



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL  
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

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Fieldworker(s): Maggie Holtzberg

Interviewee(s): Christopher Gosey

Event: Introduction to Christopher Gosey's work as an iconographer

Place of Recording: Gosey's studio [REDACTED]

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Brief summary of tape contents: Function of icon, connection to arc or reliquary, process of making an egg tempera icon in the Russian Byzantine tradition versus the Ethiopian tradition, modified encaustic process, step-by-step using casein and purified beeswax. Rarity of Ethiopian iconography in the U.S., Episcopians love of Ethiopian icons, relation to Celtic iconography, icon purchased in Ethiopia, being asked to by Patriarch to go back to Ethiopia for a year and live in monasteries up north, teff grain, Ge'ez language, colors (green, red and yellow) symbolize Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Jesus's bloodline, Patriarch's motivation, no more destruction of culture, how Gosey got into iconography, first commission, odd jobs, meeting Ksenia, cataloguing bronze doors at the John Hancock Berkeley building. Free studio space, mosaics he does with Greek Orthodox kids, making pigments, Chris's opinion of Ksenia's work, how to recognize excellence in this tradition, line work, balance of colors. Gold symbolizes the first light. The absence of shadow, lack of reflection in the eye, viewer as vanishing point (icon opens up world that embraces us) icon painter as revealers of a spiritual truth. Teaching workshops

Counter/ABS	Contents
000	MH: ..and it's May 4th, 2001. And we're in the studio of Christopher Gosey or Gossey..how do you say it?  CG: 'Goazey'..with a "Z" sound. Spelled with a "S" but it's a "Z" sound.  MH: And where are we right now?  CG: We're at the Andover Newton Theological School, which is on the pinnacle of this hill overlooking Boston and Newton. Yeah, Newton Center.  MH: Yeah, very close to Newton Center. And your studio, just explain one more time, you have a studio here because you teach, or what's..

CG: Well, I'm an artist-in-residence, or resident-artist, because I don't really live here. But I basically come here and I'm a resource for the students. Um, it's an American Baptist college and they are very interested in iconography, it is unbelievable how much they're interest in it.

MH: Is that something new?

CG: I think so, because when you think of Baptist you think of Southern Baptist (laughing), and you think of Protestantism, and the whole idea that you can't have images and all that kind of thing going on. Or if you do have images, they are not to be venerated or kissed or prayed towards or anything.

MH: And that's the whole point of your work is to do that, yeah?

CG: Yeah, to allow, to allow the invisible God and the person Jesus Christ to become visible. The whole idea is that just as in the Hebrew scriptures we read the Arc of the Covenant containing the word of God, Christians believe that Mary was pretty much that same Arc, but that the Living Word was sort of made known, made visible. Which is why in the icons, any of the frame shapes that you see especially in Russian icons are called 'kofchevs' [?]. And it comes from the Russian Slovenic, which means 'arc', or reliquary. So any of the saints you see are symbolic of the word of God made flesh. So in short the icon itself is about the material world embodying the invisible, and making the invisible good, or God present.

024 MH: And you were about to describe the process.

CG: Right. Um, when I'm working in egg tempera, you know I go through the usual process of having chosen a cured wood, without any knots, if at all possible. Taking that wood and then putting linen down, using rabbit skin glue or fish skin glue. And then going from there and applying a mixture called gesso which is made from rabbit skin glue and calcium carbonate, or chalk. And then after putting seven layers of that surface, then you can transfer the drawing, or the icon image, and then ink it, using Indian ink so you reinstate the lines that have been laid down, uh via um..oh what do you call it..well, a lot of times, I'll just use tracing paper. Uh, the black..

MH: Yeah, the carbon?

CG: Carbon paper. Though that's not the best to use all the time. But uh you can just use lead. You know I take a pencil and use lead to transfer the image. But at any rate, once you transfer that image you have to reinstate it, either with a stylus, so that it etches into the gesso, or using Indian ink. And then of course you start applying your layers flat washes of color, dark colors first and building upon those layers with lighter colors.

041 Now that's just working in the Russian Byzantine tradition. Now in Ethiopian tradition, the process of laying out colors is a little different. Ethiopians tend to start out with the lighter colors first, and then take the darker colors to sort of define shapes, and give the face form - not really creating shadows necessarily

because that goes against the whole theology of iconography, but giving shading. So that's one process.

- 046 Now the process I generally use for my large-scale Ethiopian work is uh, a method I've created myself, which I have been calling a modified encaustic version. I say modified because originally encaustic was used in making mummy portraits, similar to the one..that's a copy that I made. But even that is done using this new method.
- 050 But let me explain the first method, the original method. In um, in Imperial Rome, and in Roman-occupied Egypt, they employed..we're talking first century, second century, first or second century..they used a method of painting in which they would take hot, purified beeswax that had colors of powdered pigments put into it. Uh, and they would layer it, basically start it from dark to light, with the same methods we use in traditional icon painting, or at least traditional Russian and Byzantine icon painting. Um, that method is called encaustic method which comes from the Greek word "encausticos", which means 'to burn in.' And they would literally do that. They would put down a color, then put down another color on top, then go over and fuse those two colors with open flame and then keep building up.
- 061 Well mine is slightly different. Instead of using a gesso ground, I use two-ply museum board, 'cause I want to use something that's acid-free. I take my image and I use a stylus, and I trace over the drawing I have such that the stylus makes an impression onto the two-ply museum board. Then I take um, pigmented wax sticks, usually Prism color art sticks, which are no longer made anymore, I just bought all that was available in the country (laughing), because I'm not ready to start making my own sticks yet. Uh, and then I basically lay out all my colors just like a crayon. It's actually kind of fun, it takes you back to childhood. And build up all the basic layers and once I've done that then I take um, I take cotton balls, or Q-tips, depending on the space I have to work with, and I dip it into solvent. And I go through and basically give these nice washes of color. And it smells horrible, it's not good for the lungs. I'm wearing respirators now, but that's what you get.
- 074 And then once I've laid down all the basic colors, I know where they are, then I start to take those sticks, and dipping them in the solvent, I go through and start to..sort of give form to the image, to model the image. And then when I've done all of that, gotten everything where it should be, faces completed and everything, then I take um..I take, it's an acrylic medium..gel medium, acrylic gel medium. And I put that on the back of my two-ply museum board, and I put it onto the wood support, which is usually, which is usually earth plyboard, which is just a finer grain. I mean I can put it on regular wood, sometimes I do but this way I know it's not going to be bending and warping.And then I glue..well I put glue on the wood itself, and glue onto the back of here. And then put it down and take a roller, and roll it, make sure it's nice and flat. And then I weigh it down with weights or books. Um, you know I actually turn it faceover onto carpet, a carpeted surface, or cloth surface-something that's really smooth though. And then weigh it down. And then about a day or so I take it out and then I can begin the next step, which is to take casein medium, which is made from cow's milk, and put two or three layers over the whole thing, that acts as an isolation varnish because

when I do start to put the final layer of wax I don't want wax migrating and going everywhere.

092 So anyway I have that isolation varnish, or isolating varnish. And then I take a black, uh I take black casein paint, and I put in all my line work in a very calligraphic way. And then for anything that's white I take white casein and put that on.

MH: How do you spell casein?

CG: Casein? It's c-a-s-e-i-n. It's the stuff that you find in milk and it's used for all sorts of things – for caskets, for all kinds of gluing. It's amazing what we use casein for. And so, and by the way, a lot of traditionally [-] icons were made using either egg tempera, casein usually for the walls of churches. So, but this is totally different. This is not the traditional medium for [-]. It's something that I've devised that works well. And my mentor Ksenia, everytime I tell her I'm going to switch and do everything alright, you know, do everything in egg tempera, Ksenia says (imitating her), 'No, Chris. It is your way, you know wax. It works, it's worked for you.' She says (laughing). So I've been sticking with it, but I'm eventually going to change over because it's uh, it's great to work on when it's winter because, well, having..I haven't finished explaining it all but in winter it keeps you warm.

109 So anyway the next step is once you've put on all your ornamentation using casein, whether it's white, red or whatever colors you're using on the clothing, then you go over the whole thing with purified beeswax. And it has a nice aroma. Well I don't how your nose works, you can smell..

MH: Oh yeah it has a great smell.

CG: It's similar to the smell you would smell in a church where they have the resin because the resin is used for incense.

MH: Cause it's slight smell of honey, sweet.

CG: Yeah, yeah it's really interesting.

MH: Now how do you spread it evenly on this flat surface?

116 CG: Um, you know there are a lot of things you can use but I've found in an old [?] arts sale a fifties um sunlamp. And it is perfect. So basically what you do is you have this..you have all this wax, not percolating because you can't be bubbly, just sort of warm. You take a brush and your heat lamp and you just go and you start to spread, and you have to keep the lamp [-] some time and count sheep or something, and wait for it to melt. And then keep moving it over and then you can get it really smooth. And sometimes it's not as thin as I want it to be so I will go back over it and reheat it and I'll take little bits of toilet paper, just little squares and go in and sop up some because you don't want to get too wet...

MH: You don't want it to build up on the surface.

CG: Yeah. So you get a nice, thin finish. And then after that's done within minutes you can actually polish it with a cotton cloth. And over a couple of months, I say for the next year it will go through what is called um..um what do you call – it's a curing process.

MH: A patina?

130 CG: Well you do get a patina, absolutely. It's curing and what happens is is the wax, the moisture within the wax is expelled so you get this patina. So you have to go through and sort of polish it with an old t-shirt. I used to use all kinds of things like shimmy [?] and stuff but shimmy actually lets off little bits of stuff so now I just say get an old, high-quality cotton t-shirt, and you can just move in a circular motion and polish. And you have to do that for the first year, probably twice, maybe three times. And after that you can just let it go and it will get a nice, aged patina which isn't, which doesn't distract from the colors. , not like a film.

139 MH: How common is the Ethiopian iconography? In this country?

CG: In this country, um, it is not that common. But it's getting there, between the teaching that I've been doing, just sort of having a website, and sort of writing things about it. That's helping but I think there's certainly more people that know about it now, and that still doesn't give you a number because I really don't know but there are many more now than there were nine years ago. And part of it is because they had a big show that came through uh, in the early nineties called African Zion, which was going to be a part of the university, but we couldn't have it because well, the term 'African Zion' seemed um offensive to certain people, which is fine I totally understand how they could be. Um, so it didn't come here but it did go to other places.

151 And let's see what else has happened? There was another show of Afri..Ethiopian icons scrolls in Greenwich Village, in Soho..it wasn't in Greenwich Village, it was in Soho, south of Houston Street. And uh, that helped as well. Um..

MH: But where would they be in use? I mean, what faith are we talking about?

CG: Episcopalians.

MH: OK!

CG: Can you believe it? If it were not for the Episcopalians, I would not be in business now. Um, the Episcopalians love Ethiopian icons. And the Jesuits..love them. I've done work for the Jesuits in Connecticut, down at Fairfield University.

MH: Yeah, and what about..was that big [-] Holy Cross?

160 CG: Holy Cross. Is that here?

MH: That's in Worcester, isn't it?

CG: Oh, I wasn't aware.

MH: That would be worth looking into.

CG: Yeah, yeah. Uh yeah, it would be worth looking into. And I don't understand why the Jesuits like it because they came in in the 16th century with the Portuguese. And tried to convert the Orthodox faithful to Roman Catholicism. And actually succeeded in converting the Emperor. And one Ethiopian nun who came from an aristocratic family almost single-handedly got the country into revolt and they kicked the Jesuits and the Portuguese out. Um, so that was kind of interesting, but they love it.

167 But the Episcopalians I don't know why. Maybe because it has a folk art aspect to it visually. Um, that does it. The Germans kind of..are into it too, believe it or not. But then they've written a lot of good books over the years on copied iconography and Ethiopian. And the French to a lesser extent. So, in this country, I'd pretty much have to say, the Episcopalians.

MH: And is there any relation to Celtic?

174 CG: So funny you ask. We don't know. We think there could be because the Celts really venerated the two hermits Peter and Paul who lived in the Coptic desert. Now the Coptic church is not to be confused with the Ethiopian church at all. Um, but there is a link between the two, and that link is basically that um, the Pope in Alexandria used to send a bishop to Ethiopia, which was kind of funny..that's a whole another story had nothing to do with the art. But anyway, it's more political. But anyway, yeah, so there's that connection so it's possible that this exchange of art ideas between Armenia, Ethiopia and the Copts that maybe, just maybe through the Coptic influence on Celtic iconography..um Celtic church..

MH: And the Book of Kells. I mean there's something reminiscent about it.

CG: Yeah. Yeah, especially the cross downstairs. Or, or this traditionally cross like that, when I was in Ethiopia. I mean if that's not Celtic or something, it's just so..

MH: Oh. Oh God it is! Yeah, the whole thing.

CG: Yeah, it's just so, yeah. I mean there's something going on, but I know Armenia did similar stuff as well.

MH: Yeah. Oh yeah, do you know anything about the history of this?

CG: I don't know more than that um, it just is an Ethiopian iconography. And you can't help but think the Armenians..well, actually Ethiopia had a history [?] with a lot of folks. With India you see the Indian influence in just the Ethiopian dress. But uh, but the Syriac church definitely there was, there was this interplay going on between what was being done in their manuscripts and Ethiopian manuscripts. So I think it was just a tighter world..

MH: Yeah, an influence, back and forth. 'Cause that looks, the knot I mean the uh..

CG: Yeah, exactly. Book of Kells, Armenia.

MH: Yes, the borders. Right.

203 CG: It's all sort of here. You know, but then this will give you an idea..

MH: Oh sure, inside. Oh, that's gorgeous.

CG: A lot of times the Ethiopians would paint on skin as well.

MH: Vellum, or something.

CG: Well, you know, they would for manuscripts, for manuscripts illumination. But they had another way of painting too, of just working with um..with skin. I mean pretty much in the rough I think..I'm in transit here so some of it is still in the studio back home. No, this is here. Um, this I bought when I was in northern Ethiopia, Bahadog [?] they call it. Which is right near Lake Tanna [?] the source of the Nile. Um, and you see this is a casein type paint..

MH: And you're sure it's a hide?

214 CG: But look they just didn't even bother to get all of the hair off. They just sort of left some of it on.

MH: That is amazing. Did you talk to iconographers there? Did you meet with anyone..no.

CG: No, unfortunately the person who I bought this from, his father actually did these. But no I didn't get a chance to and I was a little upset. I actually went to meet with my Patriarch and you can see the pictures up there, that's the holy senate. [?] And then there's actually a picture of me talking to the Patriarch. But um, I will be going back. My Patriarch has asked me to come back. He wants me to go to northern Ethiopia and live for a minimum of a year in the monasteries up north.

224 Now we ain't talking this little cushy mona..monastic stuff going on here with carpet, television. No, it is like dirt floors. It's actually not that hot. Ethiopia has a medium temperature of 75 degrees year-round. So that will be fine. But I'll be living in caves. It will not be a luxurious existence. I will subsisting off of water, this grain mixed with water. It's teff. Teff is the smallest grain in the world. And you can go to some healthfood stores and find the teff burger mix, but um, I'll probably be eating that.

And so, that's actually my longterm thing is to try to find some kind of way of of getting some funding to be able to hire a person who can speak Ge'ez which is what I use on traditional Ethiopian icons which you don't really see here. But you can see it on that one, the one that I showed with all the Celtic imagery. Um, he has to be..he or she has to be fluent in Ge'ez..it would have to be a He, because I wouldn't even be able to go into monasteries if it's a She. But uh (laughing) has to be fluent in Ge'ez, uh, Amharic, which is the national language of Ethiopia.

And then Tigrinya, because Tigrinya is more of the northern dialect. And that's what I need to do. He basically told me 'You are..you have made a very good beginning.' But he's the Patriarch, he has to say that. I think I've done more than made a good beginning. But, he is the Patriarch, and he basically says you need to spend a minimum of one year. More would be better, living with the monks, and just soaking up the culture.

247 MH: And there would be iconographers there?

CG: There would be iconographers there and there would be those who shape, who have shapes iconography. I shouldn't say 'those who have shaped.' Those who know all the symbolical meanings. A lot of it is pretty much what you would see in Byzantium. So I don't think I will – this is probably not going to sound good – but I really feel this way. I don't think I'm going to learn a whole bunch of stuff I didn't know. Because some of it is really definitely, basic Byzantine stuff. But there are definitely some nuances, definitely. I mean one of the nuances I already know of through a connection I have with the high priest of the Ethiopian church which is, again..Ethiopia was Jewish before it became Christian. And that, and there were still lots of the Semitic population..because Ethiopian people are Semitic people. There was only a small remnant that definitely held to the old..why am I saying old? The living faith which Christianity grew out of.

265 Um, so anyway, they kept it and they ended up being called foreigners or 'falasse' [?], which to us it seems derogatory. But to them it really meant this is the set apart..separated people, separated from the greater populace, that have become Christian. So anyway, they carry over from Judaism to Ethiopian Christianity.. Christianity was this idea of a high priest. And we still have a high priest whose, whose um duties overlap the Patriarch's duties in some areas.

So anyway, I was talking to him, he used to live in D.C. for a while. He explained to me the three colors of green, red and yellow are symbolic of three things: the rainbow – the God Shodanoah [?] as a sign in a seal that humanity would never be destroyed by water again. And then secondly, uh three colors symbolize the Father, Son and Holy Spirit which is a very, very Christian idea. And then, thirdly, that if you look at Jesus Christ's bloodline very carefully, you will find that the three sons of Noah's blood intermingled. So actually Jesus isn't Caucasian, Negroid or Asian, he's actually all three. And so in Jesus Christ all of humanity has been reconciled in a very real way. That's really on a cosmic level, we've been reconciled. We still are fighting and carrying on down here, and doing unthinkable things to each other. So, it's that kind of stuff I would find out.

291 MH: Yeah. What do you think is his motivation in wanting you there for a year?

CG: I think with all the other stuff that's happening in Ethiopia. And between their former well, their former compatriot in Eritrea, I just think he doesn't want any more destruction of the culture. You know, it's just so much destruction. I mean it started with the Marxist coming through and killing his Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie and um, you know. Even now with the new – I don't know what they want to call themselves, democratized, socialist government. Even they are interested in themselves and themselves alone. I have a German friend who works for the U.N. and she happened to be there when I was there doing work for the

U.N. And she was just really upset about the whole thing. In fact she decided to move in back to Germany and I washed my hands of Ethiopia. Because, she had already left the government, know that you know, you really need to do something about the energy because a lot of people in the countryside are using cow dung for energy, and that really should be put back into the soil since Ethiopia really has the potential of being the breadbasket for all of Africa.

311 'Cause the soil for the most part is very fertile, very rich. So if you can get irrigation to just allow those places and make sure that the soil really has a Sabbath to rest so that is actually can rejuvenate itself, um. You know a lot of good things would happen and they are just paying no attention to it. The government puts a line in their pockets [?] put in their money in different places outside of Ethiopia. So that when the big famine really does come, their out of there. And it is coming. There's going to be a real big one. And they're just not paying attention to that. Instead they spend a lot of money on the fighting that took place uh, for a year, so. So that's a whole other story but it's so tied into all of this in a strange way.

323 So I think that really is his motivation, that you know there is complete, proper training. You know, 'cause I'm sure with me coming from a Byzantine background that there could be some assumptions made that maybe shouldn't be made.

MH: Tell me a little bit about how you got into this in the first place.

328 CG: Well when I became Russian Orthodox in 1998, um, I came in..well, first of all I was, I was an architecture intern. And I was working for a Joan Goode's [?] office in uh, in Boston, on Boylston St. And during that time I met a lot of other Protestants who were coming into Orthodoxy. 'Cause they wanted to find a connection that would put them closer to the early Christian way of doing things, which by the way would have been very, very tied to what you see in Judaism. I mean it just would have been because the earliest Christians didn't see themselves accepting something other than, you know an extension – well, not even an extension. They just thought that we're accepting the Messiah, and this is our faith.

But of course when St. Paul came through he changed a lot of that (laughing). [-] But even though, be that as it may, the Orthodox church still has some of these interesting ties to do..especially in Ethiopia where they keep two Sabbaths. And they keep a lot of kosher dietary laws and stuff in the Ethiopian church. Uh, so anyway, other people, Protestants were coming in for these very reasons, so make that connection. And to really get to the core of Christianity, not a lot of what has happened over the last two thousand years. So um, so with that, there was two people that became Orthodox with me who wanted images of saints that happened to be western, but were Orthodox. Well since the Orthodox church is mostly eastern Orthodox, a lot of the saints you just wouldn't see like Saint Jerome, and others. Um, Saint Botolph, the patron of Boston. And he's western Orthodox.

364 So you had these people who wanted these images done. And I had been sort of playing around with icon painting so they asked me to do images for them. And that was just the beginning. After I started doing that, then opportunities came for

me to do more. And um, interestingly enough, the very day I was given my – how can I say it – my pink slip saying we're going to have to lay you off, you're going back to college anyway to get your masters in architec..uh in historic preservation, so why don't we let you go first? On the same day that I received that slip, I received a commission from a Lutheran minister and her husband out of California saying, you know, your architecture's wonderful, but we looked at some of your images and we really think that it would be good if you could do an icon of St. Nicholas for us. We spent time in Alaska, we fell in love with him, and could you do that. So that was really the beginning.

383 And it's just been a matter of not going back to architecture, taking odd jobs, working at the Ritz Carlton, working at an art store, which is where I met my teacher Ksenia, yeah Ksenia Pokrovskia. And uh, that you know it just kind of happens. Once you start doing what you have some passion for, then all kinds of things start to happen.

MH: Yeah, and you said, um OK. Where did you do the historic preservation..you didn't go to historic preservations?

CG: No I ended up not going to study it formally. But at Goode [?] and associates, um I did a lot of that John Hancock Berkeley building was my last project, the one with the beacon light.

MH: I know it I walk by it every day. OK, so what did you do there?

CG: I was in charge of the door schedule, which, there was over 300 doors in that place. And also those big bronze doors on the outside, the art deco doors, I was just responsible for going in and basically cataloguing their condition, and taking photographs, and then going back and converting those into drawing. And then going and getting the 1946 drawings and making detail drawings based on those so we could give to the door people so we could come and refurbish all of this. And that was back in 19..oh, we worked on that product forever..probably 198..well when I started working there they started working on it so we're talking 1987, so probably 1985 'til 1991, after I had left, they had finally finished. It was a massive project.

414 But my first project that was a renovation of Fanueil Hall, not Quincy Market but Faneuil Hall, the actual cradle of Liberty. And that was a fascinating project. It was again, it was going out, cataloguing, measuring everything and then doing drawings so we could get, get the OK from the parks..park service, United States Park Service, to actually do the work, and then of course, generate the drawings for that. And also the Old State House. So I loved preservation. That's the only thing that could have kept me in architecture.

MH: ..in that field, yeah.

CG: Yeah, 'cause I don't like the new stuff. It's so banal. Parking garages, shopping centers, Kentucky Fried Chicken, or whatever. Banal, banal, banal.

MH: And you know...

[TAPE SIDE B]

431 CG: ..I'd be able to stay in the area which I love.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

CG: And being here in Andover-Newton Theological School has been helpful because I don't have to pay for the studio space.

MH: That's great. Would we use this as your address? When I put you on our mailing list would we use the..

CG: PO Box is probably better, yeah. But this is where probably if any teaching took place, I would do it here. MH: Um, now the mosaic, I noticed a few. Is that your work too?

435 CG: Yeah, actually. I simply brought that in because I do a lot of stuff with like Greek Orthodox kids during the summer. Um, I'm doing more and more stuff with the Episcopal Church and their young folks to try to..to to teach them what traditional art forms there were, and what went into them. And also how to read them. Like there's a language, everything means something. Like this image of the cross encrusted with jewels is symbolic of the victory that came out of what appeared to be a great tragedy. And the vines growing out of the base symbolized that it is the tree of life. You know, you know we lost our freedom through a tree, that had a [-] upon it and now we're gaining it back through uh, a servant of God who came to show us a better way. So you see, 'Eusus [?] Christos', Jesus Christ, 'Nika' [?], meaning Jesus Christ is victorious. And ultimately by that it's pointing to God, not so much the Christ, but the one who Christ represented.

And so this image is used, I've used paper mosaic. What I've done is I've taken either 2-ply museum board or just cardboard, just regular old biodegradable cardboard. Um, and I've tried to stick close to the traditional palette of the Byzantine empire and a lot of the early mosaics as you would see in synagogues in Asia and Asia Minor. And what I've done is just cut them up using a paper..not a paper..is the paper cutter the..

MH: Yeah, that's the paper cutter.

CG: It's a lot of work but that's the easiest way to cut these things. Um, so I do that and then have groups of kids and I would, you know, just give them history about Byzantine iconography. And mosaic work, and then just have them do it. And they'd have to go through certain prayers, because that's actually, that would have been actually part of that work. It was a sacred work so it would have to be approached in that way.

457 MH: God, that's wonderful. And what ha..where did you get the color from?

CG: Uh, well I just buy good ol' acrylic paint, 'cause you can get them in all these rich hues and traditional hues and palettes. And so just do that. And then we just use regular ol' clear glue, you know they make this bluish glue now you can go get at CVS. I think it originated by Elmers, instead of the white stuff. And use that

to glue so it's still no-nonsense. It doesn't require that we do a lot of dangerous stuff. And then when that's all done, just take acrylic medium. Actually gloss and matte, a mixture so that [-] it's more satiny. And then go over the whole thing. And this actually is supposed to be hanging in the chapel. Uh, at camp. And these pieces actually are pieces that I've, that I've been working with the Greek kids on – but that's not quite true. This is my own private thing. This is one that I'm working on. But these two, actually these three were started by the kids at the Greek camp last summer. And these are going to go in the chapel.

469 MH: What Greek camp are you talking about?

CG: It's um..it's the Diosys camp, Boston Diosys camp on..on uh, it's in Kintucook [?] Maine [sic], on Lake Winipasake. Um, a very wealthy Greek pharmaceutical magnet, or male or whatever. He sold one of this companies and bought that property and donated it to the camp. And it's been a camp for a year. I think it was a Baptist camp one year, and then became a hockey camp for a couple years. And the history is all on the walls.

MH: Wow.

CG: You have all these pictures from the 50s and stuff with these kids. So anyway, it's the Greeks..[-] and actually it was the small town. You see it has the old town hall. It was a little settlement in New Hampshire. So anyway, the idea is that I would keep coming back as long as I am able to help each generation of kids at summer camp do something. Then hopefully when I'm old and gray, I'll come in and we'll see all this work.

MH: Oh that's wonderful.

CG: And I'll be able to talk to these kids who say 'Yeah you know your father when he was a kid, he helped worked on that.' You know it would be really great.

MH: (laughing) It would be! That's right the multigenerations.

CG: Yeah.

481 MH: Now, when we were visiting Ksenia she showed us how she makes her pigments. Do you do that as well?

CG: I do on some occasions. Like um..I'm trying to think. I don't have any..actually one of my students is working on a piece. And we use some of the this uh, pigment. You can't see it. There's green under this blue. But it was pigment that I made from Cohasset stone. Actually I don't know where the actual pigment is but here's the stone that I used from umfe [?] bowls. And uh it's really wonderful stuff. So yeah I definitely do that. A lot of times I will ask clients um if they want to have a part of their native surroundings.

Now this actually came from Istanbul. This is uh, part of um, I don't want to say part of a [-], part of um some marble that a priest friend of mine picked up. And for his icon he wanted some of this relic if you will from Istanbul. Because

Istanbul is seen to be such an important place for the Byzantines, Byzantine church anyway.

MH: Well that's a nice idea by having something...

CG: Oh absolutely, absolutely. So I want to go back to Texas and get some of that old Texas clay.

MH: Yeah. Red clay!

496 CG: And then you go through the whole purifying of that which is, that is a whole different thing.

MH: Yeah.

CG: You get to separate the sand from the clay. Ksenia probably showed you that.

MH: She showed us a little bit of that.

498 MH: Tell me what..a little bit of your feelings about her and what she represents in terms of her artistry.

CH: Well for me what she represents is a um..how do you say, a modern day restoration of traditional aesthetics when it comes to iconography. We have so many people in this country who take one workshop from someone who doesn't really know what they're doing. And then they go off to sort of like, express themselves. And iconography isn't about expressing yourself, it's about expressing age-old theological traditions of the Orthodox church. I mean it is the artform of the Orthodox. It's great I include other people in it. I have American Baptist, I have Methodist, anyone who wants to learn it. But I always have to let them know this is really about a certain expression of a certain Christian viewpoint. Um, so for me Ksenia embodies that whole sort of respecting that tradition, and yet, um, being very practical about expressing. I mean she realizes you have to sell it, and you have to sell it for money. Can't give it away like she was able to do in Russia. And kind of had to do it because the KGB was not too happy about..would not have been happy about her doing that.

Uh, so yeah, so for me her expression is an embodiment of that. Let's go back and stick with the root. But she's more than that. I mean she's like a mother. I mean she was..I was her first student in America. And um, she opened a whole new world to me, very gently, I might add. It doesn't mean she didn't say things that were kind of hard to take. But she still was kind of like a mother hen sort of taking her little wing, and sort of pushing it forward.

518 MH: She seems very deep to me. Very wise.

CG: Yeah. Yeah, very wise. And someone who has a lot of say and can't really say it 'cause..yeah, it's a lot better. I'm not sure when you talked to her.

MH: Well, a couple months ago. January.

CG: Really? Yeah, I find that it definitely, she's still [-] by that and it was worse then. I mean I watched her for a year before I started to paint. Just watching her. You learn so much from watching. And it's the best training. I kind of understand now why an apprentice..ships in the past, in the far past, like thousand, two thousand years ago, um, there would have been this sort of, you just be around the person. Because you can just learn how to hold a brush. I mean I just..now I hold my brush the way Ksenia does. And it makes it so much easier to work. She's got so much experience.

530 MH: And help me in understanding how you recognize excellence in this genre.

CG: In this genre, you recognize excellence when you can look at 14th, 15th century icons and then look at the painting before you and get the same feeling. And you will know (laughing) uh when a painting hasn't been done at that level. Um, I would like to just look at line work and say it's all about line work. And that's part of it too because Ksenia always taught us 'start with a point, the line gets fatter, and then it ends with a point.' You can see it on all of these. It has a certain finesse to the line, like here. Uh let's see. Point gets fat. It starts with a slight point, it gets fatter then it gets thinner. And it just, these wonderful short lines.

MH: Like calligraphy, in a way.

CG: Yeah, calligraphic. And I wish I had some really bad examples to show you.

MH: Yeah, that would help.

CG: ..of things people have done that's just not there.

MH: Yeah.

CG: Oh you know what? There is one bad example. Can you hold just a second?

MH: Yes, absolutely.

545 CG: Even my students! They do it too good so no bad examples! (laughing)

MH: No bad examples! But you're saying, no this is fascinating that it's not just a visual..um, yeah?

CG: Well, even for someone whose not that good, that's still pretty good. But look at the lines..

MH: Yeah, the lines. They're overall..wobbly.

CH: Now there's just something that's just missing. Yeah so, so that's really...

MH: So you're talking about it almost has to evoke something in you. Well you know if you think about the word 'aesthetic' and how it actually means to liven the senses. That's..because you know anaesthetic means to deaden..but that's almost what you said. 'Cause it makes you feel..

CH: Yeah, you're uplifted. In 1450..15th century iconography is the epitome in Greece, that is, it's the epitome of the iconographic genre. Um, it was very clear they had a good understanding of what it meant theologically. And in doing it long enough, that it just had a high level of artistry. So, so in a very tangible way you can see excellence in terms of how the line work is done, the balancing of color values, there's no one color jumping out from the other. They're all sort of on the same level. Um, so that's one way. But just generally, what does it evoke? If you see an icon that is badly done, trust me you will know because the lines usually are not organized in a way that's harmonious. The lines fight. So if you actually look at them you don't really get a chance to rest.

You..I think, hm. Hope I'm not reading too much of what I really feel into what's [-] but I can't help but think that if I were not an artist and didn't know anything that if I saw something that [-] who were just kind of doing whatever they wanted to do and values were jumping and fighting, that it would leave me in a different place, and looking at something where, these lines all sort of have a general direction. They're starting somewhere and they're ending somewhere. There's no lines that just stop in the middle of nowhere. You know, they start..this little dark spot here, it starts thin it gets big and then ends there, so it actually ends. It comes to an end. And it's just an organization that just gives grace and harmony. And it reminds me of Saint Paul's words. Uh, he said in one of his gospels that in God, there is no..oh what is the term that he used? See if I were still a fundamentalist I could quote these scriptures. Uh, in God there is no disharmony. Now I'm paraphrasing a little bit. But, uh, no he said 'God is not a God of confusion' is what he said. And so I see the icon in a very real way as being something that there is no confusion. Everything is very ordered.

580 MH: It's symmetrical, it's balanced.

CG: Yeah. And sometimes it's asymmetrical balanced, but it..but there is still that sense of harmony.

MH: Yeah. And the gold, does the gold symbolize anything?

CG: Yeah, gold symbolizes um the first light. We read in the Hebrew scriptures that God said 'Let there be light.' And we know that with that light came life. So for us, this symbolizes you know light, that life-giving light that comes from God. And it also symbolizes uh divine knowledge that comes from God. Um so we see that expressed.

590 MH: I remember her talking about how you 'write' icons, you don't paint them. Can you talk about that a little bit, or is that not important to you?

CG: Um, it's, it is important. I do think in our English culture, especially among the Orthodox, it's a little, that word is a little overphrased. Uh, or used too much because the same word, if I understand this correctly, um, the word that they use to describe uh iconography which is 'iconographia', it really means 'to write.' And I think that that in their language it actually is akin to painting on some level. I'm not so sure it's really writing as we understand it. Um but, uh we use that term, and often than not we stress that it's writing, not painting. But I think that

may be a little overstated. I will say that the icon does serve a similar function to the narrative function of the Gospels for sure. That I would definitely push up there, I mean, if this tells a story. Um..

MH: And you have to be fluent to be able to read it. I mean I think isn't that really important for the..?

CG: I think so.

MH: And how does one learn that? I mean, is it..you're making it for the service of people that are..I mean you're not just doing it for yourself.

CG: Right, right.

MH: So, there has to be an understanding.

610 CG: Yes. I would say that I'm not so sure that there has to be a formal understanding of it. Uh, to get some of the benefit, and I'm not going to limit their ability [?] to God so I would say you probably would get all the benefit if you're open to it. But it does help for you to know what gold means, and what you know, the proliferation of light throughout the image in the absence of shadows, meaning I cannot..you cannot look at this and say well the sun's here, or the sun is here or the sun is there. You couldn't say it because there's too much going on that would make you think there's light everywhere.

MH: Now why is the absence of shadow important?

CG: uh the absence of shadow is important because if you look at this image, which is a copy of the fayoum portraits in Egypt that were used on mummy portraits by the great Roman inhabitants, they had thought of..bought into the whole idea of the sun god and a lot of other things. And you see this wonderful reflection in the eye. And you can see that the sun is sort of here. And they believed in this you know, Ra, I think was his name. But anyway, the sun god. Well, with Christianity, when Christianity came along and they appropriated the fayoum portraits. I mean they started using the similar model for icons. Uh they kept some of the things but they let go of the light in the eye. Uh, let's see a finished icon here. This finished one you don't see a light in the eye. You do see white on the side but that's only to give the eye form. It's not meant to be determinate of where light comes from. So um, basically um, the whole idea is to say that in God we live and move and have our very being [?] and that God is the light of Righteousness. And so Christians, or anyone who follows the one God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob as per the teaching of the church, they become infused with this Divine Light. And this Divine Light transforms, and makes them into something beautiful. Really, really making us what we were meant to be in the beginning. And that was, we were to be in this communion with God, such as Adam and Eve had in Paradise. Where God was our light of day. You know.

642 MH: Right. Is it..does that also apply to the lack of perspective. Wasn't there something about, where everything, I remember architecturally that everything would be on the same..

CG: Oh. Everything be on the same plane. And the vanishing point would be you and not in the distance. That's why with Saint Nicholas you see his ears coming far, you see the side of his head coming far, you see the top of it..these two nodes [?] are actually up here. But they've kind of come forward a little bit. And that uh reminds us that God loved humanity so much, that for us and all of creation that's connected to us, animals and all, could be..how can I say...restored, transfigured. And so for that reason, we become the vanishing point. So the icon really opens up a world that sort of embraces us.

MH: That's nice.

CG: Yeah, it's a whole 'nother way of seeing. And in the west they painted like this up until the Renaissance for sure. But uh, up to the time of Giotto and Cimabue, the ones who did paintings of Saint Francis of Assisi Church. Um, and then they began to start losing the understanding of what their job was as-how can I say-revealers of a spiritual truth. And they began to just think about the world's standards of truth. And they just kind of forgot.

664 MH: Yeah, and this-what'd you say-this kind of painting is a functional painting.

CG: Oh yeah, absolutely.

MH: And then there's that split where it's no longer..

CG: Yeah, it's more decorative, and it's to assuage your desires and senses. And make you go even more in the world than you ever were. And and I think um this icon talks about a faith that calls us to certainly be in a world and to be functioning in the world. But to view it from a slightly different perspective, so that everything is thought to be an opportunity – anything you experience is thought to be an opportunity to transfigure and make God's goodness come forth. Which I think is important because our very English word for God comes from the German 'Gott.' So it's really 'good one.' And uh, and I think that that is something to keep in mind when we're thinking about God and what, and what the icon should be saying about God. God is good and we're creating the image of God. The image in likeness. And unfortunately, we still retain the image as far as that goes. Uh, in within ourselves. But the likeness to God is not. I mean we have Holocaust and all sorts of weird things that happen. Uh, that we bring ourselves, I mean we bring onto others um, and it's not good. It's not good, it's not like God at all.

687 It's very interesting because uh, a friend of, a colleague of mind gave me this. Some Rabbi Joshua Bin Levi, who said a procession of angels goes before each person and angels announce his coming. And what do they say? Make way, make way for the image of God. From the town Deuteronomy...I can't read that.

MH: Something book.

CG: But I thought wow. Someone gave that to me and I thought, 'this is, this is good.'

MH: in relation to these.

CG: Right. And so what I do during the workshops is, whether I'm working with kids or adults. What I try to point out to them is that the process of creating of icon is the same process that goes into creating your life, in God. Or just as a person. 'Cause I mean, I don't always overly stress the theological things but I do make general statements that I think apply uh to anyone, whether they embrace a certain faith or not. And that is, you know, in life, we start with a pretty clear pattern. I mean as a kid, things are, I think in you that're really clear. I mean you probably know deep down inside what you really should be....well that probably doesn't make sense. But when you're a baby you may not consciously know this. But I do think that there's some hard wiring there. And I think once we get into life, and other folks who are telling us all kinds of other things, we just kind of lose that. And iconography is about restoring that part. You have the pattern, you take the raw materials of who you are. You begin to make that pattern manifest. But along the way you have to reinstate, you know, the glow [?] of what your mind's eye sees. And once you do that, then you can go to greater fulfillment. And the whole process leads you to something really beautiful. You know, it just takes time, but it can be done. And that's what I try to stress. That this really is your life.