

**Ursula wrote this explanatory article on the Mary MacKillop icon in response to the question:**

**“How did it come about that you were asked to write the icon of Mary MacKillop that is now in our chapel here at the Mary MacKillop Heritage Centre”?**

The Icon of Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop, painted by me (Ursula Betka) on a red gum log, is based on preliminary colour drawings on paper by Rita Magris who passed away in 2008.

Rita’s sister, Marzia Magris, later donated these drawings to the Sisters of St Joseph.

In 2010, Marzia invited me to paint and gild the Icon based on Rita’s prototype sketches. After meeting with Sister Helen Smith and Mr Garry McLean at the Mary MacKillop Heritage Centre, it was agreed that the journey in Australian iconography, begun by Rita, be realised in colour and gold on Australian wood.

Coloured pigments bound with egg yolk - a technique known as egg tempera, links the painting of *Saint Mary MacKillop*, and the *Madonna and Child in Adoration and Humility*, with the ancient tradition of the Holy Icon on wood in both eastern and western Christianity.



In both Icons, the expression of deep compassion in the holy women springs from their love of God in His service through the care and nurturing of a child. Both women convey an unwavering trust in God’s will: the *Fiat* - “Be it done unto me according to Thy Word” (Luke 1:26); and “Believe in the whisperings of God in your own heart”. (Mary MacKillop 1868).

The landscape settings too, in both Icons, evoke a sense of specific region and place – and a territory of calm beauty transfigured by the presence of God, which welcomes all those who journey through it.

Ursula Betka,  
11/12/2018

Images:

- 1: Mary MacKillop Icon in the Mary MacKillop Heritage Centre Chapel, East Melbourne.
- 2: The Madonna and Child in Adoration and Humility – Used for the 2018 Australia Post Christmas stamp.