



Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fabergé Collection Fact Sheet

Collection History & Overview

The full name of the exhibit is Lillian Thomas Pratt Collection of Fabergé and Russian Decorative Arts and the collection includes the largest public assemblage of Fabergé imperial Easter eggs outside Russia. The full Pratt collection numbers approximately 170 creations from the Fabergé workshops.

The collection was formed between 1933 and 1946 by Lillian Thomas Pratt of Fredericksburg, Va., the wife of General Motors executive John Lee Pratt. In 1947 she bequeathed more than 400 pieces of Russian decorative arts, many from the Fabergé workshops, to VMFA.

Karl Fabergé, son of a jeweler born in St. Petersburg in 1846, was named goldsmith and jeweler to the Russian court in the mid-1880s. Tsar Alexander III proposed the creation of an elaborate Easter egg to be presented to the tsaritsa in 1885. Such special eggs became an Easter tradition throughout Alexander's reign and that of his son and successor, Tsar Nicholas II. Fifty imperial eggs were created before the fall of the house of Romanov in 1917. Five, all from Nicholas' reign, are in the Pratt collection. Fabergé fled Russia in 1918, after his firm was closed by the Bolsheviks; he died in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1920.

Highlights

Imperial Rock-Crystal Easter Egg with Revolving Miniatures, 1896

Presented to Tsaritsa Alexandra Feodorovna in the year of Nicholas' coronation, its two halves, made of rock crystal, are joined by a diamond-set band and placed on an enamel and rock crystal base. The egg is topped by a 26-carat Siberian cabochon emerald. The rock crystal globe contains miniature paintings of royal residences.

Imperial Pelican Easter Egg, 1897

A gift from Nicholas to his mother, the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna, the 4-inch-tall egg made of red gold is surmounted by an enameled and diamond-studded pelican feeding its young. The egg unfolds to disclose eight pearl-encircled oval panels, each depicting an institution of which the dowager empress was a patron.

Imperial Peter the Great Easter Egg, 1903

Presented by Nicholas to the tsaritsa, this egg is made of red, yellow and green gold and platinum and is set with diamonds and rubies. Miniatures of Peter the Great and Nicholas and two views, of the Winter Palace and a hut Peter himself built, adorn the sides. When the top is opened, a tiny bronze replica of a 1782 statue of Peter the Great by the French sculptor Falconet arises from inside.

Imperial Tsesarevich Easter Egg, 1912

Another gift to the tsaritsa, the 1912 egg is a fantasy of lapis lazuli and gold tracery, topped by an inset diamond. Concealed inside the egg is a removable platinum double-headed eagle, set with rose diamonds, on a lapis lazuli base. This "surprise" serves as a frame for a portrait miniature of the 7-year-old tsaritsa Alexis in a sailor suit.

Imperial Red Cross Easter Egg, 1915

Tsar Nicholas' mother was the recipient of the most recent egg in the Pratt collection. Made of white opalescent enamel with a scarlet cross on each side, it is a tribute to Marie Feodorovna's presidency of the Russian Red Cross. Inside are portrait miniatures of Romanov family members dressed in the Red Cross uniform. Encircling the egg is an inscription in Russian: "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."