

# BO ZAR

11 DEC. '20 – 9:45-5:00 PM

## REVIVALS OR SURVIVAL?

THE PRESENCE OF THE ICON IN THE WEST  
FROM THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO NOWADAYS



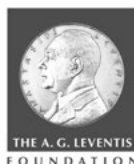
Alexander Kosolapov, *The Icon Caviar*, 2009, mix. media, 109,22 x 88,9 cm. © Alexander Kosolapov, courtesy of the artist.



Guercino, *Saint Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin*, 1652-1653, Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Source : Web Gallery of Art: Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15462132>

**ONLINE CONFERENCE**  
[REGISTRATION](#)

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The art of the icon, a visual idiom born in the Eastern Church, has deeply influenced the visual creations of Western Christianity from the Middle Ages onward, despite the adoption of a different aesthetic that was created in opposition to this *maniera greca* during the Renaissance. Even though artistic modernity was built against this art considered 'awkward' (*goffa*), it did not prevent the 'Byzantine' style to come back to surface several times in the West.

This symposium aims to question the reasons of this survival or these revivals of the art of the icon in distinct Western artistic and religious contexts. It will highlight in particular the issues underlying the meeting, and sometimes the merging, of two visual cultures but also the complex and often conflicting relationships between art and religion.

**09:45**

**Paul Dujardin, CEO and Artistic Director and  
Sophie Lauwers, Director of Exhibitions**

WELCOMING WORDS

**09: 50**

**Ralph Dekoninck and Ingrid Falque  
(UCLouvain)**

INTRODUCTION

**10:00**

**Till-Holger Borchert (Musea Brugge)**

EYCKONS AND THE POLITICS OF  
MIRACLES

There is little doubt about the fact that Jan van Eyck's painting made an impression on contemporary artists who often tried their best to emulate certain aspects of his unprecedented artistic innovations in their own works. There are compositions by Jan van Eyck that were regularly copied until the 16th century or even later. Traditionally, the significance of this phenomenon has often been understood as a way of paying respect to the great master, but this reasoning is at odds with the historical functions of the images and their devotional context. Often, these and similar images had ecclesiastical indulgences attached to them which presented welcome incentives for the devout not only to visit the images but also to pray in front of them. The images were sometimes believed to perform miracles and it was believed that producing copies would multiply the indulgencies and the miracles. Indulgencies attached to images were potentially profitably as they generated visitors and those who received indulgencies were in fact bestowed great favours. Members of the Burgundian Court and Burgundian partisans within the Papal entourage played an important role in this process when it came to the Burgundian Netherlands and political allies of Burgundy.

**10:30**

**Katrien Lichtert (Ludens Projecten)**

PICTURING THE MOTHER OF GOD. ICONIC  
IMAGES OF THE VIRGIN AND CHILD IN  
EARLY NETHERLANDISH PAINTING

The impact of Byzantium on Western Renaissance art is generally acknowledged, and this topic has been the subject of numerous conferences and publications. However, these studies mainly tend to focus on Renaissance Italy and not so much – or, in any case, to a lesser extent – on territories North of the Alps. During the 15th and early 16th centuries, images of the Virgin and Child were among the most common devotional artifacts in the Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands. Just as devotional texts encouraged the devotee to imagine and experience the events described such *Andachtsbilder* served the same purpose, offering the spectator to empathize and identify with the characters depicted. Most of these images are in fact contemporary interpretations of Eastern or (Italo)-Byzantine icons, adapted to the prevailing style and devotional practices current in the Low Countries. Sometimes, this assimilation is so thorough that the link to the original prototypes has virtually been lost. This paper will investigate the integrating of such Byzantine and byzantinizing representations of the Virgin and Child into the mainstream of Early Netherlandish painting, focusing on the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

**11:00**

BREAK

**11:30**

**Barbara Baert (KULeuven)**

**THE ICONIC GAZE. THE NEW LAMB BY THE VAN EYCKS**

When the 16th-century overpainting of the lamb on the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (1430-1432) was removed, another animal was found. The lamb appeared to have not a snout, but a face with forward facing eyes, instead of eyes placed on the side of the head. These original characteristics of the lamb were later criticized to be a *démarche*, a medieval naiveté which had to be painted over and corrected with 16th-century expertise. Nevertheless, Jan van Eyck (ca. 1390-1441) and Hubert van Eyck (ca. 1370-1426) had extraordinary observation skills and possessed an unfailing knowledge of flora and fauna. Instead of the 'natural' lamb, the masters painted the 'theological' lamb of the Revelation, including a halo of golden rays. With the Van Eycks, the lamb of the apocalypse becomes a unique, piercing figure, bestowed with an almost human gaze at if it were that of the Son of Man himself. The painters did bestow the lamb's eyes with one animal detail: the horizontal pupils that goats, sheep, and deer have. Because they are vulnerable prey animals, the horizontal pupil offers them a broader range of sight. And if the Van Eycks' lamb already sees more than humans, this optical advantage also connects with the impact of the direct, frontal eye contact.

**12:00**

**Michele Bacci**

**(Université de Fribourg)**

**HOLINESS AND ITS VISUAL AMBIGUITY: APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS ICONS IN THE VENETIAN STATO DA MÀR (14<sup>TH</sup>-16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)**

The word 'icon', stemming from the Greek εἰκών meaning 'image', is generally used in most Western European countries to hint at figurative objects that are deemed to be typical of Orthodox religious practice and stand out for their standardized morphological, compositional, and iconographic-stylistic features, i.e. their being painted on wood, their use of strongly stylized/abstract forms, and the recurrent display of half-figure images of saints. This specific understanding, that is still nowadays alien to Greek linguistic practice, was first worked out in the 15th century, when Westerners became gradually aware of the stylistic divide between Italian Renaissance arts and Byzantine pictorial traditions. In Venice, this process resulted very early in the coexistence of two different types of religious images associated with distinctive devotional functions: in churches as well as in private religious spaces, images 'in the Italian way', that is combining the optical simulation of spaces and bodies with a special emphasis on dramatic and narrative effects, coexisted with painted panels imitating the basic appearance of Greek icons.

This paper aims to investigate the ways in which, in both Venice and Venetian-ruled Crete, painters like Jacopo and Giovanni Bellini, Nikolaos Tzafouris, Michael Damaskinos, and others made various attempts at working out a synthesis between the two traditions, which, as their efforts make clear, were not deemed to be mutually excluding and resulted in the shaping of both icon-like Italian images and Venetianizing Byzantine icons. The parallel investigation of such phenomena will enable a reassessment of the grounds on which forms originally associated with either Italian or Greek traditions could be invested with specific religious meanings and deemed to be particularly suitable for their involvement in distinctive devotional practices.

**12:30**

**LUNCH BREAK**

**14 :00**

**François Boespflug  
(Université de Strasbourg)**

**IMAGES OF CHRIST AND FRONTALITY IN  
WESTERN RELIGIOUS ART IN THE 16<sup>TH</sup> AND  
17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

This presentation focuses on the evolution of the figure of Christ in Western art in the 16th and 17th centuries, looking at the iconographic representations of Christ in majesty, most often in head-and-shoulders view, mainly as 'Christ Pantocrator', 'Blessing Christ', and 'Salvator Mundi'. It could be that the perfectly frontal depiction of Christ's face, inviting the viewer's gaze into an encounter, even an exchange - one of the meanings and perhaps the main purpose of iconic art - found itself increasingly challenged, even supplanted, during these two centuries, by representations of Christ of varying ages, seen from different angles and in different postures, in three-quarter view or even profile, looking to the side, or downwards, or gazing up to the heavens. Should we see this stylistic evolution as a kind of emancipation of Western art from its Eastern models? Did the Reformation and the Council of Trent have something to do with it? Can the frontality of the representation of Christ be considered as a touchstone of iconic art? This presentation will fine-tune these observations and explanatory hypotheses, without claiming to provide the results of conclusive research.

**14:30**

**Christopher J. Nygren  
(University of Pittsburgh)**

**TITIAN'S ICONS**

Titian, one of the most successful painters of the Italian Renaissance, was credited by his contemporaries with painting a miracle-working image, the San Rocco Christ Carrying the Cross. Taking this unusual circumstance as a point of departure, I will revisit the scope and impact of Titian's life's work. I will show how, motivated by his status as the creator of a miracle-working object, Titian played an active and essential role in reorienting the long tradition of Christian icons over the course of the 16th century.

Drawing attention to Titian's unique status as a painter whose work was viewed as a conduit of divine grace, I will show clearly how the artist appropriated, deployed, and reconfigured Christian icon painting. Specifically, he tracks how Titian continually readjusted his art to fit the shifting contours of religious and political reformations, and how these changes shaped Titian's conception of what made a devotionally efficacious image. The strategies that were successful in, say, 1516 were discarded by the 1540s, when his approach to icon painting underwent a radical revision. Therefore, I will not only track the career of one of the most important artists in the tradition of Western painting but also brings to light new information about how divergent agendas of religious, political, and artistic reform interacted over the long arc of the 16th century.

**15:00**

**BREAK**

**15:30**

**Isabelle Saint-Martin  
(EPHE, Paris)**

**THE STATUS OF ICONS IN A CHRISTIAN  
ART IDEAL IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURIES**

Far from fading away in the past two centuries, the debates on Christian art have been marked by a succession of arguments of varying importance in the attempt to define an aesthetic ideal. Icons held a special and increasingly important place in these debates, though not without specific forms of appropriation and reinvention. Seen as exotic and almost 'barbarian' by theorists of the 1830s, icons nevertheless enjoyed a special status due to their close ties with Byzantine liturgy. The rediscoveries of the 1840s and 50s, however, provided their share of misunderstandings. A vision gradually came into sharper focus with the neo-Byzantine vogue at the end of the century, and even more so with the enthusiasm of the avant-gardes at the beginning of the 20th century, during which icons were associated with the beginnings of abstraction. From Maurice Denis to Father Couturier, the new acolytes of sacred art began to make space for icons, while in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, icons began to play a strong role in Catholic oratories, as if to fill a void. We will follow this evolution, both through writings on art and through a selection of works up to the most recent examples.

**16:00**

**Dimitra Kotoula  
(The Courtauld Institute of Art, Londres)**

**IN SEARCH OF A PAINTING WITHOUT  
LABELS: THE REDISCOVERY OF BYZANTINE  
ICON-PAINTING IN MODERN GREECE  
DURING THE 20TH CENTURY**

This discourse aims to discuss the revival (and not survival!), the re-invention in fact, of Byzantine icon-painting in Greece during the second half of the 20th century as a defining factor in the re- invigoration of the arts, painting in particular. Modern Greece, at the core, geographically, of the former Byzantine Empire and as a direct inheritor of the culture, language and religion of the Byzantines, witnessed in its cultural history various re-discoveries of the 'Byzantine', the icon in particular. Romanticism in the 19th century and the predominant Central European nationalism, propelled the re-invention of the Byzantine icon as an integral component in the national narrative of the then newly formed Modern Greek state. Modernity, on the other hand, the emerging 20th-century avant-garde artistic movements, offered new opportunities in revisiting the Byzantine icon: while an attempt was made, during the first half of the century, for a return to the form and style of the 'authentic' Byzantine icon away from any classical academism, the second half of the century was marked culturally by a totally different approach. Paradoxically, the Byzantine icon was re-invented by key artists during the era as a means to liberate the art of painting and re-invigorate their own artistic language. Why the Byzantine icon? Which were the elements of the icon that were reworked under this light? What was the role of the Church in these re-makings, if any? Many of the artists who were at the forefront of these revivals not only brought the Byzantine icon from the church at the spotlight of the Greek cultural and artistic scene, but also worked systematically in projects outside Greece i.e. Rallis Kospidis for the church of St Paul at Chambésy in Geneva, Nikos Eggonopoulos for the church of St Spyridon at Manhattan, U.S. What might this tell us about the role of the re-invented icon in the cross-cultural exchanges between the East (Eastern Orthodoxy) and the West during the era?

**16:30**

**Jérôme Cottin  
(Faculté de théologie protestante,  
Université de Strasbourg)**

**THE AVATARS (OR PEREGRINATIONS)  
OF ICONS IN CONTEMPORARY  
ART. TRANSFORMATIONS AND  
DECONTEXTUALIZATION**

If icons exist only in Christian circles that are not very open to contemporary culture, they nevertheless reappear - albeit transformed - in many manifestations of today's culture. This presentation invites us to explore this strange paradox, and to ask ourselves about the reasons for these Christic resurgences in a post-Christian world.

**17:00**

**END**

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### DATE

Fri 11 Dec 2020 – 09:45 → 17:00

### FREE ENTRANCE

### LANGUAGE

English, French

### REMARKS

Online event. [Registration required.](#)

### Main Support:

The A. G. Leventis Foundation

### Support:

Baillet Latour Fund

### Collaboration:

The A. G. Leventis Gallery, Nicosie, Chypre & UCLouvain (GEMCA - Group for Early Modern Cultural Analysis)



