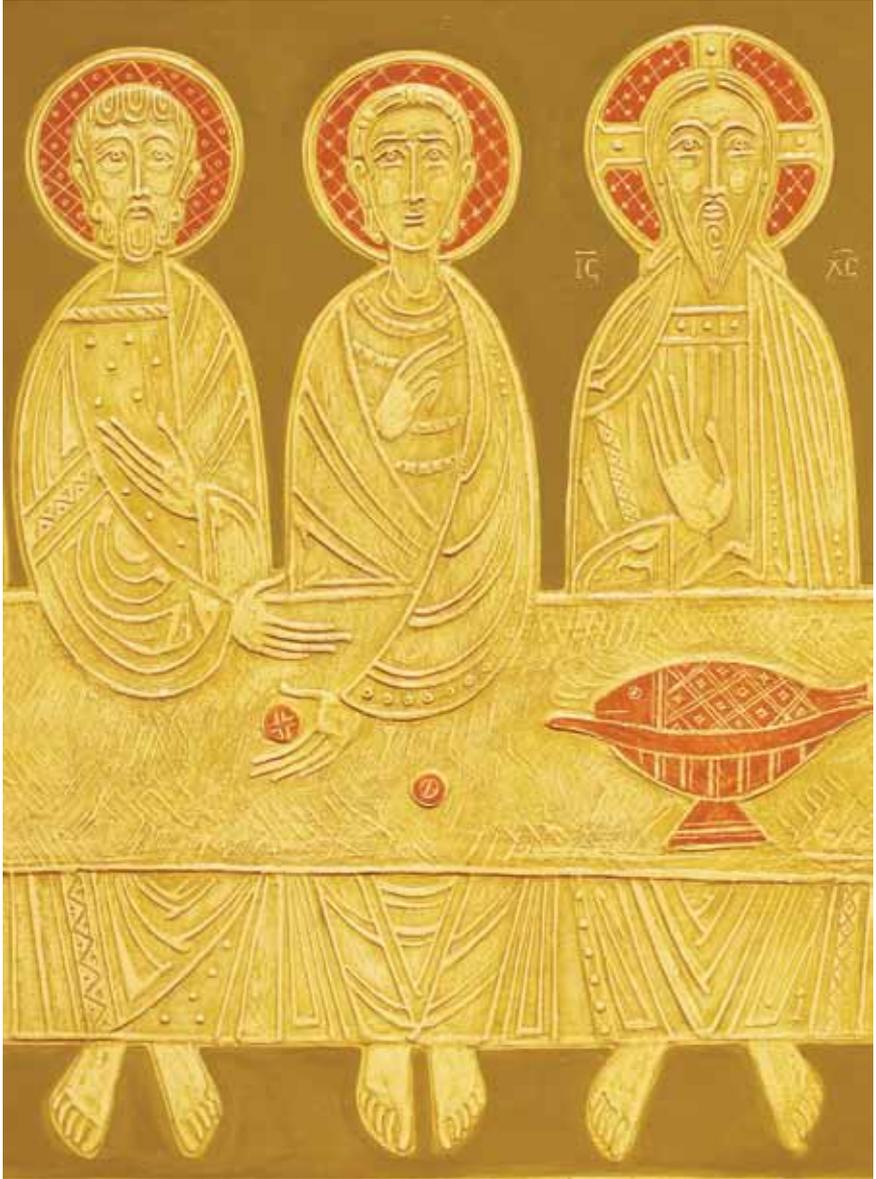


The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion presents



**LIVING TRADITION:**  
**Icons for the Liturgical Year**  
**by Davydov & Shalamova**

June 17 - September 19, 2014  
Reception & Artists' Talk:  
Tues. July 15, 2014 4:30 - 5:30pm  
Tues. Sept. 16, 2014 12:00 - 1:30pm

The Dadian Gallery

## Artist Statement:

Medieval pieces of Christian art are more and more diffused in our multicultural world. Being treasures of spirituality and art, these images are real witnesses of Christian Faith of their time. To our contemporary view some of them may seem very unusual and even weird, but it's mostly because they were made many hundreds of years ago, and art was entirely different for these artists from what we consider it now.

Imagery in the Christian church is a powerful instrument for the sermon. More than this, there are some very deep theological concepts, which can only be shown through the visual language, but not with the word.

Many Christian denominations in the contemporary world add images to their liturgical space, displaying prints of 4th century icons as well as later (even recently painted) ones without any problem. Printing is cheap and we can choose from hundreds of thousands of easily downloadable artifacts, available with a few clicks of a mouse.

But how do we make our choice? What makes us choose this image and not another one? And how do icon-painters (also called icon-writers) decide what to do and what their icons should be like?

These all are truly very hard questions, because we are used to deciding unconsciously, picking up something that catches our eye, or, visa versa, selecting something that is humble enough, attracting a minimum of attention.

Our goals can be different, so we elect images fitting our concrete needs.

But is there any general consideration of what a contemporary image in the church should be?

This is the main question for the current exhibition.

For almost 20 years we were scooping in the tradition, investigating medieval Christian art as a source for rules, ideas, hints and solutions. And yet, we have to remember, the main task of an iconographer, according to the Church Fathers of Nicaea's Council is to make an icon become an actual instrument for preaching.

If we look at images created by our predecessors, we see that the image in church has never been painted for purely decorative purposes; it used to be a very serious and sincere sermon about the values of the faith.

Icons are neither illustrations nor symbols. They embody a very concise message, transmitted visually.

The models for our icons were taken from very different historical epochs and even techniques. At first they were models for inspiration, but not for direct copying. We consider our work to be a kind of research, aimed to discover and study the methods and instruments of medieval iconographers.

We do it in order to make icons become actual art, a powerful and responsible tool for the visual sermon.

### **About the Artists:**

Philip Davydov and Olga Shalamova were both born in Russia, Moscow and St. Petersburg (at that time - Leningrad). During his schooling and for a number of years afterwards, Philip used to help to his father, an orthodox priest and iconographer, who had started his mission in 1980. At that time any Christian art in the Soviet Union was considered “religious propaganda,” and artists might have been punished for painting an icon as though committing a crime.

Simultaneous with his work in his father’s studio, Philip graduated from State Academic Institute of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg (Russia) with his diploma, “Genesis and Evolution of Altar Panels in Medieval Italy.” Here he met Olga, who by that time had graduated from an art school and art lyceum, and worked in the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts and Russian Museum.

Philip moved to Saint Petersburg in 2001, married Olga, and together they founded Sacred Murals Studio, so named because mural painting was their favorite type of liturgical art. For the past 13 years Sacred Murals Studio has participated in a variety of projects for Christian churches of different denominations. Fresco projects have included a True Fresco mural in the altar apse in Saint John the Evangelist church, New Brunswick, New Jersey; an iconostasis in the church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Saint Petersburg; the dome fresco painting in the Assumption Church in Sologubovka (Saint Petersburg region); and more than 200 icons in total. Since 2004, Philip and Olga have been teaching iconography as a series of courses in Australia, Canada, Russia and the United States.

## About Egg Tempera:

Egg tempera is one of the most ancient painting media, which can be traced to the early medieval era.

The term “tempera” comes from “temper” or “tempering,” which means ‘to control,’ or rather, ‘to bring to a certain consistency.’ It’s truly a good term, because one of the key points in egg tempera is to balance paint consistency between being too thick (greasy?) and too thin (liquid?). The perfect balance allows the possibility of creating unbelievably deep yet transparent glazes and shades, and the smoothest transitions with unbeatable lightness.

To make egg tempera paint, the emulsion must first be prepared: mix one egg yolk with double volume of water and add some drops of vinegar or any other preservative. When the emulsion is ready, it can be mixed and ground with almost any dry pigment and applied with a dry brush. The painting process in itself can hardly be compared with any other technique. It’s well known that each artist develops a personal painting method in every media, and that is exactly the case with egg tempera.

In 1993, Philip started to learn this technique from his father, an iconographer and orthodox priest, and through all these years, in every image, the egg tempera still reveals a variety of surprises, especially in how beautifully it renders the colors when applied with care.

The icon painting (sometimes also called icon-writing) process can be distinguished in four stages: Drawing; Painting; Accenting (highlights and shadows); and Graphics.

Both in the drawing and the glazing, whatever the consistency of the paint, the paintbrush should always be dry enough to apply a very thin layer of color. This gives the freedom to apply the paint in hundreds of different ways, manipulating it with almost transparent shades while modeling forms and shapes.

## About Relief Gesso:

From the earliest times iconographers decorated their icons in different ways. The most famous icons were covered with gold or silver with all sorts of precious stones and pearls included.

It's human nature for humans to try to embellish the most dear and valuable things. In our own time, a great number of these decoration techniques –such as gilding– have lost their meaning, due to so many gold-imitating materials in our everyday lives, from bijouterie to the “golden” spray paint from a Dollar Store. The gold on contemporary icons is no longer perceived as an expression of absolute value. Now we would rather think or cogitate than see that the gold is the image of Light of God.

This means that it's better to add our labor instead of gold if we really want to add more value to our icons. So Olga has perfected the technique of relief gesso, which gives almost infinite possibilities for this kind of elaboration. Hand-crafted backgrounds, halos and ornamentation help to arrest the beholder's wandering eyes and underscore the significance of the image.

With the use of technology in all spheres of human activity (including iconography) reaching such an incredible height, Philip and Olga believe that, at least in the icons, it is essential to preserve the sensation that the image was really made by a human hand.

There is nothing really new in Olga's use of the relief gesso technique; it was widely exploited in 12th and 13th century icons from Cyprus, in Russia, and in other places. Artists not only modeled the relief backgrounds, but sometimes even carved into it. While studying the Byzantine tradition of relief icons, Olga decided to model the entire icon with gesso. She liked that idea because she discovered that, when she started simplifying the image by transforming it into a relief, its main sense and idea were made much more easily perceptible for the beholder. If we take time to look carefully at ancient and medieval art, the techniques of the old masters may reveal to us many new ways and give uncountable possibilities for creative work. Thus, the icons of the 21st century should maintain their theological content, not made as merely archive artefacts copied from museum photographs. With tons of available images and techniques to choose from, icons have to be created as functional tools for prayer, using a visual language that speaks to contemporary people.

## In the Dadian Gallery:

### On the walls left to right:

Philip Davydov, *The Night Travelers*, OSB, gesso, egg tempera, gold leaf  
2013

Philip Davydov, *The Washing of the Feet*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2013

Philip Davydov, *The Flagellation of Christ*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2013

Philip Davydov, *Portable Crucifix*, OSB, gesso, egg tempera, gold leaf 2013

Philip Davydov, *The Holy Trinity*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera, gold leaf 2013

Philip Davydov, *The Mother of God of Tenderness*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2014

Olga Shalamova, *The Apparition of Angel to Holy Myrrhbearers*, Wood, gesso,  
egg tempera 2011

Philip Davydov, *The Apparition of Christ to Holy Myrrhbearers*, Wood, gesso,  
egg tempera 2014

Olga Shalamova, *The Mother of God Hodegitria*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2014

Olga Shalamova, *The Resurrection*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2014

Olga Shalamova, *Christ Pantokrator*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2013

Olga Shalamova, *Altar Panel*, Wood, gesso relief, egg tempera 2013

Olga Shalamova, *Saint John the Baptist*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2014

Olga Shalamova, *The Nativity of Christ*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2014

Olga Shalamova, *The Annunciation*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera, gold leaf  
2013

Philip Davydov, *The Mother of God of Tenderness*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2014

Olga Shalamova, *The Mother of God Enthroned*, Wood, gesso relief, egg  
tempera 2014

Olga Shalamova, *Saint Seraphim of Sarov*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2012

Olga Shalamova, *The Last Supper*, Wood, gesso relief, egg tempera 2013

Olga Shalamova, *The Holy Mandylion*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2012

Olga Shalamova, *The Nativity of Christ*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2012

Olga Shalamova, *The Transfiguration of Christ*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2013

**In case, right side:**

Philip Davydov, *The Mother of God of Tenderness*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera  
2014

Olga Shalamova, *Christ Pantocrator*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera, gold leaf  
2014

Philip Davydov, *Christ with the Golden Hair*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2009

Olga Shalamova, *The Mother of God of Tenderness*, Wood, gesso, egg  
tempera, gold leaf 2014

Olga Shalamova, *Christ Pantocrator*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2014

**In case, left side:**

Philip Davydov, *Christ Pantokrator*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2013

Olga Shalamova, *The Mother of God with Christ Child*, Wood, gesso, egg  
tempera, gold leaf 2011

Philip Davydov, *The Mother of God of Tenderness*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2014

Philip Davydov, *Christ Pantokrator*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera, gold leaf  
2013

Olga Shalamova, *The Mother of God of Tenderness*, Wood, gesso, egg  
tempera, gold leaf 2013

**In the office of the President:**

Philip Davydov, *The Annunciation*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera 2013

Philip Davydov, *The Mother of God Hodegitria*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2012

Olga Shalamova, *The Mother of God Hodegitria*, Wood, gesso, egg tempera,  
gold leaf 2011

**Prices available on request**

## Curator's Statement

The Dadian Gallery sparkles with 35 lovingly-created icons that have been transported from Russia to Washington, DC. The practice of representing holy beings on a flat panel, functioning as instruments of instruction, veneration or worship, has existed since early Christian times, perhaps as far back as the 2nd century. Iconographers Philip Davydov and Olga Shalamova have devoted their lives to researching, assimilating, fabricating, extending and reinterpreting this time-honored Orthodox Christian tradition.

The couple has produced more than 200 icons, which reflect centuries-old theological vocabulary and requisite mastery of the ancient, laborious egg tempera painting technique. Yet the artworks of Davydov and Shalamova are not merely a reiteration of standardized types; they succeed in effectively translating a visual language so that it is eloquently comprehensible to contemporary viewers. By turns narrative or ministerial, subtle or abstract, painterly or graphic, each icon is a unique undertaking, a specific realization. The presence of these modern icons in the gallery provides viewers with the opportunity to select and connect with a single, solitary image that may become a powerful conduit for an individual encounter with the face of holiness.

~ Trudi Ludwig Johnson, Curator

*The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion is a program of Wesley Theological Seminary. The Center sponsors a variety of cultural events which explore the intersection of art and religion. All contributions are tax-deductible and gratefully accepted.*

To receive electronic postcards for future Dadian Gallery exhibitions and the Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion's newsletter (10 to 12 mailings a year) please use the QR code at the right or send an e-mail with your name and email address to [agray@wesleyseminary.edu](mailto:agray@wesleyseminary.edu)



HENRY LUCE III  
CENTER  
for the  
Arts and  
Religion

The Dadian Gallery  
[www.wesleyseminary.edu/lcar.aspx](http://www.wesleyseminary.edu/lcar.aspx)  
Wesley Theological Seminary  
4500 Massachusetts Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20016  
202.885.8608