



*Sister Mary Charles and Gary Erickson, Subiaco Studio, 2005*

and workshop assistant, art handler, photographer, and go-to-guy until his untimely death in 2006. Gary undertook the work of preparing wooden panels, applying and sanding layer upon layer of gesso, and

operating and supplied. Sister Mary Charles came to call him her apprentice, a traditional role in the world of art.

“I think it’s wonderful how God has given me this icon part of the journey at the latter part of my life because it’s more contemplative. It’s less physical. It doesn’t put the same demands on you that sculpture does. It’s... a nice way to complete an artistic journey” (Lucero).

Iconographers do not say an artist “painted” an icon; instead, they say an icon was “written.” This distinction is the key to what icons are and are not. The “writer” of an icon is not creating an original composition, image or narrative. Iconographers are usually transcribing, or writing, from a prototype. Their job is not to invent; it is

to accurately repeat a gesture, so that others can use it as a devotional image for meditation.

“In icons the light source is always coming from within, unlike the Western landscape or still life where you have light sources that are flooding on from the outside. The idea is that the holiness is within the person, and so you try to work and work until it is glowing from within. I try to paint in a contemplative manner as much as I can. I try not to answer the phone, to keep the place very quiet...” (*Sisters*).

Sister Mary Charles took six pages of notes from Paul Evdokimov’s *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, published the same year she took instruction at St. John of Damascus School of Sacred Art. These notes indicate her delight in the author’s stress on icons as spiritual abstractions and on the differences in techniques used in writing icons versus creating secular art forms.

In his essay which appears below, Rev. Dustin Lyon states that the modern notion of an icon is that it is prayed into sanctity by a worshipper. The spiritual “charge” doesn’t exist in the object per se, but rather in the dialogue between the icon and a viewer. This idea of “dialogue” with artworks has permeated modern aesthetic theory from the mid-19th century on. The concept of the viewer’s active participation in the experience of abstract art recalls debates about how to “read” abstract works by American artists like Ad