

Press Release

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THE RUSSIAN ART SALE

Two exceptional Imperial Presentation snuff-boxes Property from the Portland Collection Masterpieces from the Imperial Porcelain Factory A Unique Collection of Neo-Russian Furniture



London - Christie's upcoming Russian Works of Art sale on 29 November 2010 will be one of the most substantial sales put together by the department – it will offer over 300 works of art, spanning from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries and will be lead by an important jewelled vari-coloured gold and guilloché enamelled **Imperial presentation snuff-box**, by Fabergé. It was presented to the Turkish diplomat, Turkhan Pasha (1846-1927), in December 1913 on behalf of Emperor Nicholas II probably to commemorate the end of his five year ambassadorship in St. Petersburg (estimate: £400,000-600,000 / separate press release available).

The sale will also offer a small selection of Fabergé objects from the **Portland Collection**, highlighted by a two-colour gold and silver mounted table clock, by the head workmaster Michael Perchin and scratched inventory number 2316, made in St Petersburg between 1899 and 1908 (estimate: £50,000-80,000).

Ivy Gordon-Lennox, (1887-1982) wife of the 7th Duke of Portland, is believed to have acquired the Fabergé objects in the family's collection (lots 218/232/256 and 259 in the present auction). Ivy



held the office of Maid-of-Honour to Queen Alexandra between 1912 and 1915 and her

interest in object by Fabergé might have been inspired by Queen Alexandra. It is notable that the Royal Collection contains an obsidian model of a sea lion on rock crystal base by Fabergé, acquired by Queen Alexandra, which is similar to the obsidian seal from the Portland collection being offered with an estimate of £80,000-120,000. Further Fabergé objects from the Portland collection include a three-colour gold mounted nephrite and guilloché enamel bonbonnière (estimate: £50,000-80,000) and a nephrite bowl formed as a recumbent pigeon with gold-set ruby eyes (estimate: £12,000-18,000).

Further **Fabergé** highlights of the sale are a two-colour gold mounted orange lacquered bonbonnière set with a miniature, with the workmaster's mark of Micheal Perchin (estimate: £100,000-150,000, lot 267); a silver-gilt and cloisonné enamel icon, marked K. Fabergé with the Imperial warrant, made in Moscow between 1907 and 1917 (estimate: £70,000-100,000). The Icon represents St. Vladimir within a richly enamelled oklad and is contained in its original Fabergé wood case.



A jewelled gold-mounted guilloché enamel brooch, with a diamond-set sprig of lily-of-the-valley by Fabergé, circa 1898 was originally given by Empress Alexandra Feodorovna to her close friend Marion-Louisa Baroness Ungern-Sternberg, known as Pollie. The brooch is documented in a letter, in which the Empress wishes Pollie all the best for the birth of her first child. The baby girl was named Alix after the Empress, who became her godmother (estimate: £10,000-15,000).

The important porcelain section of the sale features a pair of monumental two-handed porcelain vases by the **Imperial Porcelain Factory**, made in St. Petersburg in the 1850s to 1860s (estimate: £600,000-900,000).

Both are of amphora form and one is painted with *The Singer* after Jacob Ochtervelt, by A. Kirsanov and dated 1867; the other one is painted with *The Messenger* after Gerard ter Borch, signed Vas. Midin and dated 1867. In the 1860s, vases were being produced primarily as exhibition pieces to be displayed at international shows and the All-Russian exhibitions. Many of these vases were



decorated with copies of Old Master or nineteenth century paintings and the middle section of the vases was treated by Imperial Porcelain Factory artists as a canvas on which to showcase their work after important paintings. The paintings were typically scaled-down, faithful copies of originals in the Hermitage, the Academy of Arts or from collections in the Imperial Palaces. The names of both the original artist and factory artist were usually added to the vase paintings. Both original Dutch Old Master paintings

represented on the vases were part of the Hermitage collection, where *The Messenger* by Gerard ter Borch (1617-1681) is still found today. The current whereabouts of *The Singer* by Jacob Ochtervelt (1634-1682) are unknown, making the present reproduction on the vase one of the only surviving records of the original painting.

Andrei Kirsanov and Vasiliï Midin were both well-known painters at the Imperial Porcelain Factory during the middle of the nineteenth century. Kirsanov came from a family of factory workmen and studied at the factory school. Midin entered the Imperial Factory in 1845 and studied at the Academy of Arts from 1852-1857. The date of production of the present vases most likely spans the end of the reign of Nicholas I and the beginning of the reign of Alexander II.



Another pair of two-handled porcelain vases will be offered for sale with an estimate of £300,000-500,000. The pair was also produced by the Imperial Porcelain Factory in St Petersburg, under the period of Nicholas I, dated 1839. Each painted with the same reproduction of *The Singer* and *The Messenger* (for further details, see above lot description) by Alexander Nesterov. The Imperial Porcelain Factory produced a remarkable number of vases during the period of Nicholas I (1825-1855), widely considered the height of craftsmanship at the factory. The finest examples were presented as gifts to the Imperial family at Christmas and Easter and were used to adorn palaces and mansions. Some vases were intended as grand presentation gifts to both Russians and foreigners. Alexander Nesterov, the son of a workman from the Imperial Porcelain Factory, was appointed Master Painter in 1834. He worked at the factory until 1859 and was regarded as one of the best figure painters during the reign of Nicholas I.

A unique selection of thirty-two pieces of Russian design furniture and decorative objects will form another interesting section of the sale, showcasing works by Princess Maria Tenisheva and the Talashkino and Abramtsevo workshops. Highlights of the section include a bronze and enamel paperweight in the form of a swan that was created by Princess Maria Tenisheva in 1908 (estimate: £100,000-120,000). It was part of a series of seven bronze animal figures - *Fish, Pigeon, Cat, Pig, Owl* and *Rooster* - created in the artist's Parisian workshop. Six of the series were designed as boxes and the present lot was distinctively formed as a paperweight. The entire series was exhibited in Prague and Paris in 1909 and was well received, even inspiring the artist Nicholas Roerich to publish



an article in the Russian art press entitled “Enchanted Animals”. The fish and pigeon from this series of seven bronze animals were sold at Christie’s this June.

Also by Princess Maria Tenisheva are a pair of gilt-bronze, enamel and ivory candlesticks made in 1907 and exhibited in Paris, London and Moscow (estimate: £120,000-150,000).



From the Talashkino workshops comes a unique embroidered linen wedding table cloth, made circa 1900. It is embroidered in vari-colour thread after a design by A. Zinoviev and V. Beketov with a central scene depicting a couple by a tree and the border is decorated with a frieze of figures dancing, hunting and riding horses among stylised birds and trees (estimate: £50,000-70,000). An extremely rare pinewood and maplewood frame made at the workshops in 1900 of rectangular form and decorated with a pyrographed, painted and varnished landscape, after a design by Mikhail Vrubel, will be offered with an estimate of £35,000-45,000.

A further rare and important **Imperial presentation**

snuff-box by the jeweller Friedrich Koechli will also be offered in the sale. The jewelled gold snuff-box is guilloché enamelled in green and set with a miniature of Emperor Nicholas II, in the uniform of the Preobrazhenskii Regiment (estimate: £250,000-



350,000). This presentation box has been presented twice. It was first presented by Tsarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich in 1891 to General Major N. Shipov, Ataman of the Ural Cossack Voisko. Then, in 1896 after the snuff-box was sold back by General Major Shipov to the Imperial Cabinet (a common practice), it was presented by Emperor Nicholas II to General Marie Charles Justin Tournier (1841-1912), head of the military household of the French President.

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Image available on request

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Notes to editors:

A full length press release exists for the Faberge presentation box and another release for the picture highlights of the Russian sale.