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Art exhibit aided by research scholar project

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University senior art history major Corey Gross recently had an opportunity to experience the challenges and rewards that come from conducting research in an area he loves – Russian icon painting.

Through the **University Student Research Scholar Program**, Gross and 29 other undergraduate and graduate students have worked with faculty mentors while pursuing individual projects and gaining valuable research experience. Gross chose to work with Assistant Professor of Art History Tamara Machmut-Jhashi on a paper reviewing different periods of Russian icons – religious works painted on wood panel using egg tempera. His paper likely will be centered on Novgorod School icons from the 13th to 15th-centuries.

Gross' research coincides with the current **Meadow Brook Art Gallery** exhibit entitled "Between Matter and Spirit: Russian Icon Painting." Late 19th-century icons and Samovars (tea servers) from the private collection of Dr. and Mrs. Eduard Kotlyarov of Bloomfield Hills are being displayed at the gallery from Jan. 10 to Feb. 9. Such works are rarely seen outside of Russia. Gross contributed an essay, "The Making of an Icon," to the exhibit catalog and helped set up the exhibit by installing the icons and polishing the Samovars. Gross also will incorporate his research on the exhibit pieces in his Research Scholar Program paper.

"The artists I happen to like – people like Kandinsky, Rodchenko and Goncharova – also happen to be early 20th-century Russian artists of the avant-garde. All were ahead of their time, and I always liked modern and contemporary art," said Gross, who studied Russian language and culture abroad at the St. Petersburg State University in the fall of 2001. "What fascinates me most about the icons is how they are so revered in Russia. I recall being in a Russian museum looking at icons and the people were praying right in front of them or kissing the glass that covered them. It's odd how spiritual they really are.

"The icons have definitely influenced my own work," said Gross, who also works with oils and acrylics as a studio artist.

To date, 30 students have been selected for the Research Scholar Program. The program supports research projects from juniors and seniors as well as exceptional proposals from other undergraduate or graduate students. Students are selected based on their academic strengths as well as the quality, significance and potential impact of their proposed research projects.

Current projects range from chemistry and business administration to philosophy and English. Award recipients receive up to \$1,000 to support their research projects for a minimum of one semester and have the opportunity to apply for up to \$500 in travel support to present their research results at a professional conference. Each student research scholar must submit a final research report within one year.

Machmut-Jhashi encouraged Gross to apply for the Research Scholar Program, knowing of his interest in Russian icons after he took her Russian Art class (AH 343).

"I was very excited to learn that we would offer the Research Scholar Program," Machmut-Jhashi said. "Not only is Gross an art history student, he's also a speaker of Russian and is very interested in Russian culture. His semester abroad in St. Petersburg gave him a great background for Russian art. Studying the icons has definitely added a new dimension to his knowledge."

Gross hopes to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago after he graduates from Oakland.

"I want to paint as well as study art," he said.

Applications for the University Student Research Scholar Program are accepted three times per year. The deadline for the next series of proposals is Feb. 11. For application and program information, visit the **Provost's Program for University Research Scholars** Web page.

SUMMARY

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