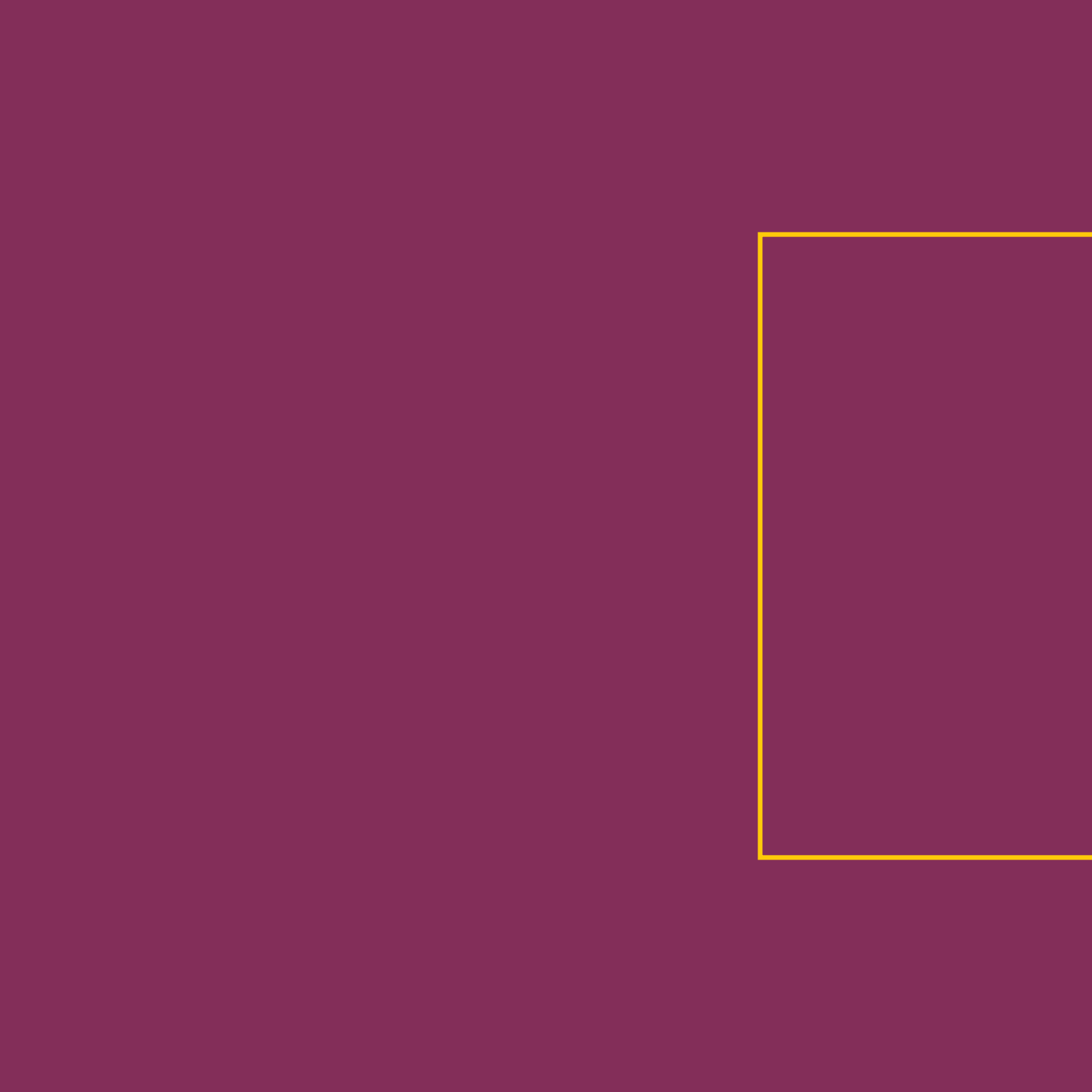




Saved by Beauty

**DOSTOEVSKY
AND AMERICA**

A Visual Tribute to the
200th Anniversary of the Birth
of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-2021)



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

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DOSTOEVSKY AND AMERICA

**A Visual Tribute to the 200th Anniversary
of the Birth of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-2021)**

Painting exhibition
of the group "OCHRE"



New York, 2022

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America

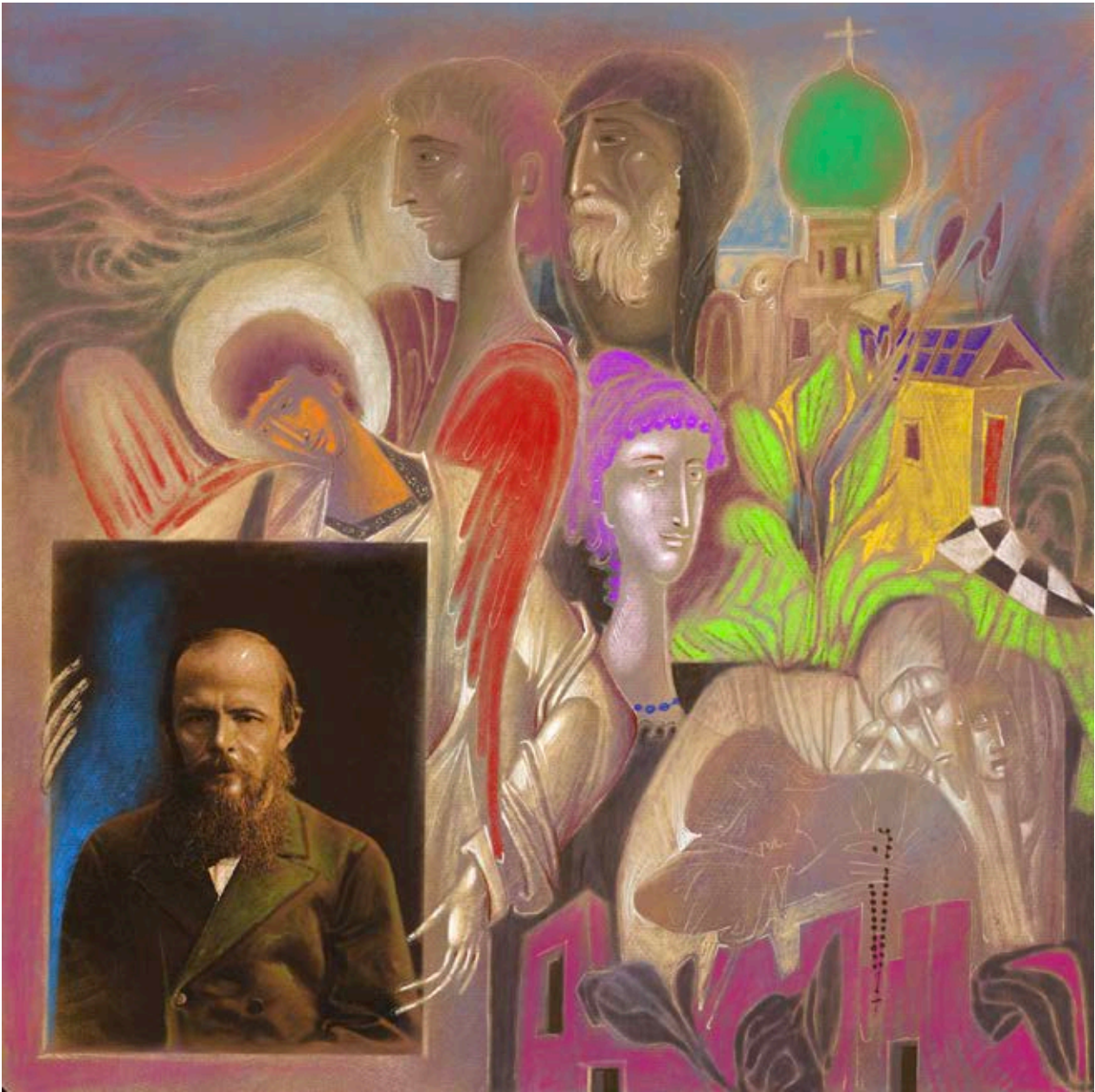
I would like to thank the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture in New York City for hosting this crucial exhibition celebrating the bicentennial of Dostoevsky's birth in 1821. The COVID pandemic delayed this project by one year. However, the influence and inspiration of the Russian author are beyond time and space.

My sincere gratitude goes to His Grace Bishop Maxim of the Western American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church who mentioned to me that this exhibition was being presented in Greece. It is with great pleasure that we now welcome these beautiful paintings to New York, a city that exemplifies in many ways the extreme contradictions and creative struggles that Dostoevsky successfully described in his writings.

Fr. Stamatis Skliris, George Kordis, Bishop Maxim Vasiljevic, Babis Pylarinos, Costas Lavdas, Maria Panou, Giannoulis Lymperopoulos, Nektarios Mamais, Fotis Varthis, Konstantinos Kougioumtzis, Christos Kechagioglis, Nektarios Stamatelos, Despina Karantani, George Margaritis, Christina Papatheou-Douligeri, all these artists are part of a renaissance movement intimately connected with a religious revival. And they are all members of the visual group "OCHRE."

Looking at these paintings, we are never too far from the world of icons. Indeed, a simple icon, rendered magnificently, becomes a polysemous sign of multiple layers of meaning and participates in our worship experience. The well-known Orthodox theologian, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, once wrote: "The true sense of worship is to be found not in the symbolic, but in the real fulfillment of the Church: the new life, given in Christ, and that this eternal transformation of the Church into the Body of Christ, her ascension, in Christ and with Christ into the eschatological fulness of the Kingdom, is the very source of all Christian action in the world."

But Dostoevsky walks the road to the Kingdom by exploring the multifaceted dimensions of human tragedy. The free man is enslaved by the external forces that dehumanize its ultimate being. The struggle between light and darkness brings forward the oxymoron complexity of the person. The faithful don't know God, whereas the atheist only speaks about religion. He looks into the soul of humanity and finds hell and paradise cohabiting. This graphic experience of paradox, of in-between, is what makes his work so phenomenal and this exhibition so important as it tries and succeeds in capturing through shapes and colors the depth of the human soul.



"Dostoevsky", Digital Painting, Giclee print, 2021, George Kordis

A portrait of the great writer surrounded by imaginary people-heroes of his stories.
An Angel is holding the writer's portrait in order for the divine inspiration of his work to be revealed.



"Annia Snitkina",
Digital Painting,
Giclee print, 2021.
George Kordis

A portrait of Anna who was the person writing down an "evangelist" Dostoevsky's stories. She is surrounded by an Angel who is holding in his hands the dead Dostoevsky.



"The Underground Man", acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Stamatis Skliris

The underground space is not a real-life one, but rather a conventional rendition of the hero's descent into solitude and alienation. His wide-open eyes desperately try to restore substantial communication channels, and his face, deeply etched by the agony of his spirit, mirrors the labyrinth he finds himself in.



"Sonia Marmeladova", acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Stamatis Skliris

She looks like a simple young woman who is led astray into corrupt paths by her beauty and love for her failed father. Yet, her eyes show the ethereal oil of her devotion to her father and her loved one, and this devotion is precisely what saves an uncorrupted integrity deep in herself.



"White Nights by Dostoevsky",
acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Stamatis Skliris

The gloomy hero at the bottom of the square offers his hand to his beloved woman who climbs down the stairs towards him. The shady square, however, together with the church, the romantic streetlight and -above all- his sorrow anticipates the dead-end to their affair.



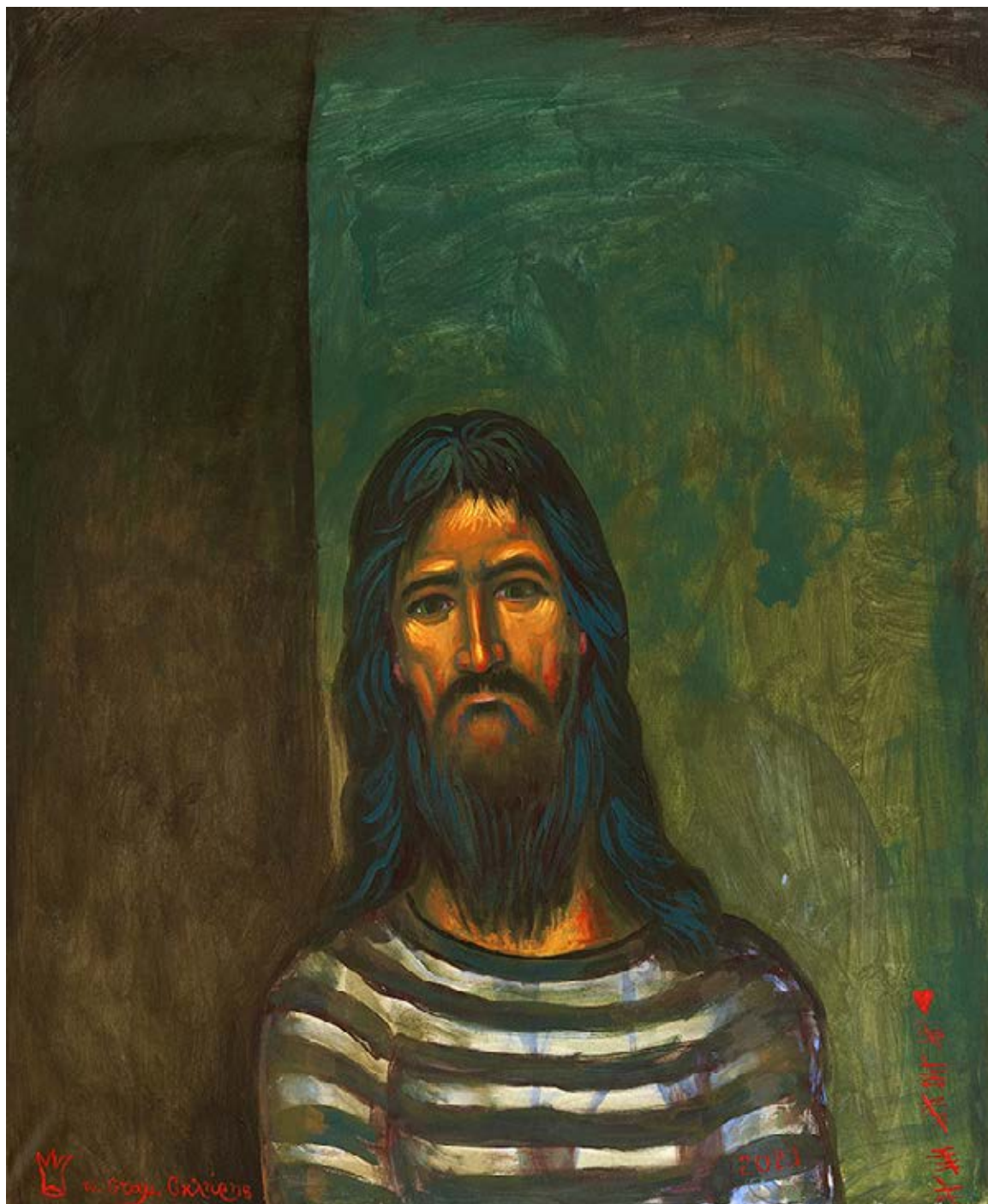
"Smerdyakov",
acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Stamatis Skliris

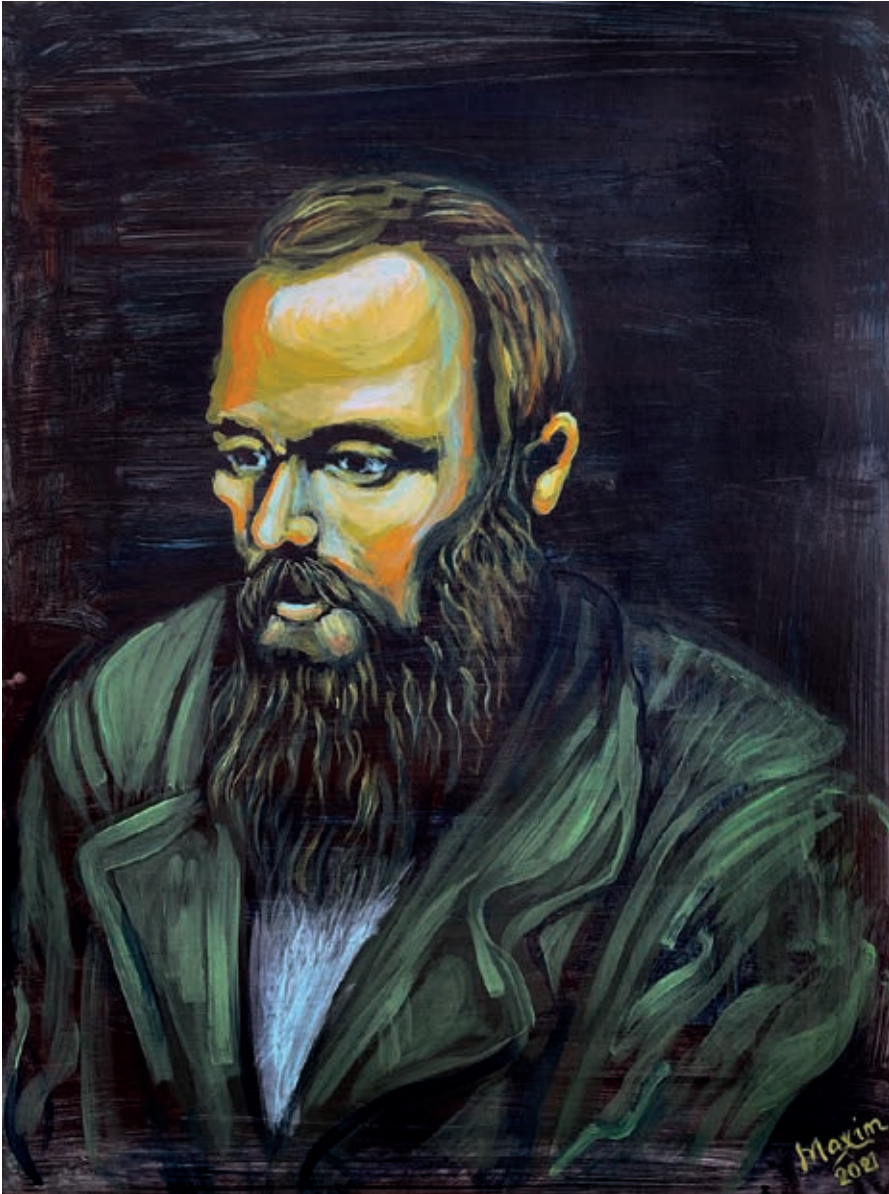
As repulsive, immoral, half-witted and divided as he is, Smerdyakov hurries in his intense impulse to blow a fatal hit with the bronze pestle held tightly in his palm. This appalling painting depiction of him is, in a way, concealing some hidden sympathy for the tragic hero.

"Dostoevsky in
the Prison Ship",
acrylic on canvas,
2021,
Stamatis Skliris

This portrait of
Dostoyevskiy
does not aim to
reproduce his
physical
appearance but
rather his inner
relationship with
Christ Crucified.

His vision
encompasses the
Void. The cell
space is alive, as if
shredded by the
breaths of
martyrdom of the
many convicts
that have covered
its walls with rust.



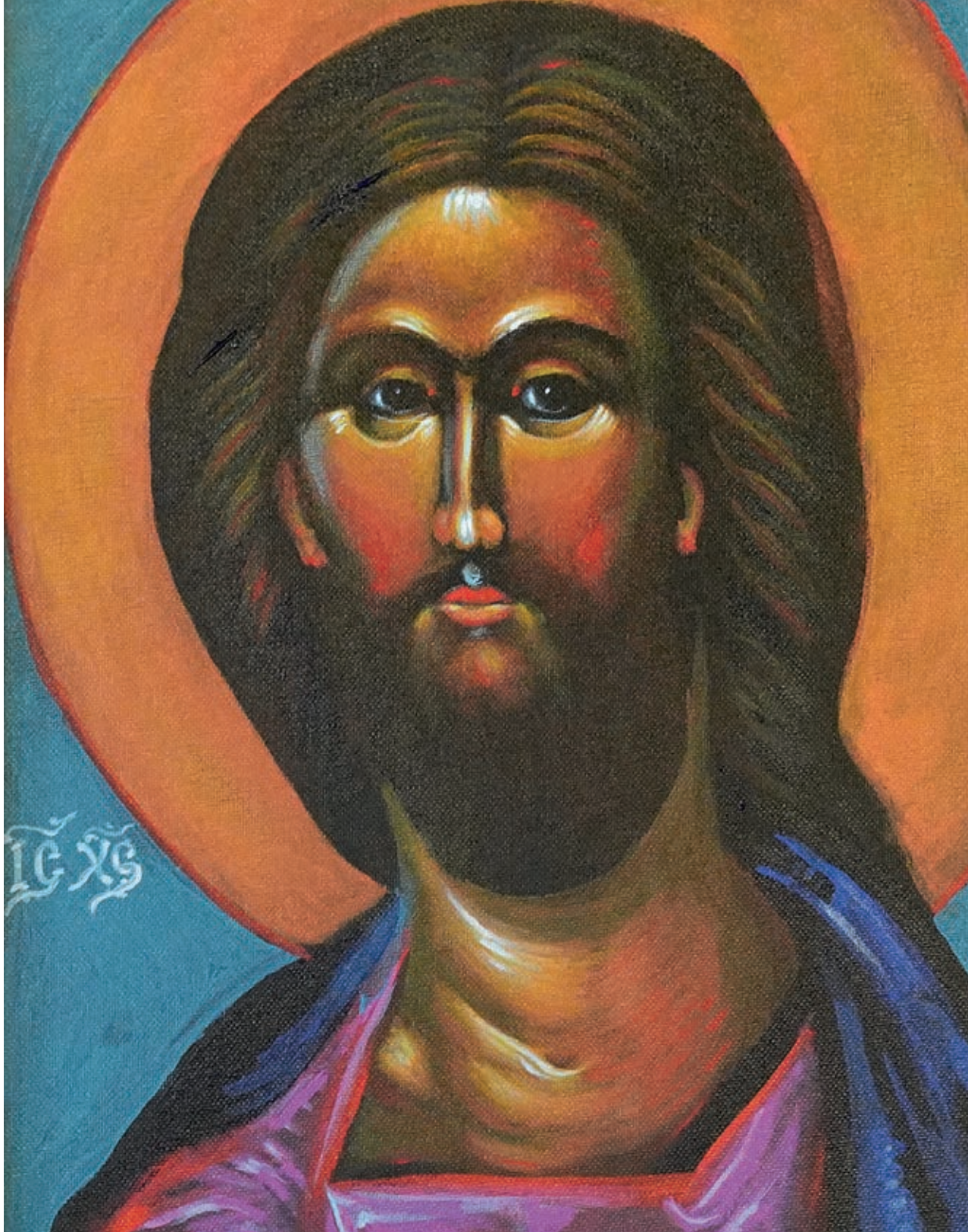


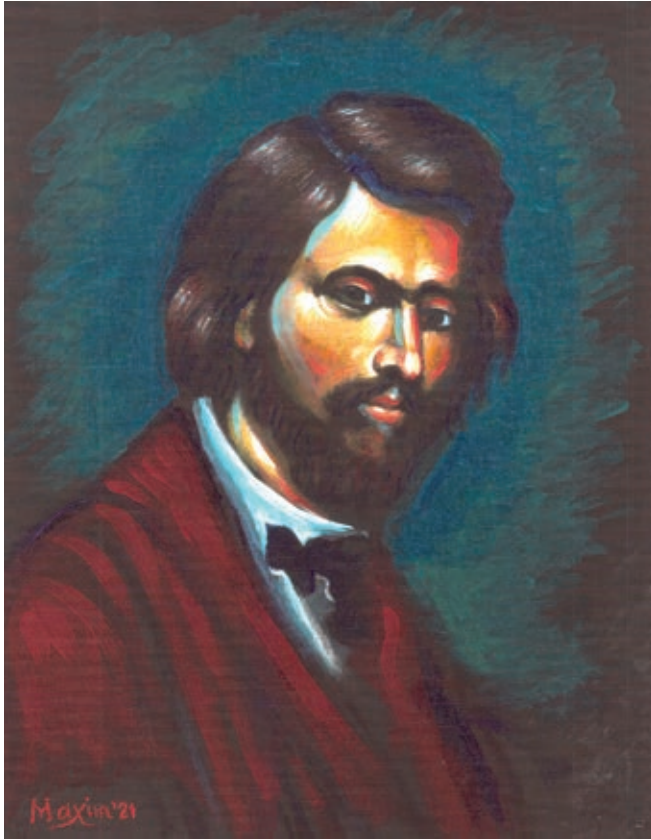
"Fyodor Dostoevsky",
acrylic on cardboard, 2021
Bishop Maxim

The portrait crystallizes a multifaceted but blessed gaze of Dostoevsky. By looking at the painting one realizes that this man has lived a storm and his eyes have a sweetness that says: *Glory to God, we are saved! We have escaped from nothingness!* To right and left, two huge boulders jut forth, the prominent cheekbones typical of his race; a sparse moustache and a straggling beard veil the sad-looking mouth and delicate chin. All is dark and preeminently earthly in this unbeautiful face, so flat and colorless is it, so lacking in brightness: a piece of the Russian steppe cast high and dry upon the stones. The radiance of the deep-set eyes, gleaming from within their sockets, is directed inward.

„Jesus Christ”,
acrylic on canvas,
2021, Bishop Maxim

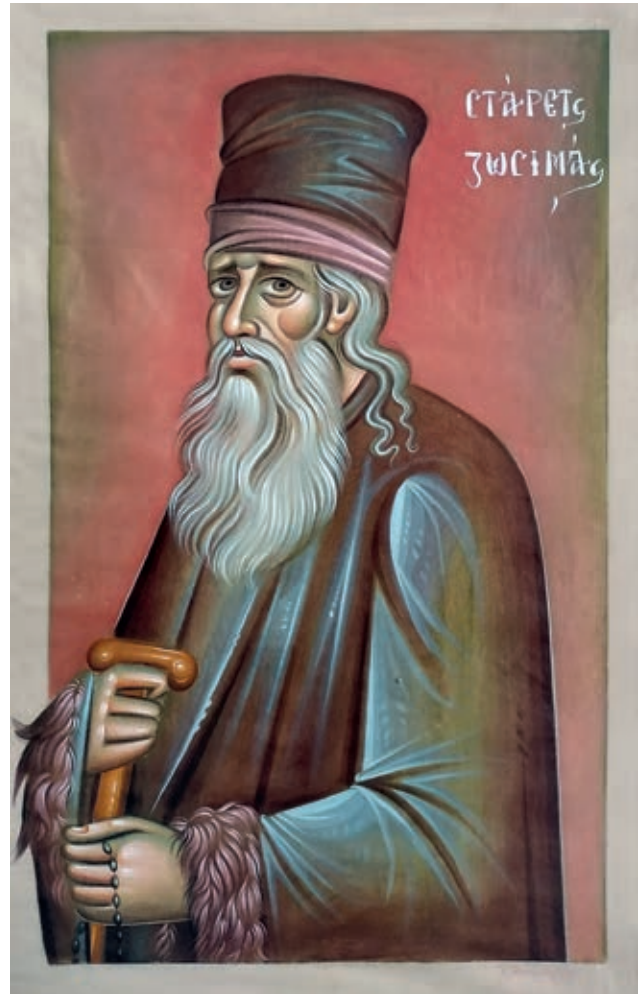
His eyes have a gaze
as if they were teary,
in pain, looking at the
suffering people. It is
the same Christ of all
humankind, but here
he expresses himself
as the Christ of
Dostoevsky who
answers the prayers
of the unfortunate
and the desperate.
Yet, the illumination of
a character in the
style of a Byzantine
icon, the majesty of a
neck holding the
head of a God-man,
seems to be a work of
art, not only humble
but also expelling and
twisted iconography.
It is an icon of
redemption.





"Karamazov", acrylic on cardboard, 2021.
Bishop Maxim

This painting depicts a hero who embodies the characteristics of all the Karamazovs: Fyodorov's passion, Dimitry's curiosity, Ivan's seriousness, and Alyosha's spirituality. Ivan has long suffered until he realized that Smerdyakov was his dark alter ego. This painting depicts a hero who embodies the characteristics of all the Karamazovs: Fyodorov's passion, Dimitry's curiosity, Ivan's seriousness, and Alyosha's spirituality. Ivan has long suffered until he realized that Smerdyakov was his dark alter ego.



"Starets Zosima", acrylic on cotton fabric, 2021.
Konstantinos Kougioumtzis

The painting depicts Starets Zosima from Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. "Love all creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand within it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things." This "divine mystery" of which Starets Zosima speaks is precisely the interdependence, the reciprocal coherence, of all created things in God. Illustrated in the Byzantine art style.



"Alexei Ivanovich and Polina Alexandrovna", 2021,
acrylic on canvas, Bishop Maxim

Every now and then I would glance at Polina Alexandrovna, but she paid me no attention; until eventually I became so irritated that I decided to play the boor... Polina was not at all pleased at my questions; I could see that she was doing her best to irritate me with the brusquerie of her answers. But I took no notice of this... Again, therefore, I put to myself the question: "Do I, or do I not love her?" and again I could return myself no answer or, rather, for the hundredth time I told myself that I detested her. Through *The Gambler* Dostoevsky rationalized his dependence on gambling. From that point on, the novel can be considered for some kind of self-condemnation and excuse.



"Stavrogin", acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Bishop Maxim

An impressive work in terms of beauty. Except for the face, the painting is covered with red and green brushstrokes in the depths. A grave monotony reigns over a devilish forger of better and brighter future (Verkhovensky, Stavrogin).



"Klara Olufsievna", acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Bishop Maxim

In the novel *The Double*, Klara Olsufyevna, "pale, tired and sad, but richly dressed", gradually becomes a "enchantress" for Goliadkin's bipolar personality. Klara is Osulfy Ivanovitch's only daughter. Engaged to marry a Prince she doesn't want to marry, Klara contacts Golyadkin and asks him to take her away. In the novel *The Double*, Klara Olsufyevna, "pale, tired and sad, but richly dressed", gradually becomes a "enchantress" for Goliadkin's bipolar personality. Klara is Osulfy Ivanovitch's only daughter. Engaged to marry a Prince she doesn't want to marry, Klara contacts Golyadkin and asks him to take her away.



"Return to a Dream", acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Despina Karantani

Inspired from the book "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man", the painting causes a nostalgia for a return to lost innocence.
"Sorrow compressed my heart, and I felt I would die, and then ... Well, then I woke up."



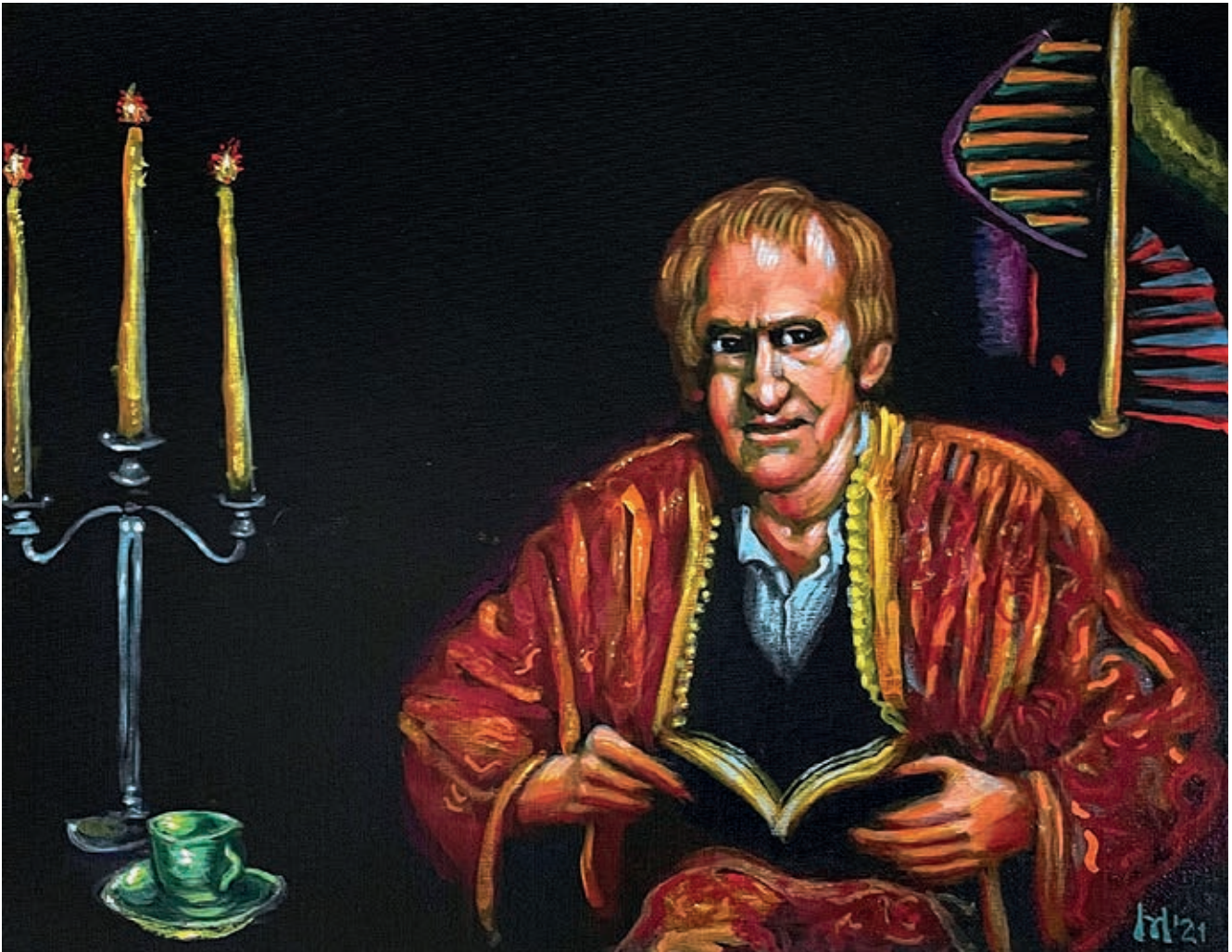
"A Repetition", digital, 2021,
Maria Panou

"A Repetition", digital print on canvas painting is inspired by Dostoevsky's short story "The dream of a ridiculous man". The hero travels through a dream to another Earth, almost identical to the one we know, looks like a copy, a repetition of what we know, but soon he realizes that nothing is the same.



"Elder Tikhon", acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Bishop Maxim

"Elder Tikhon" retains a subtle hue and a discreet transition from a warm to a cold one. This portrait speaks with its attitude and raised shoulders, with bowed head and face, above the strong shoulders, of an ascetic who is a brave hero of Christian asceticism. He wears a monk's hat and has a strong face, with a neat hair and beard, and is adorned by the unity of the individual elements. Head, face, chin and raised shoulders are adorned by the harmony of the drawing.



"Monologue from Underground",
acrylic on canvas, 2021, Bishop Maxim

The hero's gaze reveals indirectly that his thought is moving and that it calms down on one of the spots, just to be followed by a moment of hesitation because it immediately feels something else. This disbalance and the attitude toward the "whole" of the society, point to the fact that this indomitable "caveman" is dominated by an immeasurable "disgust" toward the normalcy he disrespects. Another work's virtue is that he laughs at us, is inclined toward us, and has a conversation with us. How naturally he holds his notebook, how he browses pages and holds the notebook with his palms!



"Sonya Marmeladova à la Fayum",
acrylic on woodboard, 2021, Bishop Maxim

A noble portrait, which after many centuries continues the tradition of Fayum portraits (naturalistic painted portrait on wooden boards attached to upper class mummies from Roman Egypt). It is characterized by an unspeakable aristocratic nobility, for which we cannot understand how it came about. This painting follows all the Byzantine lessons that the artist has in himself, but at the same time he has one "fabric" of high artistic breath, one breath that can turn and speak to modern man. It is a portrait that we can say is contemporary, a portrait of the 21st century.

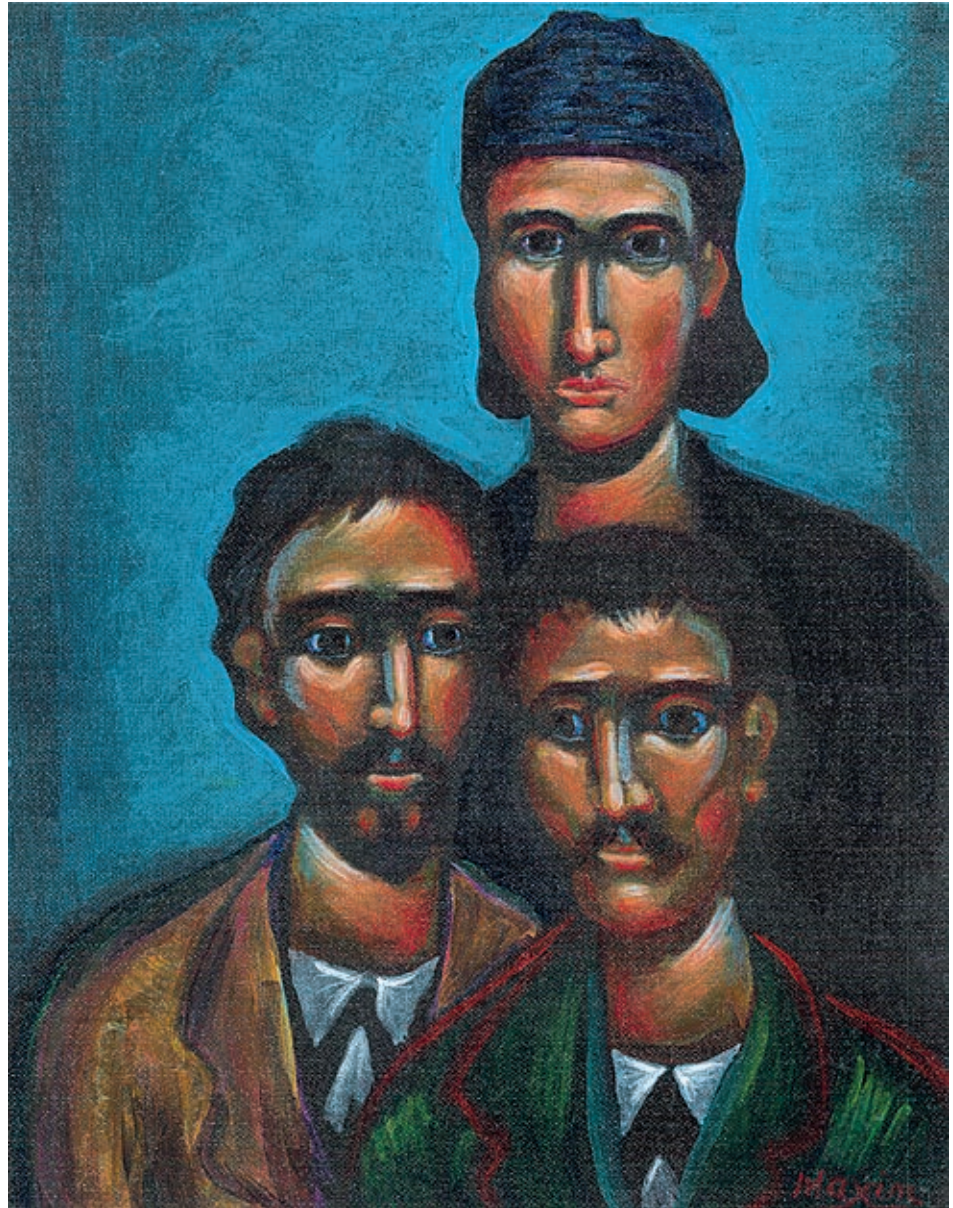


"Stairs to the Underground",
acrylic on canvas, 2021, Bishop Maxim

The elliptical ladder is characterized by an expression of mystery and conspiracy, as if it were a cunning companion with intermittent thoughts protagonists from the underworld. The cold, turquoise color of the floor, in the splendor of the complementary color of the surroundings, leaves us for a moment with a feeling of refreshment at high temperatures of the tormented main hero. The black color in the background shows a fight in the houses of a man from the underground and a living sensation, which makes the hedgehog want to build stable buildings and need nothing, with whom Dostoevsky fought.

"Brothers Karamazov",
acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Bishop Maxim

The three characters is a wondrous group as three completely different worlds. The heroes are placed in a single three-angled layout as if their faces are engraved in a regular triangle. This static setting, however, cannot prevent these static characters from having a single glance that reflects something about which three of them are asking, maybe let fate, as if they were in a house and through a window, look at the destiny that passes by the house, where it seems to be completely serious. Impressive is the seriousness of anyone who observes something that washes us away as if it were something invisible and angelic. And they seem to have a petrified expression while watching the scene, and as if it gives them a unity, to live like brothers. In its simplicity (trinity), this portrait is impressive in achieving the unattainable: three immovable men seem interesting to us thanks to the instinct of the oneness coming out of their eyes.





"Myshkin", acrylic and gold leaves on canvas, 2020,
Costas Labdas

Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin, the main character in Dostoevsky's book *The Idiot*, suffers from the sacred disease (as the ancient Greeks referred to epilepsy). This painting is part of a trilogy, in which the author painted the other two characters from Dostoevsky's books (*Kirilov* and *Schmerdiakov*), who also suffered from epilepsy, exactly as their author did.



"Underground", acrylic on canvas, 2021,
Giannoulis Liberopoulos

The underground is not a space after all. It is an existential state. The anonymous hero—anyone—incompatible with the imaginary type of the everyday man of the book, ruptures the social conditions that tightly bind him and descends deep into his invisible underground. Down there, alone and naked, he converses face to face with his idol, he fights and bleeds with his weaknesses, thoughts and passions. Life in the underground desperately seeks for ascension, to experience real freedom and life.

"I'm a Ridiculous Man", acrylic on canvas, 2021.
Christos Kexagioglou

I'm a ridiculous person. So, with an assumption, between the nightmare and reality, an inner journey begins. The bed, which can be both a sanctuary and a hell, is depicted as a vessel that will lead to self-knowledge, responsibility, sacrifice, and redemption through the labyrinthine worlds of demons. A journey that never ends: "And I will continue to search, to search!"





"Dostoevsky in His Wet Loneliness", acrylic and ink on canvas, 2021, Nektarios Mamais

A portrait of Dostoevsky emerges through the watery environment of loneliness described in his works. Maybe a self-portrait of the painter himself in relation to the emotion caused by Dostoevsky's texts.



"Fyodor Dostoevsky Rapt in His Thoughts", digital, 2021, Babis Pilarinos

On a bridge over the river Neva in St. Petersburg, walks Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, absorbed in thoughts, almost hunted. His path crosses that of a woman's; she is intrigued by how immersed in his thoughts he seems.



"You will never reach your destination if you stop and throw stones at every dog that barks".
acrylic on canvas, 2021, Nektarios Stamatelos

This insightful phrase from Dostoevsky's Diary gave birth to this painting. The main thing is not to stop. As they say, dogs were born to bark at us, but our task is to move forward. Big goals require the immense effort. A headwind blowing against the course of your ship is good, too—it does not increase your speed, but it does make you cleverer.



"The Dream of a Ridiculous Man",
digital, 2021, Maria Panou

Inspired by Dostoevsky's short story "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man". Somewhere faraway or deep inside, there is another Earth similar to the one we know but inhabited by perfect beings. Innocent people flow with the stream of all beings in absolute harmony. But Paradise cannot last forever. The fall of man is inevitable. Is it really possible for humans to return in an innocent state of being, or Paradise is beyond reach?



"How Ends a Poem", wood engraving, 2021, Fothis Barthis

This print draws inspiration from the chapter The Grand Inquisitor from the novel The Brothers Karamazov where Ivan tells a tale/poem to his brother Alyosha. This poem ends with a kiss as a final response without words.

about the artists

“OCHRE” is an informal group of painters, who have contributed to the traditional Orthodox iconography but at the same time are in dialogue with the modern artistic trends. The exhibition is organized with great passion by the 7 artists.

The exhibit is characterized by great pluralism. It hosts various currents and artistic trends, which are in a harmonious dialogue with each other. One sees Byzantine elements conversing with impressionist, expressionist, cubist, abstract, as well as features of street art, graffiti, etc.

The works emit a deep study and understanding of Dostoevsky’s novels. It is very important that the painters have so seriously studied the great writer and philosopher at a time when electronic images and soap operas distract readers from great and essential works and wider Literature.

It is obvious that we have before us an important robust and fruitful spiritual event, which will be a station for the artistic events in Greece and it is not excluded that its message will spread to other countries.

epilogue

In our time, when there is a tendency to rob everything of their original meaning and purpose, this exhibit appears as an oasis of the Logos and a festival of the Spirit.

Through Fyodor (Russian pronunciation of Theodore) God (Theos) offers Himself to us as a gift (*doron*). It is hard to tell what a greater surprise is: through whom or to whom He offers Himself—in how fragile vessels He is willing to abide. Through a person and literary work of a suffering man who is seemingly, like his characters, falling apart, but hungry and thirsty for Christ, the Truth is concealed or revealed to everyone in accordance with their own, conscious, or unconscious, desire for Him. Every exhibited painting is a unique testimony to it.

Each of the authors, touched by the flame of inspiration, speaks of the same using a different tongue, to invite us to the unity and community of the Pentecost. It is as logical as the dream of a ridiculous man, as the Brothers Karamazov, the cubism in Orthodox iconography or Dostoyevsky in Athens. This logic transcends the fallen, calculated "logic", which enslaves. Compared to that "logic", this one is non-logical for it is the logic of the Logos, the logic of Love, which sets us free and hence it is compellingly and essentially needed, as therapeutic and salvific.

In New York, a place of cosmic outreach, the culture stemming from the experience of the cult, is offered to the suffering world without preaching, but rather compassionately. By its blessed mission even the disfigured and abused words such as "technical" and "technology" are redeemed and given back their pristine meaning and beauty.

