

International exhibition *Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Christian Orthodox World* reveals over 100 beautiful icons



Saint George and the Dragon, Crete, circa 1500. Egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood. Private collection, Canberra.

Opening on Friday 15 April – Good Friday in the Catholic liturgical calendar – *Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Christian Orthodox World* introduces the tradition of the devotional art of the Christian Orthodox faith in an exhibition of icons drawn from across the world.

This ancient visual tradition is surveyed through 118 captivating icons, dating from 1350 to 1800. After the fall of Byzantium in 1453, the icon tradition associated with Constantinople, the seat of Eastern Christianity, continued and flourished across the Orthodox world.

'Heavenly Beings: Icons is a truly impressive survey with over 100 hauntingly beautiful paintings on wooden panels depicting the sacred subjects of early Christianity. It is an extraordinary privilege that Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki is exhibiting these extremely rare works from such diverse cultures, giving visitors insight to this profound and wide-reaching tradition,' says Auckland Art Gallery Director, Kirsten Lacy.

The exhibition brings together masters, such as the Cretans, Angelos Akotantos, Andreas Paviyas, Nikolaos Tzafouris and Constantine Tzanes, whose holy subjects vibrate with life against shimmering gold leaf backgrounds. Visitors will be invited to discover the great guardian saints who gave hope to ordinary people throughout the ages: Saints Nicholas, George, Elijah, Paraskeva and many more, beloved as healers, warriors, consolers and miracle workers.

Heavenly Beings: Icons reveals the beauty and power of icons, both for general audiences today and for people across centuries throughout the far-flung regions of the Eastern Orthodox community. It explores their dynamic role in the lives of pilgrims, priests and everyday believers of the early modern world. For followers, then and today, such images of holy figures, painted on gilded wooden panels according to age-old methods, serve as 'windows into heaven' during the act of prayer.

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The most ambitious exhibition of icons to be staged in Australasia, *Heavenly Beings: Icons* unites exceptional examples from private and public collections across Aotearoa and Australia. In doing so, it lifts the veil on a profound and rich tradition that is alive and well in Tāmaki Makaurau and throughout our vibrant nation.

‘Christian Orthodoxy in Aotearoa dates from the early days of the gold rush, yet it has been over forty years since New Zealanders have had a chance to explore an exhibition of this scale and quality dedicated to the icon tradition,’ says the exhibition’s curator, Dr Sophie Matthiesson.

‘That exhibition in 1980 had a lasting impact on artists and general visitors who saw it. Icons not only formed the bedrock of much Italian Renaissance art, but also transformed the art of modernists such as Henri Matisse in Europe and New Zealand artists Rita Angus and Colin McCahon.’

Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Christian Orthodox World is accompanied by a free and fully illustrated e-publication with in-depth essays by leading international scholars.

Event details:

Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Christian Orthodox World

When:

Friday 15 April to Sunday 18 September 2022
10am–5pm daily

Where:

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Cnr Kitchener and Wellesley Streets
Auckland, New Zealand

Admission:

Members FREE
Adult \$24.50
Child under 12 and under FREE

Other ticket types available

Head to aucklandartgallery.com/heavenlybeings

**For more information, high-res images
and interview requests contact:**

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