

Vladimir Mother of God

Origins

The original Vladimir Mother of God is a Byzantine Icon, rumoured to have been written by St. Luke the Evangelist in 1131. It depicts the Virgin and Child and is an early example of the Eleusa Iconographic type (Virgin of Tenderness). It is one of the most culturally significant and celebrated pieces of art in Russian history.

Thought to have been painted in Constantinople, the Vladimir Mother of God was gifted by the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople to Grand Duke Yuri Dolgorukiy of Kiev in 1131. Academics associate this gift to wider attempts to convert and Christianise Slavic peoples. The Icon was kept in a nunnery in Vyshhorod until Yuri's son, Andrey of Bogolyubovo, brought it to Vladimir in 1155, where it **received** its name.



Traditional accounts suggest that the horses transporting the Icon stopped near Vladimir and refused to go further. Many people took this as a sign that the Theotokos (Mother of God) wished the Icon to remain in Vladimir. The icon became the highest embodiment of a culture which reflected more clearly than that of other Russian Principalities the ideal beauty and harmony of the World as the creation of God.

Iconography

The Vladimir Mother of God features the Christ Child sat on the Holy Mother's right, embracing cheek to cheek with the Christ child gazing lovingly towards and reaching for Mary. She holds him with one arm and looks solemnly towards the viewer. Iconographers describe her pensive gaze as looking both inwards and outwards, with the look of maternal tenderness and poignant sorrow as representative of the emotions of the Nativity and the Calvary.

Art historian David Talbot Rice said that "[Our Lady of Vladimir] ...is admitted by all who have seen it to be one of the most outstanding religious paintings of the world."