

Title: The Fabergé Imperial Eggs: A Geo-Cultural Mapping
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This paper treats the famous imperial Easter eggs, which were created for Alexander III and Nicholas II by the House of Fabergé between 1885 and 1917. There were 50 eggs in all, 42 have survived. After the Revolution, the imperial eggs were nationalized; some were sold abroad to private collectors and museums, resold on elite auction blocks. Some of the imperial eggs remained in Russia at the Kremlin Armory. In 2004, nine additional eggs were repatriated by Viktor Vekselberg, who purchased the Forbes collection.

How can we characterize the “afterlife” of these imperial objects, which outlasted the socio-political context they so vividly embodied? How have the imperial eggs come to figure in post-Soviet Russian cultural and identity politics? Bruno Latour proposes treating objects as associations or networks, to detect “*how many participants* are gathered in a *thing* to make it exist and to maintain its existence.” Arjun Appadurai investigates the work things perform in the world, tracing “the constant transcendence of cultural boundaries by the flow of commodities, where culture is understood as a bounded and localized system of meanings.”

My paper investigates the cultural discourse around the Fabergé imperial eggs – the genres or modes through which their histories have been narrated, and their exchange-value over the decades. A “close reading” of several imperial eggs highlights their use of materials, motifs, and artistic principles of mimicry, miniaturization, and surprise; mapping peregrinations across time/space charts provenance and object “biographies.” I interrogate press and period sources, memoirs, museum and auction catalogs, post-Soviet legal and public discourse on cultural property, and Internet sites. My goal is to characterize the imperial eggs as product *and* producer of discourse, subjected to constant re-assessment, generating diverse narratives and cultural pathways.