



## Our Lady of Vladimir Icon & Riza (Oklad)

Originally from Constantinople, Our Lady of Vladimir traveled to Kiev around 1155, then to the city of Vladimir in 1160, when tradition says the horses stopped and would not continue in Vladimir (hence the icon's name). It was moved to Moscow in 1395.

The image is of the Eleusa or “merciful” genre which conveys deep emotional connection. Jesus’ cheek presses against Mary’s in a tender gesture, while his small arm encircles her neck. Mary’s expression of bright sadness combines maternal love with prophetic sorrow, her large, soulful eyes foresee the passion that awaits her Son.

I have long been a fan of iconographer Fr. Anthony Gunin and this icon gave me the opportunity to study with him and learn his style while painting a copy of his work. I love the tenderness and calm feeling that emanates from the cool color palette, which offers a contrast to the usual warm ochre colors. Relatively few layers of egg tempera preserve the transparency of the icon as if it were painted in watercolors. It was painted with a technique using a tiny semidry brush to mimic “painting with haze”.

A *Riza* (or *Oklad*) is a traditional icon cover for protection. Usually, it is usually gilded, silvered metal with repoussé work and is pierced to expose elements of the underlying icon. Sometimes it is enameled, filigreed, or set with artificial, semi-precious or even precious stones and pearls. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the purpose of a *riza* is to honor and venerate an icon, and ultimately the figure depicted. The liturgical was to amplify the image of the saint’s soul, shining purity (silver), godly blessing (gold), and multiple facets of the characters (gems and pearls). This practice is sometimes considered of an ancient pagan origin when idols were covered with gold and silver; however, the meaning has change from practical to purely artistic. For practical purposes, a *riza* was used to protect the icons from candles and *lampadas* (oil lamps) that were burned in front of icons, darkening them over time. A *riza* is designed specifically for the icon it is to cover. It leaves open spaces where the face, hands, and feet of the icon's subject can be seen.

*Alice Bolgova, Iconographer*

*Classical Iconography Institute Calligraphy Instructor*