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Carl Fabergé

1846 - 1920



During 1846 in St. Petersburg, Russia, the first son of jeweler Gustav Fabergé (FAB-URJ-AY) was born. He was named Carl Gustavovich Fabergé. A son's middle name was a combination of his father's first name and ovich, which means "son of". While Carl grew up his father worked diligently to become a respected jeweler and prosperous middle class tradesman in the largest and richest country in the world at the time.

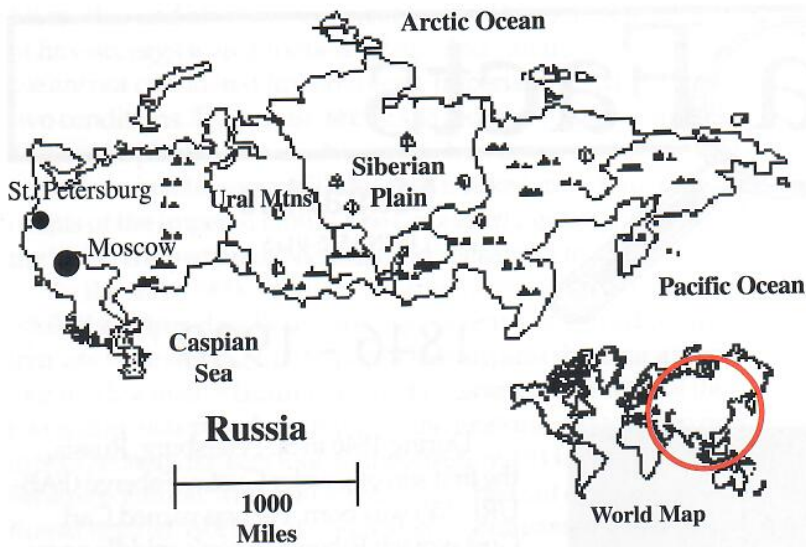
In 1860 Gustav suddenly moved his family to the city of Dresden, Germany. He left his shop to partner and jeweler Hiskias Pendin. Carl was not happy about this change. He had to leave the carefree lifestyle of a 14 year old to study a commercial course that would prepare him to learn his father's trade. It was customary for a son to follow in his father's career footsteps.

When he was 18 his father sent him to study in Europe. He observed stonecarving in Florence, Italy, went to workshops in London and Paris and toured many museums and exhibits. He familiarized himself with local styles of art and jewelry making, both past and present. Full of new ideas and exciting knowledge, Carl returned to St. Petersburg to perfect his craft as an apprentice in his father's workshop. He learned to design and make pieces of fashionable jewelry. At age 21 he was admitted to the jewelers' guild.

Fabergé, Carl (1846-1920). *Easter egg containing a model of the cruiser "Memory of Azov", 1891.* © Scala/Art Resource, NY. Location: Armory of the Kremlin, Moscow, Russia

Where In Time ?

1840s	1850s-1860s	1870s	1880s-1890s	1900s
1846 Carl Fabergé is born. 1846-49 <i>War & Peace</i> written 1844 Telegraph, Morse Code 1849 California Gold Rush	1860 Snapshot photography 1861-1865 U.S. Civil War 1869 Suez Canal opens 1869 Women's Suffrage	1871 Prussians besiege Paris 1874 Impressionist artists hold first exhibit. 1876 Bell develops telephone. 1879 Edison develops lightbulb.	Art Nouveau 1880 - 1910 Post Impressionism 1886 - 1920	1903 Wright Brothers 1917 Russian Revolution 1918 World War I 1920 Carl Fabergé dies.



He could have worked independently but continued in his father's shop. Six years later he married the daughter of a cabinetmaker from the court of the Russian Czar. She came from an artisan's family so they were a good match. With a new wife and growing ambitions, Carl took over the family business. He worked hard over the next ten years as head of Fabergé, which produced objects for sale that were not much different from any other jeweler in Europe.

He became friends with the curator of **The Hermitage Museum** at the winter Palace in St. Petersburg. It was a storehouse for all the precious objects hoarded by Russian Czars throughout centuries of rule. Fabergé assisted the curator in cataloging, repairing and appraising all its jewelry and precious objects. He never charged for his services.

His younger brother Agathon, a brilliant designer full of new ideas, arrived from Dresden in 1882. While studying The Hermitage treasures the Fabergé brothers became very familiar with the many decorative objects made for personal use that had been fashionable in the 1700's, like boxes for tobacco and candy. They spent months reassembling pieces of ancient gold and jewelry unearthed at the Russian seaport of Kerch. These treasures so fascinated the brothers they decided to make some copies and sell them. Finnish craftsman Erik Kollin helped them make a number of pieces, which they displayed at the Moscow Fair rather than in their shop. It proved to be a very clever idea.

Alexander III, the new Czar of Russia, and his wife Maria were at the Fair and purchased a pair of gold cufflinks from Fabergé. This gave him instant notoriety, his display was awarded a gold medal, and the press and public hailed him as having opened a new era in jewelry art. His career was about to take off.

Fabergé hired Michael Perchin, a very gifted young Russian goldsmith. They experimented with gold and enamels. They taught themselves early enameling techniques after studying works of art at The Hermitage. They made a copy of an 18th century French oval gold snuff box from the Czar's collection. When the Czar was shown the original and the copy he couldn't tell the difference. He was so delighted by the deception he ordered both boxes to be displayed side by side in The Hermitage so he could boast about the talent of his Russian goldsmith.

Translucent **enameling** was a prized art in the 18th century. It consisted of applying several coats of a liquid glasslike substance (the enamel) to a metal surface and firing the object in an oven after each coat. Each successive firing was carefully controlled to take place at a lower temperature so the previous layer would not melt.

Up to six coats of enamel were applied, each one adding more luster and depth of color. Only a small number of colors were available so Fabergé experimented with the colors and gradually developed over 140 shades. The quality of Fabergé enamels and his chief enameler became legends. Craftsmen traveled to St. Petersburg to learn the secrets of enameling, but none were able to replicate it.

Fabergé experimented with gold to get different colors. He added copper to natural yellow gold to get rose gold. Green gold is created by mixing silver and gold, white gold by mixing in nickel or platinum. Fabergé also found ways of achieving more subtle tones like orange, gray and blue gold.

New Fabergé techniques required new machines, including one machine that could **incise**



Fabergé, Carl (1846-1920) *Selection of enamel Easter Eggs*, executed by Fedor Ruckert c. 1900. Location: Private Collection. © Art Resource, NY



Firm of Fabergé, Carl (1846-1920) *Round Box*, silver gilt and enamel, Diameter: 5.8 cm. Date: 1906-1916, The India Early Minshall Collection. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio.

any given background pattern onto a sheet of metal.

He perfected methods of invisible soldering which allowed different color metals to be put side by side with no seams visible. His boxes were so precisely fabricated that they closed almost airtight and remained closed without a clasp even when turned upside down. All were constructed with such meticulous workmanship that the overall design disguised each box's unique function. This precision and inventiveness set Fabergé apart from all competitors.

His career as an Imperial goldsmith began when he was named Supplier to the Imperial Court of the Czar. This title was usually bestowed after eight to ten years of faithful service on those whose workmanship or products were considered to be of high enough quality for the Czar and his court. This appointment was a blessing to the Fabergé business because it allowed him to display the Russian Imperial eagle in his shop and on the boxes in which his objects and jewelry were sold.

By 1887 demand was growing for Fabergé work. He opened a second production center and a sales outlet in Moscow. Business was so good by 1898 that Fabergé built himself a house with living quarters, a shop, a design studio and large studio to accommodate as many craftsmen as possible. Many new workshops were established with head workmasters in charge. Each workshop specialized in something different.

One workshop made the main jewelry, another a lesser jewelry. Another created picture frames or worked with enamels and precious stones. Everyone was under contract to Fabergé. The tools and materials they bought from him were paid for out of profits their work earned not out of personal salaries. At peak production Fabergé employed over three hundred craftsmen in St. Petersburg alone, including teams of designers, sculptors, miniature painters, stonemasons, and stone setters. Carpenters made the presentation boxes. Managing the growing business and all the employees required much of his attention. Gradually Carl, his brother Agathon and later Carl's four sons, all gifted designers, concentrated on sketching and designing. The actual production was left in the hands of his head workmasters and craftsmen. An especially important commission would be produced under one head workmaster's personal supervision. His symbol or initials were called a **hallmark**, and would be stamped into that piece.

Carl Fabergé, a kind and well mannered gentleman, was a demanding perfectionist who insisted on controlling the quality of everything that left his shop. Each finished item had to be submitted to him for final approval. He did not miss the slightest flaw. If not satisfied he would shatter the item to pieces with a hammer. His insistence on quality was the basis of the firm's reputation.

Fabergé rarely used large precious stones. For visual effect he preferred small stones or chips. He also preferred using commonplace materials like wood, pottery, glass, copper, steel or even brick and stone. The value of objects made from these materials was in the way they were used in the overall artistic design. Everyday items like picture frames, letter openers, fans, hair combs, knitting needles and clocks were transformed into works of art.

Fabergé objects were presented at all Imperial Family birthdays, name days, christenings, weddings, anniversaries, on Christmas and at Easter. So he would always provide the right object Fabergé would send his son Eugene with a number of objects or a series of designs from which the family could choose. He also designed and created gifts for the Czar and Czarina to give to visiting royalty or heads of state. People who rendered services to the Imperial family were also given tokens of appreciation.

Easter is the most important feast on the Russian Orthodox Church calendar. Eggs were often exchanged because they symbolize the Resurrection of Christ. When Carl Fabergé became court Supplier, he created a gold Easter egg covered in white enamel for the Czar. Its golden yolk contained a miniature gold hen. The egg was graciously accepted by Czar Alexander, who presented it to his wife Maria. She was charmed and delighted because it reminded her of her homeland. From then on the Czar had Fabergé make an Easter egg as a surprise gift for Maria each year. This went on for eleven years until the death of the Czar. His son Nicholas continued the tradition for

any given background pattern onto a sheet of metal.

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Where did Fabergé get many of his ideas for objects to create?

What two conditions had to be met to create an Imperial Egg?

What did eggs symbolize for the Czar's family? What did eggs symbolize for Fabergé? What did eggs symbolize for the Russian people?

Why would the Imperial Eggs still be treasured today?

his mother and also had eggs made for his wife Alexandra. A total of fifty-six eggs were produced. Eggs made for other wealthy people are not considered Imperial eggs. Imperial eggs had to meet two conditions. They must be egg shaped and contain a surprise. They were planned far in advance, took over a year to make and were done in total secrecy. These eggs marked important dates and events of the Imperial family. The *Coronation Egg* commemorated the lavish coronation of Nicholas and Alexandra in 1877.

In the early 1900s ordinary Russian citizens lived in misery while the upper class flourished. Discontent was spreading and extremists were stirring up the population against the Czar and plotting his downfall. Vladimir Lenin, the leading intellectual of the revolution, was preaching revolt of the working classes from exile in Switzerland. Strikers took to the streets in 1914. Assassinations became common. Many attempts were aimed at the Czar. When Russia entered World War I on Serbia's side against Austria and Germany, 15 million Russians died, were wounded or taken prisoner in the three years of war that followed.

Fabergé was one of the first businesses to be affected by the war, which caused an immediate drop in lavish spending in St. Petersburg. Most of his best craftsmen were drafted into the army. Fabergé converted his silver factories into production lines for shells and grenades. He continued making eggs for the royal family. In 1915, when the Russian army began taking terrible losses, the popular mood changed to hatred for the Imperial family. Fabergé was concerned by the social unrest and took steps to protect his business. He sold shares in the company, but retained a voting majority for himself, his sons and certain employees. Local employees ran the business to keep it from being destroyed.

The Czar was concerned with the war and failed to understand how serious things were at home. He gave orders to use force to end the situation. When Imperial guards killed hundreds of demonstrators, the people revolted. Members of the Imperial family soon found themselves under guard as prisoners in their own palace. When Lenin returned to Russia, the Social Democrat party, the Bolsheviks, seized power and ended the war for Russia by signing an armistice with Germany in March of 1918. Lenin ordered the brutal murder of the Imperial family.

The House of Fabergé officially shut down in November of 1918 when Carl Fabergé closed the St. Petersburg store and gave its contents to The Hermitage. He fled to Finland, then Germany and finally settled in Switzerland, where he died in 1920.



MUSEUMS



Where YOU can find Fabergé art:

Forbes Magazine Collection, New York City

New Orleans Museum of Art

Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco

Hillwood Museum, Washington D.C.

Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore MD

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond VA

Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland OH



Fabergé, Carl (1846-1920) *Hippopotamus*, 1908-17. Carved nephrite. © Beniaminson/Art Resource, NY. Location not indicated.

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Fabergé WEBSITES

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