



**New Orleans
Museum of Art**

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New Orleans Museum of Art Presents
OBJECTS OF DESIRE:
Fabergé from the Hodges Family Collection

Works by master Russian artist-jeweler on view Nov. 9, 2008 to Jan. 18, 2009

[Hi-res images available upon request.]

NEW ORLEANS, La. (Wednesday, October 8, 2008)—This winter, the New Orleans Museum of Art presents ***OBJECTS OF DESIRE: Fabergé from the Hodges Family Collection***—featuring sculpture, jewels, smoking accessories, scientific instruments and other precious objects by **Peter Carl Fabergé**—on view from November 9, 2008 through January 18, 2009.

The opening of this major exhibition, featuring several pieces never before exhibited publicly in the United States, will coincide with the Forty-Third Odyssey Ball, the Museum's lavish annual gala, a perennial highlight of the New Orleans social calendar.

The Hodges Family Fabergé Collection currently includes 106 diversified objects, a number that continues to grow as Louisiana resident **D. Lee Hodges** amasses one of this country's premier groups of Fabergé masterworks.

“The New Orleans Museum of Art is honored to be showing such an esteemed collection of Fabergé objects,” said New Orleans Museum of Art director **E. John Bullard**. “The generous long-term loans of Dr. Hodges and his family allow our Museum to remain one of the top destinations in the world for viewing Fabergé objects. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of the Hodges family, and look forward to showcasing these extraordinary objects to our visitors for many years to come.”

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OBJECTS OF DESIRE: Fabergé from the Hodges Family Collection
2/2/2/2

Public Programs

Thursday, Nov. 13, 6-8 p.m.—Educator Workshop

All area educators are invited to this free workshop, led by Curator of Decorative Arts **John W. Keefe**, for a glimpse into the famed Russian Fabergé workshop and a tour of the major NOMA-organized exhibition, *OBJECTS OF DESIRE: Fabergé from the Hodges Family Collection*. Education materials are provided and all participants receive a certificate of attendance. Pre-registration is required; please contact the Education Department at (504) 658-4128 or education@noma.org.

Sunday, Nov. 16, 2 p.m.—Lecture by John W. Keefe

Join us in the Stern Auditorium for a free lecture on *OBJECTS OF DESIRE: Fabergé from the Hodges Family Collection*, by **John W. Keefe**, the RosaMary Foundation Curator of the Decorative Arts and organizer of the exhibition.

More on Fabergé at NOMA

Since 1983, the Fabergé gallery at the New Orleans Museum of Art has been one of the most visited sites within the nearly 100-year-old building. With the relocation of the Matilda Geddings Gray Foundation Collection of Fabergé to the Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art in Nashville in 2007, the Museum was faced with the daunting prospect of either replacing that Fabergé material or of regretfully closing that popular gallery. At that point, D. Lee Hodges realized that the Museum was in dire need of assistance and generously offered to place his collection of Fabergé works on extended loan, an offer made all the more remarkable by the fact that Dr. Hodges was a Louisiana collector of whom the Museum had heretofore been unaware.

“The result of this collaboration is the major exhibition *OBJECTS OF DESIRE*, in which many of the works have never previously been on public display or are so famous that they will appear as friends of long standing,” said **John W. Keefe**, The RosaMary Foundation Curator of Decorative Arts and organizer of the exhibition.

Once a portion of the Hodges family collection was installed in the Museum, it became apparent to its owner that certain areas of Fabergé’s fantastic oeuvre were not represented. That realization prompted the decision to assemble a broader range of works that would expose the art of the great Russian artist-jeweler to an augmented viewing public. That new emphasis upon an expanded and diversified group of objects was accompanied by an increased interest in utilizing the collection for educational purposes. The Hodges family feels strongly that the most effective means of facilitating that education is to have the collection on public view. The quest for the best work of Fabergé continues, and the collection presently numbers more than 106 diversified pieces.

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About D. Lee Hodges and the Hodges Family Collection

As a youth in his native Virginia, D. Lee Hodges took particular pleasure in summer visits with his uncle, a precision micro-mechanical engineer working in the NASA space program during the late 1950s and beyond. That uncle's hobby was the crafting of tiny measuring devices; one of those, a diminutive micrometer less than an inch in total length, required nearly five years to complete working under the magnification of a binocular microscope. The fascinated boy was indelibly impressed by the small scale, the exacting precision and the thousands of hours his uncle spent creating these artful miniatures. Although an experienced collector of American decorative arts when he first encountered the work of Fabergé, Dr. Hodges was struck with a Proustian sense of its fine design, precision and consistency. This initial astonished reaction to the art of Peter Carl Fabergé and the connection to his uncle's tiny perfect machines prompted the decision to collect works by Fabergé.

Although Peter Carl Fabergé (Russian, 1846-1920) is today arguably the most celebrated goldsmith-jeweler since the Renaissance, this was not always the case. As late as the 1960s, many collectors in other fields, as well as a number of museums, tended to view objects by Fabergé as lightweight and certainly as "estate" property, meaning that they were crafted of expensive materials but had little aesthetic merit. They were baubles for moneyed, but not very serious, collectors. That concept began to erode in the 1970s as curators, connoisseurs and collectors began to reevaluate Fabergé's oeuvre in a favorable light. The first monograph on Fabergé was published in 1949 by Henry C. Bainbridge, the former co-director of the London Fabergé branch, which had opened in 1903. It was to be followed by a virtual flood of publications dealing with Fabergé art that has endured to the present day.

What began as small specialized exhibitions in the late 1950s burgeoned in the 1990s to large scholarly exhibitions of Fabergé's work. These were accompanied by important meticulously researched catalogues and were attended in record numbers by the lay public. The growing renown of Fabergé was enhanced by the international reportage of the phenomenal prices reached by major Fabergé objects at the world's major auction houses. The \$9,579,600 for the Imperial Winter Egg at Christie's, New York in April 19, 2002, set a new world auction record for a Fabergé object. In 2007, the world sat up again when it heard that the "Gnome" handseal of the Tsarina Maria Feodorovna had been sold by Christie's, New York, for \$1, 384, 000. In November 2007, a previously unrecorded 1902 egg-clock by Fabergé sold at Christie's, London, for a new world record for an object by Fabergé of \$18,500,000. The days of Fabergé works as "estate" property were long gone.

OBJECTS OF DESIRE: Fabergé from the Hodges Family Collection

4/4/4/4

In all of this, another phenomenon of interest came to light. Following the cataclysm of the 1917 Russian Revolution, a number of formerly affluent Russians fled their native country, taking with them the highly portable pieces of Fabergé's art. Those then appeared on the market in Paris, London and New York and were eagerly acquired by new owners. Prominent among these were such Americans as Marjorie Merriweather Post of Washington, D.C.; Matilda Geddings Gray of Louisiana; Lillian Thomas Pratt of Virginia; India Early Minshall of Cleveland, Ohio, and Lansdell K. Christie of New York; all of whom avidly competed for Fabergé treasures for their collections. Many of the objects from those collections are now in American museums.

With the dissolution of Communist Russia in the 1990s, and the reinstatement of capitalism, a new class of fabulously rich Russian magnates emerged. These newly rich oligarchs wanted Russian art for their new apartments, houses and estates, and high on their lists were works by Fabergé. To the chagrin of American Fabergé enthusiasts, a flow of Fabergé pieces from the United States back to Russia began. In 2004, the eagerly awaited public auction of the Fabergé collection of the late Malcolm Forbes was abruptly cancelled when the Forbes heirs elected to sell the entire collection en bloc to Viktor Vekselberg of Moscow, a Russian oil and gas tycoon. The outcry in this country was clamorous, but the objects, including the largest privately held group of Fabergé's imperial Easter eggs, were returned to Russian soil. Distressing as all of this has been to American collectors in particular, it has had the backlash effect of making those collectors all the more eager to acquire examples by the House of Fabergé. While frustrated by the ever-escalating demand and subsequent prices for works by Fabergé, D. Lee Hodges is all the more determined to continue to seek the best of the available pieces by this greatest of the Russian goldsmith-jewelers.

About NOMA and the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden

The New Orleans Museum of Art, founded in 1910 by Isaac Delgado, houses more than 30,000 art objects encompassing 4,000 years of world art. Works from the permanent collection, along with continuously changing temporary exhibitions, are on view in the Museum's 46 galleries Wednesdays from noon to 8 p.m. and Thursdays to Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission to the Museum is free to Louisiana residents through the generosity of The Helis Foundation.

Admission to the adjacent Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden, featuring work by 57 artists, including several of the 20th century's great master sculptors, is always free during regular Museum hours.

The New Orleans Museum of Art and the Besthoff Sculpture Garden are fully accessible to handicapped visitors and wheelchairs are available from the front desk.

For more information, call (504) 659-4100 or visit www.noma.org.

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