

ICONOGRAPHY OF THE FRESCOES



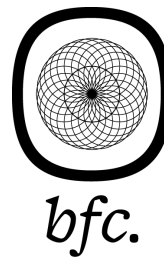
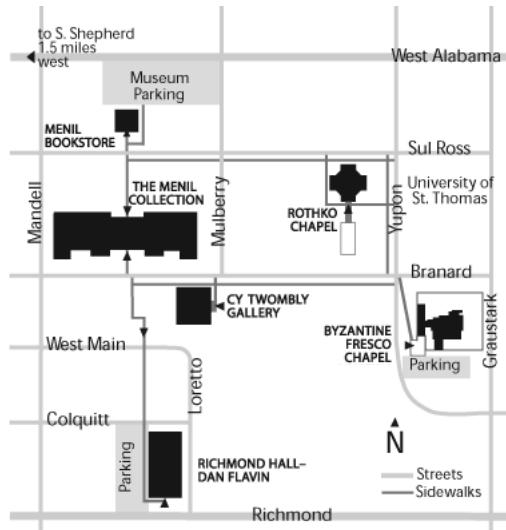
The Lysi dome represents Christ Pantokrator, "All sovereign." It defines a space with no beginning and no end. Absolute frontality has driven time out of space. His gaze is transworldly: not looking but all-seeing. Christ is shown here to be the true image of His Father, the begotten before the Creation, timeless. The bust portrayal comes closer to making Christ universal and the ubiquitous Being that He is. Feet would commit him to a specific place and put Him back into historical time.

A double cortege of angels proceeds toward the empty prepared throne (Hetoimasia), the throne for Christ's Second Coming. The prepared throne bearing the Cross, the Instruments of the Passion, the Gospel Book, and the dove prophesies the Last Judgment. The richly appointed throne is guarded by archangels Michael and Gabriel and two seraphim. Mary leads one cortege of angels, while John the Baptist leads the other in prayer (deesis) to the throne, the symbolic representation of Christ.

In the apse the Virgin, flanked by archangels Gabriel and Michael, stands in the orante posture. On her breast is a medallion with the bust of the Infant Christ: it symbolizes Incarnation.



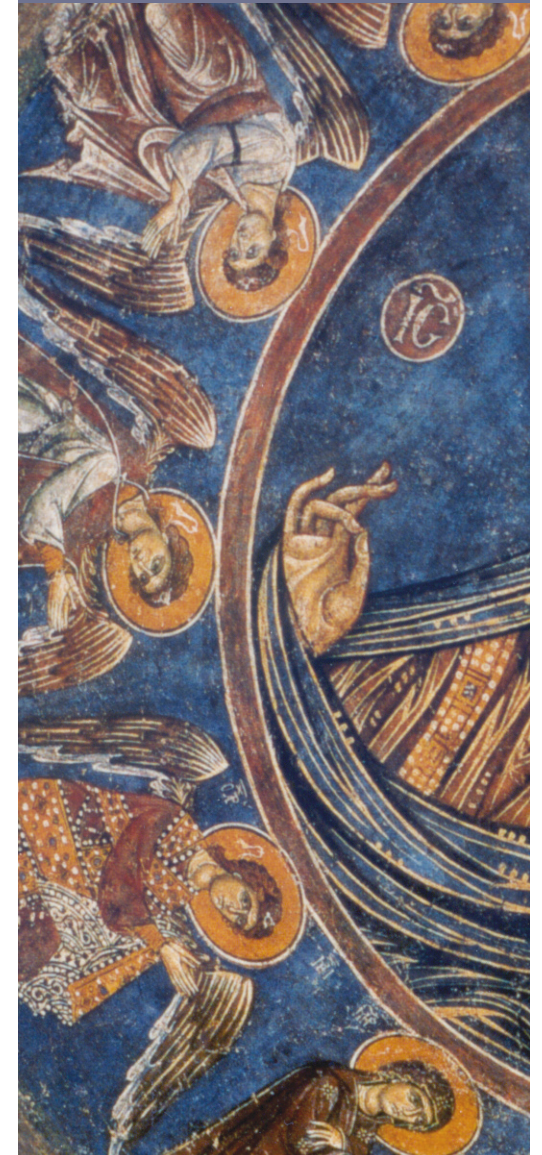
BYZANTINE FRESCO CHAPEL
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OPEN FREE TO THE PUBLIC
WEDNESDAY THROUGH SUNDAY
11:00 AM - 6:00 PM

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BYZANTINE FRESCO CHAPEL



ORIGINS OF THE FRESCOES



EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH OF ST. THEMONIANOS, LYSI, CYPRUS

Welcome to the Byzantine Fresco Chapel. This unique place displays the dome and the apse of a small Byzantine votive chapel of the thirteenth century.

In June 1983 The Menil Foundation was shown photographs of thirteenth-century frescoes that had been cut into 38 pieces and removed from their original site near Lysi, in the Turkish-occupied section of Cyprus. They were going to be sold individually for profit and dispersed. Struck by the beauty of the photographs, the Foundation asked its Washington attorney to investigate the origin of the frescoes and discovered that they came from Cyprus.

The Menil Foundation contacted both the Republic and the Church of Cyprus. With their knowledge and encouragement the Foundation paid the ransom to the thieves and received possession of all 38 fragments which were then entrusted to an expert icon restorer in London.

The frescoes are forever owned by the Church of Cyprus. This official and emphatic recognition made it possible to build the Byzantine Fresco Chapel, which not only presents the frescoes in a dignified manner, but returns them to their original religious function as sacred art destined to glorify God and instruct the onlooker.

In December 1992 The Byzantine Fresco Foundation was founded as a non-profit organization dedicated to the creation of the chapel building and its ongoing programs. Today, the Byzantine Fresco Chapel is a site for study, meditation, and reflection for all who visit.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN



INTERIOR VIEW OF GLASS CHAPEL, LOOKING SOUTHEAST

The design of the building, by architect François de Menil, embodies two important concepts. First, that the architecture restore to the frescoes the spiritual significance and function that had been obscured by their removal from a religious context. Second, that the chapel invoke the frescoes' history but also bring that past to a new context with new meaning.

The chapel's design accomplishes the transposition of the ancient relics to the contemporary site by means of a mediating external building with an embedded steel structure—a reliquary box. The form of a reliquary box, such as the small one pictured below, derives from the tradition of housing sacred objects in small casket-like cases, sometimes one within another.

The dislocation/relocation of the sacred works is addressed through an inversion. The ethereal soul is solidified and made opaque in the frescoes.



GOLD RELIQUARY YUGOSLAVIA, STROBI EARLY BYZANTINE, 6TH CENTURY 1 3/4 x 2 1/3 x 1 1/2 IN. THE MENIL COLLECTION



VIEW OF STOLEN FRESCOES CUT INTO THIRTY-EIGHT PIECES

The material solidity of the original chapel building is shattered and made ephemeral by means of the fragmented free-standing glass structure. Twentieth-century technology supports this fractured body and transposes it to an active present. The immaterial materiality of the infill glass panels intensifies the absence/presence of the original site and transforms the glass structure into an apparition constantly fluxing as one moves through it.

The infinite is evoked through the play of darkness and light. As daylight washes down dematerializing the concrete wall, the black steel reliquary box appears to levitate in space. At the perimeter walls the sky is visible, but from within all appears to be limitless infinity.



VIEW OF APSE AND DOME FACING EAST