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Iconography

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I have always considered myself an artist even though my artistic endeavors had been limited to literature and music. However, in the past few years, since my time at Saint John Fisher College, I have been studying at the Katholiek Universiteit Leuven in Leuven, Belgium; and as part of my continuing seminary education, I was fortunate enough to have taken instruction in iconography. I initially thought that this exercise would be rather uninteresting and I didn't take it seriously, but I have found a true home as an iconographer, and I am thrilled with the enriching practice of the writing of sacred icons."



*Mike Costik
SJFC Class of 2008*

Iconography

I have always considered myself an artist even though my artistic endeavors had been limited to literature and music. However, in the past few years, since my time at Saint John Fisher College, I have been studying at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Leuven, Belgium; and as part of my continuing seminary education, I was fortunate enough to have taken instruction in iconography. I initially thought that this exercise would be rather uninteresting and I didn't take it seriously, but I have found a true home as an iconographer, and I am thrilled with the enriching practice of the writing of sacred icons.

Due in part to the artistic nourishment of this practice, I have found opened to me a whole world of creative expression. I have composed several sacred choral works out of the same spiritual disciplines and theological ideas involved with writing "windows to the divine". And I have resumed my work as a professional singer even as I prepare for my final year of seminary. I have also begun a serious academic study into the interrelationship among the classical disciplines of religion, art, and philosophy.

My primary message to the readers today would naturally, therefore, consist of the following: Beauty is an important and fundamental gift to humankind that is too often overlooked and misunderstood. Beauty is always powerful and could be defined as an honest communication of a great truth. An artist, by striving to create an image – musical, literary, or visual, attempts to contribute something substantial to the understanding of what it is to be human.

These are questions that will largely occupy the remainder of my life in their contemplation, but my hope is very simple: That whatever image I write is as beautiful as possible.

Święta Kinga

I have begun a custom in my iconography to inscribe the icons in Polish rather than Greek or Latin. I think the reason for this is because my spirituality has largely surrounded my Polish roots and I have discovered how tremendously artistic the Polish people are. This icon of Saint Kinga of Poland is a great example. This icon was written for a salt mine, and St. Kinga is the patron saint of salt miners. Her chapel is 140 meters below ground in Wieliczka near Krakow carved out of the salt deposits.

I wrote this icon in Canandaigua almost two years ago and I think it is the best face that I've done. St. Kinga was Queen of Poland and renounced her throne after the death of her husband, Bolesław the Chaste. She entered a convent and lived out her days continuing the works of charity that she and her husband had begun.

She is often depicted with her eyes toward heaven and her crown and scepter on the floor, but in iconography the goal is to depict the subject glorified. In that sense, Kinga's crown was replaced with one of greater value which is why I was led to depict her not wearing the crown, but with one indicating her presence among the saints.

{Mike Costik, soon to be ordained a Deacon for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, finished his pre-theology training at St. John Fisher College during the 2007-2008 academic year}



Icon, and photo of it, by Mike Costik