

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 20, 2018
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Fabergé Rediscovered

The first comprehensive Fabergé exhibition to be organized by and presented at Hillwood; unveils new discoveries, attributions, and context for exploring the legendary jeweler to the court of Russia

On view June 9, 2018 to January 13, 2019

WASHINGTON—Exquisite works from the legendary jeweler to the last court of Russia are revealed in a new light in the special exhibition [*Fabergé Rediscovered*](#), on view at [Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens](#) from June 9, 2017 through January 13, 2018.

Treasures created by the firm of Peter Carl Fabergé (1846-1920) have inspired admiration and intrigue for over a century, both for their remarkable craftsmanship and the fascinating histories that surround them. Featuring over 100 objects, *Fabergé Rediscovered* will unveil new discoveries relating to Hillwood’s own collection of Fabergé imperial Easter eggs and other famed works, highlighting new attributions and provenances and providing a new framework to study and understand 19th- and 20th-century jewelry and goldsmithing. The special exhibition will display the greatest examples from Hillwood’s Fabergé collection, left by [Marjorie](#)

[Merriweather Post](#) for the benefit of future generations, along with important loans from other museums and private collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Musée d’Orsay, the McFerrin Collection, the Edouard and Maurice Sandoz Foundation, and His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco.

“Marjorie Post was a serious collector and approached the collecting of Fabergé as she did her important collection of French 18th-century and Russian imperial art, as an avid student and connoisseur. As a result, she assembled an important and impressive collection of these intriguing works,” explained Hillwood executive director, Kate Markert. “Since it’s been over 22 years since Hillwood’s Fabergé collection was last examined in a book or exhibition, this fresh look at the works of Fabergé, revealing new information, attributions, and provenances for Hillwood’s objects, is long overdue.”

The famous discovery in 2014 of a long-lost imperial Easter egg—Tsar Alexander III’s 1887 Easter gift to his wife, Tsarina Maria Fedorovna—by a scrap metal dealer in the Midwest not only made headlines, but also prompted new findings about Hillwood’s own collection. Newly uncovered facts relating to the rediscovered egg confirmed that *Twelve Monograms Egg*, long believed to have been made in 1895, was actually one of the



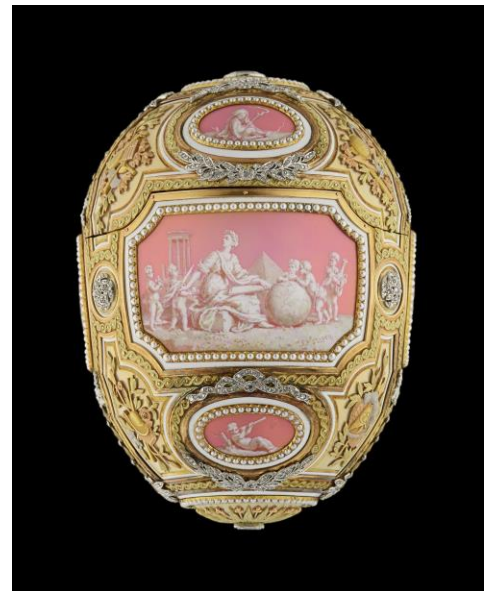
two imperial Easter eggs fabricated in 1896. The fascination with Fabergé continues to uncover new facts and discoveries about the storied jeweler to the court of St. Petersburg. Hillwood's collection has been the focus of study for several of its curators, beginning with Post's curator, Marvin Ross, who published a book about Hillwood's Fabergé in 1965. Anne Odom published on Hillwood's Fabergé collection in 1996, and was the last to do so. Current chief curator, Dr. Wilfried Zeisler, conducted research into Hillwood's archives, at the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, where Post's archives are housed, and in Russia to bring to light more of the collection's history and Post's early interest in Fabergé for this special exhibition and accompanying publication.

"Hillwood's Fabergé holdings of about 90 objects represent a small portion of over 5,000 Russian objects in the collection," said Zeisler. "That Post and Ross dedicated their first publication on the collection to the works of Fabergé is a testament to the jeweler's importance in the history of decorative art. This new research, along with the updated attributions and provenances, will offer interest and intrigue to even the most knowledgeable Fabergé aficionados, while also introducing the famous jeweler to new audiences."

Fabergé at Hillwood

Marjorie Merriweather Post began collecting art in the first decade of the 20th century. In furnishing her New York apartment, she adopted a taste for 18th-century French style, which was the design trend of the day. The first Fabergé pieces she collected can be seen in the context of her new-found interest in French decorative art, particularly as they aligned with the criteria she developed for collecting: They were beautiful, finely crafted, and were associated with royalty.

Post acquired her first Fabergé piece in 1927 from the New York branch of Cartier. The 18th-century amethyst quartz box, which had once belonged to Prince Felix Yusupov, bears on its gold lid the marks of Fabergé. It would have interested Post for its precious materials and prestigious history. The second Fabergé item to enter her collection, and the first with an imperial connection, was a nephrite cane handle, set in gold and decorated with enamel, diamonds, and rubies. A note accompanying the piece signed by Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, the last tsar's sister, verifies that it once belonged to her. In 1931, Eleanor Barzin, Post's middle daughter, acquired the *Catherine the Great Egg* from Hammer Galleries as a birthday gift for her mother. A tribute to French design, the egg aligned with Marjorie's interest in French 18th-century gold and enameled boxes. When she departed for Moscow with her husband, diplomat Joseph E. Davies, in 1937, when he was appointed U.S.



ambassador to the Soviet Union, Marjorie was already thoroughly acquainted with the history of the Romanovs and their jeweler Fabergé, having already acquired these three impressive examples.

With the possible exception of a rare wood display case with silver mounts, it does not appear that Post purchased any Fabergé objects during her time in the Soviet Union. The discoveries of other Russian treasures she made there, including porcelain, silver, enamel, and liturgical objects, did ignite a passion for Russian art, including the works of Fabergé, that would fuel her collecting for the rest of her life.

Post bought Hillwood in 1955 and decided that her home would become a museum, planning displays of her works accordingly and continuing to add to her collection. She acquired Fabergé most assiduously in the 1960s. Among the nearly 90 pieces of Fabergé in Hillwood's collection, highlights include two imperial Easter eggs; a bowenite clock designed by Fabergé's chief silversmith, Julius Rappoport, modeled after an 18th-century English clock, which belonged to Nicholas II's mother, Maria; a *carnet*, or notebook, with a miniature of the Empress Alexandra, possibly made at the time of her engagement in 1894; and a music box once belonging to the Yusupov family, considered to be one of the finest examples of Fabergé enameling.

Exhibition Organization and Highlights

The exhibition will open with an invitation into the 19th-century jewelry showroom of Peter Carl Fabergé, exploring the process of creation and featuring 18th-century objects similar to precious works that Fabergé would have seen and drawn inspiration from. This opening section will present original drawings from Fabergé's workshop that are in Hillwood's collection and have never before been seen by the public.

Like most successful jewelers of the time, Fabergé's clientele was society's elite, including royals, aristocrats, industrial magnates, and financiers. The second section of the exhibition focuses on official commissions from the Russian court, from the aristocracy, and even royalty from foreign countries. Grand dukes and grand duchesses, the children and grandchildren of Russia's sovereigns, were among the major benefactors of luxury goods by Fabergé. Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich is a good example. A highlight of this section is a gift he likely gave to one of his many lovers, the actress Elizabeth Balletta, who originally owned Hillwood's miniature copy of the famous *Bronze Horseman* statue by Étienne-Maurice Falconet, created to honor Peter the Great, the founder of St. Petersburg.

Fabergé created many items as tokens of love and affection, like the Peter the Great miniature. Several of Hillwood's items were specifically commissioned to celebrate marriage, including objects that commemorated the nuptials of aristocrats and members of the extended imperial family. To mark the 25th wedding anniversary of Count Felix Sumarokov-Elston (later Prince Yusopov) and Princess Zinaida Yusupova, their two sons, Nikolai and Felix, commissioned Fabergé to fashion an exquisite French 18th-century-style music box, which today is one of Hillwood's masterpieces and a feature of this third section of the exhibition. The name Fabergé is perhaps best known for the famous imperial Easter eggs. Alexander III ordered an Easter egg from Fabergé in 1885 as a gift to his wife Maria Fedorovna, marking the first in a series of commissions that continued until 1917. After his death in 1894, his son Nicholas II continued this tradition by giving Fabergé eggs to his mother and his wife each Easter. This section features not only Hillwood's two imperial eggs, but also the *Blue Serpent Clock Egg*, one of the three imperial eggs that were re-dated upon the discovery of a lost Fabergé egg in 2014, on loan for the exhibition from His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco. There are a total of three imperial Easter eggs on view in the exhibition.

Fabergé supplied the Russian imperial family and court with items for both official and personal use, including those used for every-day luxury, which are featured in this section. Several objects in Hillwood's collection belonged to Maria Fedorovna, who was a luxury goods and fashion enthusiast. Two major examples are a triptych icon of the Elevation of the True Cross and the James Cox-inspired clock, both originally gifts and excellent examples of the rococo revival style in Russia.

The next section focuses on Russian and foreign competitors to Fabergé, featuring works by the firm of Ovchinnikov, the Grachev Brothers, and Cartier, moving on to important pieces in the context of war and revolution. The exhibition closes with a focus on major American art dealers and collectors, including Marjorie

Post, who played a significant role in Fabergé's success after the fall of the imperial regime. Here, exquisite pieces, including the Yusupov snuffbox she acquired early on, an egg-shaped basket and bell push attributed to the firm's most exacting workmaster, Mikhail Perkhin, and a clock in the shape of a table that was the 51st birthday gift that Davies gave to Post while stationed in Moscow, showcase the brilliant connoisseurship that Post brought to her collecting of Fabergé.

Curator and Author

Dr. Wilfried Zeisler is Hillwood's chief curator. He is a graduate of Sorbonne University and the École du Louvre, Paris. Wilfried has written extensively on the decorative arts in France and Russia, including a 2010 book on ceramics and several articles. Wilfried's dissertation, *L'Objet d'art et de luxe français en Russie (1881-1917)* [*French Objets d'art and Luxury Goods in Russia*], was published in 2014. He has participated in and curated exhibitions in Paris and Monaco. At Hillwood, he was the curator of *Splendor and Surprise: Elegant Containers, Antique to Modern* (2015) and *Konstantin Makovsky: The Tsar's Painter* (2016). Wilfried co-authored the latter exhibition's accompanying book: *Konstantin Makovsky: The Tsar's Painter in America and Paris* (2015).

Publication

A full-color, 224-page companion catalog of the same title and authored by Zeisler has been published in partnership with Giles in conjunction with the exhibition. The lavishly illustrated book focuses on the recent research into Fabergé, providing revelations from the Russian public archives, and the discovery of objects thought to be lost that have brought to light new information about Fabergé's career and his creations. With new photography and illuminating focus spreads by Fabergé experts, this new volume presents the firm in the broader history of 19th- to 20th-century jewelry and goldsmithing, documents new attributions and provenances, and examines our continuing fascination with Fabergé's remarkable work.

Events and Programs

Fabergé Rediscovered inspires an array of programs and events throughout the presentation of the exhibition.

An opening celebration will be held on Tuesday, June 5, 2017. Inspired by Post's grand affairs at Hillwood, the evening will include cocktails and a glamorous dinner on the Lunar Lawn in honor of Post's singular style and in support of Hillwood's mission to share her cultural treasure with future generations.

In October, a four-part lecture series will explore the history and creations of Fabergé. Speakers, dates, and subjects are:

Wed, Oct 3: *Fabergé Rediscovered*, with Dr. Wilfried Zeisler, chief curator, Hillwood

Wed, Oct 10: *Russia, Royalty and The Romanovs: The Queen's Gallery*, with Caroline de Guitaut, curator, Royal Collection

Tues, Oct 16: *Topic TBD*, with Mikhail Ovchinnikov, director, Fabergé Museum in St. Petersburg

Tues, Oct 23: *Fabergé in London*, Kieran McCarthy, director, Wartski

Press Preview

A press breakfast and preview is planned for Tuesday, June 5, 2017, from 9-11 a.m. Invitation to follow.

Exhibition Sponsors

Faberge Rediscovered is supported by The Richard C. von Hess Foundation, Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Northern Trust, Ellen MacNeille Charles, Judy and Scott Phares, Lucy S. Rhame, Ms. Nedenia Rumbough and Mr. Jan Roosenburg, Janice and Ralph Shrader, Richard and Rosalee Davison, Kathy Durdin, Freeman's, Ms. Martha Johnston, Dr. and Mrs. Michael J. Petite, Bonhams, Kyra Cheremeteff and Thomas W. Richardson, and Mrs. William Bowen Astrop. All exhibitions and programs are funded in part by the U.S. Commission on the Fine Arts through the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs program.

About Hillwood

When art collector, businesswoman, social figure, and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post left to the public her northwest Washington, D.C. estate, she endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of [Russian imperial art](#) outside of Russia, an [exquisite 18th-century French decorative art collection](#), and 25 acres of serene landscaped [gardens](#) and natural woodlands. Opened as a public institution in 1977, today Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens offers a gracious and immersive experience unlike any other. Highlights of the collection include Fabergé eggs, Russian porcelain, Russian orthodox icons, Beauvais tapestries, and Sèvres porcelain, and Post's personal collection of apparel, accessories, and jewelry. Thirteen acres of enchanting formal gardens include a [japanese-style garden](#), [rose garden](#), [French parterre](#), and a [greenhouse](#) full of orchids.

General Information

Location: 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
Metro: VanNess/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)

Information/Tickets: 202.686.5807 for information or www.HillwoodMuseum.org
[Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum)

Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mondays, most holidays, and for several weeks in January.

Café: The Hillwood café serves lunch Tuesday through Saturday from 11a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Afternoon tea is served on Sundays only from 11a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Express dining, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages, is available Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call 202.686.5807 for café reservations.

Suggested Donation: \$18, \$15 seniors, \$10 college students, \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18.
No donation is suggested for children under 6.
Adults and seniors receive \$3 off the suggested donation for weekday visits and \$1 for weekend visits when reservations are made online.

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