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Society Offers Reward For Return of Stolen 'Jenny' Stamps

It's been six decades since two rare 1918 "Inverted Jenny" airmail stamps were stolen from the exhibition of a private collection, but the search continues, as a reward of \$50,000 for each stamp was put on the table recently.



■ Page 48

Unique Family Heirloom Lives Up To Its Cherished Lineage

In the latest Ask the Experts column, Dr. Anthony J. Cavo confirms the identity and possible value of a reader's spectacularly uncommon Renaissance Revival swivel chair.

■ Page 11

Exploring The Artist Within The Late Actor Anthony Quinn



You may know the late Anthony Quinn best for his Oscar-nominated performance in "Zorba the Greek," but Art Markets columnist Mary Manion examines the many other artistic offerings of this painter, sculptor and writer.

■ Page 16

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TESTED METTLE

Ornate Russian Orthodox silver representing more than status in today's collecting market.

■ Page 18

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TESTED METTLE

Russian Orthodox religious items and pre-revolution status symbols proving to be worthwhile investments

Melody Amsel-Arieli

From the mid-1800s through the early 19th century, the Russian Imperial family, nobility and the wealthier middle class dined off tables sparkling with silver salt cellars, wine coolers, napkin rings, utensils and tableware. Inveterate tea drinkers, too, they boasted functional, stunningly styled silver teapots, glass holders, creamers and sugar-cube baskets as well.

Purely decorative silver pieces like tankards, snuff boxes and cigarette cases, however, were probably displayed in glass cabinets or on desks.

“Like those who today display original works of art in their homes as status symbols,” explains Michael Prevezer, director

and head of the Silver Dept., Christies South Kensington, London, “wealthy Russians commissioned silver services or objects to demonstrate their affluence and power.”

During the political unrest of early 20th century Russia, however, the opulent lifestyle came to an end. Many silver items, along with other metallic valuables, were seized, melted to mint coins or destroyed indiscriminately. Others reached the West with Russian refugees. Through the 1930s, Communist authorities sold many pieces of silver — which they deemed of no artistic value — internationally for hard cash. Many other pieces, smuggled out of the country through the years, eventually found their way into American collections.

“Today, however,” continues Prevezer, “after *perestroika* and the break-up of the old Soviet Union — with all the money being made by the oligarch class, growing interest in Russian art history, and renewed Russian nationalism — a whole new generation of Russian buyers has arisen. Though many are genuine collectors, others seek gifts as status symbols or buy things back for Russia in hopes of gleaning favor with the authorities. Along with these, Russian émigré, American, German and Israeli collectors have ensured a full recovery of the Russian silver market.”

Fabergé, still very much a magical name in Russian works of art today, created a vast number of silver items. Although his large, rare pieces may be quite costly, many smaller functional items, like cigarette cases, spoons, napkin rings and claret jugs, remain within reach. A Fabergé silver vodka cup at auction, for example, may fetch between \$800 and \$1,200. A silver cigarette case may start at \$1,700.

Still, cautions Daniel Bexfield, antique silver specialist, member of Britain’s Association of Art and Antique Dealers and director of The British Antiques Dealers Association, “there are only a limited number of genuine Fabergé pieces on the market, so if you have two people where money is no object bidding against each other, prices will soar upwards.” Happily, collectors can find high quality silver art by many other jewelers to the Russian Imperial Court, including Britzin, Grachev, Gubkin, Alexiev, Adler and Sazikov.

Those seeking less expensive pieces, observes Bexfield,



Parcel-gilt silver and niello beaker, mark of Kusov, Moscow, 1797, decorated with three oval vignettes depicting a boy releasing a pigeon or dove, a lady in hat playing a lute and a seated cellist reading a book of music, with floral swags, scrolls and pendent fruit between, all on checkered ground, gilt interior, 3 1/2 inches high, 4 oz, realized \$11,500 in June 2013. Courtesy of CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2014



Matching wedding pair icon in gild silver, enameled covers with river pearl skirts, by Ovchinnikov. © 2014, Courtesy of www.RussianStore.com



Russian silver and enamel vodka cup, Moscow 1888 by Gustav Klingert, \$1,311. Courtesy Daniel Bexfield, www.bexfield.co.uk/

“could quite easily find odd pieces of Russian cutlery from around \$30 upwards by hunting round antique markets. Moreover, because pieces made around the turn of the century (1900) seem to be exceedingly popular, bargains may sometimes be found on earlier ones, those dating back to the 18th century. If you had a couple of hundred dollars to spend, however, the scope widens.”

Small pieces, like vodka cups, coffee spoons or a nice set of six Russian spoons from around 1860, for example, command several hundred dollars. One really good enameled single spoon, however, might command many times more.

Complete silver sets, of course, are at a premium — especially those that are cloisonné, which were far more expensive to begin with. “I always say that one should never buy as an investment but for the

enjoyment of owning beautiful pieces to use and enjoy,” adds Bexfield. “That said, these purchases can often prove to be very good investments, as well.”

Although high quality Russian silver ecclesiastical items were once generally considered non-commercial, those that have survived the country’s political and religious turmoil have become extremely collectible. Those created for public veneration in Orthodox churches and monasteries include tabernacles, chalices, sensors and containers for holy oil. Those used in private worship include religious medallions, pectoral crosses, personal icons and smaller travel icons.

“Renewed popularity of the Russian Orthodox religion has elevated their prices,” explains Dennis Easter, the proprietor of the Russian Store and RussianStore.com. “Highly ornate examples have



An Edward VII silver figural bird-form box with hinged lid, with Russian import marks, Chester, England, circa 1907-1908. Marks: [lion passant], [Chester], [effaced maker's marks], [84-delta-right facing kokoshnik]; 2 5/8 inches high, commanded \$594. Photo courtesy Heritage Auctions

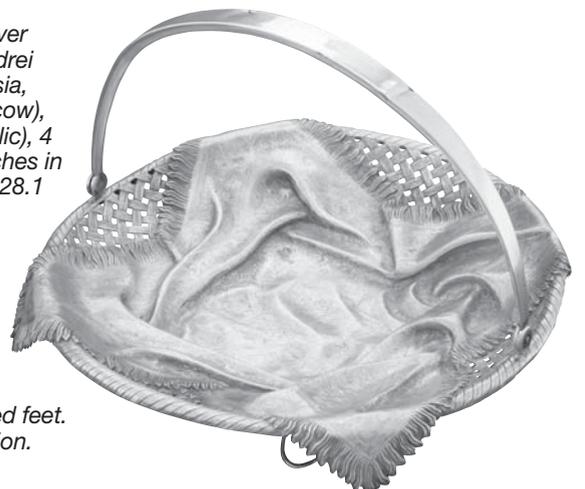


Two-color gold and gem-set vodka cup, Faberge, St. Petersburg, circa 1895, circular on three lapis lazuli ball feet, the rim with applied wirework frieze of scrolls set with rose-cut diamonds and rubies, the Norse dragon handle set with a ruby in top of its head, rose-gold interior, 1 1/2 inches in diameter, realized \$17,700 in November 2013. Courtesy of CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2014

► A Patnikov Russian silver and silver gilt basket, Andrei Pastnikov, Moscow, Russia, circa 1889. Marks: (Moscow), 84, AK/1889, AP (in Cyrillic), 4 inches high by 11 7/8 inches in diameter (handle down), 28.1 ounces.

The basket with trompe l'oeil decoration of a chased, fringed damask napkin draped over the woven basket, U-shaped swing handle, is raised on four interlaced feet. It sold for \$4,063 at auction.

Photo courtesy Heritage Auctions





Kazan Mother of God icon in Art Nouveau silver cover embellished by polychrome enamel and precious stones.
© 2014, Courtesy of www.RussianStore.com



▲ Set of six Russian silver stag-form shot glasses, maker unidentified, St. Petersburg, Russia, circa 1915. Marks: [a-right facing kokoshnik-84], KL; 3 inches high; finished at \$8,125.
Photo courtesy Heritage Auctions

◀ Silver-gilt and cloisonné enamel casket, mark of Ovchinnikov, Moscow 1908/17, with silver-gilt drop scroll handles, hinged enamel clasp at front and bracket feet, enameled with scrolling flowers around a central flower-head in two shades of pink, two shades of green, red, yellow, white and four shades of blue, gilt interior, 1911, 4 7/8 inches long, 2 3/4 inches high, realized \$11,500 in June 2013. Courtesy of CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2014

become fashionable gifts and ‘must-have’ items among the new Russian elite.

“Finely painted late-19th — early 20th century icons that feature oklad silver protective covers, as well as richly-enameled ones that reflect the styles and techniques of time-honored 19th century Russia are very popular,” he continues. These include matching “wedding pairs,” traditional wedding gift icons that depict highly stylized images of Christ Pantocrator (Almighty) opposite the Madonna with Christ Child, and those crafted by purveyors to the Russian Imperial Household, like Faberge, Ovchinnikov, and Khlebnikov. Silver icons that feature personal presentation plaques to the Imperial family are also very collectible. Earlier 17th to 19th century silverwork icons, adds Easter, especially those that

are superbly preserved and feature desirable or rare subjects, are the most collectible of all.

The market for Russian silver icons reached its peak price just before the economic crash of 2007. Today, though lower and middle-end pieces remain below their peak, prices of high and very high-end icons are currently near — and in some instances — above their 2007 level.

That said, prices can vary widely depending on their makers, provenance, craftsmanship, state or preservation and proven authenticity. While low-end smaller icons in oklad covers of thin stamped silver can sell for as little as \$300 each, a high quality richly enameled icon by an important craftsman (especially one with proven Imperial provenance) may reach six figures and, in very ex-

treme cases, more than a million dollars at auction.

Due to high demand, Russian silver items have been heavily falsified over the past 100 years. Imitations, often crafted in Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia or Turkey, range from very poor to near-original quality — complete with original-appearing silver marks!

Buyers who lack expertise are advised to seek independent professional opinion and insist on written authenticity guarantees before expanding their collections. If a find is too good to be true, say experts, it’s probably not true. ■

Melody Amsel-Arieli is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to *Antique Trader*. She is the author of “Between Galicia and Hungary: The Jews of Stropkov” and “Jewish Lives, Britain 1750-1950” (*Pen and Sword*, 2013). She lives in Israel.