



Our next Madingley conference will take place over the weekend of 16-18 October 2026 and will be devoted to the theme ‘Holy Beauty: Art and Iconography on Mount Athos’. It will be jointly chaired by Fr Maximos Conostas and Dr Graham Speake. A distinguished panel of experts on such themes as monumental painting, panel painting, icon painting on the Holy Mountain today, and the theology of the icon will offer illustrated presentations aimed at a non-specialist audience.

Fr Maximos will open the proceedings by speaking about the connections between visual culture and religion within Orthodox Christianity; and Aidan Hart, former hermit, now iconographer of worldwide renown, will give a practical demonstration of icon painting in action. There will be the usual framework of Orthodox services in the medieval parish church, a well-



stocked bookstall will carry a wide range of titles on Orthodox iconography, and comfortable en-suite accommodation and a high standard of cuisine will be provided in this splendid sixteenth-century English country house. The programme set out below is provisional and subject to last-minute alteration.

THE ITINERARY

1. **Archimandrite Maximos Conostas:** ‘In the Beginning was the Image: From the Birth of Art to Byzantine Icons’
2. **Robin Cormack:** ‘Exhibiting Treasures of Mount Athos outside Mount Athos: Some Issues’
3. **Aidan Hart:** ‘The Panel Icon on Mount Athos: A Ladder between Heaven and Earth’
4. **Aidan Hart:** ‘Painting an Icon: A Practical Demonstration’
5. **Thanasis Semoglou:** ‘The newly discovered wall paintings in the katholikon of Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos’
6. **Markos Kampanis:** ‘Visualizing Mount Athos: Iconographic and Pictorial Representations of its Architecture and Landscape’
7. **Father Loukas:** ‘The Mystagogy of the Icon: Challenges and Concerns of Contemporary Icon Painting’
8. **Marcus Plested:** ‘The Theology of the Athonite Icon’

1

FIRST SESSION

Archimandrite Maximos Conostas: 'In the Beginning was the Image: From the Birth of Art to Byzantine Icons'

About the paper

This paper examines the origins and significance of artistic activity, arguing that art is not merely decorative but intrinsic to human cognition and expression. Visual perception and cognition are inseparable, and works of art function as a special mode of thinking, as structured symbolic expressions through which human beings articulate complex ideas that resist purely verbal formulation. Byzantine icons provide a compelling historical case: far from being simple illustrations or devotional images, they embody theological concepts – such as transcendence, incarnation, and divine presence – through highly formalized visual systems. By analysing the symbolic logic of iconographic composition, the paper argues that artistic creation reveals a fundamental dimension of human nature: the impulse to think, know, and communicate through images when language alone proves insufficient.

About the speaker

The Very Revd Archimandrite Maximos Conostas is Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at the University of Austin, Texas. He studied painting and art history at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, taught theology at Harvard Divinity School and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, and for many years was a monk on Mount Athos. He is the author of many books and articles, including *The Art of Seeing: Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography*, and 'The Theology of the Icon', forthcoming in a major volume on icons to be published by Cambridge University Press.



The Very Revd Archimandrite Maximos Conostas

2

SECOND SESSION

Robin Cormack: 'Exhibiting Treasures of Mount Athos outside Mount Athos: Some Issues'

About the paper

Since 1997 three exhibitions of art belonging to the Orthodox monasteries of Mount Athos have been held outside the confines of these exclusively male communities. This art, collected over a thousand years, has now been viewed by the public, both male and female and both religious and secular. Each of these exhibitions has had a different curatorial focus: Thessaloniki (1997) demonstrated the quantity and variety of art on Mount Athos, Helsinki (2006-7) used art to emphasize the spirituality of the monastic life, and Paris (2009) selected objects of the highest quality. Issues arising from these choices will be highlighted.



Robin Cormack

About the speaker

Robin Cormack is Emeritus Professor in the History of Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. He has published widely on Byzantine art, and has acted as consultant on a dozen exhibitions of Byzantine and Russian art. He is currently working on a book for Cambridge University Press together with Maria Vassilaki entitled *Transformations of the Icon: from Constantinople to Crete and Venice*.

3

THIRD SESSION

Aidan Hart: ‘The Panel Icon on Mount Athos: A Ladder between Heaven and Earth’

About the paper

Panel icons, mosaics, frescos, and the whole range of liturgical arts are players in the rich liturgy of praise offered by man to God, and of divine revelation offered by God to man. This talk explores the role of the panel icon in Athonite life and discusses some of miraculous icons of the Holy Mountain, particularly the *Portaitissa* of Iviron.

About the speaker

Aidan Hart has been a professional liturgical artist for over forty years. He works in a variety of mediums, including mosaic, carving, and wall painting as well as egg tempera. He is the author of four books on icons, and teaches for the King’s Foundation School of Traditional Arts. He lived at Iviron on Athos for a total of about two years.



Aidan Hart

4

FOURTH SESSION

Aidan Hart: ‘Painting an Icon: A Practical Demonstration’



Thanasis Semoglou: ‘The newly discovered wall paintings in the katholikon of Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos’

About the paper

Recent conservation in the katholikon of Vatopedi has uncovered an extensive Middle Byzantine painted layer hidden for centuries beneath eighteenth-century overpainting. These newly revealed frescoes—showing hierarchs, martyrs, prophets, and refined ornamental decoration—form a coherent and remarkably well-preserved programme dating to the late twelfth century. The paintings display exceptional artistic quality and clear affinities with the monumental art of Constantinople, offering fresh insight into artistic exchange between the capital and Mount Athos. Their scale and ambition may relate to the documented benefactions of Saint Sava of Serbia, whose support for Vatopedi in this period provides a compelling historical context. The lecture will present this previously unpublished material and reassess the katholikon’s decorative history—from its eleventh-century origins to the celebrated Palaiologan cycle of 1312—highlighting how each phase reflects the evolving spiritual and artistic identity of the monastery. These discoveries represent one of the most significant recent contributions to Byzantine art history and deepen our understanding of Athonite monastic culture and its connections with the wider Orthodox world.

About the speaker

Professor Thanasis Semoglou studied Archaeology and Art History at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and completed postgraduate work in Paris and Belgrade. He earned his PhD at the École Pratique des Hautes Études with support from the Alexandros Onassis Foundation. A long-standing member of the Thessaloniki faculty, he has been Professor of Byzantine Art and Archaeology since 2015. His work has received international recognition through fellowships from the British School at Athens, DAAD, and the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme. In 2024 he held a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science fellowship, lecturing on Athonite art at Waseda University. Since 2013 he has served on Greece’s UNESCO Memory of the World Committee and, since 2020, as Associate President of the European Centre of Byzantine Monuments and a member of the Committee for the Preservation of the Athonite Heritage. He has presented at over one hundred conferences and published five books, more than eighty articles, and two catalogues of Byzantine icons.



Professor Thanasis Semoglou

Markos Kampanis: ‘Visualizing Mount Athos: Iconographic and Pictorial Representations of its Architecture and Landscape’

About the paper

Mount Athos has long been represented across a wide range of artistic media and has inspired numerous artists worldwide, particularly in Greece. Although photographers and printmakers have also contributed to its visual representation, this paper focuses primarily on depictions of Mount Athos in painting and mural art, with particular emphasis on architectural forms and the natural landscape. Through a selection of representative examples, the study examines how artists have rendered the distinctive monastic complexes and the surrounding environment of the Athonite peninsula. It further explores the interplay between topographical accuracy and symbolic interpretation, demonstrating how Mount Athos is presented both as a recognizable geographical setting and as an idealized sacred landscape within Byzantine and modern visual culture. The visual material accompanying the presentation ranges widely: from travelling artists such as Edward Lear and Vasily Barski to early Greek artists and the renowned iconographer Fotis Kondoglou, from contemporary British or French artists to the major Greek landscape painter Spyros Papaloukas. The presentation will also include the speaker’s own mural depictions of Mount Athos.



Markos Kampanis

About the speaker

Markos Kampanis studied painting in London and works across a range of media, including painting, printmaking, book illustration, murals, and occasionally stage design. He has held numerous solo and group exhibitions in Greece and internationally. For several years his work has focused on Mount Athos, and he serves as curator of the Mount Athos Art Archives of the monastery of Simonopetra. He is particularly active in the field of church mural painting, with works in St Catherine's monastery at Sinai, the monasteries of Vatopedi, Iviron, and Simonopetra on Mount Athos, as well as at the Patriarchate of Alexandria. In 2023–4 a major retrospective exhibition of his work was presented at the National Library of Greece in Athens and at the Teloglion Foundation of Arts in Thessaloniki. In 2025 a series of works inspired by the *Odyssey* was exhibited at the Benaki Museum.

7

SEVENTH SESSION

Father Loukas: 'The Mystagogy of the Icon: Challenges and Concerns of Contemporary Icon Painting'

About the paper

This paper surveys the historical development and stylistic evolution of iconography on Mount Athos, tracing its trajectory from the work of earlier generations to contemporary practice. In particular, it examines how these historic iconographic traditions have been received, interpreted, and adapted by Athonite painters today. Additionally, the paper addresses the unique modern challenges facing traditional icon painting, while exploring the distinct responsibilities, activities, and spiritual-artistic goals of the contemporary Athonite monk tasked with sustaining this living heritage.

About the speaker

Born in Greece in 1964, Father Loukas of Xenophontos arrived at Mount Athos at age twenty-one, where he studied iconography and now leads a renowned workshop. On Mount Athos, he has painted major churches and refectories at Xenophontos, Simonopetra, Iviron, Pantokrator, and Vatopedi. His notable international works include the St Nicholas Shrine at Ground Zero in New York and an icon of the Theotokos 'Keeper of the Portal' displayed at the Kremlin entrance. Beyond wall and panel paintings, Father Loukas creates mosaics, metalwork, wood and stone carvings, calligraphy, and manuscript illuminations.



Father Loukas of
Xenophontos

8

EIGHTH SESSION

Marcus Plested: 'The Theology of the Athonite Icon'

About the paper

This talk will begin with a general survey of the theology of the icon and of the history of icon veneration. It will move on to look at some of the specifics of the icon in its Athonite context including the Hesychast attitude to icons, some particular Athonite examples of miraculous icons, and will touch on the question of Western influence on Athonite iconography.

About the speaker



Professor Marcus
Plested

Professor Marcus Plested has recently returned from a thirteen-year sojourn at Marquette University in the United States to take up the 1643 Chair of Divinity at the University of St Andrews. He was formerly a doctoral student at Oxford of the ever-memorable President of the Friends of Mount Athos, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware. He later taught for many years at the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Patristic, Byzantine, and modern Orthodox theology. His most recent visit to the Holy Mountain was in 2022 in order to interview a leading figure in the modern revival of Athonite monasticism, Elder Vasilios Gontikakis (1936-2025). This came as part of the research for his latest book, *The Master Builder: Demetrios Koutroubis and the Renewal of Theology in Modern Greece* (Limni, Greece: Harvey 2024).

We would ask you to use our new online booking system by [clicking here](#) - should you prefer the traditional method please complete the details of your booking below and, if possible, email the completed form to Peter Lea: fwplea@gmail.com or post it to him at: 58 Manor Road, Woodstock OX20 1XJ, then follow the instructions about making a deposit at the foot of the form.



**THE FRIENDS
OF MOUNT
ATHOS**

I/we wish to attend the conference.

Please reserve a single/shared room @ £425 per person.

Please reserve ___ non-residential place(s) @ £125 per day.

I enclose a non-refundable deposit of £50 per person.

A number of rooms are available for students @ £235 pp - please contact Peter Lea for details.

Dietary requirements and/or special needs (if any): _____

Name of member/guest: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

DEPOSIT REQUIRED

A non-refundable deposit of £50 per person is required with every booking. If possible, a bank transfer should be made in £ sterling to the charity's account at:

Lloyds Bank (Piccadilly)

Sort Code: 30-96-64

Account No: 00058730

quoting your surname as the reference.

If this is not possible, a cheque payable to 'Friends of Mount Athos' may be sent with the booking form to Peter Lea (address above).

Members wishing to pay their deposit in Euros or US Dollars should email him to obtain the relevant account details.

LIVE STREAMING

It is our intention to stream the conference proceedings to those registering for it. Further details will be provided nearer the event.