



## THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS PRESENTS

### TRADITION & OPULENCE: EASTER IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA

APRIL 7 – AUGUST 7, 2020



**CLINTON, MA** – On view April 7–August 7, 2020, *Tradition & Opulence: Easter in Imperial Russia*, an exhibition of nearly 200 objects, will recreate the splendor of Easter celebrations during the last days of the Tsars. No country is better known for its Easter eggs than Russia. From the jeweled creations of Fabergé to humble wood carvings, the nation’s greatest artists, icon painters, jewelers, and artisans have created imaginative egg designs in every medium for the most important of the Orthodox Christian feasts.

Easter (*Paskha*), the “feast of feasts,” celebrates the Resurrection of Christ, one of the foundations of Christian belief, as well as the promise of mankind’s redemption. During the Romanov Era, this annual spring holiday was celebrated with the lavish decoration and exchange of numerous and elaborately decorated eggs.

*Tradition & Opulence* gathers an unprecedented selection of 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century material culture related to Russian Easter celebrations, including icons and works by Fabergé, Ovchinnikov, Grachev, Denisov-Uralsky, the Russian Imperial Porcelain Manufactory, Kuznetsov, and Gardner, as well as ephemera and graphic works on the Easter theme. All of these objects were created and gifted in celebration of Easter, the festival of renewal and resurrection and remain connected by a common chronology, a time when tumultuous change was roiling just beneath the surface of Russian society.

“The waning decades of the Romanov dynasty saw a world of opulence and splendor. All the ceremony, pomp, and magnificence of the era awaits the visitor to this exhibition. But to only look at the glittering surface of these objects is to lose much of the rich and resonant texture of this fascinating and precarious period in Russian history,” says MoRI Director **Kent Russell**.

“At the time when most of these objects were made, Russia was on the edge of World War I,” Russell continues. “Industrialization and the resulting growth of the prosperous urban, mercantile classes was engendering a period of rapid change and modernization. While the Imperial Court and the aristocracy held tenuous sway, seismic changes were taking place. The Romanov monarchy and the Orthodox Church were the anchors that held Russian society together, but both would be shaken to

their core in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Religion and State were inextricably intertwined. This social, religious, and political milieu is the backdrop for the unique objects in this exhibition.”

The Russian Easter egg tradition dates back to pre-Christian times when people saw eggs as symbols of fertility and renewal. When Russian Orthodoxy was adopted, eggs became a central motif of Christian symbolism. Easter was celebrated with religious services, public processions with icons, exchanges of gifts, and feasting. By the 19th century, the egg’s mystical symbolism and decorative potential was fully exploited by Russian artists and artisans.

Russian Tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II began the tradition of commissioning fantastical and whimsical eggs to be presented as gifts to members of their family. Made of precious metals or stones and encrusted with jewels or decorated with enamel work, these eggs display a craftsmanship, value, and rarity that increases the mystery and romanticism that surrounds them.

The exhibition is curated by Dr. Karen Kettering, Dmitry Gurevich, and Nicholas B. A. Nicholson. An illustrated catalogue will be available.

## RELATED EVENTS

**Lecture: “Today I Arise”: Russian Practices of Lenten Repentance and Paschal Renewal in the Last Years of the Empire with Professor Nadieszda Kizenko**

Saturday, May 9, 1:00-2:00pm

Members \$6, Nonmembers \$12

The objects in *Tradition & Opulence* take on new meaning when looked at in the context of their use. Although many seem to be purely decorative, they have a religious context. Easter eggs and Easter foods in Russia were part of a broader European tradition to prepare for the Paschal Resurrection as a spiritual spring cleaning. To celebrate Easter, people first had to cleanse themselves by going through Lent, fasting, and confessing their sins. This communal, ritualized aspect of repentance and atonement in Russia and Europe also drew on Jewish practices in the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: stepping back from one’s usual life and reflecting on one’s sins made it possible to then embrace the joyous physicality, materiality, and new life that Easter and Easter eggs represented. This lecture will look at individual objects through the prism of religious and popular observance.

Nadia Kizenko is Professor of Russian and East European history at the State University of New York, Albany. She writes and often lectures on Orthodox Christianity in the Russian empire and beyond.



Look for her forthcoming book, *Good for the Russian Souls? Church, State, and Sacramental Confession in the Empire from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to 1917*.

## **ABOUT THE MUSEUM**

The Museum of Russian Icons inspires the appreciation and study of Russian culture by collecting and exhibiting icons and related objects, igniting the interest of national and international audiences, and offering interactive educational programs. The Museum serves as a leading center for research and scholarship through the Center for Icon Studies and other institutional collaborations. It is the only museum in the US dedicated to Russian icons, and it is the largest collection of icons outside of Russia.

**Museum hours:** Tuesday–Friday, 11am to 4pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11am to 5pm. First Sunday of the month: free admission! Closed Mondays.

**Admission:** Adults \$10, seniors (59+) \$7, Students \$5, Children (3-7) \$5, Children under 3 Free.

For more information, please visit [museumofrussianicons.org](http://museumofrussianicons.org). Follow the Museum of Russian Icons on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

*Image credits:*

*Pendant egg, Firm of Fabergé, workmaster August Hollming, St. Petersburg, Russia, 1899-1903, Purpurine, gold, diamonds, Formerly in the collection of Grand Duchess Ksenia Alexandrovna (1875-1960)*

*From the McFerrin Collection, Houston, TX Guardian Angel in egg-shaped frame, Firm of Grachev Brothers, St. Petersburg, Russia, before 1899, oil on zinc, gilded silver, enamel. Private collection, New York, NY*