

## TOPIC 7

### Who buys icons and why?

Dr. Stefan Brenske, art historian, icons specialist, author, and frequent guest on German television program “Lieb & Teuer” (NDR)

Icon enthusiasts are a highly diversified bunch. They cannot really be linked to specific religious denominations, professional groups, or the like. Normally, buyers of icons have a certain inner connection to icons, at least to “their” icons. However, this does not at all mean that they are necessarily religious believers who have been baptized in the Orthodox Christian Church. There are also buyers who do not belong to any religion at all. Overall, it may perhaps be said that those who delight in icons possess a certain interest in spirituality and take a basic pleasure in older works of art.

It is rare that purely rational motives alone drive someone to hang an icon in their home. Although there have been isolated cases of investor-collectors—collectors who buy art solely with an eye to future returns or put their artworks in storage solely for the purpose of selling them later at a high premium (and, after all, icons do offer some highly interesting prospects in this regard)—they remain the absolute exception.

Not uncommonly, there are personal motives that prompt someone to purchase an icon. In my conversations with buyers I will occasionally hear sentences such as: “We are reminded of our wonderful trips to Russia and Greece,” “I found the work especially moving,” “We have children and grandchildren and would like to leave each one of them an icon,” “I’m going through a difficult time/I’m faced with some difficult decisions and have the feeling that the icon might provide support,” “For me, icons possess an aura of calm and timelessness—it does me good to have them around me.”