of teachers and skilled craftsmen who were supplied by the Greek Emperor of Byzantium as a wedding gift... thereafter monks and monasteries blossomed and flourished. This was the start of a five-hundred year development of the Novgorod School with its Abstract Style of religious art. This was in the Golden Age of religious panel painting, 1000-1600AD, in which the subjects used a considerable amount of gold leaf in later periods, outlining, background work, jewels, and halo.

The art style and form, considered over the centuries by art historians as perfection for religious expression, is a style founded in Kiev, between the years 1350 – 1550. This historical account and instructional programme..., the website and research project, applauds and celebrates that two-hundred-year period...

The move from Constantinople by the Eastern Church, away from the invading armies of Islam, and later the Ottoman Turks, transported the faith into Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and further still, into central Russia. This sectarian movement - the Eastern Church fleeing before the Islamic invasion, included skilled artisans, artists, writers, musicians – their social and religious culture, customs, and rites. These paintings became the chief expression and symbol of Russian religious thought, and popular belief; they were primitive and mystical, and full of symbolism. The majority were small paintings on wood – convenient for home use. Those made for the church were approximately life size and painted on smoothed planks of wood, glued, wedged and ledged; a gesso covered surface, on a glue size. The gesso, of liquid plaster – gypsum, supported and held a colour pigment suspended in egg; in some instances, the work was *buon fresco* – colour pigment applied to wet plaster. Overtime, these paintings on panels became more than just religious paintings, becoming sacred, and The Russian National style of Art.

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halo in gold. The hues: bright and saturated, and overall, an emphasis on fine details, almost an over-emphasis, particularly on the features. A rhythmical composition, especially on the cloaks and shifts, with fine white crease lines. The robes painted in two colours their shapes and form outlined in thick black lines. Eyes, forehead, nose, fingers, and toe joints emphasized with fine white lines, *the ozhivki*.

## CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTH OF MUSCOVY: - Orthodox Church - Ivan III – Tsar – Moscow Dominates – Metropolitan Makarie – Churches Stripped – The Moscow School – Stroganov School- The Golden Age of the Icon.

The Christian Church throughout the ages has used religious pictures as an expression of faith and devotion... the subjects based upon the Nativity, Jesus, Mary, the Saints, Disciples, and certain Biblical stories. The art expressed the faith using a stylized configuration of line and form: the colours chosen for each aspect symbolized a particular meaning; the abstract composition emphasized the pictures significance. This spiritual depth – achieved by religious art, was inherent within Byzantine culture and the Orthodox Church... eventually became a highly developed art form.

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from side view to full frontal... eyes almond shaped and heavily outlined, hair combed up and hands expressive. As the Christian church decorators continued their art these frescos became further stylized – using shapes, forms and colours, passed down through the ages... purposely becoming metaphoric - to elicit certain feelings.

In the sixteenth century, during the reign of Ivan III, the centre of artistic life gravitated towards Moscow. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks precipitated the greater influence of the Moscow style, which became illustrative rather than iconographic. These later scenes depicted new science whilst drawing subjects taken from literature of the period. This freedom, from the more traditional style, allowed the artist to show the subjects emotion – expression, and the technique became highly finished. The frescos of Therapontov lead the way to pictures showing beauty, joy, concern, and drama.

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Although the production of Icons continued, particularly by the Stroganov School, which produced miniatures, the old National abstract style lost its importance. The golden age of the Icon, as a great art form, became extinct.

## CHAPTER V

EASTERN ABSTRACT ART:– Mosaics – Church of The Holy Wisdom - Subjects and Symbols - Greek influence – Monk Olympus - Church of the Trinity – The Art of the Fresco Painter – The Gesture of the Hands – The significance use of Colour.

The Virgin Mary, the central figure, suggested by an eleventh century mosaic installed in the cathedral of the Holy Wisdom, Kiev, called ‘The Virgin in Prayer’, designed and laid by the monk Olympus of Pechersk. Prayers to the Virgin afforded protection. The raising up of her hands [Orans] means intercession, the right hand showing this protection ‘by the grace of Jesus Christ’ [an explanatory sign placed there purposely by me plus the use of a chequered inner cloak].

The inner robe red, and outer of blue. Flesh tones of umber, ochre, sienna, and sepia. The figure is standing on a base that is typical, formed by a series of sloping, elevated slabs of rock. The chequered robe also much used to give a formal pattern – used to direct the viewers gaze to the gentle stylized face. The background is a depiction of gold leaf upon a shallow impressed gesso. The frame adapted from the iconostasis or chancel- screen, of the gatehouse Church of the Trinity, 1734-35.

Panel painting was a development - using both the work of the fresco painter and the art form of the mosaic stone layer... the difference being the panel painter’s work could be moved.

The panel painter still painted on plaster only the plaster was laid on a panel of wood, which allowed it to become transportable. However, in the transition the form and style changed... for now the figures and faces were head on - forward

facing. The outline still used to give a clear uncluttered picture, and the style now abstract to give easy recognition. The abstract style was a previous one but by continual application became even more stylized. By this time these painting claimed an added reverence, they became venerated.

As with all Icons, hand positions, are not only significant but also eloquent... noticeable particularly, relative to the face, and other parts of the body. The hands stress the way divine truth is mediated to gain access to God's Kingdom. If the palm of the hand, or hands - offering a blessing, face, or turn, inwards - placed close to the heart, it is referred to as a Jesus Prayer. If the palms show - outwards, it represents the external world.

Look at the shape of the fingers. On many Icons the three fingers: Three, four and five, are not pressed together. The thumb and the fourth finger are crossed. This makes the index finger [2] upright and finger [3] slightly bent. The bent middle finger [5] once again slightly bent, gives the form of a letter 'c'. The letters I, C, X, C, are a Greek abbreviation for Jesus Christ.

Icons are not supposed to be perfect representations, naturalistic works of art, or to be of the natural world. They are of a much higher plain making possible a progression to an 'angelic state'. Icons are used, 'as a servant of the Christian faith'. The body posture, including the hands, conforms to the 'hesychast tradition' - it is about watchfulness and attentiveness. The Hesychastic Prayer: is a mystical prayer - to do with body posture and breathing patterns, which invokes an inner stillness - to withdraw inwards in prayer.

The use of colour has great significance. Through the ages it has become traditional to colour certain forms of dress and background in a particular manner - that gives meaning. Here is a list that can be readily seen in most Icons:

**Crimson red, Vermillion**, represents blood, particularly of Christ, the giving of life for salvation. Often used for the inner shift or cloak. The offering of life, by the Martyrs.

**Scarlet**, used to indicate action or activity, towards a divine life.

**Maroon**, is used for the palliases, or bedding, Mary lies upon.

**Orange** often indicates youthful exuberance and fire.

**Chrome yellow**, used to suggest gold.

**Green**, flora, and things from the earth.

**Azure** blue, the heavens, space, human life, earthly things.

**Indigo**, royal apparel, including shoes.

**Violet** sometimes used to indicate foreignness – of another place.

**Umber**, the earth, wood, nature, the great outside.

**White**, purity, the angels, Christ's mantle, essence of God.

**Black** denotes seriousness and formality.

**Gold**, heaven – beyond this world.

**Khaki**, Cinnamon, a yellowish, brown, greyish – flesh tones

**Brown**, the earth. Used in many instances to outline lesser work.

## CHAPTER VI

THE PROJECT: - The Execution of a Traditional Panel Painting – The Icon - To emulate the Novgorod Style – Tools and Materials – Making the Wooden Panel - Egg Tempora on Gesso - Copying the style of Andrew Rublev.

Today, any reference to an 'Icon' brings to mind a small picture you point to with a mouse - on a computer screen. It's an

instruction using a symbol rather than by word. This definition translates well to panel painting - a picture that takes the place of something else... using an Icon as an intercessory – that acts for you.

In the Greek, Russian, and Uniate Church - of the Ukraine, an Icon was and is a sacred religious picture on wood or other material, of The Lord, The Virgin Mary, A Saint, or Heavenly Body. A representational picture: of a sacred person, a religious group, or biblical scene. Later, civil leaders were included... all believed, would be intercessory to The Lord, to those who asked for it.

Art critics and writers have neglected the Icon as an art form. The many wars - both internal and international, political and religious strife, the emergence of a new Empire, and then its break up, all have played a part to obscure the development of the art form –keeping it within the boundaries of greater Russia. Some believe that Icons are religious pictures, whatever the medium, and substrate.

**For this project, I have chosen this definition:**

*‘An Icon is a transportable, devotional work of fine art, painted on a wood panel... following the original Greek abstract style...’*

In its conception and early life, the Icon had a particular form, colouration, and style. It served to help the people to form a closer relationship with their religion, and religious writings. The form, overtime, gave a meaning to the beholder of what they were seeking. The believer could identify with the form, which was ‘primitive and naturalistic’ the impression could be remembered clearly, and over the generations venerated. It is important to remember that Icons were venerated for the part

they played and not worshipped as idols, which at onetime they were thought to be, even though the older generations thought the Icons were *nerukotvornii* [not made by human hands].

In the lifetime of the Icon, the abstract form became more pronounced. The archaic period came later followed by what was to become a recognisable traditional style in the early 1300s; which preceded a more representational form, which developed into mannerist.

Icons, or panel paintings, are faith objects and serve as reminders – to transcend the material world with its physical reality into a spiritual world of truth and light. They also served as bearers of hope, for the vast majority of Greater Russia: the poor, oppressed, and disabled. As a general statement about colouration, the majority of Russian panel paintings were predominately red or maroon and brown. After the middle of the fifteenth century, gold began to appear, particularly for the background, halo, outlining, and highlights. In many scenes the paths, small mounds of rocks, steps and plinths are drawn ‘out of square’ or, ‘out of perspective’ – the treads and risers sloping, or falling, forwards. It was believed this gave the picture a feeling of distance.

Painting fine art pictures onto wood, rather than any other substrate, has a history of its own. It was performed by many cultures for its convenience, versatility, and ease of handling. Perhaps its greatest facility was its transportability and permanence of image. It is little wonder then that it was used extensively by religious artists as a way of transmitting to the people another life – beyond daily existence – one that they could appeal to - to seek comfort and absolution. Over time, the paintings assumed an even greater significance – to be revered and blessed with supernatural powers. After many pictures had

been produced - by repetition... a form devised that passed onto new generations the message of redemption: by colour, style, and form, becoming representational and mannered. This form of art was a development of Middle Eastern temple painting, Greek and Italian frescos, and religious painters, after the death of Christ in Rome. The painters, with their artistic style and materials, travelled northwards, along with their benefactors, when the Christian Church split - to become an eastern and western part. The eastern art movement travelled from Greece up through Asia Minor to Southern Russia and Kiev as Islamic dominance came behind, to spread its empire. As the art movement moved north, each country offered some influence. Syria onto Anatolia, Armenia into the Caucasus the influence of the letterform and writings. The juxtaposition of primary colours, the scenes built up working from right to left; the stress on 'the meaning' the features now dark brown or deep red, stressing a certain mournfulness with tenderness. The further north the more ethereal the painting became. Gone the distant aloofness, and ascetic disdain; the invitation to lavishness, full colour, and clearness of line, proclaimed a greater surety and confidence.

In the two hundred year period, we are to emulate, 1350-1550; the wood was split from the trunk using an axe and hammered wedges - to form baulks and then planks. If the wood worked soon after the tree felled, this splitting was relatively simple to achieve. The split planks were made uniform, to a number of set sizes: for building work, furniture manufacturing and sundry other tasks. They were stacked on 'stickers' to allow circulating air to season the wood - this may have taken months or years, depending on the woods eventual use [this is known as 'putting the wood in stick']. Although this appears at first glance to be rather crude, the artisans were experts - all buildings were

of wood and the operations for cutting and smoothing commonplace. Large panels made by gluing planks together with inserted wedges, plus ledges and braces to prevent twisting and splitting. This method used for panel making and furniture making. The face of the panel worked over with an adze and then scraped and sanded. Finally, a large flat stone spun on the surface with fine silver sand to give a final smooth finish.

Both the smoothing of the surface and the application of the first coats of size give the surface a ‘thirsty’ surface and ensure following coats of surface preparation will adhere properly. The size or primer: will help to fill in the pores of the wood, prevent the gesso from drying out too quickly, and make the new surface more receptive to the gesso.

Frequent applications of thin coats of size, and later, gesso, before the previous coat fully dry should prevent the surface from cracking. Naturally, all these surface materials are water based... after the final coat of gesso the panel dried naturally for at least two days before sketching-in the drawing’s key lines. I have screwed a batten to the top of the frame to accept a pinned tracing that can be flapped back.

## **THE PROJECT**

- **Aim:** to produce a Panel Painting, measuring 61cm x 43cm.
- **Object:** to emulate the same style, use the same materials, and perform the same techniques, as a painter in the fourteenth century - to match the golden days of Andrew Rublev, associated with the Russian National and Novgorod style, of 1350-1430.

- **The Subject:** The Virgin Mary. She, the first-born of the new creation – the renewal of all, born on earth – the mother of all renewed humanity... was the incarnation of The Son of God.

- **Method:** I shall set out all the steps and tools necessary to achieve the aims and objectives without embellishment. In a manner that anyone with some limited skills could attain, giving UK's prices and purchasing restrictions, according to weight, pigment, and quantities, from a registered distributor.

## **TOOLS, MATERIALS & CONSTRUCTION**

As with any job, it is essential to have at least the minimum tools, equipment, space, and bench. These do not need to be of the highest standard but adequate. If an essentials is missing, or below minimum standard, frustrations will set in, and the job will suffer.

Have to hand these necessary tools... some tools can double up to serve other purposes. Do not attempt to work with badly made or deficient materials. Buying the very best professional tools is not necessary; there are some very reasonably tools on the market that will fit our purpose... it is also possible to purchase some excellent second-hand tools which will give you an added goal to keep the old tools in use.

### **Equipment:**

Workbench

Carpenters horse/stool

**Wood:** *Pinaceae*: common names: Redwood, Fir, Red, or Yellow Deal, the original wood worked in Russia, Siberia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the course of centuries of panel painting, many types of wood were used – much depending on what was locally available. However, any that was knotty, hard, and very closely grained - emitting sap and resin, put aside, in favour of clean knot free, easily workable wood.

**Amount and Size:**

Nos. 1. 25 x 225mm x 1.20m, plank.

Nos. 1. 25 x 50mm x 2.70m, batten.

Total cost: £11.52, VAT 1.73.

**Tools:**

Square

Tenon saw, with 250mm, 14 pt., blade

Electric drill, 2-speed.

Quick release drill system - Countersink Nos 8 & 10

Block plane

Ratchet screwdriver

Rasp

40 Brass wood screws @ 90p per ten.

Fish glue

Mitre block/box

Pencil

Medium Sandpaper

Tape measure.

## **CHAPTER VII**

CONSTRUCTING THE PANEL:- Wood Selection – Making the Frame - The use of tools – Applying the original techniques – Carpenters skills – The Workbench – Carpenters Horse – Screws and Pegs – Scraping and Sanding - Rabbit Skin Glue – Sizing,

### **MAKING THE PANEL**

- Cut the 25x225mm plank to a length size of 61cm – to form two pieces of the same length..., these are later butted together to form a panel..
- Sand paper the rough ends of all cut wood.
- Create, with the 25x50mm batten, a frame, using the mitre box to cut the corners... to be later, glued and screwed onto the outer edges of the panel.
- Position one of the prepared long frame sides to one of the boards. Drill four holes and countersink. Apply glue and screw down one-side of the frame.
- Fit the top of the frame to the corner of the same board. Using a T-square, square-up the top, drill and countersink three holes. Glue and screw in position.
- Repeat the process to produce the bottom batten of the frame.
- Position the other panel board and mark out where the top and bottom battens fall.
- Removing the second panel apply glue to the traced out batten positions and along the edge that is going to marry up with the other board.
- Offer-up the second panel and screw in position.
- Offer-up the last remaining frame side, drill, and countersink four holes. Glue and screw this into position. Wipe away all extraneous glue.

- Cut a centre ledge piece, dill and countersink, glue and screw into the centre of the panel to help prevent the panel twisting.
- Plane away any discrepancies. Sand paper smooth all parts of the job and leave - to dry the glue overnight. Stand the panel in a draughty dry environment to further season the wood for about a week before the application of the wood size – to fill the pores of the wood and give a gripping surface for the next coat.

During all seasoning, the wood cell structure moves/flexes unevenly. Where you might have a perfectly level joint and smooth even finish - prior to additional seasoning, further drying off might change the wood's finish.

This additional seasoning, can take any number of weeks to make the panel suitable for placing into a well-heated interior room. The applications of: size, gesso, tracing, sketching, colouring, varnishing and gluing a material back-cover, will give the wood additional time to acclimatize. Even so, care should be taken to slowly bring the finished article into a centrally heated atmosphere.

The importance of correct drying out – seasoning, cannot be over emphasized. Any wood product must be seasoned appropriately for its eventual final position. Unseasoned wood is prone to decay, warp, and split. All timber has a degree of moisture within its cell structure. For our project, this moisture should be extracted by the time the final application of varnish made.

When moisture is withdrawn, the cell walls shrink. This is most apparent where the growth rings are. For our panel these rings are along the longest sides. Uneven shrinkage is the cause of splits, shakes, checks, and twisting. The ends of our cut wood, is where most moisture escapes. This maybe reduced by covering the ends... however, this may show in the face of the panel.

Once the timber has passed ‘fibre saturation point’ greater movement follows.

A number of factors affect the strength of any timber: place of tree growth, method of cutting, and where the tree grown relative to landscape.

Redwoods are a more primitive plant than hardwoods. There are two types of cells – elongated cells arranged in radial rows – pass the trees food..., and cube shaped cells, which store the food. The resin canals store resin that is secreted to keep the cell structure flexible. When seasoned there is a tendency for the wood to become discoloured – by blueing.

## **APPLYING THE GESSO**

The object of applying gesso: to provide a permanent smooth surface, allow a certain amount of scraping back to make corrections, give a surface that will hold a low carved-relief effect, successfully take-up the paints vehicle, and to make sure the paint’s pigment adheres to the surface...

Before the gesso is applied, the wood’s surface is primed using...

## **RABBIT SKIN GLUE:**

Available as a powder or granular - it’s more popular form. A number of coats of size and gesso applied to the panel. Both the size, and gesso, needs a binder, either parchment clippings, and, in this case, high quality animal skin glue. There is no need to worry about the mixture becoming solid, rancid, or acid. Once mixed, the rabbit glue will last for as long as necessary.

A cupful of rabbit skin granules placed in a bowl. Pour in an equal amount of cold boiled water to cover..., leave to soak

'fatten' overnight. In the morning, the granules will be puffy and swollen - lumped together. Now place the bowl into a saucepan of water with two further cupfuls, of water in the mixture... the glue, to gently heat, stirring occasionally, until runny – without any lumps. Do not boil, for this weakens the composition, and causes bubbles. Once reduced - free from lumps, this becomes the stock mixture - the basis for all glues, size/primers and gesso... kept in its basin - within the heating pan. This stock mixture should be of sufficient quantity to complete the whole job. For our job, to cover a panel, 30 x 20 inches... a cupful of granules, to three cupfuls of water, is sufficient.

## **SCRAPING AND SANDING**

You may think that the surface you have prepared is reasonably level and free from faults. Once you start painting however, it soon becomes apparent that there are many uneven areas. This will disappoint and cause you concern if serious. That is why it is so important that you paint evenly and consistently, applying the gesso in coats - laid at right angles to each other. Your design and painting will dictate how much unevenness the job will stand. Already the job has taken you ten days with considerable preparation and careful handling. Make sure you do not allow yourself to be too hurried, lose patience, or make serious errors – damage the surface. There is no need for the whole surface of the wood to be as even as plate glass. The painting will cover up a certain amount of discrepancies. Once the surface has been prepared - to accept the drawing, cover all areas not being worked on - to protect the surface. The surface of the gesso, once painted and left to dry will be smooth, if slightly uneven. If you sand the surface, it is best to polish afterwards using a damp cloth to work-up a new surface. This is known as

‘water polishing’. I advise however to leave well alone, if possible, relying upon a good even application of gesso.

Either applying watercolour paints to dry plaster, *Fresco*, or, *Buon Fresco*, wet plaster, is a demanding occupation because the painter has to know what hue the colour will return to when dry. *Fresco*: the application of watercolour paint for interior work and *Buon Fresco*: for exterior work – applying paint to recently applied plaster before it has dried. On dried plaster, the paint vehicle [water] is sucked into the porous plaster leaving the pigment on or close to the surface. On a damp surface, both the vehicle and the pigment taken into the plaster – makes a longer lasting finish.

For my painting, I shall work on a natural gesso finish using a reduced tempera colour as a priming coat for each section, gradually working up the finish mixing both white of egg and the yoke. Once completed, I shall apply a series of shellac varnish coats - to obtain greater saturation, depth of colour, and permanence of image.

It was not usual, by panel painters, up to the middle period [1450], to work gold into their designs. Gold was introduced increasingly after this period. By 1450, the style was very much less flamboyant - an evolution of traditional Greco-Italian wall painting based in Kiev – ‘Old Russia’. I intend to maintain that style using my paints to emulate gold.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **PRIMING AND SIZING**

Making up the Stock Gesso – Priming the surface - Creating the Working Surface – Applying many coats – Impasto Work - Sanding and Scraping – Smoothing and Polishing – Protecting the Work Surface...

Using a one-inch brush, paint a thin coat of gesso on all surfaces of the wood... This aqueous mixture acts as a priming coat..., a second and third coat, can be painted on when the previous dry, and rubbed down with fine sand paper. Further coats can be added plus the inclusion of a level-tablespoon of whiting in the primer. The 'take-up' all size and gesso it is better when it is slightly warm. Whenever you add whiting to the gesso, water, or glue, allow the chalk to settle gently on the bottom of the pan, letting the air bubbles disperse - before stirring and mixing-in. The primer coats must be allowed to dry out overnight. If at anytime during the making of size or gesso: the mixture starts to bubble, has bubbles, or a scum – this should be gently scraped from the surface of the gesso. Some workers sieve the gesso to remove any residue, foreign bodies, and bubbles. Fortunately, my gesso is free from any of these and quite fit to use. Sandpapering each coat of gesso is also advised this too I have shied away from. It is sometimes possible to spoil the surface, if the lower coats are still too damp. Once the seven coats of gesso laid the result can be allowed to thoroughly dry out over two days before lying on the traced lines.

Keep your stockpot free from a build-up of glue at the sides, and whilst keeping it in the outer pan remove it from the heat, adding a little water to make up for evaporation.

On many old original panels, the back of the panel was treated in the same way – primed and coated with gesso. However, I believe it is better to allow the panel to retain its ability to breath and fully season, during the painting procedure... so I intend to leave the back alone, except to cover with green baize - when the panel is finally finished. Many old

panels had a linen scrim '*intelaggio*' placed over the size in areas of joints, splits and shakes – the reinforcement there to prevent the gesso cracking. I trust ours will not need this!

In ancient times, gesso was used for both wall paintings and wood panels. The mixture was made of gypsum [similar to plaster of Paris], a hydrated form of calcium sulphate, and a natural chalk substance. The differences between all these plasters. This is baked, in an oven, which removes any vegetable matter, and then crushed to a powder much like modern day whiting. Gesso whiting is calcium carbonate – natural chalk, a product of Northern Europe.

Add the whiting gradually into the heated rabbit glue, [the binder], mixing to ensure no lumpiness. Continue doing this until the mixture has the consistency of emulsion paint – this will take 500kg of whiting.

Paint a full coat of this creamy mixture onto the panel in one direction and allow the surface to dry out white [the under-surface can retain a minute amount of moisture]. Continue adding further coats in a similar manner - reversing the direction of the brush strokes each fresh application. When all the coats of *gesso grosso* and *gesso sottile* – thick and thin, laid-on, and completely dry [for two days at least], then the surface can be lightly sanded.

As to the number of coats: I would suggest three coats of primer [each coat will take about two hours to dry], and seven coats of thick, emulsion weight, gesso, There is no harm done if the gesso is used whilst still slightly warm in fact it maybe easier to apply. However, it is best to apply full coats at a reasonable speed without going back on yourself - to try to smooth it out. Keep the panel flat do not attempt to float the coats on by tipping the board. The object is to build up a minimum one millimetre thick layer. If you require some shapes to be impressed, do this whilst the plaster is still damp, make sure the

layer laid on at least twice as thick [the thicker the gesso the more pronounced the intaglio work]. All coats applied, just when the surface of the previous becomes dry and white... this will mean the underside of the plaster may still be damp. Try to complete the gesso work in one day. The following day check carefully the surface. If there appear minute, pinholes, which look like the face of smooth, coral consider painting two further coats of thin gesso maybe necessary. Remember that applying egg tempera to the surface will cover up some surface deficiencies. When finished, allow a further two days to totally dry out before lightly sanding the surface with the finest of papers using a wood block to give a controlled level surface... only attempt this if necessary.

## CHAPTER IX

### TRACING THE GUIDELINES

Pastiglia [Impasto] – Gesso Grotto – Gesso Sottile – Perfect Surface Creation – Creating the Image – Deciding on the Colours – Rough Drawings - Working Drawings, Fair Copy - Traced Lines – Creating the Key Image – Transferring the Keyline Drawing.

Having decided on the subject, which in this case is The Virgin Mary, the original finished sketch, or original artwork, needs to fit the proportions of the panel. This can either be done using a grid system of lines on both the original and on the panel then drawing in the outline of the subject, or, a Keyline tracing made of the original then photocopying, by enlargement, to the size required – pasting the sheets together if beyond the capabilities of the copier. The guidelines you need on the panel will correspond to the style and form you wish your painting to

take – minute detail - for a tight interpretation, minimum outline - for a freer, looser finish. It is better to have a clear, detailed, and accurate series of guidelines rather than a limited line sketch, which causes later confusion and much working out to follow. If you start, painting using only the minimal guide lines you will have to resort to using the brush to draw with. Whichever system you adopt most subjects will need detailed brushwork taking many days

## **TRANSFERRING THE GUIDELINES**

To achieve a right reading transfer of the enlarged tracing the back of the tracing rubbed over with charcoal, soft lead pencil or conte crayon. Then the lines retraced through using a sharpened rounded metal tool – very much like a metal knitting needle.

Alternatively, turning over your tracing onto a light box or sheet of plate glass - allowing light to show up the lines on the reverse side of the tracing, retrace all the keylines with a 6B pencil. Once finished the sheet reversed - now laid down right reading onto the gesso surface, and by applying pressure to each line, with a smooth polished bone or small flat stick – wooden ruler, transfer the lines onto the gesso surface. Do not use carbon paper as the transfer medium because the carbon is greasy. Obtain a blue non-greasy transfer-paper for the best results. At the time we are wishing to emulate the artist would have drawn his guidelines with a brush most likely using verdant rather than sienna.

## **IMPASTO IMAGES [Pastiglia]**

Some of your work may require an impasto - raised, proud, image: background panelling, halo, jewellery etc., this can be achieved by using thick gesso applied with a brush, palette knife, or by dribbling/dropping the gesso on with a stick.

I am going to use a brush, first to apply rabbit glue to those areas to be raised, and then applying the gesso, in a series of coats, when almost dry – the rabbit glue being a better attachment for the gesso.

The small beads around the outside of the halo, and the inner ring, will, I believe, benefit from a raised surface, as will the two flower designs on the cloak, the headscarf's cross and the pupil of the eyes.

## **APPLYING THE BINDER**

Keeping to the aims of the project: I shall apply paint, simulating the artists of five hundred years ago - using the 'fixing' medium of an egg. There are many other binders but none so reliable, equally long lasting, and easily available. The object of using the egg binder is not to alter the colour, add glaze or improve the brushing technique. It is purely to stick the pigment to the surface – stop the pigment rubbing off, prevent flaking, allow some surface flexibility, and to give protection whilst the job is worked on. However, both the yoke and white give a glaze – which is unnecessary, because the panel will be varnished, when the painting completed. If the colour applied, too wet bubbles will appear. It is very difficult to obtain evenness of colour.

As previous Icon painters, I shall use a limited palette..., to as many of today's natural colouring pigments as possible, although most of the pigments would have been available to the Russian painters, they would have been in a cruder form.

Both the yoke and the white of egg can be used: the yoke adds a gelatine/thin jelly, smoothness, which attaches easily to the gesso, adding fluidity whilst maintaining transparency; the 'white' adds glair, gives a clear adhesiveness, which dries extremely hard. It is natural to use more yoke for the under-colours, then applying the white as an extra glaze and hardness, closer to the final surface. Both however, are used in proportion to the effect the artist desires either giving greater workability using the yoke, or finished brittle hardness adding the white. It is not necessary to use the white of egg particularly if the finished result is to be varnished. The finished colour is not permanent – can be, reduced with water. This 'tempering' the pigment, or conversion by adding the 'binder' - to a more acrylic like medium, gives workability, stickability, and hardness to the pigment. Using either or both, the artist will find the paint dries quickly. Extra body added by including in the mixed colour some whitening or gesso. This addition of this chalk mixture gives: added body to the paint removes minute bubbles, smoothness, opacity, and whiteness. Unfortunately, it also reduces saturation, by adding white and takes away the colour's brightness and transparency. A final emphasis to fine detail can be made using a *buon fresco* method. The egg tempera technique requires delicate almost dry brush-strokes 'shaping-up' the picture - to give modelling. Do not use copious amounts of water to 'float-on' colour, it will not work you will only lift off what you have already applied. The hard, non-porous gesso surface will only allow a dry-brush or stippling technique to build-up weight of colour. Any deficiencies 'entered-in' using stipple. In effect, it is like painting on white Formica, or glass – no soaking in, difficult to vignette, almost impossible to maintain fine lines – 'over colouring' will only disturb the underlying colour – weight of colour achieved by 'working-up' the pigment.

## **CHAPTER X**

### **THE PAINTING SEQUENCE**

Collect your Palette – Working from Light to Dark, Cold to Warm – Protecting the Working Surface – Special features – Abstract Style – Emulating the Master – The use of Gold – Scraper Work – Mixing gesso into the paint – making the paint opaque.

### **THE OUTER FRAME**

Covering up most of the Keyline drawing - to protect the surface, I shall complete each side of the outer frame using: Warm Sepia, Burnt Sienna, Brown Madder, Raw and Burnt Umber and Windsor Yellow.

### **THE HEADBOARD OR PELMET.**

Using the same range of colours and painting techniques, I shall complete the simulated wood-carved panel above The Virgin's Head. Both the outer carved frame and pelmet are later additions to the original panel painting. In the period we are dealing with, 1350 – 1550, this extravagant ornamentation was not available, nor considered. The original frame would have been a simple painted moulding more appropriate to the general decoration of the time. What we have here is a typical gold-leaf covered moulding of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in keeping with the Icon and its probable inclusion within an Iconostasis.

## **THE CHECKERBOARD CLOAK-LINING.**

A study of Icons will show the use of a checkerboard design in black and white usually for the lining of a top garment – cloak or mantle. The design was adopted to give formality forcing the onlooker to study the face of the subject given a studied look of tenderness or seriousness. There are a number of different designs from blocking out every other square to every fourth square – in sequence. It certainly catches the eye, which is what it is meant to do but does not sit comfortable amongst other more conventional studies.

## **ROCKY OUTCROP**

In many panel paintings is to be seen the subjects placed amid a rocky outcrop of rocks, or steps. On others, the subject is standing on a plinth. All aspects of the painting are directed to telling a story, a feeling, or emotion. The ascending rocky steps, the raised figures the suspended group are meant to convey a journey, a story, or subject's position beyond the normal day-to-day life. The sloping risers and treads to the front are to give an additional feeling of distance.

## **SLEEVES OF UNDERGARMENT**

Bluish/Green, the undergarment – shift, in green to indicate Mary's beginnings as a person from the soil, from the 'country'. The colour suggests naturalness, has a calming influence is the colour of the countryside.

## **MANTLE**

Shown in blue - to depict the sky and all things in heaven – over the earth. Subject above earthly things – beyond reach.

## **CLOAK**

The blood of Christ - giving up life – The Martyrs - The act of Salvation, from human bondage – saving the soul and the deliverance from sin.

## **FACE, HANDS & FEET**

Most faces were long with the men having high bulbous foreheads and sunken eyes. Small finely chiselled feet and delicate hands. White/Ivory highlights outlining all features and bone structures. Beards and hair, given shape and texture by white highlights. All lines curved giving emphasis to facial creases... staring eyes and well-defined ears. Portraits could be forceful, forbidding, and serious. Whereas women were depicted as, gentle, loving, kind, and compassionate, men were stern and serious.

## **GOLD BRAID**

All clothing edged with gold braid to suggest the object was rich with heavenly blessings. This was not to suggest financial betterment, wealth or position but of things beyond earths promise.

## **OUTLINE**

All Icons of this period were outlined in white and black. Black was reserved for the main subjects to pick them out in

poor light – to be easily seen at a distance. The artist used his ‘rest board’ to run his brush up against to give a straight line. Most of the outlining was thus: straight, board and distinct. This defined the abstract mannered style more than anything else did.

## **WATER GILDING**

Although I shall not be including any gilding to this work, because this project aims at work produced in the middle of the fifteenth century, when gold leaf was rarely used, I feel I ought to at least give some guidance as to how one sets about it, remembering that gilding was the final action when completing the painting.

i. To prevent either metallic powder or leaf attaching itself to any part of the work French chalk or whitening is dusted on those parts to be gilded using a cotton wool powder puff. [It is best not to use talcum powder]

ii. An undercoat/size, or bole, is painted where the metal top surface is to lie. A colour can be introduced which closely resembles the metal applied; this masks any deviation when attaching the powder or leaf – in this instance chrome yellow – this under colour has a colouring effect upon the metallic leaf. After 1450, when gold leaf became increasingly popular – to further heighten the value of the Icon and to give brilliance, the tacky under colour, or clay bole, was deep maroon red, a colour often seen outlining the Icon’s detail.

iii. The artist might chose a more simple means to apply gold leaf to small areas by mixing rabbit skin glue to his paint, then by checking the tackiness with the back of his hand before applying the gold, to make sure there was sufficient tack. For small areas it is unnecessary to use a clay bole as the under colour. Whatever the tactic used the object is to secure the gold leaf - as a

permanent feature. The final coats of varnish will also assist to hold the leaf in place.

iv. Using a guilders tip [a broad brush] rub through your hair to give the hairs some static electricity pick up a sheet of gold leaf previously removed and cut to size from the book – the sheets of gold are interleaved between rouged sheets of velum.

v. Place the gold leaf onto the painted area... continue until the area to be covered is covered. Then dab down with a guilders mop [fat round brush] into every corner and line. Any gaps, holes, or errors masked using gold leaf particles or brass powder.

vi. Now, polish with a bone burnisher to bring out the shine, compress the leaf into the glue, and attach the leaf to all contours of the moulding or impasto work.

## **VARNISHING**

To preserve the finished work, shellac or copal varnish, within a mixture of linseed and lavender oil - the main ingredients, in a spirit base, is painted on using seven coats. A suitable commercial varnish is 'Easy French Polish' where at least five coats applied. Finally, allow seven days, to dry thoroughly.

## **BACKING THE FRAME**

To allow the wood to breathe the back of the frame is covered with a green base or felt cloth stuck to the outer edges. Completing the task by screwing two mirror plates, to the back of the panel frame, 1/3 down each upright – side-frame. The panel should be hung with a slight forward tip – this prevents reflection.