

28th October 2013

Day One, Monday Feast of St Simon and St Jude

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## **ICONS: learning to "SEE WITH THE EYE OF THE HEART"**

One of the main weaknesses of icon painting is the lack of understanding of the anatomical structure of the human form.

Learn how to develop powers of observation and analysis. Understand composition. Details are significant and important.

Look at the brush strokes very carefully. Question why they are applied in a certain direction. Look at details very closely.

Icons are painted using timeless principles. Each icon will express uniquely. Although there is diversity, there is also unity.

Theology: there are three basic elements

### 1. The Fall

Man pulled out the plug and disconnected from the Creator. The lamp went out.

### 2. The Incarnation

God came to earth as man so that man can shine with the light of divinity again.

### 3. Deification/Transfiguration

Matter can become grace bearing.

Icons are made from the elements. Animal kingdom, earth/minerals, water...grace bearing matter.

Divinity revealed through matter.

'Holy' means 'dedicated to'.

Halo indicates inner light, divine radiance.

Logical, rational, supra rational - material and spiritual worlds.

It would be good to revive the western tradition of iconography, such as the Romanesque period.

Additional notes to the printed pages given out:

The church fathers gave solid reasons in favour of icons - which include frescoes and embroideries.

The whole reason of the incarnation was to deify us, Christ is fully God and fully man. The Theotokos - the mother of God - affirms Christ's full humanity and full divinity.

Icons create a yearning for the person depicted. We are not looking at a picture, but at a saint.

We have an inner memory of paradise, icons bring people home. True beauty calls us higher to reawaken our memory of paradise. A feeling of 'instacy' (as opposed to 'ecstasy') which is outside of us.

'If you want to find God, plunge into yourselves'.

Worship is due to God alone, "Latreia"

Veneration is due to vehicles of grace "proskesis"

The church has always venerated relics as grace bearing matter, icons are made to be used. God can use icons as a vehicle.

The unusual forms of perspectives in icons can initiate us into seeing in different perspectives. Iconographers must develop their own spiritual skills to initiate others into a new way of seeing. Develop ways of explaining their meaning to others.

The name on the icon makes the icon an icon. We venerate the icon that bears the name. Old Testament names contain some reference to God.

The calligraphy of the written name is very important.

Tradition that St Luke wrote the first icon.

## EGG TEMPERA MIX

Be organised and tidy, have an uncluttered desk.

One egg mixed up should last a week to ten days, kept in the fridge.

Egg tempera mix is a mini ecology. Use free range eggs, do good things on a small scale. Christian ecology should be present in the making of the icon.

Separate the white from the yellow. Wash hands in between and wipe dry on kitchen towel to remove all the white. The protein of the egg forms a binder to the pigment.

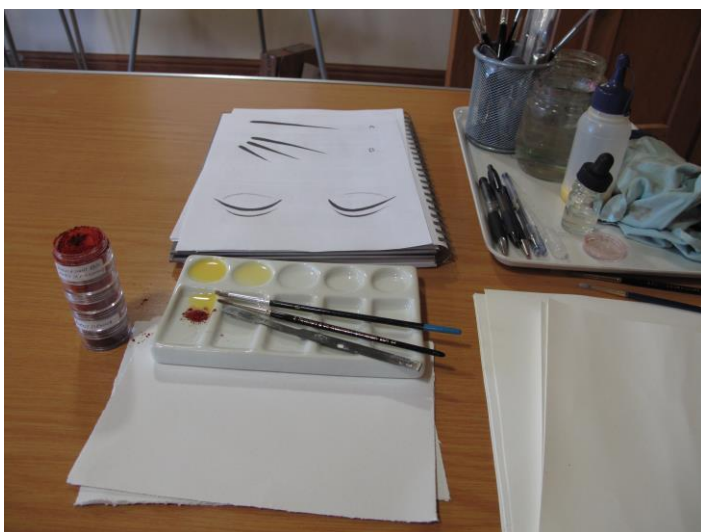
Use 50% egg, 30% water, 20% alcohol (gin/vodka) preservative.

Russian method uses vinegar drops, but this is acidic and some pigments, like azurite are sensitive to acid. Vinegar cuts the fat content and affects the flow of the paint. Monochrome is fine with vinegar as long as it is in the earth pigments. See Aidans book for which pigments are sensitive to acid.

The combination of egg to pigment is critical. The egg must be saturated with pigment to a consistency of cream before distilled water is added. The yellow colour from the yolk disappears. Drop the egg mix into dimple one, then 20% egg 80% water into dimple two, then all water in dimple three.

Carry out brush exercises on card (paper will buckle).

Use a palette with round dimples (**not** like mine!) as the flat bottomed ones dry out so quickly. Have plenty of scrap paper under the palette to test the translucency of the paint after each dip into the pigment. Use a palette knife, not spoon, to scoop up the pigment.



Have a large container of water, like a jug or large jar to rinse brushes. Have a pipette for adding water, and a synthetic brush for mixing.

EGG FIRST THEN ADD PIGMENT! Add drops of egg with your brush into the sloping trough then use a palette knife to take out the pigment and mix until it is thick and of a creamy consistency and cannot take any more. You can grind with a muller on glass, as some pigments do need grinding.

## **BRUSH STROKES**

Add water according to what you are painting. Test on scrap paper. Sometimes you need two mixes, one concentrated, one more fluid.

Check for translucency. When finished, wash the brush and squeeze it out on the cloth. Pigments build up so do wash out daily with paint brush soap.

There are two main brushes used for icon painting:

sable - springy

Squirrel-softer

Use sable for the calligraphic brush strokes, designer brushes sizes no 2 or 3.

Elbow on the table, relaxed movement, use the whole arm, brush pointing in the direction of movement. Brush to be held at 45 degrees to the paper.

Start with a point, then the line gets wider, dip brush half way into the paint mix. Line should be made up thinking of how a swan lands on a lake, gliding down gently, not a helicopter landing. End the stroke with the bowl/belly of the brush. Make a nice gradual increase in line width. NO wrist movement, it is all from the arm.

When you are confident with the lines, vary the lengths and angles.

Practice painting lines to achieve distinction and unity.

Eyebrows are built up using a thin wash curve first, then add a deeper thinner brow line. No division, no confusion. The lines must grow out of nothing.

## **MODELLING**

### Petit lac/ Puddling/wet on wet

Apply a reservoir of bold colour, then quickly wash your brush, dip it in your glaze and puddle the glaze up to the edge of the paint pool and then manipulate and bleed the paint outwards. When the paint has dried, apply further coats. Working quickly apply dark, then lighter washes.

Refer also to p207 in Aidan's book.

### Dry Brush technique

This method has more control. Observe your prototype study area and make the shape carefully.

Dry the brush and fan out on scrap paper until there is less and less pigment. Paint the form accurately and then feather the edge. Use the glaze to thin the paint. Build up in layers to get an even effect. The byzantine technique uses lots of fine lines.

- A Dry Brush
- B Variation
- C Puddle
- D Puddle fanned

Over-egging the mixture can leave the surface greasy, with no purchase. Can lead to cracking in future.

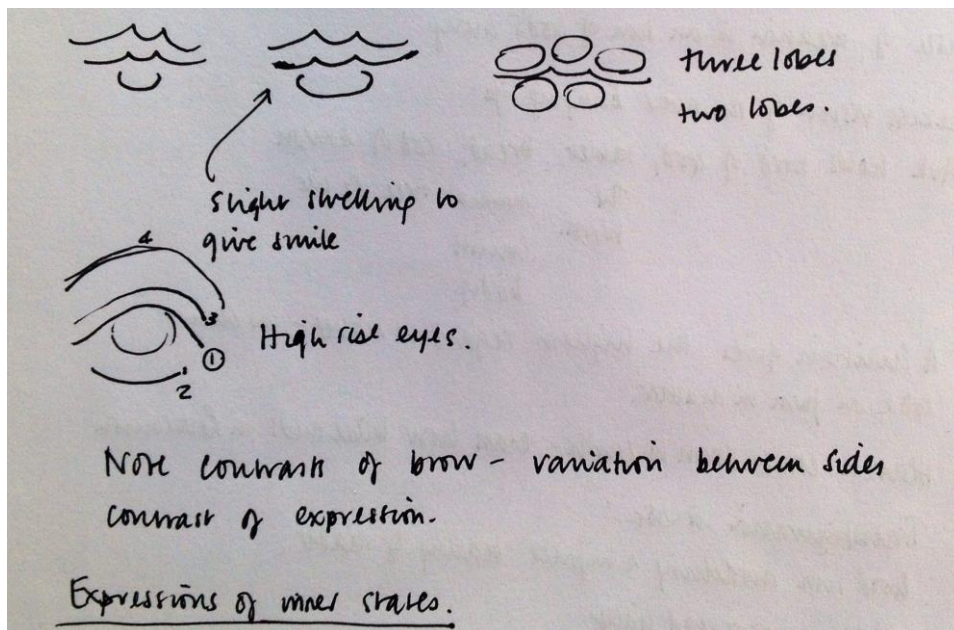
## **PORTRAIT STUDY**

The monochrome studies should not be traced. We aim to be able to sketch with the brush using a very dilute mixture of red ochre. You can just use a pigment and water mix to sketch out the structure and proportions. We have to learn to get under the skin of icons.

Understand the proportions of the body and face. Average body is 7.5 to 8 head lengths in height. (In Georgian icons the eyes are placed higher). Establish the correct general proportion first and really study the face going through all the points below by eye, before applying the brush strokes.

1. Make the head shape first.
2. Assess the turn of the head, to establish the centre line.
3. Map out the position of the mid line for the eyes.
4. Nose end is a quarter of the way up, sometimes a bit more.
5. Note the general energetic movement of the face, hair, neck, beard etc
6. LOOK! Then look again, observation of relationships of features` is key.
7. Notice the eye space between the eyes and the bridge of the nose. Note the variations of the bridge, pointed, curved, straight.
8. Look at the eyes in relation to the width of the face.
9. Look at the hair line. The brow hair usually starts a quarter of the way down.
10. The nose consists of the bridge, the stem, bowl and nostrils.

11. The lips consist of three lines drawn horizontally, with curves to show the lip lobes. The lines of the lips do not meet at the corner of the mouth. Instead a slight smile is shown by a swelling of the mid lip line at each end.



12. The eye and brow is drawn in stages, upper lid, lower lid, mid crease and brow.

13. The ear is located between the eyes and nose.

*NB All the monochrome studies should be carried out on watercolour paper to stop the paper from buckling.*

**Don't be afraid of making mistakes.**

A square synthetic brush is effective in removing mistakes. It needs to be short and square edged, and you can always cut through a pointed brush with a scalpel to make a square edge.

**"Always strive to do something better"**

Evening lecture "the Theology of the Icon" by Aidan Hart.  
Written notes on hand out.  
Additional notes on the text given below.

St John of Damascus was a learned and well-respected man.

To deny icons is to deny the incarnation.

In the Old Testament, when God spoke, He did so only through the written word.

Pentecost granted deification to mankind.

"Proscenesis" (check spelling) Greek, "to bow down"

God prefers to give through us.

Christ is the perfect living icon of the father.

There is a second type of image- his pre-eternal plan. Uncreated thought. The whole of creation is an icon of God's glory.

Ezekiel's vision of the river bringing life.

The ark holds the word of God, tablet (the word), bread (manna/Christ's body), rod of Aaron, the tree of life.

A Christian gives the highest regard to matter - as Christ took form in matter. Heaven comes down to earth, that is how the bible ends in the Book of Revelation.

Good icon modelling reinforces the beauty of matter.

Grace is uncreated light. Icons are grace bearing, or have become that way.

To 'see something' is an encounter.

In the hand-out - "apology" means a defence of something.

We all share the same human nature, but we are each unique.

Angels have, by grace, taken in bodily form, therefore we can portray them in icons.

You begin to honour more things in the world around us.