

### ***Some Main Ideas about Fabergé***

Although created in different centuries, Hillwood's Fabergé objects and French collection share some commonalities in style (favored rococo and neoclassical styles), function (self-presentation by wealthy of one's taste and status; many used in intimate, small interiors), and production (collaborative, exquisite craftsmanship).

Fabergé was not the maker himself, but a smart entrepreneur who directed the vision and production of a multi-national company. His firm was nationalized after the Russian Revolution.

Many visitors today are familiar with his name and intrigued by the allure of his craftsmanship and association with Russia's last emperor.

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#### **Style**

##### ***What do these objects' appearance reveal about the people who made and used them?***

Inspired and looked to the past

- Historicism (revisiting past styles) was fashionable during his time
- Fabergé inspired by Renaissance and rococo 1700s, France and England
- He also embraced the neoclassical revival – after 1903 became THE Fabergé style
- He reinterpreted the past, rather than copy exactly – for instance, his enamel colors are brighter and more varied than examples from 1700s

His Moscow workshops – less looking to past

- Less conservative style, more embracing new (like art nouveau, leaf-shaped box)

Fabergé's style characteristics

- Clean lines
- Gems used strategically as accents in the piece's design
- Combining precious (gems) with non-precious (enamels, hardstones)
- Masterful enameling
- Master at small intricate pieces: clocks, surprises that move, trains, palace replicas

He is first Russian craftsman to influence the style of a major Western firm

- Cartier copied his enamels

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#### **Function**

##### ***What purpose did it serve? Literally? Figuratively? Who used it?***

Who used? Russian Imperial court and aristocracy, but also wealthy around the world...those who could afford precious things made with expensive metals and gems

"Objects of fantasy and function"

- Function

- Jewelry and table silver (candle, tableware, large silver objects) – firm’s bread-and-butter items for whole life of the firm
- Objects for display in the intimate interior, more relaxed lifestyle of Imperial family at this time, like Victorian clutter, more middle-class pastimes during private hours
  - Desk accessories: seals, writing sets, stamp moisteners, clocks
  - Icons for home icon corner
  - New social habits
    - Cigarettes (not snuff)...needed cigarette cases
    - Make-up/cosmetic accessories
    - Photography...needed frames
    - Electricity...needed bell pushes
  - Other: cane handle, watch fob, boxes, crochet hook!
- Gifts
  - Wedding, anniversary, special dinners
  - Imperial Easter Eggs – 1885-1917, Alexander III for wife, then Nicholas II for mom and wife, 50 eggs produced
- Fantasy
  - Imperial Easter Eggs too
  - Hardstone animals (flowers too)

#### Marjorie Post

- About 90 pieces of Fabergé at Hillwood, and are part of her larger collection of Russian art of more than 5,000 works
- Fabergé fits in her three collecting criteria to a “T”
- Her Fabergé pieces fit perfectly with her French decorative arts collection, given the strong influence of French art on Fabergé’s pieces
- When Post and Joseph Davies departed for Moscow in 1937, Post was familiar with history of Romanovs and their jeweler as well as had personally entertained/met Russian artists and émigrés
- Displayed her Fabergé pieces in both formal rooms for display (French drawing room and Icon Room) and “lived” with her collection (clock and frames in her bedroom)
- Post became an avid student of Fabergé, amassing and reading major reference works, on the firm, meeting prominent scholars on its history/production, and using her time in Russia to visit places connected to the imperial family and Fabergé.
- Among other American women who collected Fabergé in the 1930s and 1940s (Pratt, Geddings Grey, and Minshall), Post was the only one to visit Russia and develop a broader passion for Russian imperial art.
- By mid-1930s Post already had three Fabergé pieces (Catherine the Great egg, cane handle, lion box)

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### **Production**

#### ***How was it made? Who made it?***

#### Peter Carl Fabergé

- Fabergé (1846-1920) – born in Russia of French descent, son of a goldsmith; studied jewelry-making in Germany and traveled and saw jeweled masterpieces from Renaissance to 1700s. Took over father’s business in St. Petersburg in 1872 at age 26. Smart entrepreneur – got training and exposure by appraising and repairing Hermitage jewelry. Began to supply Russian Imperial court, big moment in 1885 when got official appointment as supplier to the court after delivering first Imperial Easter egg (Alexander III for wife)...1918 his firm is nationalized...1920 dies in Switzerland

- At height (1910) employed some 500 people
- Locations: St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, London , and a mail order catalog (meant clients wide-spread)
  - Moscow store and workshop
    - "New Russians": money from expansion of capitalism
    - Silver/jewelry production centered there
    - Stylistic differences between St. Petersburg...more experimentation in Moscow, Russia style more popular here, as well as art nouveau
- He is not the maker! He:
  - directed workshops
  - supplied gems and precious metals
  - approved design sketches
  - monitored quality
  - determined the direction and standards of Fabergé style
  - supervised important commissions like Imperial Easter Eggs

#### Collaborative, joint projects

- Fabergé – supervisor of creation and production
- Workmaster
  - Many workmasters from Finland. Specialization at workshops: some jewelry, some silver, etc. Workmasters managed their own staff.
- Gold/silver smith
  - Fabergé mastered 4 colors of gold – red, yellow, white, green; like on Catherine the Great Easter Egg
  - Chasers and engravers use tools to decorate a metal object to give shape and form
  - Moscow is center of silver production
- Enameller
  - Enameling – Fabergé’s fame! Expanded number of designs and colors, over silver or gold; mastered 18<sup>th</sup> c. art of French enameling
  - Enamel – powdered glass fused (heat) to a metal base...5-6 layers to create luster
  - Guilloche – machine engraved, patterns like sunburst – on carnet (presentation notebook)
  - En plein (plain) – enamel applied in a smooth layer; Fabergé puts over engraved pattern, on music box
  - Champlévé – small compartments hollowed, on the Twelve Monogram Easter Egg
- Gem cutter – gems
  - Stone cutter – hardstones, a plentiful natural resource in Russia, carving center in Germany
- Miniaturist/painter
- Developed relationship with ateliers that produced specific things, e.g. Rappaport for silver
- Technical achievements
  - Imperial Easter Eggs are mechanical masterpieces, technical marvels
  - Master of varicolored gold (red, yellow, white, green)
  - Expanded colors of enamel