

AN ICONOGRAPHER SAINT; SEARCHING FOR THE TRUE LIKENESS

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St Sophrony (Sakharov), recently included in the catalogue of saints,¹ is best known for his theological writings. However, during the first years of his adult life, he dedicated himself to a career as a painter. Unable to find fulfillment in this profession, he left the world for Mt Athos at the age of 29. He spent the next sixty-year period as a monk, a hermit, a priest, and a spiritual father. He founded a monastery and wrote several books about his elder, St Silouan, and about his own experiences, mainly as a hesychast. In his later years during the building of his monastery, of necessity, he returned to painting, more particularly to iconography, and expressed his spiritual wisdom with colour and brushes.²

St Sophrony's journey to the icon

‘The act of the creation of all things is a mystery drawing us to Him.’³

St Sophrony's early life was dedicated to painting. Through his art he tried to fathom and solve the questions that tormented him about life, about Being, about death and eternity. While this brought him through the path of abstraction, he ultimately realised that the solution to all his quests was the Creator of the universe not the creation. During ardent prayer of repentance for having arrogantly turned away from

¹ St Sophrony was added to the list of saints by the Ecumenical Patriarch in November of 2019.

² Due to failing eyesight and physical strength, toward the end of his life, St Sophrony was unable to paint and climbed the scaffolding for the last time at the age of ninety to touch up a work.

³ A. Sophrony, *We Shall See Him*, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 1988), 150.

his childhood beliefs in search of something he deemed higher and loftier, Christ came to him. After this encounter, any further search for truth through painting seemed futile, and he withdrew from the world and entered the Monastery of St Panteleimon on Mt Athos. While St Sophrony's life has been told in detail in many places,⁴ the great turning point in his spiritual life must be emphasised: his meeting with St Silouan.⁵ Through St Silouan's teaching, all his questions about creativity and the Creator were solved: 'My talks with Staretz Silouan⁶ concentrated, of course, on prayer and living according to God's will; but my previous career naturally inclined me to reflect on creative work in general, and its meaning'.⁷

St Silouan explained creation from a hypostatic point of view. When the Son took flesh and became like us, we were given the full potential to enter into his love and collaborate in the eternal creative act through our aspiration to perfection. We were able to strive to imitate Christ and so 'to wish to enter into the living stream of divine eternity'.⁸

'This creative work is the noblest of all work available to man. Man sets out, not passively but in a creative spirit, towards this ideal, but always remembering to avoid any tendency to create God after his own image'.⁹

Guided by St Silouan, St Sophrony gave himself over to relentless prayer in order to come nearer to his Creator and Saviour. He found that: 'In proportion as the image of Christ becomes ever more sacred to

⁴ See the Introduction by R. Edmonds to A. Sophrony, *His Life is Mine*, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988); the first chapter in A. Zacharias, *Man the Target of God*, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2015), 25–53; Sr Gabriela, *Seeking Perfection in the World of Art*, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2014); and Sr Gabriela, *Being*, Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2016.

⁵ For the relationship between St Silouan and St Sophrony, see also the first chapter in A. Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, (Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2013).

⁶ St Silouan was added to the calendar of saints by the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1987. All St Sophrony's writings were published before this act, so he refers to his elder as Staretz Silouan.

⁷ A. Sophrony, *Wisdom from Mount Athos*, (New York, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 13.

⁸ Idem, p.14.

⁹ Idem, p. 15.

us, and His word is perceived as creative energy, so a marvelous peace floods the soul while a luminous aura envelops heart and head'.¹⁰

Another problem that St Silouan solved for him was how it was possible for man to be in the image of the Almighty, 'invisible, searchless, uncircumscribed and immutable'¹¹ God. The Elder told him that by devoutly trying to follow Christ's commandments, the soul would be filled with grace and love from the Holy Spirit, who would inspire prayer for the whole world as for oneself. The soul then becomes akin to Christ in his prayer in Gethsemane.

Such prayer is a transition into another dimension—the dimension of the person-hypostasis, in the likeness of the Hypostasis of the Word made flesh. We know that to the extent that man becomes like unto Christ in his earthly life, so he is already divinised and made a communicant in Divine life.¹²

St Sophrony spent all his life striving to fulfill these precepts, working hard to actualise this likeness within himself through ascetic renunciation. He relentlessly sought, first in prayer of repentance, but later in life with the aid of brushes and colour, the Face of Christ.

O LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who art the brightness of the Father,
the express image of His Person,
the all-perfect tracing of His Essence and His Nature;
open our hearts and stablish our minds
that we may know Thee.¹³

To paint a worthy icon of his Saviour was something that preoccupied St Sophrony deeply and was something for which he strove all his life. He realised that to paint a perfect icon of Christ is not possible. However, every icon carries a small part of him, and with each icon it is possible to portray a fraction. Yet ultimately, an icon of Christ is just a 'trampoline' towards our Saviour: we see that the icon represents

¹⁰ *His life is Mine*, 118.

¹¹ The Anaphora, St Basil's Liturgy, *The Orthodox Liturgy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 120.

¹² *Wisdom*, 15.

¹³ A. Sophrony, *On Prayer*, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 1996), 201.

him and our mind shoots up in prayer, much higher, beyond panel and colour, to the Divine Person himself. St Sophrony sought to create a worthy image of Christ until his eyes failed. The image he held to be most favourable¹⁴ was a drawing he made for the icon of the iconostasis in the chapel built in honour of his elder, St Silouan. It shows a face that reflects the painter's long years of prayer and repentance, as only an image can do.¹⁵

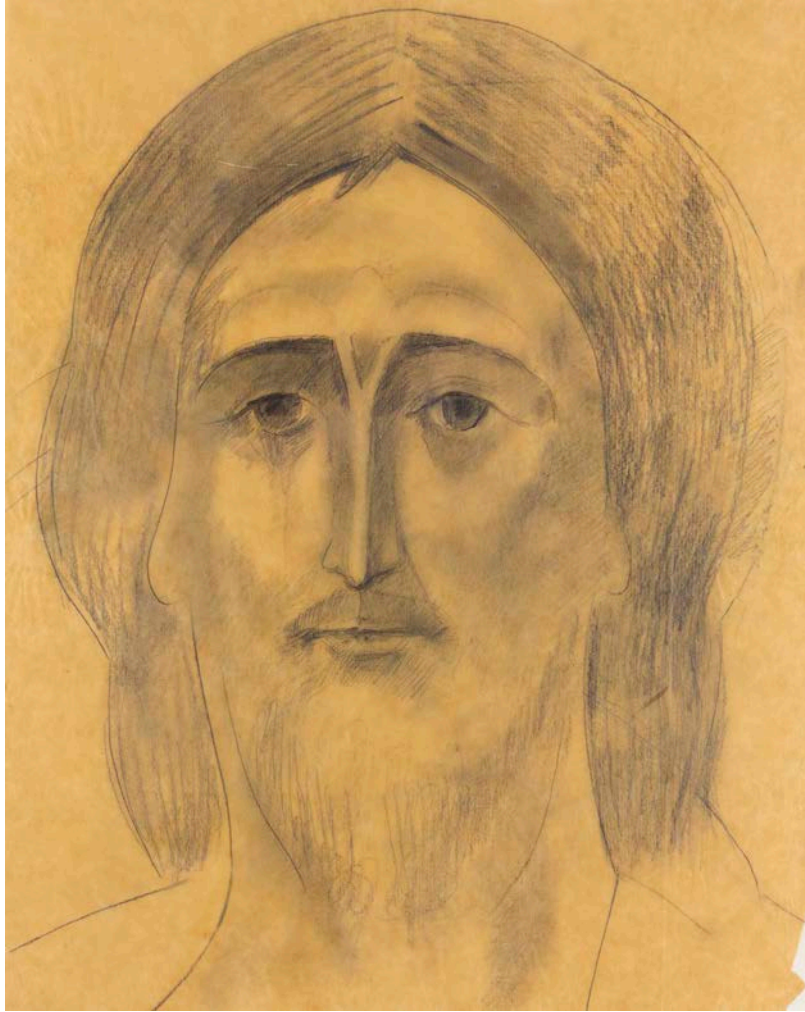


Figure 1: Drawing made for the icon of Christ in the iconostasis of St Silouan's Chapel, 1988, pencil on greaseproof paper, 39 x 31.3 cm.

¹⁴ On finishing any icon of Christ, St Sophrony was always disappointed.

¹⁵ 'The drawing shows me at one glance what might be spread over ten pages in a book.' As stated by Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons*.

In a letter to his sister, St Sophrony describes his thoughts, quoting Vladimir Soloviev who stated that he had never seen a satisfactory icon of Christ. St Sophrony goes on to say:

Who among contemporary people, if they met God the Word incarnate face to Face, would be satisfied, would comprehend infinite majesty in the form of a humble, and even disparaged, man? ... I have been thinking about those artists, spirit-inspired iconographers, who strove to express, in the material flesh of the ICON, the union of Uncreated with created.¹⁶

He then compares the different approaches to this problem. Some icon painters have purposely distorted the human features so as to bring the mind of the beholder on to another plane, away from anything earthly. Other painters have tried to keep both human and divine dimensions, the temporal and the eternal, and have translated them into human features, not allowing themselves to fall into naturalism, like western religious art, but rather into a transfigured form.

It is relatively easy to create an image pleasing to the eye by a hint, by a sketch. But exceptional genius is needed to ‘complete’ a work without sinking into ‘carnal beauty’. The wonderful history of the Icon knows many master-artists; some of them preferred to violate all the proportions or traits—others, such as St Andrei Rublev, created an exceptional harmony of two worlds in works of a rare completeness. I like both the first and the second. But the second stands higher in my estimation as true spirit-inspired artists and masters.¹⁷

And as a conclusion, he states: ‘In order to become an iconographer of the second category, it is indispensable to have in one’s life the experience of seeing a man transfigured by the descent upon him of the Holy Spirit’.¹⁸

¹⁶ A. Sophrony, *Letters to His Family*, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2015), 191–193.

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ Idem.

Such a person he had experienced in his life: his elder, St Silouan.

When St Silouan was numbered among the saints, St Sophrony had to paint his icon. This brought him to the delicate position of having to portray the fine balance between the outer likeness and the inner spiritual portrait of the person. He said that an icon should not be a photographic likeness and creating the icon was especially difficult in the case of St Silouan, whose facial expression changed continuously due to his incessant prayer.



Figure 2: St Silouan, wall painting on the face of the balcony, west wall, St Silouan's Chapel, mid 1980s, oil paint on plaster, size of head from top of hat to bottom of beard, 54.5cm.

The physical features of the person depicted on an icon should be retained but should be transfigured through the Uncreated Light of Christ. The fourth kneeling prayer at Pentecost expresses this transformation, where the petition asks Christ to clad us in Light. As such, the person with all his personal traits and individualities puts on Christ's Light and is transfigured by Light unto holiness. St Sophrony himself had the experience of this otherworldly Light from childhood:

There were occasions when coming out of church I would see the city, then the whole world for me, lit by two kinds of light. Sunlight could not eclipse the presence of another Light. To think of it brings back the feeling of quiet happiness that filled my soul at the time. I have forgotten almost all that happened in that period of my life but the Light I have not forgotten.¹⁹

He rediscovered it again as a hermit on Mt Athos where, immersed in repentance,²⁰ he spent entire days in contemplation of the Divine Light. This experience, both of hesychastic prayer and the visitation of the Uncreated Light, is marked upon the icon he painted of his elder.

It has been granted to me to contemplate different kinds of light and lights - the light the artist knows when elated by the beauty of the visible world; the light of philosophical contemplation that develops into a mystical experience.... I have been tempted by manifestations of light from hostile spirits. But in my adult years, when I returned to Christ as perfect God, the unoriginate Light shone on me. This wondrous Light, even in the measure vouchsafed to me from on High, eclipsed all else, just as the rising sun eclipses the brightest star.²¹

So it was with these experiences and with the 'luggage' of his professional artistic knowledge from his youth that he embarked on icon painting.

¹⁹ *We Shall See Him*, 37.

²⁰ See chapter on Uncreated Light in *We Shall See Him*. Here St Sophrony describes the various stages in detail and warns against light phenomena which are not from God.

²¹ *We Shall See Him*, 155–156.

St Sophrony the icon painter

*Figure 3: St Sophrony painting the face of St Photius
above the clerestory windows in St Silouan's Chapel, 1984.*

Though St Sophrony had experienced all the spiritual states described above, painting for him was not something euphoric or automatic. He worked hard at all drawings and paintings in a professional manner, not believing in following quick impulses, as mentioned above, where he described the various degrees of icon painters.

His approach was always very serious and any new inspiration was carefully tested with much prayer before being put into practice. Yet, he often scribbled down ideas and sketches on any paper at hand, like this lion drawn on an envelope:²²

²² This was one of many sketches done in preparation for a commission to paint a monumental-size icon of Christ in Glory. See A. *Sophrony (Sergei Sakharov) Catalogue Raisonné*,



Figure 4: Sketch of lion, the symbol of Evangelist Mark, in preparation for an icon of Christ in Glory, 1974, pen on paper, 22 x 22.9 cm.

Initially, St Sophrony had no intention of returning to painting. He had renounced this passion in his twenties and had given himself over wholeheartedly to prayer.²³

While a hermit on Mt Athos, he painted several icons, probably as a means of livelihood, but not in order to continue his art. His icons from this period were done in a formal Byzantine manner. A fellow monk and painter on the Holy Mountain shared his large collection of old *anthivola* with him, a sign that his intention to paint icons was genuine. However, later in France, he started painting in a more personal style, expressing his vision and knowledge of Christ. It began unexpectedly when he was serving as a priest at a youth camp outside of Paris. As they had not provided icons for their makeshift chapel, St Sophrony decided to rectify this. He stripped one of the camp beds of its linen, tore the sheet into several squares, chose two of them, thumbtacked them to the kitchen table and, standing, painted two icons: one of Christ and one of the Mother of God with oil paint provided by a retired painter.²⁴ He painted them in one session, in the space of a few hours. He was not happy with the outcome of the image of Christ.²⁵

Drawing & Painting, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2019), 41, 141–146.

²³ *We Shall See Him*, 15.

²⁴ Madame Feodorovna, inhabitant of the Russian care home in Paris.

²⁵ Testimony given by Jean DeBoihues, son of the owner of the farmhouse, who was present at the time of painting.



Figure 5: Christ, 1953, oil paint on cotton sheet, 41 x 41 cm.

Being unhappy with the result of his icon of Christ was something that continued throughout St Sophrony's life. He searched to express the Saviour, *Whom he had known*; and whenever he felt he was drawing near to representing a glimpse of the Person of Christ, the joy was short-lived. He soon realised that it was only a small fragment and far from the Divine. In his own words:

There is no icon of Christ that corresponds to our 'thoughts, impressions, dreams' about how He is. When I see an icon of Christ, then I simply see that it IS Christ and my mind soars up endlessly much higher.

Some people have fixed facial features that don't change very much, others have faces that change all the time. Christ's face was like that, every second it was different. The painter of King Abgar could not paint it, so Christ gave it to him Himself.²⁶

St Sophrony's aim with his icon painting was to represent spiritual portraits and beauty. He did not follow any particular style or school, but valued all trends for their various strong points. He preferred the Byzantine use of proportion, using the more classical rules for the drawing of the body. He admired the finesse of colour and tone in Russian icons, but did not agree with the Russian exaggerated use of proportion. In his view, bodies painted on icons, *'should not be too naturalistic but neither should the transfiguration be negative'*.²⁷ It is not possible to generalize his taste. He approached each work with appreciation for its own value and merits. Yet, for his own painting, he preferred to be simple, even minimalistic; to paint only the essentials and concentrate on the face, which is the mirror of the soul. The aim and criteria for an icon were to inspire prayer and be a link to the person depicted. However, he was also mindful of the fact that icons are art. He continued to put high demands on himself so that the icon would be beautiful, and that the composition would be over all harmonious like a poem, *'where no word is superfluous and the balance is just right'*.

²⁶ Unpublished workshop note, 19.11.1983. The reference to King Abgar concerns the painting-not-made-by-hand created by Christ himself when he pressed a towel onto his own face.

²⁷ All notes in italic are from unpublished working notes.

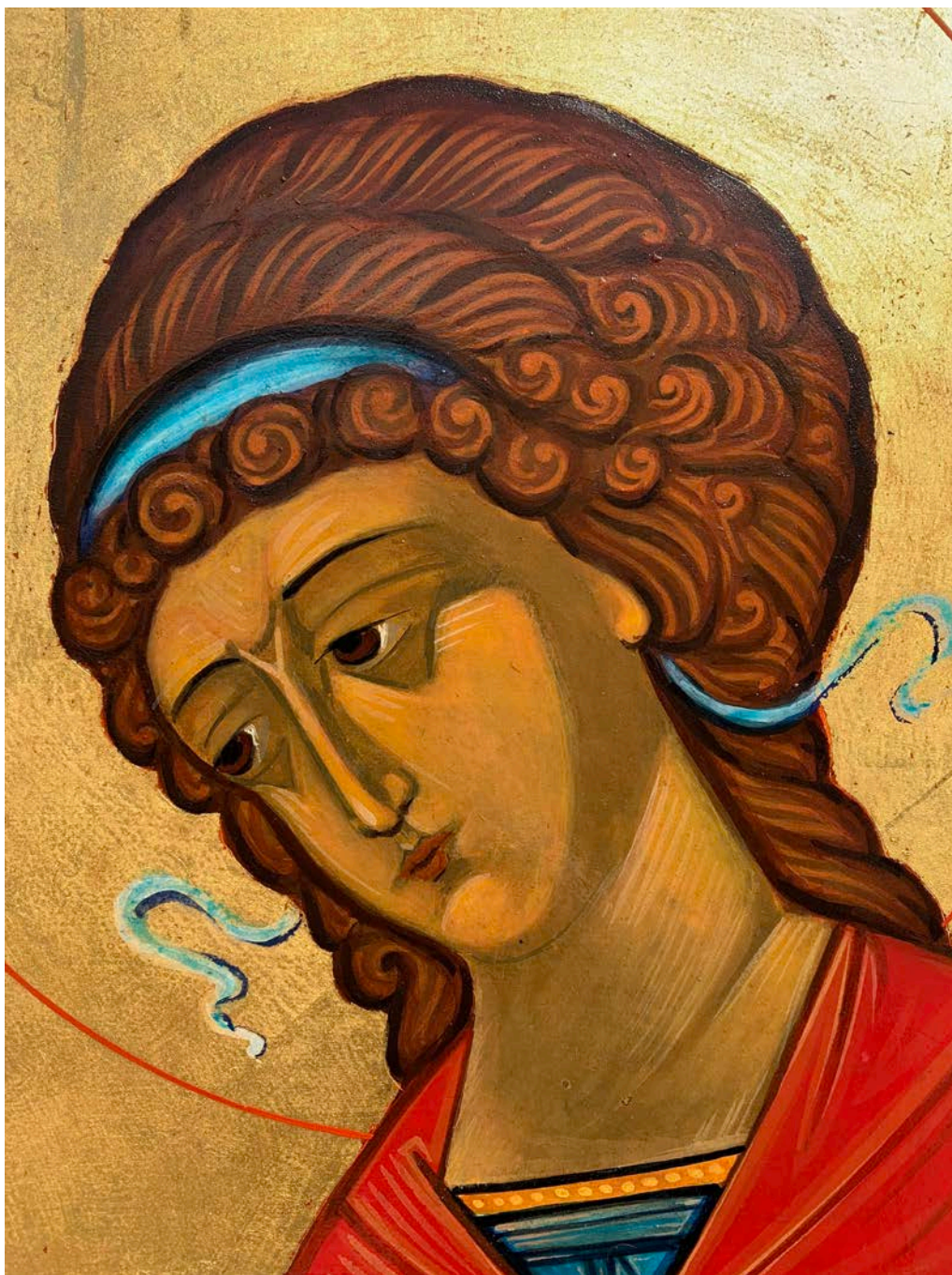


Figure 6: Head of Archangel Gabriel, 1969, detail of South door of iconostasis of St Nicholas' Church, Southampton, egg tempera on gessoed panel, 98.4 x 55.8 cm.



*Figure 7: Head of St Helena, 1960, detail, egg tempera
on gessoed hard board panel, 201 x 127 cm.*

When St Sophrony founded his own monastery, the first new building that he erected was an icon workshop. He designed it to have roof lights and intended the floor space to remain empty so that the work could be moved and placed in the most favourable position for correct lighting. His intention was that his young community would live from painting icons on commission.²⁸ For this reason, he tested the abilities of each new member and managed to form several artists out of people whose background was far removed from anything artistic. He also advocated collaboration. Whoever was good at something did the part he knew well. He often worked together with helpers, asking the assistant to begin the painting of an icon. Then, he would do the finishing touches. This was the case in his seventies and eighties when he no longer had his full strength. His work on commission was done mainly in the 1960s and the first part of the 1970s. After that a new stage began: the painting of murals.

In his youth, St Sophrony had often worked on monumental scale paintings for his own development and also for commission. He painted a large mural of a war scene in the Palace of the Nobility in Moscow.²⁹ Thus, his knowledge and feeling for murals had been sharply developed.

The first mural project started in the late 70s with a purpose-built hall, a refectory, that was to serve both as a refectory, and, in case of need, as a chapel. A few years later, a purpose-built chapel was constructed in which the walls were kept especially large, without any architectural embellishments, in order to have more room for murals. Here, he was finally able to give scope to all his gifts: composition, colour, harmony, and the painting of faces.³⁰

²⁸ Finally, the reception of guests became the main livelihood of the Community. For his icons painted on commission, see: *A. Sophrony (Sergei Sakharov), Catalogue Raisonné Vol. 2. Icons: Commissions & Collaborations*, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2020).

²⁹ This mural was thirteen metres long and six metres high. Its date has not been determined but it was probably done before the Revolution of 1917 in connection with the tercentenary celebration of the Romanov Dynasty prior to which the building underwent major refurbishment.

³⁰ Due to his age, St Sophrony relied to a large extent on the help of his assistants whom he instructed with great care, first and foremost as a father. He taught each person for his spiritual benefit. Feeling any resistance, he would always cede to the person in front of him. Hence, the work might have been quite different had he been younger and stronger at the time.



Figure 8: General view of Refectory, looking east, Community of St John the Baptist.

Composition was of prime importance for St Sophrony, as the underlying structure influences the whole, giving it an invisible calm and serenity. In his arrangements of space, one can see the former artist. The constructivist movement was active at the time of his studies of art in Moscow; and though he did not follow them openly, many of their trends and ideas can be detected in the way he arranged his compositions. One striking aspect is the continuation of movement from one area of the mural to another, either in a continued line or a mirrored curve or shape. This technique was especially used in scenes with large groups of people. In order to give an inner calm, the folds of garments would carry on as a line into an adjacent figure and would bind the whole group into a unity that did not give any sense of agitation. Elsewhere, the fold of a garment would be picked up again in the line of

a mountain or perhaps would be echoed in an adjacent shape. In other cases, on a single figure, he searched for lines that were equivalent on each side, but would not be mirrored or repeated. At all times, harmony was kept. *'It is important to have a harmony, not anything distorted, off balance. But in the details, there should not be any repetition, no mirrored hand or eye, etc'.*



Figure 9: St Sophrony painting the mountains on the mural of the Transfiguration, St Silouan's Chapel, 1985.

Another aspect of St Sophrony's technique was his use of space: each empty area had to be carefully measured so that it did not create a hole in the ensemble. At the same time, empty areas helped to give emphasis to the more important parts and also provided a necessary rest for the eyes. For the chapel, another form of art from his youth was put into practice: the art of camouflage, which he learned during his time in the army.³¹ Because of building restrictions, it had not been possible to build the type of roof St Sophrony wanted. So, in order to give the impression of a vaulted ceiling, he conceived a series of concentric circles which gave the impression not only of a vaulted ceiling, but even of a dome. A further effect used for this was the contrast of gold and bronze paint on the ceiling, which added yet another dimension.



Figure 10: Ceiling of St Silouan's Chapel, middle and east sections.

³¹ The art of camouflage was new to Russia and was taught to them by the French. St Sophrony's teacher in the Moscow art school, VKhUTEMAS, P.P. Konchalovsky, taught camouflage in the army during WW1.

The sense of a vault was further emphasised on the east wall by reflecting the circles on the ceiling in draperies as well as reflections of them on the table of the Last Supper and on the carpet in front of the Holy Table.



Figure 11:
East wall of
St Silouan's
Chapel.

Special care was also taken for the general outline or skyline of the walls. Here, the time he spent in abstract painting became valuable.³² Shapes and outlines were measured and evaluated for their relation to the whole composition and were adjusted to give a dynamic sense of movement and fine-tuned to the need of the room and the space.³³ In the chapel, he was particularly attentive to this and at the same time to the colour composition. As the north wall had all the scenes from Christ's birth until the Entry into Jerusalem, he arranged for the colours to express this: *'The north wall has a tragic character, the earth (the green mountains). While the south wall is already saved, it is on fire.'* The south wall, which had as its highpoint the Resurrection, was painted in a different colour scale with a predominating orange tone.

³² St Sophrony studied abstract art with Wassily Kandinsky.

³³ For a detailed account of the painting in the chapel, see Sr Gabriela, *Failures and Discoveries, notes from an icon workshop*, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2018).



(image12, Caption: North wall of St Silouan's Chapel)





(image 13, Caption: South wall of St Silouan's Chapel)

‘There must be harmony between the two sides, the two sidewalls; they should not be the same, but have the same volume. Beauty is something that one finds corresponding to something within one; that is, when seeing something in front of us, one feels a ‘vibration’ inside oneself.’

In the use and composition of colours, the artist in St Sophrony was still alive.

Each situation was judged on its own value. Nothing was simply standardised. Always of prime importance was the culture of the surface, which was another artistic milieu prevalent in Moscow in the early part of the last century: a work of art was judged by the quality of the surface texture. In spite of having sublime colours, if the surface of a work was not good, even imperceptibly so, it would lose quality. In the case of



murals, this meant that the surface should be perfectly matt, while in the case of icons, the surface should be like porcelain.

The palette of colours St Sophrony used varied from panel icons to murals.³⁴ For murals, the colours he chose were often pastel shades so as not to overpower the room, which should be harmonious with no particular colour ‘jumping’ out of the surface. All should be inscribed and an integral part of the wall. Another guideline that was followed was the quality of natural light. As the light in England is soft, strong colours were not used, but rather tones that harmonised with the gentle natural light.³⁵

³⁴ The technique he used for murals was to apply very diluted oil paint to sanded gypsum plaster. For panel icons, traditional egg tempera was used.

³⁵ However, St Sophrony said that in countries with strong light, the colours should be correspondingly brighter and more intense. He has often been misunderstood in this aspect. The colour scale of the chapel has on occasion been copied in countries where soft colours were not in accord with the hot climate.



Figure 14: Mural of the Holy Trinity, 1977–1982, Oil paint on gypsum plaster, Refectory, Community of St John the Baptist, 2.94 x 3.58 m.

On panel icons, the criterium was to give a solid presence, and often many layers of paint were applied, building up the surface and the colour at the same time. This under-painting was done with less expensive earth colours to give the base. Then more precious top colours were applied.

There were other principles that St Sophrony used from his time as a painter: *'A painter must use the "dirt" [they have left over] and try to*

make something beautiful’, meaning by this that even the last remains of colour could be used creatively and would often give unexpected solutions and combinations. He rarely used primary colours, but usually mixed two or three colours to obtain the required hue. He preferred sober tones. *‘In order to make colours serious, one can add a spot of black in every colour’*.

However, to find exactly what was required was always a struggle, and St Sophrony did not spare himself the hard work of trials and searches. For the murals of the chapel, this was particularly difficult as the four walls and the ceiling had to be considered one large painting ensemble. *‘When we have found the colour scale we will use the same colours everywhere and it will be like a symphony of colours.’*

Another aspect for the mural painting was that, in contrast to panel icons, the light parts were kept as transparent as possible, and the use of white was kept to a minimum. *‘White is too thick as a colour, it can destroy the surface, as I told you, the surface has a great importance’*.

Image 15,
Caption:
Mother
of God of
Tenderness,
1960, egg
tempera
on gessoed
hardboard
panel, detail,
190 x 155 cm.



St Sophrony treated the surface and the most important main part of the icon, the face, with utmost attention. The colour he preferred to use was yellow ochre, which he considered to have a very noble tonality. As far as possible, he preferred to use only yellow ochre for the light modeling of faces with a little white added at the end. He did not like to use red in faces, as this added a carnal aspect which he sought to avoid at all cost. In drawing iconographic faces, he prolonged the nose, usually making it thin and straight, and enlarged the eyes. He put special emphasis on the pupils, which would look at the beholder but at the same time would be fixed within, giving a sense of eternity.



Figure 17: Face of St Silouan, drawing for mural on balcony, St Silouan's Chapel, 1984, pencil on greaseproof paper, 54.5 x 37 cm.

Figure 16: Drawing for the mural of the Angel at the Empty Tomb, 1977, pencil on news print, 50.9 x 37.7 cm.



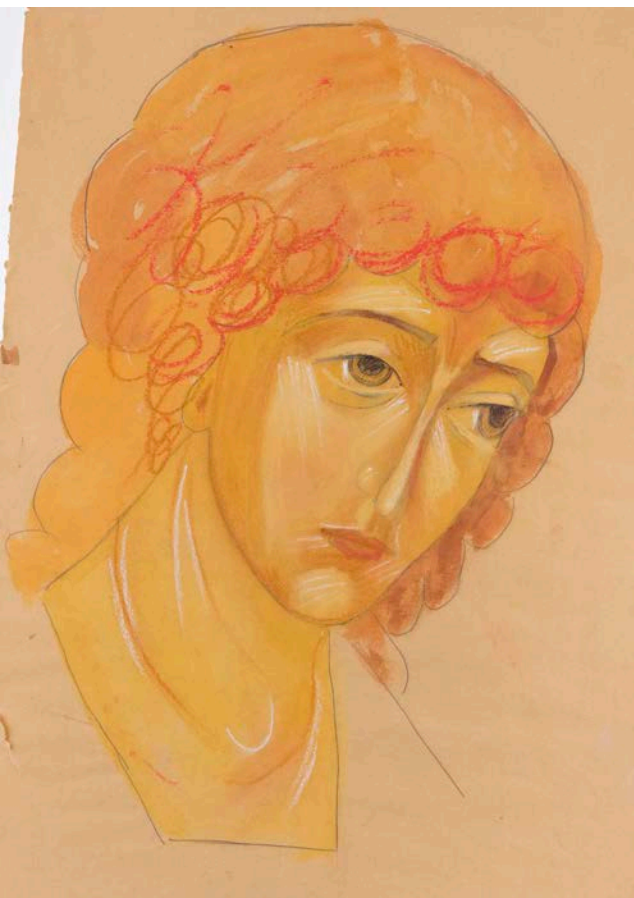
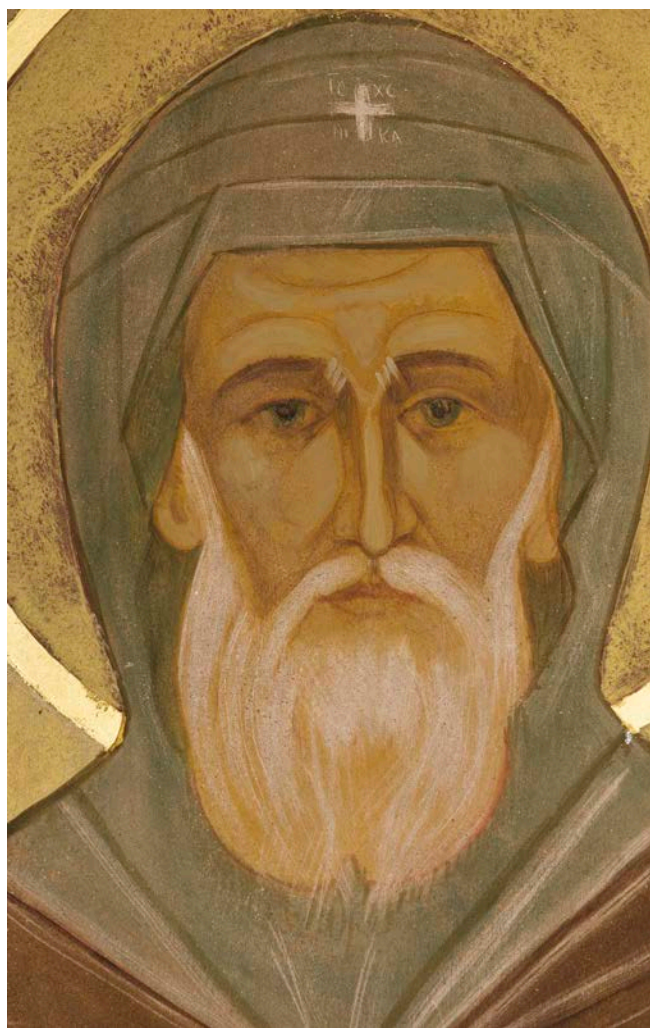


Figure 18: Pastel study for the left-hand Angel, 'The Father', for the mural of the Holy Trinity, 1977, 55.5 x 38cm. St Sophrony would frequently make special pastel studies for the more important faces before painting them.

St Sophrony was against putting any light reflection within the iris or pupil, saying that this added an unwanted 'evil' aspect.³⁶ He told us that, 'one can often see in people's eyes which religion they belong to'. The eyes reflect the soul of the person, so naturally they are the most important part of an icon.

Figure 19: St Nilus of Sora, detail, 1984–1986, oil paint on gypsum plaster, west wall of St Silouan's Chapel.



³⁶ His observations probably stem from his involvement in Eastern religions in his youth.

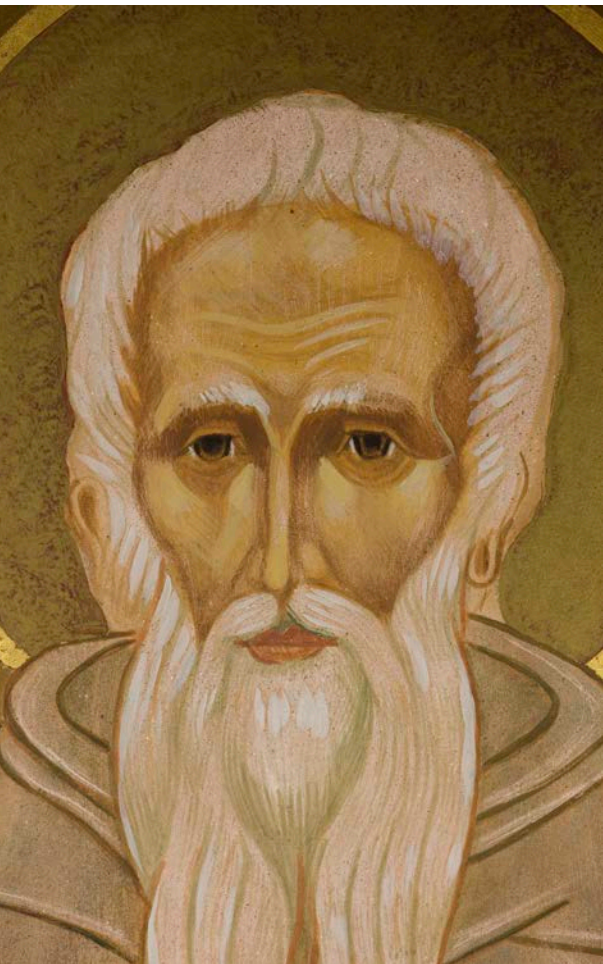


Figure 20: *St Paissius the Great, detail, same as image 19.*

He would work for long hours with great care on faces, especially on the eyes, eyebrows and the area around them. He explained that *'severity, suffering and sadness are expressed in the eyebrows. This is what one often sees in frescoes. A great artist can paint sad eyes, but have the rest normal'*.

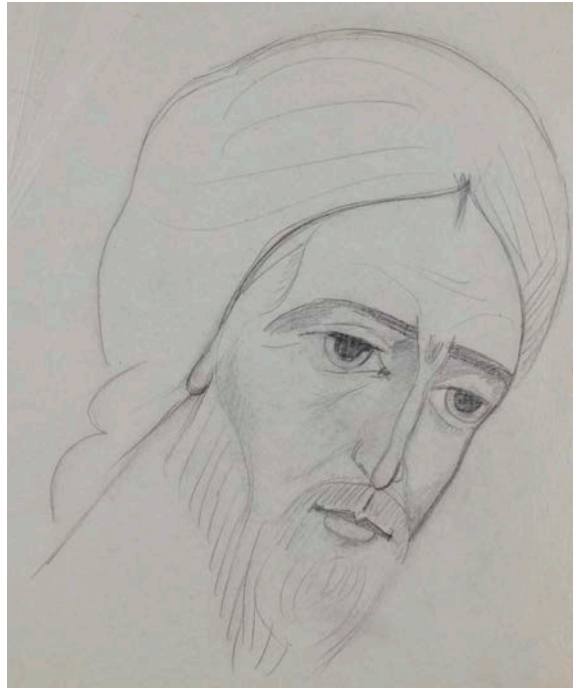


Figure 21: *Myrrh-bearing Woman at the Empty Tomb, detail, 1977–1982, oil paint on gypsum plaster.*

Yet the main aim for St Sophrony, as mentioned above, was to strive towards a worthy representation of Christ, something of which he never

tired. In the form of painting, he wanted to pass on what he had learned and experienced in his contact with the Saviour. Whereas God becomes tangible through the icon, Christ can only be depicted, painted, and portrayed through true knowledge of him.³⁷

Figure 22: Christ at the Resurrection, 1977, Drawing for mural in the Refectory, pencil on greaseproof paper, 44.5 x 38.5 cm.



‘We must not put many shadows on the face of Christ, in fact he is all light.’

St Sophrony composed this prayer to God the Father to bless the icons he had made of his son:

O THOU THAT ART

God the Father, Almighty and proper to be worshipped, it is very meet, right and befitting the majesty of Thy holiness that we should praise and adore Thee, of certainty the Only True God; Who art from everlasting, searchless, unknowable, ineffable.

³⁷ All that I have written is true of my father in God, St Sophrony. Yet, I am light years away from his state. Though it has fallen upon me to paint his icon, I cannot compare myself even remotely to him when he had to paint *his* own elder. My approach to painting his icon is to call upon his prayers for help. And, thankfully, he does help.

Look down in mercy upon us and upon this icon of Thine only-begotten Son, Who being the brightness of Thy glory and the express image of Thy Person, doth uphold all things by the word of His power; Who being God pre-eternal showed Himself upon earth; being incarnate of the Holy Virgin emptied Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant in the likeness of our earthly body that He might mould us like unto His glorious body; giving Himself a ransom unto death, and having descended by the cross into hell, and being risen again the third day, ascending into heaven He sat on the right hand of Thy Majesty on high.

WHEREFORE, O Father all-holy, we have fashioned this image of Thy beloved Christ, and we pray and beseech Thee, of Thy goodness send down Thy Holy Spirit upon this Icon, to bless it and hallow it, that all who pray here may be heard of Thee and receive Thy heavenly blessing, and the grace of Thy Holy and life-giving Spirit, and the hallowing of Thine Only-begotten Son.

For Thou art our sanctification, and to Thee we ascribe glory, now, and forever: world without end. Amen.

May this icon of our Lord Jesus Christ
be blessed and hallowed
by the sprinkling of holy water
in the Name of the Father
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.³⁸

³⁸ *On Prayer*, (1996), 208.

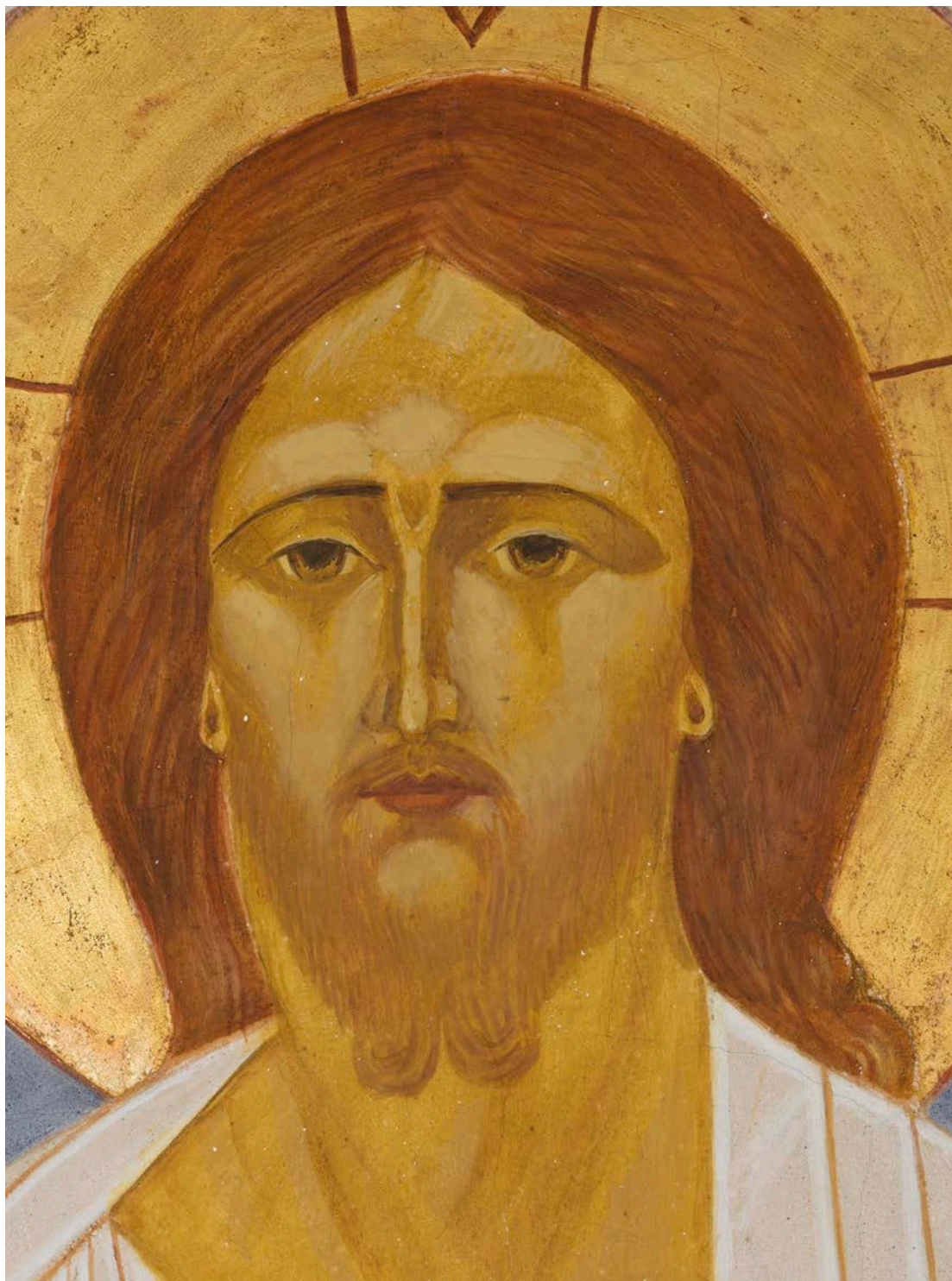


Figure 23: Christ at the Deisis, 1977–1982, Refectory, oil paint on plaster.