

For Immediate Release

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**ONE OF ONLY 19 FABERGE SNUFF-BOXES WITH PORTRAIT OF EMPEROR  
NICHOLAS II OFFERED BY CHRISTIE'S THIS NOVEMBER**



**London** - Christie's upcoming Russian Works of Art sale on 29 November 2010 will be led by an important jewelled vari-coloured gold and guilloché enamelled Imperial presentation snuff-box, marked Fabergé, with the workmaster's mark of Henrik Wigström. 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. In 1919 the snuff-box changed hands for the last time, when it was acquired by the family of the present owner. It will be offered with an estimate of £400,000-600,000.

The firm of Fabergé was awarded the title of Court Jeweller in 1884 and became one of the main suppliers to the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty. Only fifty-four presentation snuff-boxes set with a miniature of Nicholas II were ever presented by the Emperor. Of these, only nineteen were executed by Fabergé, making these boxes even rarer than the fifty known Imperial Easter eggs.

The present Imperial presentation snuff-box was purchased from Fabergé on 16 May 1909 at a cost of 2,500 roubles and was entered in the ledgers of the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty. In 1911, a portrait miniature painted by Vasilii Zuev was set on the cover. The snuff-box was later presented on behalf of Emperor Nicholas II to Turkhan Pasha, Turkish ambassador in St Petersburg, on 12 December 1913.

Vasilii Zuev, born in Stavropol in 1870, graduated from St Petersburg's Baron Stieglitz Central School of Applied Arts in 1895 and studied for one year at the Imperial Academy of Arts. He was a drawing master at the Imperial Alexandrovskii Lyceum and from 1904 worked for the Office of His Imperial

Majesty painting miniatures on ivory. Zuev was recruited to work for the firm of Fabergé and painted miniatures for a number of Imperial presentation snuff-boxes and Imperial Easter eggs. The depictions of Nicholas II painted by court miniaturist Zuev were based on photographs or paintings and depicted the Emperor at various ages, in different regimental uniforms, in this particular case the Emperor is depicted in the uniform of the Preobrazhenskii Regiment. The rectangular form of the box itself - with cut corners, use of three-colour gold, sophisticated rich royal blue guilloché enamelling - exemplify Fabergé's revival of the Louis XVI style, and reflect the overwhelming influence of the eighteenth century French court on the Russian Imperial tradition of presenting gold snuff-boxes.

The recipient of this jewelled portrait snuff-box was Turkhan Pasha, a career diplomat and politician, who held posts throughout Europe and served as Prime Minister of Albania in 1914 and from 1918 to 1920. He became Chargé d'Affaires at the Turkish Embassy in St Petersburg in 1873 and returned to St Petersburg as Ambassador between 1908 and 1913.

In Russia, the practice of awarding jewelled snuff-boxes came into its own during the reigns of the Empresses Elizabeth and Catherine the Great, when snuff taking developed into an elaborate social ritual - *l'art de priser* - and gave rise to the new art form of luxurious snuff-boxes, for which there was a tremendous demand. This custom endured in Russia long after the fashion for snuff taking had passed. A jewelled presentation snuff-box was the most frequently awarded portrait gift during the reign of Nicholas II and was an Imperial award bestowed upon both deserving Russian nationals as well as foreign dignitaries. Nicholas II presented a total of fifty-four snuff-boxes with his miniature portrait, twenty of these to prominent Russians and thirty-four to foreign dignitaries.

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