

# CURRICULUM FOR



THE PRINCE'S  
FOUNDATION

SCHOOL OF  
TRADITIONAL  
ARTS

# ICON PAINTING COURSE

October 2019 - September 2021

Prepared by Aidan Hart

## AIMS & STRUCTURE

### Duration, student numbers, venue:

The Icon Painting Course is run by The Prince's School of Traditional Arts (which is based in Shoreditch, London). Classes are held at the beautiful Holy Trinity Centre in Meole Brace, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 9HF.

Aidan Hart will be the chief tutor. There may also be the odd visiting tutor.

Teaching will be held seven times a year for three academic years. Each session runs for three consecutive days, on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, in the months of October, November, February, March, May, June, and September. Sessions will usually, but not always, be held during the last week of these months.

Practical sessions run from 9 am to 6 pm. A talk with discussion is given on most mornings, 9.00-10.00 am.

Included in the course fees are the lunches, Monday and Tuesday evening meals (around 6.15 -7.15 pm), and morning and afternoon tea refreshments.

There will be the same twelve students for the duration of the three year course, with no new entrants, so that the tutor can give his time to this one group.

Students need to organize and pay for their own travel and accommodation arrangements.

## STUDENT COMMITMENT

Students are expected to:

1. complete the homework given at the end of each session. Expect an average minimum of four hours icon painting or research a week.
2. attend all seven sessions a year unless there are serious and pre-notified reasons for missing one
3. complete their dissertation
4. complete at least the requisite number of icons and studies, even if some sessions have had to be missed (two icons of faces, two icons of saints half length, two icons of standing or sitting saints, one festal icon, and at least eight monochrome studies)
5. present their completed body of work at the Certificate exhibition at Shoreditch, London, at the end of the final year.

The Certificate of Completion will not be granted until all the above requirements are met.

## AIM

The programme's aim is to give students a firm foundation in the techniques and theology of panel icon painting.

Although this is a three year programme, the part-time nature of the course means that it does not aim of itself to bring students to the high professional standard required for this most demanding of liturgical arts. However, the Course will provide an excellent basis for students' progress towards this goal.

## OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course students should be able to paint skilfully executed panel icons in egg tempera that adhere to the traditional principles of the icon tradition of the Orthodox Church, clearly expressing the transfigured world that lies at the heart of its theology.

The programme's understanding of the icon tradition includes early western medieval iconography such as works from the Carolingian and Romanesque periods as well as Byzantine and Russian, and also recent icon masters.

### **A. Skills**

As part of this objective, by the end of the course students should be able to do the following:

1. prepare sound gessoed panels
2. execute water and oil gilding and gold assist
3. consistently paint icons:
4. with good proportion
5. that show a firm grasp of anatomy and drapery as these are painted in the icon tradition
6. based on traditional geometric means of expressing spiritual realities
7. execute brushwork that is confident and relates to the form being painted
8. choose colours that are harmonious and fitting for the spiritual subject of the icon
9. go some way towards developing an indigenous Western expression of the tradition so greatly articulated by the Byzantine, Slavic and early western European cultures
10. photograph their work proficiently
11. perform the essential business skills of book keeping, advertising, quoting etc.

### **B. Theory and theology**

As well as gaining technical skills, by the end of the course students should have a basic knowledge of the following theological and historical areas:

1. The theological basis for images, especially as described by the Seventh Ecumenical Council, St John of Damascus, and St Theodore the Studite
2. The relationship between the feast icons and the liturgical and Biblical texts for those feasts
3. The role that icons and wall paintings have in the larger liturgical life of the Church
4. Know the main schools of iconography East and West and identify their chief stylistic features
5. Have a basic knowledge of the scope of the icon tradition in different media (e.g. embroidery, relief carving, mosaic, enamel, metal)
6. Appreciate the importance of a deep spiritual life for the iconographer
7. Understand the theological basis for the stylistic conventions used in icons e.g. perspective systems, geometric structures, abstracted garments.
8. Understand the theology behind the schema used in wall paintings and mosaics
9. Know how to design a new icon e.g. how to research the life of the saint and existing icons, know how to express salient features symbolically, and establish appropriate proportions and geometry.
10. Be able to differentiate between the timeless principles that inform all traditional icons (the Tradition) and the particular means used by different schools (traditions) to express those principles.

## METHODS OF TEACHING & LEARNING SKILLS

The first four sessions are spent painting monochrome studies (using one colour only) to gain deeper understanding of icon form and develop brushwork skills. These are done in egg tempera on watercolour paper.

Skill learning in class time will be done by the tutor demonstrating each stage of painting an icon, followed by the student then completing that stage in their own icon while the tutor circulates the class to help each student individually. The prototype of this class icon is chosen or agreed by the tutor.

Students will work at home until the next session on a separate though similar icon, using the newly acquired techniques covered in class. This is to reinforce what had been learned in class. The prototype for this home icon is chosen by the student in conjunction with the tutor.

During the next session the tutor will assess progress on the icon being painted at home, and demonstrate the next stages of the class icon.

As the course progresses and students have proven able to produce images with consistently good proportion, anatomy and form, they will be encouraged to design and develop variations within the tradition, with the help of the tutor and input from other students.

In order to better assimilate knowledge, students are expected to make notes and records of studies as the course progresses, so that by the end of the three years they have a well ordered portfolio of technical and theological information to refer to in the future.

Although this portfolio is for the student's personal use, the tutor will ask to see this as an encouragement to order their learning process.

Although students will be helped to develop a field of particular interest to them as the course progresses, it must be understood that the most efficient use of class time for skill learning requires that we move as a group together, passing through the stages in a logical fashion.

The textbook which forms the basis of the course and which students are required to possess is "Techniques of Icon and Wall Painting: Egg tempera, Fresco, Secco", by Aidan Hart, £40. Gracewing Publishers. Second edition, now with index, 2015.

### **Methods of teaching and learning the theory and theology**

Although the theology and history will be intertwined with skill learning, the first hour of Mondays and Tuesdays will be dedicated to theory. The teaching will take the form of talks followed by discussion. These presentations will mostly be given by the tutor, but visiting speakers may also be invited. About fourteen talks will be given each year.

In the talks the emphasis will be on establishing the essential theological basis of icons, the history of icon schools, and the aesthetics and science behind icon painting.

Around the beginning of the third academic year each student will be required to present to the tutor a dissertation. This will usually consist of an essay of around 3,000 words, with or without illustrations as appropriate. The subject of each dissertation will be agreed beforehand with the tutor. In some cases a more image based study with less writing may be pursued. The purpose of the dissertation is to provide students an opportunity for more in-depth research into an area of special interest to them.

## ASSESSMENT THROUGHOUT THE COURSE

Towards the end of each academic year one-to-one meetings will be held with the tutor to discuss how things are going (with both skill learning and theory) and to evaluate work.

At the end of the third year (usually in October) there will be a final Icon Course exhibition at the PSTA gallery in Shoreditch where students' work is exhibited. There is no formal assessment of this work, but we try and have on or two experienced iconographers present an hour or two before the opening for students to speak to about their work if they wish.

## CRITERIA FOR AWARDING THE CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

To gain the Certificate in Icon Painting, students will need to:

1. complete at least the requisite number of icons and studies (two icons of faces, two icons of saints half length, two icons of standing or sitting saints, one festal icon, and at least eight monochrome studies)
2. exhibit in the final exhibition at least five monochrome studies and five of their best panel icons, including one of a full length figure, two busts or heads (e.g. the Mandilion) and one festal icon
3. have submitted their dissertation by the beginning of the third academic year (October 2020). Only in exceptional circumstances will this deadline be postponed for an individual.
4. have attended at least six of the seven sessions each year. Only due to illness or exceptional circumstances may this be reconsidered for an individual.
5. present to the tutor at their final assessment meeting a portfolio of their notes on technique and theory taken throughout the three years, in an ordered, readable format.

## CURRICULUM

The following curriculum is intended to give a structure and to let students know what we hope to cover; in reality we shall have to be flexible how we pace ourselves. If students as a group learn a given skill faster than expected then we will pass to the next skill sooner, and vice versa.

If any individual students learn a given skill particularly quickly they will be given special studies to extend them, without jeopardizing the progression of the group together as a whole.

The curriculum is devised to progress logically, starting with foundational skills and theory then progressing to more developed skills.

The tutor may change the order of the talks on theory if he feels that the group needs to cover a particular subject earlier than planned.

Codes below (e.g. 1.3.7) refer to: the year: the module: the session number of that year, there being seven sessions a year, each of three full consecutive days.

The skills will be studied 10 am - 6 pm Mondays and Tuesdays, and 9.00-5.00pm Wednesdays, and the theory usually on Mondays and Tuesdays 9.00 am -10.00 am.

# YEAR 1

## Practical

The first part of this year is dedicated to 1) executing monochrome studies in order to gain a good understanding of iconographic form and to gain proficiency in brushwork. Models will be from the Byzantine, Russian and medieval western traditions such as the Romanesque.

These works will be painted in egg tempera on watercolour paper. Further studies will be given for students to execute at home. 2) Panel preparation and gilding 3) Beginning to paint the first icon

## MODULE1: Monochrome studies

- 1.1.1 Male and female faces of different ages. Studies in basic facial proportions.
- 1.1.2 Hands and feet. Half length busts of male and female saints. Proportions of full figures.
- 1.1.3 Full length saints, standing and seated
- 1.1.4 Monochromes of subjects that need improvement. Perspective and landscape (added)

## MODULE 2: Business matters

1.2.4 How to photograph work. Business management: pricing; advertising; accounting; tax; limited company or sole trader; copyright; intellectual property law; card printing.

## MODULE 3: Panel preparation, gilding, pigment preparation

1.3.5 Monday To be held at Dylan Hartley's studio in Telford. How wooden panels are prepared. How they are gessoed. Apply size. Apply fabric. Apply primer (some boards have been pre-sized or fabric pre-applied to allow these stages to be done on the same day. This might be a long day, with evening food being had at Dylan's). Tuesday at Meole Brace. Apply gesso layers (this process may go until about 8pm). Wednesday: Prepare drawings for first panels.

1.3.6 Monday: Apply bole and sand. Water gild icon and burnish (today or tomorrow, depending on each student's progress). Tuesday: Complete water gilding if necessary. Oil gild second icon. How to do assist. Wednesday: Pigment preparation.

## MODULE 4: Painting faces

1.4.7 Begin painting the Mandilion. Select with tutor an icon (mainly face icon type) to continue on at home. One-to-one meetings with the tutor for feedback and to assess progress.

## Theory (Around 14 talks a year)

- 1.1 The theological basis of the icon as expressed in the Seventh Ecumenical Council and in the writings of St John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite.
- 1.2 The liturgical uses of the icon.
- 1.3 The Iconscreen: history and principles of design
- 1.4 The three stages of spiritual ascent and their relationship with iconography: purification, illumination, union.
- 1.5 The nature of tradition: timeless principles and cultural expressions.
- 1.6. Colour symbolism, Science of Colour,
- 1.7 Pigment theory and preparation
- 1.8 The meaning and importance of tradition in iconography: the theology behind stylistic elements in rendering the face and figure (e.g. enlarged eyes, diminished lips, ways that drapery is abstracted)
- 1.9 The theology behind the stylistic elements of perspective, landscape and architecture as found in icons
- 1.10 Style and theology
- 1.11 Early Christian art (Roman, Eastern) and pre-iconoclastic iconography 1.12 AD 867- 1204

- 1.13 Palaeologue, and Post-iconoclastic Byzantine iconography to 15th century
- 1.14 Icon types of the Mother of God

## YEAR 2

### Practical

#### MODULE 4: Painting faces

- 2.4.1 Continue painting the Mandilion.
- 2.4.2 Complete the Mandilion. Begin half length figure.

#### MODULE 5: Painting half length icons in egg tempera

- 2.5.3 Painting a half length icon in class. Students also choose one other half length icon of their choice to continue with at home.
- 2.5.4 Complete half length icon.

#### MODULE 6: Painting icons of full figures

- 2.6.5 Begin painting whole standing figure. For studies at home students will work on a seated figure of their own choice.
- 2.6.6 Continue with standing figure
- 2.6.7 Complete standing figure. One to one meetings with the tutor for feedback and to assess progress.

### Theory

- 2.1 The priestly role of the human person and iconographer: transfiguring matter
- 2.2 Russian iconography 11th to 16th centuries
- 2.3 Western schools of iconography: Anglo Saxon, Celtic, Romanesque etc.
- 2.4 The theology of divine light and the symbolism of gold
- 2.5 Perspective
- 2.6 Modern Art and the Icon
- 2.7 How to analyse and discover the secrets of good icons.
- 2.8 Wall Paintings and church architecture
- 2.9 Churches of Thessaloniki
- 2.10 Feasts: Part 1: The texts of each of the twelve main liturgical feasts and how this theology is expressed in the corresponding icon: geometry, colour, movement
- 2.11 Feasts: Part 2.
- 2.12 Feasts: Part 3
- 2.13 Feasts: Part 4
- 2.14 Feasts: Part 5

## YEAR 3

### Practical

#### MODULE 7: Painting icons of feasts

- 3.7.1 Draw a festal icon of student's choice (although ideally students paint different feasts). Begin painting. Note: Due to the complexity of festal icons, students are not required to paint another festal icon at home, but can continue work on this same icon.
- 3.7.2 Continue on festal icon
- 3.7.3 Continue on festal icon
- 3.7.4 Continue on festal icon
- 3.7.5 Complete festal icon (or other icons if festal icon is already completed)

- 3.7.6 Complete unfinished work for exhibition
- 3.7.7 Complete unfinished work for exhibition.

## END OF CERTIFICATE EXHIBITION AT THE SCHOOL OF TRADITIONAL ARTS

(date to be fixed, but usually around mid October 2018)

### Theory

#### Hand in dissertations

- 3.1 How to adapt existing festal icons to make a variation on the theme.
- 3.2 The symbolism of gestures
- 3.3 The uniqueness of the human person and the oneness of human nature
- 3.4 Discussion on the development of an indigenous iconography that is fully traditional.
- 3.5 Western Saints: how to research their life and prepare an icon of them.
- 3.6 Designing icon screens.
- 3.7 The 21st century and contemporary iconography
- 3.8 An historical overview of icons in different media (embroidery, metal repoussé, ivory and relief wood carving, mosaic, enamel etc.).
- 3.9 The business side of the ministry of icon painting
- 3.10 How to give talks about iconography
- 3.12 How to continue improving your icon painting

## TIMETABLE FOR PSTA ICON PAINTING COURSE 2019/2020 (YEAR 1)

### 2019

- 1.1 Monday 28th October 9:00 – 19:30
- Tuesday 29th October 9:00 – 19:30
- Wednesday 30th October 9:00 – 17:00
- 1.2 Monday 25th November 9:00 – 19:30
- Tuesday 26th November 9:00 – 19:30
- Wednesday 27th November 9:00 – 17:00

### 2020

- 1.3 Monday 24th February 9:00 – 19:30
- Tuesday 25th February 9:00 – 19:30
- Wednesday 26th February 9:00 – 17:00
- 1.4 Monday 23rd March 9:00 – 19:30
- Tuesday 24th March 9:00 – 19:30
- Wednesday 25th March 9:00 – 17:00
- 1.5 Monday 18th May (early, to miss Public holiday May 25th) (Note: This panel and gesso making workshop will probably to be held at Dylan Hartley's workshop: Fusion, Jackfield, Ironbridge, TF8 7AP. We will travel there together from the Trinity centre.) 9:00 – 20.00 at Dylan's, supper at restaurant near Dylan's or in Shrewsbury. Tuesday 19th May 9:00 at TC, drive to Dylan's (about 30-40 minutes). Leave Dylan's around 5 pm, for supper at TC. Wednesday 20th May 9:00 – 11.00 at Dylan's, lunch at Dylan's. Will be free after lunch to do as they wish – depart directly from Ironbridge



- 1.6      Monday 22nd June            9:00 – 19:30  
            Tuesday 23rd June 9:00 – 19:30
- Wednesday 24th June        9:00 – 17:00
- 1.7      Monday 28th September    9:00 – 19:30  
            Tuesday 29th September    9:00 – 19:30  
            Wednesday 30th September 9:00 – 17:00