

SECOND FLOOR GALLERY: UNDERSTANDING POST'S LEGACY

Wilfried Zeisler, Deputy Director and Chief Curator

The Russian Sacred Arts Gallery opened in the mansion in 2014. After ten years, it is time for a refresh. The space will close on December 4, 2023, and reopen in late March 2024 with a new name, *Second Floor Gallery: Understanding Post's Legacy*, with new displays and a new storyline. Most of the objects currently on view in the gallery will be reused in the new space while others will be displayed in their historic locations. Many icons will return to adorn the icon room as they did during Marjorie Merriweather Post's time.

Inspired by Hillwood's new publication, *The Houses and Collections of Marjorie Merriweather Post – The Joy of It*, the updated second floor gallery will explore the history of Hillwood's collection amassed by founder Marjorie Post and developed by the museum since its opening to the public on July 11, 1977. The display will provide an opportunity to explore in detail some of the finest examples in the collection including several pieces currently on view in the gallery, such as the Buch chalice (acc. no. 11.223) (fig. 1), the nuptial crown (acc. no. 17.63) (fig. 2), and sacred vestments. Textiles will continue to rotate twice a year. The gallery will also highlight new research, acquisitions, and long-term loans.



Fig. 1 Chalice, Iver Winfeldt Buch (Norwegian, active in Russia, 1749–1811), St. Petersburg, 1791, Gold, diamonds, chalcedony, bloodstone, nephrite, carnelian, cast glass, *Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post, 1973* (11.223)



Fig. 2 Nuptial crown, Leopold Pfisterer, jeweler (Austrian, active in Russia, 1764–97), St. Petersburg, 1767: diamonds on jacket and caftan, St. Petersburg, 1884: diamonds reset in crown, Silver, diamonds, velvet, *Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post, 1973* (17.63)

The display will be organized in four main sections, all illustrated with objects including many from storage or with new interpretation. The gallery will start with a selection of artworks illustrating Post's early collecting and interest for ceramics, precious gold objects, hardstone, enamel, and miniatures. On a screen visitors will be able to watch a virtual visit to Post's 1920s New York apartment, filled with many of the treasures that are still at Hillwood.

The following section will be dedicated to Post’s collecting in the Soviet Republics and Europe in the late 1930s. It will showcase objects including porcelain, glassware, icons, chalices, and vestments offered for sale through state-run antique shops by the Soviet authorities. These shops presented Marjorie Post and other travelers to the Soviet Union with the opportunity to collect and preserve remarkable objects from the Russian court culture. While married to Joseph E. Davies, the U.S. ambassador to Moscow (1936—38) and to Brussels (1938—39), Post acquired objects in Russia (mainly Moscow and St. Petersburg), Ukraine (Kyiv), Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Paris, and London among other places. They formed the nucleus of Hillwood’s collection of Russian imperial art. One of the highlights will be a precious footed bowl made of nephrite, silver gilt, and jewels which used to be on view in the Pavilion (acc. no. 21.96) (fig. 3). Marjorie Post found it in Leningrad (today, St. Petersburg) in 1937–38 in the store that the government established in the former elegant boutique of Fabergé, the famous jeweler to the imperial Russian court.



Fig. 3 Footed bowl (tazza), Probably Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 1800s, Nephrite, silver gilt, jewels, Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post, 1973 (21.96)



Fig. 4 Bust of Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich of Russia (1850–1908), Leopold Bernstamm, sculptor (Baltic German [Latvian], active in France and Russia, 1859–1939), Siot-Decauville, foundry (French, 1860–1920s), Paris, after 1892, Bronze, marble, Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post, 1973 (14.42)

The next section will illustrate Marjorie Post’s attraction to the stories behind the objects she was considering for the collection. Post’s interest was not limited to France and Russia; her collection reflects the ties among many European courts, including those of Great Britain, Austria, and Prussia. During the 1900s, many of the centuries-old European courts disappeared. With the support of books and rare documents today in Hillwood’s Collections & Research Center, the collection chronicles European courts’ coronations, marriages, banquets, balls, and etiquette, as well as the extraordinary path of women such as Queen Marie Antoinette of France and Empress Catherine II of Russia. Various artisans and artists created works of art in relation to these court traditions and historic figures, although few were members of the aristocracy themselves. In the case of the Russian Empire, many such artisans were serfs working for the elite’s manufactories and workshops until the abolition of serfdom in 1861. This story will be illustrated with an icon crafted in the workshop of silversmith Pavel Ovchinnikov (acc. no. 54.30). Born to a family of serfs, Ovchinnikov was freed in 1850 and became one of the leading silversmiths in Russia in the 1800s.

Finally, a section will explore how Hillwood became a museum and how, inspired by Post's vision, the museum continues to acquire new works of art through loans, purchases, and gifts, including select examples of contemporary design relevant to Hillwood's history and collection. Hillwood's recent acquisitions of the portrait of Olga von Pistohlkors by Konstantin Makovsky (acc. no. 2022.2.1) and Kettle by Froment-Meurice (acc. no. 2020.1.1-5) will be displayed in this section. It will also be an opportunity to present the exceptional loans from the Jules Chéret Museum of Fine Arts in Nice, France secured in 2023. These long-term loans are displayed here while the museum in Nice is closed for several years of renovation. During the 1800s, Nice became the most famous beach resort for European royals and aristocrats, as well as American magnates, to visit in the winter, and later in the summer. Among them were many citizens of the Russian Empire, spending time in Nice to enjoy the Mediterranean climate far away from the formal court life. Others sought better weather for health reasons. The selection of works from the Jules Chéret Museum speaks to both the rich international history of Nice and its ties to European courts as well as its connection with pieces from Hillwood's collection including works by painter Konstantin Makovsky and sculptor Leopold Bernstamm (acc. nos. 51.79 and 14.42 (fig. 4)) which will be featured in the gallery alongside the loans from Nice.