

Crafts, professions of excellence

Iconography and wood decoration

Related professional – **Gaetano Russo**
Workshop: **Gaetano Russo Art Studio, Cerignola**



The term icon comes from Greek and means image. Even now it is still used to refer to sacred images in Byzantine art, particularly in Russian art, to refer to a special painting on a panel very different from a wall painting. The function of the icon is essential for the Christian. It represents the meaning and value of the signs of mystery that enable us to become aware of the greatness of God. It is a way to make real and see with one's own eyes the word of the Lord that is heard during Mass. The icon tradition originated around the fourth century, when the Eastern Church was still in union with the Western Church. For this reason, icons are an indispensable heritage of all Christianity, without distinction. Painting is not only a beautiful art form, but it is also a way to live one's faith deeply and with a certain intensity. The actual birth of icons fits into a broad context that

Project Number 2021-1-CZ01-KA220-YOU-000029289

"The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."

goes back to prehistory and humans exploiting images to establish contact with deities. The purpose was to make the vision of what was depicted real and to feel closer to the favoured deity. For the church, the icon is a sacramental that manifests divine substance; sacred figures have become part of liturgical symbology since they evoke a divine presence, although it has traditionally developed a place within homes, for example, to decorate and dedicate a place in the home to prayer. Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Byzantium, and Russia were the most important centres of iconographic production. In these areas, icons became a characteristic element of art and faith until the 18th century. Sacred representations were mostly exported to the West, especially Rome, where they became objects of worship and veneration. Indeed, one of the functions of the sacred icon was to catechise the people about the mysteries of the life of faith through images. This tool was stronger than words also because few people in the Middle Ages could read. On the other hand, images could reach the hearts of all the faithful without distinction.

What are the skills and expertise of professionals in this profession?

Professional knowledge, such as drawing, painting, use of stucco and gold leaf, ability to reproduce drawings, and knowledge of materials and types of Creativity, precision, aesthetic instinct, and detail are other skills.



decorating,
images and
wood.
attention to

Some materials used in this profession.



Icons are still made today using

the ancient techniques and materials of the past. It starts with a prepared wooden board on which gauze is placed. Over the gauze is spread plaster or stucco in several layers, where the iconographer then makes the basic drawing in pencil. Next, the gold leaf is laid down and then the colours are applied: the darker ones that form the basis of the whole image, then the lighter ones superimposed. Recently there has been a great development in this market: one can speak of a great trend to buy icons as gifts or for one's home. Some specific tools used in this craft are wooden base (any type and size, depending on the creation); Acrylic colours and paints, pencils, finish paints, sponges, gold leaf, stucco, etc. Drawing tools, palettes, inks, acrylic paints, watercolour paints, oil paints, egg tempera paints, final paints, wrought iron hooks, and plastering materials.

What markets are related to this profession?

The interior design, religious, and heritage preservation markets are among this profession's major areas of interest. Both individuals and the public directly approach the artisan to create their works. In the case of interior design, it will be collaborations related to the creation or restoration of some furniture used in living spaces and/or offices; in the case of artistic heritage, it is a matter of renovating, touching up, arranging already existing works, fixing any cracks or damaged parts in the creation; in the case of religious icons, thus collaboration with churches and shrines, it is often a matter of creating from scratch icons depicting saints and sacred moments to then use them as an interior decoration of the churches themselves. This craft is connected with the interior design sector, the religious market, and heritage preservation.



Project Number 2021-1-CZ01-KA220-YOU-000029289

European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."

Where to learn the profession.

Italy has numerous courses at all levels, but in general, there is no official training to be an iconographer which can accredit you to do the work of an iconographer. It is more a matter of directing one's studies towards the art world, the Academy of fine arts or any other address aimed at painting, decoration, and woodworking. A course of study that allows one to acquire a title and later perfect oneself and become a specialist in iconography or, more generally, in wood decoration.



Project Number 2021-1-CZ01-KA220-YOU-000029289

"The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."