

BOARD BUILDING WORKSHOP

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE ANCIENT PRACTICE OF TRADITIONAL BOARD BUILDING
FOR EGG-TEMPERA ICONOGRAPHY



PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE ICONOGRAPHY APPRENTICESHIP YEAR

Adults (June 17-22, 2024)

Grades 7-12 (July 15-20, 2024)

Schedule: 4 weekday evenings, plus all day Saturday.

M/T/W/F at 7-8 pm EST. No class Thursday to allow boards to dry. Saturday 9-12 and 1-3.

Board Building in Traditional Iconography refers to not just cutting and preparing the wood, sometimes with raised borders, but also a day-long process of applying “gesso,” a mixture of rabbit-skin glue and calcium carbonate. The result is the board on which traditional egg-tempera icons are painted. Though it takes prayer and time to make, it is really the only surface on which it is possible to both hold the many layers of paint and stand the test of time by not cracking and warping. This summer workshop is strongly recommended before Iconography Apprenticeship Year 2 and a requirement before the Iconography Apprenticeship Year 3.



An adult should be paired with a school-aged student of any age to help with gathering supplies and cutting the board to size before class, or finding someone to do so. The adult should be available, though not necessarily continuously present, for problem-solving during the evening classes and (especially) the all-day Saturday Class.

The materials for this class are extensive! However, many are household materials and ultimately you will save money by gessoing your own boards. For example, a small hand-gessoed traditional (not-for-acrylic) board made by someone else is upwards of \$65, but only \$5-10 worth of materials (and lots of time).

Required materials

[Please watch this video](#)

in which I give a visual overview of the many materials needed

Two specialty items you will need to order following these exact links:

1. **Calcium Carbonate** (“whiting”, “chalk”). Use [Kremer Pigment’s chalk from Champagne France](#). 1 kg is fine for one 9×12 board, but 10kg will set you up for several boards. **Please order this before working through the rest of the list.** It can take weeks to arrive, if Kremer NYC is out of stock and needs to receive it first from France.
2. **Finely-ground rabbit skin** from [Sinopia Pigments](#) -if you are ordering other items from Sinopia anyway- or [Blick](#) or [Amazon](#).

Other items

1. **Candy thermometer:** [this one](#) or any reliable **candy (not meat)** thermometer you might have. This is important because your week of work will end as a cracked board if you overheat it at even one short stage of the process. Do not get the thermometers that are like sticks to poke into meat. Sometimes they are advertised as “candy thermometers” but do not work well for our purposes.

2. **Old light-colored cotton sheets or linen or muslin**, the size of the icon you wish to gesso.
There can be no holes in the part you want to use, but old and worn is fine. If you need to buy this new, purchase linen or muslin (not cotton) at a place like JoAnn's Fabrics and run it through the wash with no detergent and dry before class.
3. **Utility knife** (carpet knife) for cutting off the extra cloth after dry
4. **Cheesecloth** for straining the gesso
5. **A large rubber band** for fixing the cheesecloth to the jar or coffee pot
6. **A large jar with a rim or coffee pot with rim** for straining the gesso into
7. **A double boiler** with at least 4 cup (quart) capacity
8. **Large, 3" house-painting style brush**
9. **Access to a stovetop**
10. **Scrubable table surface or painter's plastic or trash bag** to protect the surface. Dried gesso comes off with hot water, but only with some elbow grease.
11. **Rag or washable potholder** to set the hot double boiler with prepared gesso
12. **MUST BE: 3/4" cabinet-grade ("Grade A"- or "Grade B" if the store does not have A) PLYWOOD board** to cut one of the following size options before our first class. It must be plywood to avoid warping. Note, you may make up to two 9×12 boards if you want to or one large board and one 9×12, but be aware that the more you take on, the more time you will need to put in on Saturday, possibly beyond the 3 p.m. end time.
 - a. Apprenticeship Year 1 (7th-12th Grade) and Year 1&2 Combined (Adult): 8X10"
 - b. Apprenticeship Year 2-3: 12X16"
 - c. Apprenticeship Level 3-5 (whether School-Age or Adult): 10X27" If you are able to do an arched top, that looks nice with the icon we will paint. 27" is the highest point.
13. **A scrap of wood slightly smaller than the board you will gesso**, as the board should be slightly raised from the table
14. **Sand Paper** from a hardware store or Amazon. If you have or can borrow an electric sander for the final stage (after Saturday), that can be helpful. Otherwise, you will be wrapping sandpaper around a wood scrap or pink eraser and hand sanding.
 - a. 100-grade

- b. 220-grade
- c. 400-grade
- d. 600-grade

15. **Optional Raised Borders:** If you are up for an additional challenge, will not be gessoing an arched board, and like the look of it, you may also choose to add raised borders. It will take a little more time to gesso with the raised border, so just plan on gessoing one board. You will want the measurement inside the “frame” of strips to meet the above size requirements. For example, if you are part of a class that uses a 9×12 board, and your wood strips are 1” wide, you will need the board to be 11”x14”. Adding raised borders adds the following **time commitments:**

- a. It will take more time to actually gesso the board on Saturday, so plan on gessoing just one board if you would like raised borders
- b. You will have a small step to complete on your Tuesday morning, outside of class

16. **The addition of raised borders also requires the following items.** Note that you need to have the following items on hand but do not need to cut or adhere the wood to the larger board until we are together in class so I can explain.

17. Wood strips (c. 1” on each side, though the bottom can be larger, such as 2”)

18. Wood glue (Elmer’s or any brand)

19. Wood filler (Elmer’s or any brand. Stainable)

20. Wood clamps (or a large stack of books)

21. An adult-operated electric saw or hand miter saw for cutting the wood strips during our first class. It is totally acceptable for a parent of a school-aged student to make the cuts, but these will need to be done during the Monday evening class after the student makes the marks for where to cut it.

