

### ***Some "Big Ideas"***

- Marjorie Post acquired them for memories they evoked (began collecting icons when in USSR in 1937-38, continued after), sometimes imperial associations, fine craftsmanship
  - Their style has changed over time – Western influences, for example
  - Hillwood's icons are a great introduction to the history of Russian icon painting
  - Many icons in museums were once part of church or iconostasis – hard to imagine now their original setting
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### **Style**

#### ***What do these objects' appearance reveal about the people who made and used them?***

- Marjorie Post's preferred style
  - Liked icons that show the influence of Western paintings, many with oklads (covers). This style had been dismissed as symptoms of decline from modern influences; now seen as signs of style's change over time
  - At her death in 1973 – 84 icons dating from 1500s-1900s
- Literally painted images of Christ, Mother of God, and saints
  - Could be narrative – i.e.: saint surrounded by life scenes
- Have a set language
  - Different from secular painting – depicts divine personages, not earthly faces
    - Stylized faces (thin noses, small mouths, large eyes) signifying their divinity, their "refined" state
    - Flat perspective (no shadows) or reverse perspective (objects expand away from viewer)
    - Gold = divine energy/light
    - Colors = symbolic
  - Within a church on icon screen (iconostasis) – has an organizing row system
- Judging from holes, many had oklads (icon covers) or other adornments
  - Oklads adorned as well as protected (symbolically and literally) the icon beneath, and were a way of honoring
  - Oklads could be 1) mostly borders surrounding sacred figure, stamped with patterns and adorned with stones/gems, or 2) less frequently complete metal covers that revealed only faces, hands, feet of the holy personage depicted
  - The sacred figure might also acquire a wardrobe of adornments, like diadems, halo, collars
- Stylistic change happens over time – some reasons for the change include impacts from West, from inside the church (1660s – Patriarch Nikon, Old Believer split), and Peter the Great's decrees about icon painting and church practices
- Size: Icons for private use (as opposed to those in churches) tend to be smaller

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## Function

### *What purpose did it serve? Literally? Figuratively? Who used it?*

- For Orthodox believers: sacred liturgical objects
  - Used as a focus for daily prayer
    - “Windows onto heaven” – serve as intermediaries between earthly and heavenly realms
    - You venerate (not worship, but to honor with a religious/solemn act of devotion) the holy personage on the icon, your veneration passes directly to the sacred personage depicted
      - Light candles/lamps before them, purify with incense, bow or prostrate in front of, kiss them
  - Church icons
    - Carried in processions, encased church pillars, displayed near altar, on icon screen (iconostasis) between congregation and sanctuary
    - Mineas – special icons on canvas depict the month’s important saints/feasts
  - Personal icons
    - Integral to life 1500s-1917, in your home for daily prayer
      - Given as wedding gifts, taken to the sick, bless sons going to war, banish evil spirits from home
      - Saints: One receives special protection from one’s name saint
- Didactic, narrative – “pictures for illiterate” – visual instructions about church stories, feast days, lives of saints
- In a museum: art

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## **Production**

### ***How was it made? Who made it?***

- First icons came to Russia from Byzantium (modern day Turkey and the center of Eastern Orthodoxy from 324-1453), when the people of Rus' (later known as Russia) converted to Christianity in 988
  - Over time, Russian Orthodox church built on Byzantine legacy, added own saints and miracle-working icons, and distinctive tradition of icon painting
    - Ex. Kazan Mother of God (1579) – special protector of Russia, “revealed”
- Materials – icon: wood, paint, gold...oklads: precious metals like gold, gems/stones, enameling
- Production is full of sacred and symbolic meaning
- Judging from holes, many had oklads (icon cover)
  - Adorning icons can be an act of special piety; it brought favor to the donor and honor to the holy image
- “Renewal” – touched up or repainted over varnish – sometimes mark political event
- 1800s – rise of mass produced and factory-made icons; emperor set up icon painting workshop in response