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Hillwood's Hardstone Collection

Opened as a public institution in 1977, Hillwood was bought by Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887–1973) in 1955. Post soon decided her home would be a museum. Her Washington, D. C. estate endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of Russian Imperial art outside of Russia, a distinguished 18th-century French decorative arts collection, and a fine collection of fashion and jewelry. In the 1920s, Post began collecting Chinese jades and various gems that she "selected to illustrate the decorative use of minerals as well as different types of carving". In 1926, when she bought her first Fabergé piece, a hardstone and gem encrusted Yusupov heirloom, Post was still not familiar with the work of the Russian jeweler. A few years later, while married to the Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Joseph E. Davies (1876–1958), Post discovered Russian culture and Russians' appreciation for and skill with turning hardstone into works of art. Precious hardstone artifacts were gathered from around the world to adorn Post's various homes, one of which, in Brussels, had a "Malachite Room". Today, Hillwood's collection includes approximately one hundred Russian seals in assorted hardstones, about forty malachite pieces, and around twenty Russian items crafted from or set with lapis lazuli. More than 20 of the approximately 90 pieces in the Fabergé collection are made of hardstone. These objects have been not studied to date as a group. Nevertheless Marvin C. Ross, Hillwood's first curator, identified them as a distinct part of the collection: in 1963, he presented a lecture titled "Minerals in Art at Hillwood". The purposes of this paper are to present Hillwood's Russian hardstone collection in the broader context of the history of Post's taste for gems and share discoveries and attributions relating to the Museum's hardstone masterpieces.

Marjorie Post and Her Interest in Hardstone Carving

Marjorie Post was the only child of Ella Merriweather (1853–1912) and industrialist Charles W. Post (1854–1914), founder of the Postum Cereal Company. After C. W. Post's death in 1914, Marjorie took over the company. The family business grew into the global firm known as General Foods and with its expansion she became one of the wealthiest women in the United States.

Post's social position and wealth encouraged the taste for collecting that she inherited from her father. C.W. was a collector of paintings, particularly British land- and seascapes and genre works by minor European academic painters. In the 1910s, while married to the banker Edward B. Close (1882–1955), Marjorie

mingled with New York's fashionable society. Collecting was considered a social achievement and Post began to buy French decorative arts to furbish her New York home. Her taste quickly developed under the tutelage of Sir Joseph Duveen. At that time, Duveen's clients included magnates and renowned collectors such as Henry Clay Frick, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller. Marjorie's collection grew rapidly. During her marriage to financier Edward F. Hutton (1875-1962) in the 1920s, she established herself among the discerning collectors of the decorative arts. In 1924, Post began preparing a catalog of her impressive collection. This work was reworked until 1937, but unfortunately never published. The catalog gives a good sense of Post's taste before she started to collect Russian art. It includes paintings, sculpture, embroideries, lace, bibelots, enamels, porcelains, and a special section titled "Far Eastern Ornaments of Jade and Other Semi-Precious Materials". This chapter clearly illustrates Post's early interest in Chinese hardstone carving. Today, jades and gems - about 150 pieces - comprise most of Hillwood's Chinese collection. It also contains a large number of carved snuff bottles, figurines, and animals.

Chinese gems and jades were but one area of interest for Post in lapidary work. She also liked to collect hardstone furniture. The most impressive piece Post possessed was a table with a top commissioned in the 1920s from the Società Civile-Arte del Mosaico in Florence for her Palm Beach residence, Mar-a-Lago (33.50). The table, designed by architect Joseph Urban, was acquired from Mario Montelatici's workshop. Its six leaves feature designs in pietradurathat recall those seen on 16th - 17th century models in the Pitti and Uffizi Galleries. The length of the top, about 15 meters, probably makes it the most imposing mosaic ever produced by a Florentine workshop².

Post's passion for hardstone during the 1920s-early 1930s is made evident through the objects she purchased for personal use. During that time, Post became a client of luxury firms such as Cartier. The Parisian firm opened a branch in New York City in 1909. Post not only selected extraordinary pieces of jewelry, but also exquisite objets d'art, including frames, ashtrays, desk sets, and bell pushes³. These were delicately crafted from lapis-lazuli, agate, onyx, jade, and nephrite and ornamented with enamel and precious stones. Cartier had developed close ties with Russian suppliers, especially Ural lapidary workshops, as demonstrated in Géza von Habsburg and LudmilaBudrina's essential publications on the topic⁴. After the Russian Revolution, Cartier continued the tradition started by Fabergé and others of using unusual materials for "functional jewel[s]"⁵. Cartier modernized its stone works with Art Deco designs, a style the firm ultimately mastered. Like many other French jewelers, Cartier bought treasures saved by Russian émigrés. Prince Felix Yusupov for instance sold an amethyst quartz box with a gold lid topped by a reclining lion in spinel to the firm (11.62). Acquired by Post in 1926, this rare piece, which combines an Indian Mughal work with a mount by Fabergé, met three of her main criteria for collecting: a historical piece of carved stone, a precious container, and a prestigious provenance. The box was described in a draft of the catalog of her collection as a "French bonbon box", with only a brief mention of its provenance.

It was only later that the marks of Mikhail Perkhin and Fabergé on the mount were identified⁶. Post's second Fabergé purchase, a nephrite cane handle, was selected using the same criterion. The piece, which also bears the marks of Perkhin, is set in gold and decorated with enamel, diamonds, and rubies (11.66). As stated in a note from Grand Duchess Xenia dated November 05, 1927, "this jewelled [sic] handle Fabergé made belonged to me & formed part of my collection"⁷. It is now known that it was originally purchased by Empress Alexandra on March 29, 1902⁸. This acquisition was the first directly connected to the name of Fabergé and to the Imperial family. It undoubtedly relates to Marjorie's interest in Russian royalty, as shown through her patronage of many White Russian charities in the 1920s. This cane handle as well as the Catherine the Great Egg she acquired in 1931 embody the nature of Post's Russian art collection and may have inspired her choices while visiting Russia in the late 1930s.

Post's Acquisitions in Russia: Malachite, Lapis Lazuli Furniture, and Hardstone Seals

In view of Marjorie Post's burgeoning interest in Russian royals, it must have been very exciting for her to discover Russia with her third husband, Ambassador Joseph E. Davies. The couple began visiting the commission shops open to foreigners in Moscow and Leningrad. There, Marjorie bought the objects that would form the nucleus of her Russian collection; mostly sacred art artifacts such as icons, vestments, altar cloths, and chalices. She also acquired works of art that fed her curiosity for hardstone carving. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the objects she bought in Russia from those purchased while traveling in Europe and those obtained when Davies was en poste in Belgium in 1938-39. Photographs of the interiors of the American Embassy in Brussels show most of the Russian works of art she acquired in the late 1930s, including those bought in Russia.

Among the malachite tables she acquired there is a bronze table with caryatid legs supporting a round malachite top (32.20)⁹. This table was owned by Post before 1939 and may have been bought in Russia¹⁰. Dating to the second half of the 19th century, it has the same feet as a table now in the Yekaterinburg Fine Arts Museum. The most important malachite table in Hillwood's collection however was acquired by the Museum in 2006. It is documented as being part of Post's collection in 1943, but may have been purchased in the early 1940s when the Davies moved back to the United States (32.33)¹¹. In 2013, Budrina identified the table as one of the masterpieces presented by the Demidov Malachite Factory at the 1851 World's Fair in London¹². Adorned with Louis XV style bronzes, the table was produced in collaboration with the Duke of Leuchtenberg's bronze factory. Unfortunately, the table was transformed in the 1940s to make it fit with Post's settees and only the top and a portion of the bronze mounts are original. Other malachite pieces at Hillwood can also be directly associated with the Demidov mines in Nizhniy Tagil such as a pair of cups with the name of Demidov set beneath a crown on the bowls (21.100)¹³.

Post placed most of her hardstone treasures in a room at the American Embassy in Brussels known as the "Malachite Room". Photographs of the room show many of the aforementioned objects as well as other malachite artifacts she may have bought in Russia, including tables (32.9, 32.3, 32.15, 32.19, 32.21), boxes, and cups (21.101).

Malachite was not the only stone that Post liked to collect and display in her home; she also purchased a lavish cabinet made of wood adorned with lapis-lazuli and bronze in Russia that can be recognized in a photograph of the Anteroom of the Embassy (32.22). This precious piece of furniture was made in 1873 at the Peterhof Lapidary Factory in collaboration with Nichols & Plinke for the silver wedding anniversary of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich and his wife Alexandra. It was made after a design by court architect Ippolit Monighetti, as indicated by archival records¹⁴. A sketch by the artist reveals that four enameled coats of arms were removed from the doors. Post saw it in a commission shop in Moscow, bought it, and filled the empty spaces with lapis-lazuli medallions.

In addition to furniture and objets d'art, Post's "Malachite Room" contained a Fabergé circular vitrine (32.30) with a collection of carved stone seals and objets de vertu, many probably bought in Russia or acquired later. Most of Hillwood's seals are of traditional shapes in rock crystal or smoky quartz and are similar to those kept in the Yekaterinburg Museum of Lapidary Work¹⁵. Some however present an original shape such as the form of a scale weight (21.52, 21.214). The seals were largely produced in 19th-century Ural workshops, known for their seal fabrication since the late 18th century¹⁶. The most unusual set owned by Post is a group of bust-shaped seals. According to Budrina, these can be attributed to the workshop established by Ivan Stebakov in Yekaterinburg in 1849, whose works achieved great success at national and international exhibitions in the 1860s-70s¹⁷. Stebakov was primarily known for his fashionable bust-shaped hardstone seals. Hillwood's collection includes seven such busts of Russian heroes, rulers, and writers. One of the earliest recorded models – displayed by Stebakov in St. Petersburg in 1861 – is a seal of Timofei Ermak¹⁸. Hillwood possesses one example in smoky quartz (21.33). The collection also contains a rock crystal variation on Stebakov's bust-shaped seal of Ermak made after an 1821 design (21.34)¹⁹. Stebakov drew inspiration from the tale of Russian folk hero Ivan Susanin as well, illustrated in Hillwood's collection by a smoky quartz seal (21.36)²⁰.

Many of Stebakov's bust-shaped seals depict sovereigns, particularly Russian rulers²¹. Hillwood holds a rock crystal seal of Rurik (21.35) that may be related to one shown by Stebakov at the Paris exhibition of 1867²². Hillwood's collection also includes a rock crystal bust of Catherine the Great that can be attributed to the workshop of Stebakov or one of his Yekaterinburg competitors (21.38).

Hillwood's collection contains bust-shaped seals of Russian writers whose makers need to be identified as well²³. This group includes Pushkin (21.31), Krylov (21.32), and Ostrovsky (21.37), all three of which were displayed in Post's "Malachite Room". An analysis of the room's display suggests that hardstone carving was one of Post's primary interests in Russian art. This partiality probably influenced her selection of Fabergé pieces.

The Fabergé Collection: A Collection of Mounted Hardstones?

Close examination of the vitrine in Post's "Malachite Room" reveals some her early Fabergé purchases. In addition to the aforementioned seals, the case held a few pieces then associated with Fabergé's workshop. Once more, they reflect Post's taste for stone carving, especially objects with precious mounts such as a small rock crystal box whose gold mount set with diamonds and rubies is attributed to Perkhin (11.78). In the vitrine there was also a figurine of a French bulldog carved in agate with a gold collar (21.27); the kind of objects usually categorized as part of the famous "Fabergé Menagerie"²⁴. The dog is now attributed to the firm of Cartier²⁵. It is interesting to note that Post did not focus on acquiring small animals by Fabergé when building her collection in the 1950s-60s. Post likely acquired pieces because of her interest in animals and the materials themselves. Indeed, Post was a dog lover and had a general interest in wildlife and exotic animals such as elephants²⁶. Regarding the Fabergé pieces Post acquired while living in Washington, it appears that she chose many of them due to their material properties. These items were bought by Post directly (12.155, 11.61, 11.82, 11.219, 12.151) or given to her as gifts by her husband Joseph Davies (11.74, 11.71) and daughter Adelaide (21.192, 11.221, 11.220, 21.193). Most of the pieces are of bowenite or nephrite, both of which can be associated with Post's taste for Chinese jades. One of Hillwood's Fabergé frames (11.70) features a bowenite panel set in a gold mount by Perkhin. Bought before 1952, it holds an ivory miniature of Post after her portrait by Douglas Chandor²⁷. Framing her portrait in bowenite conveys a great deal about Post's taste for carved, green hardstone objects d'art. Hillwood's collection of bowenite works by Fabergé includes a clock that was once part of Empress Maria Feodorovna's collection at the Anichkov Palace (12.155)²⁸ and a bell push with gold mounts by Perkhin (11.74). The nephrite pieces comprise different objects such as boxes by Perkhin (11.64, 11.67) and Henrik Wigström (11.82), a bell-push by Perkhin (11.71), and a handle by Wigström (21.192). Hardstone works such as these illustrate how Fabergé and his contemporaries used stones and gems in unexpected ways in order to produce magnificent objets d'art.

This presentation demonstrates how Hillwood's Russian collection provides an overview of hardstone production in Yekaterinburg workshops as well as in those of Fabergé and his competitors. Only a broader understanding of the collector's taste allows us to comprehend the collection formed by Marjorie Post. If Post's interest in Chinese jades and hardstone carving had not developed as it did in the 1920s, she may not have built what former chief curator Anne Odom deemed "a mineralogist's delight"²⁹.

¹ Marjorie Merriweather Post, *Notes on Hillwood*, Washington, DC: Hillwood Museum, 1970, p. 16

² Anna M. Massinelli, *Painting in Stone: Modern Florentine Pietra Dura Mosaic*, Firenze: Aska, 2014, p. 128

³ Laurent Salomé, Laure Dalon, eds., *Cartier: Style and History*, Paris: RMN, 2013, p. 286-293

²⁵ Géza von Habsburg, *Ibid.*, p. 343

²⁶ Estella Chung, *Living Artfully At Home with Marjorie Merrweather Post*, London, Washington, D.C. Hillwood Museum and Gardens Foundation in association with D. Giles Limited, 2013, p. 119

²⁷ The miniature was painted by the Russian-born miniaturist, Sonia Engalichev

²⁸ Silver mounts by Julius Rappoport. See Wilfried Zeisler, *L'Objet d'art et de luxe français en Russie (1881–1917) Fournisseurs, clients, collections et influences*, Paris: Mare & Martin, 2014, figs. 180, 197

²⁹ Cathleen McCarthy, 'House on a Hill', *Lapidary Journal* 46, August 1992, no. 5, p. 29

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Название статьи. Камнерезное искусство в Музее Хиллвуд

Аннотация: В статье содержатся биографические сведения о Марджори Меривезер Пост, а также общая характеристика и история формирования собранной ею коллекции. Автор уделяет особое внимание русской части собрания музея в Хиллвуде. Приводится описание наиболее значимых произведений коллекции, выполненных из полудрагоценных камней. Упомянуты два произведения из малахита, предположительно выполненные на Демидовской малахитовой фабрике, деревянный кабинет, украшенный лазуритом, печати работы Фаберже из горного хрусталя и дымчатого кварца, коллекция печатей в виде бюстов. Особое внимание уделяется произведениям из полудрагоценного камня фирмы Фаберже, находящимся в коллекции. Анализируются ассортимент и используемые при выполнении изделий Фаберже камни. Коллекция включает порядка 100 печатей, выполненных в России из различных камней, примерно 40 малахитовых произведений и приблизительно 20 русских произведений, созданных с применением лазурита. Более 20 из этих предметов созданы мастерами Фаберже.

- ⁴ Géza von Habsburg, ed. *Fabergé – Cartier: Rivalen am Zarenhof*. München: Hirmer Verlag, 2004. Ludmila Budrina, "Russkie kamnerezy firmy Kartie", *Izvestia Uralskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*. Series 2. 2011, no 1 (87), p. 66-78
- ⁵ Liana Paredes, *Cartier Frames*. Washington, D.C.: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, 1994
- ⁶ Marvin C. Ross, "Fabergé and His Master Craftsmen", *The Art of Karl Fabergé and his Contemporaries*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965. p. 17
- ⁷ Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, Archives and Special Collections
- ⁸ Rifat R. Gafullin, *Izdeliya firmy Faberzhe kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka v sobranii GMZ "Pavlovsk"*. Polnyi katalog kollektsii T. IX Sankt-Peterburg GMZ "Pavlovsk". 2013. p. 248
- ⁹ *The Fabergé Menagerie*. London: Philip Wilson Pub., Baltimore (Md): Walters Art Museum, 2003. no 8
- ¹⁰ Fred Vogel's invoice, dated March 10, 1939. Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, Archives and Special Collections
- ¹¹ Fred Vogel's invoice, dated March 09, 1943. Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, Archives and Special Collections
- ¹² Ludmila Budrina, "Malakhitovaya fabrika Demidovykh po sledam eksponatov pervoi Vsemimoy vystavki (London, 1851)", Demidova N.G. ed., *Demidovy v Rossii i Italii*. Moskva: Kontsept-Media, 2013. p. 277-279
- ¹³ *The Fabergé Menagerie*, no 7
- ¹⁴ Natalia Mavrodina, *Iskusstvo russkikh kamnerezov XVIII-XIX vekov. Katalog kollektsii*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2007. p. 467; Vladimir Listov, *Ippolit Monigetti*. Leningrad: Strouizdat, 1976. p. 130
- ¹⁵ Ludmila Budrina, "Kamennye pechaty", *Puteshestvie v mir kamnya*. Yekaterinburg: Avtograf, 2007. p. 158
- ¹⁶ Tatiana N. Muntyan et al., *Karl Faberzhe i мастера kamnereznogo dela. Katalog vystavki*. Moskva: Muzei Moskovskogo Kremlya, 2011. nos. 340, 341
- ¹⁷ Ludmila Budrina, "Zabytye imena uralskikh kamnerezov. Ivan Sergeevich Stebakov", *Izvestia Uralskogo federalnogo universiteta*. Series 2. 2014. no 2 (127). p. 172-186
- ¹⁸ After a print by I. Rozanov (1821-1824)
- ¹⁹ Ludmila Budrina, "Zabytye imena uralskikh kamnerezov", p. 181-182
- ²⁰ A similar piece belongs to the State Hermitage. See Nina Y. Binukova and I. N. Ukhanova, eds. *Istorizm v Rossii: Stil' i epokha v dekorativnom iskusstve 1820-1890-e gody. Katalog vystavki*. Sankt-Peterburg: Siavina, 1996. no 646. p. 333. Susanin's models appeared quite recently at auctions including one in a Fabergé box (Christie's, London, 2 June 2014, lot 212). see also Olivier Couteau-Bégarie, Paris, 19-20 May 2015, lot 310
- ²¹ Olga K. Bazhenova, *Izdeliya iz tsvetnogo kamnia vtoroy poloviny XVIII-XX vekov v sobranii GMZ "Pavlovsk"*. Polnyi katalog kollektsii T. XIII Sankt-Peterburg: GMZ "Pavlovsk". 2013. p. 144
- ²² Ludmila Budrina, "Zabytye imena uralskikh kamnerezov", p. 181
- ²³ Ludmila Budrina, "Skulptura iz gomogo khristalya. Traditsii evropeiskogo vrozozhdeniya v kamnereznom iskusstve Urala", *Yuvelirnoe iskusstvo i materialnaya kultura. Tezisy dokladov*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2011. p. 11
- ²⁴ *The Fabergé Menagerie*, ibid