

Cummer Museum presents 'Tradition in Transition'

By JUDY WELLS
The Times-Union

Western Christians bow their heads and close their eyes to pray. Eastern Orthodox Christians pray open-eyed to an icon.

"In the Orthodox tradition, the image would translate your message; it was your intermediary," said Holly Kuris, associate curator at the Cummer.

"Tradition in Transition: Russian Icons in the Age of the Romanovs" fills the walls of a gallery at the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens with visual gems of intense color and piety. The 45 works range from those created for the most powerful to those for the poor. Both icons and *oklads*, the elaborate, often jeweled covers favored by the wealthy, are included in the exhibit that opened Tuesday.

The Orthodox church based in Byzantium had strictly regulated the creation of icons since the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787. Certain icons were said to have appeared in supernatural ways and produced miracles, so these were frequently replicated to adopt the special power. Artists followed a rigid formula from manuals, their only freedom in the colors they chose.

Two hundred years later, the land we know as Russia officially adopted Christianity, and the artists in that region began producing icons, Byzantine at first but gradually more and more Russian in style with a distinctive Slavic fervor. That also changed.

The mid-16th century Council of the Hundred Chapters of Church reaffirmed control over icon painters, discouraging "German" (foreign) influences, according to *The Evolution of Style in Muscovite Icons* by Daniel C. Waugh. In the 18th century, Peter the Great turned the country and its artists toward the West.

When the late Marjorie Merriweather Post's husband, Joseph Davies, was the U.S. ambassador to Russia (1936-38), that country was getting rid of religious works it felt did not represent true Russian



RELIGION AND RUSSIAN ICONS

Above: *Kazan Mother of God*
Russia, about 1600-1650

Right: *Mother of God Promise of Those Who Suffer*
Moscow, Russia, 1790-1795 (icon); 1795 (*oklad*)

Images courtesy Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens



on exhibit

'Tradition in Transition: Russian Icons in the Age of the Romanovs'

Where: Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, 829 Riverside Ave.

When: Through Wednesday, Sept. 12.

More information: (904) 355-0630

New exhibit pairs father, daughter

"Hand in Hand: A Father-Daughter Art Duet" opens with a reception from 6 to 9 p.m. today at R. Roberts Gallery, 3606 St. Johns Ave. Saturday hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The show features mixed media works on canvas and two-dimensional copper creations. Tayloe White, who is known for floral and landscapes motifs, will show new portraiture. Her father, Frank McDonald, will show his metal wildlife sculptures done in the repujado (re-poo-ha-dough) style, a design technique involving hammering, pressing and embossing metal surfaces. The show continues through Friday, June 29. Call (904) 388-1188. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

New faces

Stop by the opening reception for "Fresh Perspectives from Jacksonville's Emerging Artists" from 6 to 10 p.m. Friday, June 22. It's at Steller's Gallery, Julington Creek, 115 Bartram Oaks Walk, Suite 101. See the newest works by April Aultman, Meg Crowley, Laura Barkley, Courtney Vickery, Anania Green and Kim Barry. The show continues through Saturday, June 30. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Call (904) 230-4700.

Keep looking

"Through Our Eyes 2007: What's Goin' On" remains on display at the Ritz Theatre & LaVilla Museum through Friday, July 20. The show is the 15th in an annual series that poses a question and asks African-Americans to answer through art. More than 20 people contributed to the exhibit, which includes sculpture, paintings, photography and poetry. The museum is at 829 N. Davis St. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday and 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Call (904) 632-5555.

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Icons

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traditions, and Post was able to assemble a remarkable collection of icons.

According to Kuris, ridding the country of Westernized religious artifacts meshed nicely with Soviets' need for money. The Soviets gave visiting VIPs tours of such galleries in case they wanted to buy souvenirs.

After Post established the Hillwood Museum & Gardens in Washington, other icon collectors added to the collection from which this show is taken.

A representation of one of Russia's most sacred icons rests on the Cummer's walls. The original *Kazan, Mother of God*

icon was dug up after the Holy Mother came to a young girl in a dream and directed her to take church officials to it. Many miracles have been attributed to it, from returning sight to the blind to winning wars.

Another icon, *Iverskaia, Mother of God* and its elaborate seed pearl-encrusted *oklad*, is a copy of an image credited with miracles. The Hillwood version is said to have come from the Imperial family's private quarters at Tsarskoe Selo.

Whatever their origins, humble or exalted, these icons present Western viewers with a very different approach to prayer and faith.

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