

## MGM 2003 - The Tzar's Secret Eggs - Fabergé In Edinburgh

By Penny Parkin | 03 June 2003

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### Review



**Left:** cornflowers and buttercups (detail), c. 1900, Carl Fabergé. The Royal Collection. © 2003 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

*Indulging in extravagances, Penny Parkin carried herself gracefully to a Royal palace for a date with some serious grandeur.*

The words 'Fabergé Egg' have always held a unique aspirational appeal. With a surprise in the middle, and only 50 in existence, I was keen to set eyes on a real one.

Taking the train to Edinburgh, I headed down the Royal Mile to 'Fabergé' at the Queen's Gallery, Holyroodhouse until October 12, which explores the work of Russia's premier Imperial craftsman.

Curator Deborah Clarke points out that the exhibition reveals Fabergé's surprising range of skill, although she admits that whilst wandering around the exhibition she has noticed that the first thing people demand is 'Where are the eggs?'

**Right:** Mosaic Egg, 1914, Carl Fabergé. The Royal Collection. © 2003 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



Following in the footsteps of his father Gustav, who was a jeweller, Carl Fabergé started work as an apprentice in Frankfurt, Florence and Paris, taking over the family's St Petersburg business in 1872, aged 26.

A natural at enamelling, gold decoration and stone setting and inspired by a wealth of international sources after his multicultural training, Fabergé was soon appointed as a supplier to Tsar Alexander III of Russia and later to his son Nicholas II.

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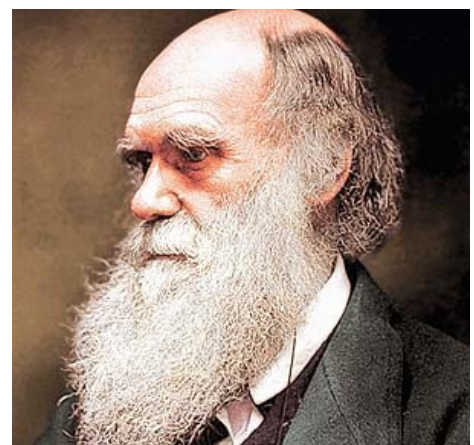
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In total, 50 Imperial eggs were made. Prized as Easter gifts, and symbolic of 'Resurrection', 'New Life' and 'hopefulness', the first were crafted for Russian Tsar Alexander III, who ordered one a year to surprise the Tsarina Maria.

Nicholas II carried on his father's tradition, commissioning one egg a year for his wife Tsarina Aleksandra Feodorovna and another for his mother, the dowager Empress.

Three of these Imperial eggs are displayed. Taking pride of place, teetering atop a high platform is the impressive Colonnade Egg, 1910, surrounded by silver cherubs representing Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia and Alexis, the Romanov children.



**Left:** bleeding heart, c.1900, Carl Fabergé. The Royal Collection. © 2003 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Made from delicate green and pink semi-precious stones to depict the love of the Tsar for his family, the rose coloured egg sits neatly inside four green columns. In view of its history the egg makes a powerfully poignant centrepiece to the exhibition considering the assassination of the Romanov family in 1918.

Also displayed are the intricately crafted Mosaic egg, 1914, reminiscent of a Victorian sampler tapestry, which contains a plaque depicting the Romanov children and the bright blue Basket of Flowers egg, 1901.

A Fabergé speciality, flowers were a particular favourite of Queen Alexandra, the wife of King Edward VII. The neatly crafted chrysanthemums on display were bought for her as a gift in 1908 and cost a king's ransom of £117.

Queen Alexandra was also fond of animals and also amassed a canny collection of Fabergé horses, chickens and other creatures. Her husband, King Edward VII followed suit and commissioned sculptures of his various dogs and horses including his prized racehorse Persimmon.

**Right:** imperial presentation box, 1896-1908, Carl Fabergé. The Royal Collection. © 2003 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



Edward VII was also a fan of Fabergé's brightly coloured boxes and cigarette cases which testify to his vivid use of colour, in particular a vivid cobalt blue art nouveau case decorated with a diamond snake, clasping its own tail.

Despite the lavishness of Fabergé's many creations however, what strikes me most about these objets is their poignant history, their humanity and the way they seem to touch the people who come to look at them.

A little girl standing beside me wanted her mother to buy one of the clocks. Likewise, a cheery old lady wanted to take one home for her mantelpiece. Such universal popularity bears witness to the skill and craftsmanship of a man passionately in love with his work.

The exhibition ends with a section devoted to would be Fabergé imitators

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including Russian court suppliers such as Tillander and somewhat surprisingly French jewellers Cartier and Boucheron. Again, they simply attest to the genius that is Fabergé.

Reviewer Penelope Parkin is participating in the 24 Hour Museum / Museum and Galleries Month Arts Writing Prize.



Penelope Parkin travelled on GNER East Coast Main Line from Kings Cross to Edinburgh. Contact (08457) 225 225 (Open 8am 10pm daily) or take a

look at the [GNER website](#) for details.

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#### Referenced venues

The Palace of Holyroodhouse and The Queen's Gallery  
Edinburgh, EH8 8DX

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