



Our Lady of Częstochowa

Not only is this 15th century icon the Patroness Poland, but she was also crowned queen of Poland in 1655. This miracle-working icon is shrouded in mystery and was said to have bled after being permanently scarred by Hussite raiders in 1430. It became known as “the Black Madonna” likely because her complexion darkened over time from candle soot, incense and dust, influencing the development of a new genre of “black madonnas.”

The style appears to be a blend of Byzantine and Western. It follows the traditional Byzantine three-quarter frontal iconographic position utilizing traditional inverse perspective; however, the proportions are stylized and the modeling is representative of a softer, Western influence. The color theory is traditional, but the style in which the fabric folds are painted are Western, making this icon truly a hybrid style reflecting Poland’s position as a bridge between Eastern and Western Christianity.

The underlying geometry is a triangle, corresponding to the Hodegetria genre in which Mary points the way to Christ, who blesses the viewer and holds a closed Gospel book.

Having grown up in Poland, I have a devotion to the Black Madonna, along with most all Poles. Even though she is as mysterious as her origins, she feels familiar as a symbol of my family heritage.

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