

Holy icons are a timeless phenomenon of the revelation of God, represented by colors, shapes, lines, and other elements of art. The most important principle of their creation is the adherence to the established rules of writing icons. Thus, the iconographer does not add anything new to religious icons, strictly following the Christian tradition and the canons of iconography and iconometry. At the same time, paintings of all types represent a specific form of artwork created with the use of the artist's personal imagination and worldview formed under the influence of society, family, way of life, etc. However, that's not the only difference between holy icons and paintings. What are the others?

1. There is no time in the religious icon. A religious icon can depict several different scenes and events (for example, the life of the saint from the birth to the death) that occur at the same time. This technique corresponds to the Christian belief about God's perception of time, which says, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." Paintings, on the other hand, depict events in sequence.

2. Colors in holy icons have a symbolic meaning. Colors used in painting religious icons have a symbolic meaning. For example, white means holiness and divine light, red stands for life on earth and Christ's sacrifice, and blue signifies the Kingdom of God. As for the paintings, the color scale is also symbolic, but its use depends on the artist's personal preferences or the work itself.

3. Orthodox icons don't show human emotions. Unlike paintings that are created to force an intense emotional response, most Orthodox icons represent unemotional and dispassionate images of certain figures and scenes. Iconographers don't try to express their personality or convey their inner feelings through work; empathy and perception of iconographic symbols are only felt on a spiritual level.

4. Holy icons are painted using reverse perspective. Paintings are created according to the rules of direct perspective, which gives a sense of three-dimensional depth. Holy icons, by contrast, are painted using reverse or inverse perspective, which gives the sense of entering the divine world where space and time are insignificant. It is also one of the reasons why Eastern Orthodox icons are considered "windows into heaven."

5. Iconographers don't follow the correct proportions of the human body. Religious icons often depict figures with too big eyes and elongated bodies, the proportions of which are far from correct. This iconographic technique is employed to convey the spiritual change of the human body in the heavenly world and to show the inner beauty instead of the physical appearance of the depicted figure.

As you can see, the difference between holy icons and paintings does exist. If you want to learn more about Byzantine Catholic or Orthodox iconography, you may browse on line.

Some details about this icon or icons in general

St. Andrew is always shown with what looks like uncombed hair...

In this icon he is at the back of other disciples on far right

The Lord is sitting on a stool which looks a little like a throne...this is a symbol alluding to his kingship

In icons the apostles can often be distinguished by the colour of their garment

Peter is always shown wearing blue and yellow ochre as in this icon.

The young St. John the beloved is usually in a reddish outer garment and white or pale blue inner garment

The Lord is almost always shown with his hand in a blessing gesture. ...and of course he is always blessing us.

In icons there is no time. Several events can be shown at the same time. For instance, in the Nativity icon the birth is central...but the shepherds receiving news from an angel is also shown, as well as the three wise men, and the choirs of angels. The temptation of St. Joseph is also present.

The icon makes present the person, the event, at this very time.

Icons are often referred to as 'Windows to heaven' because they bring the spiritual or transcendent person or event to the 'now'. As one contemplates the icon and spiritual world becomes more and more real ..more present to the beholder.