

# Press Release



20 March 2017

## **Most important donation of Fabergé ever made to a British public collection acquired for the Nation and Allocated along with other major works to the V&A**

Nine superb works by Carl Fabergé and two by the eighteenth-century goldsmith, Johann Christian Neuber, have been donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) by Nicholas Snowman OBE from the Kenneth and Sallie Snowman Collection under the Cultural Gifts Scheme. The Scheme was introduced by the Government in 2013 as a major initiative to encourage life-time giving to UK public collections. This is the second gift under the Scheme to be allocated to the V&A. The V&A has one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of jewellery in the world, and these treasures are now on display in the Museum's William and Judith Bollinger Gallery, which tells the story of jewellery in Europe from prehistoric times to the present day.

Very few Fabergé items are held in British public collections. These nine items of exceptional quality, including some of fascinating provenance, constitute a major benefit to the study of European jewellery in the UK. Kenneth Snowman CBE FSA (1919-2002) was the pre-eminent authority on the Russian goldsmith Fabergé and was even called on by James Bond for his advice on a Fabergé problem in *The Property of a Lady*, a short story published by Ian Fleming in 1963. Snowman published his first book on Fabergé in 1953 and the works presented to the V&A reflect a career of fifty years as scholar, dealer and curator.

The Fabergé pieces include four carved animals from the collection of Queen Alexandra, who, with her husband King Edward VII, was an important patron of the London branch of the famous Russian goldsmith. The animals are masterpieces of carving in chalcedony and agate, and include a baboon hissing in defiance, a sturgeon, a kangaroo and a chinchilla. The other Fabergé animals include an obsidian seal, in which skin texture and stone are perfectly matched, and a highly stylised smoky quartz hare which shows the influence of Japanese netsuke on Fabergé's work. The most evocative of all the Fabergé objects is a rock crystal letter opener, mounted in gold and set with a diamond. This was a present from the Tsarina Alexandra of Russia to her former English governess, 'dear Miss

Jackson', at Christmas in 1900. Miss Jackson had been Alexandra's support after the early death of her mother.

Kenneth Snowman was also a distinguished authority on eighteenth-century goldsmiths' work. The Cultural Gift also includes two exquisite examples that were once in the legendary collection of King Farouk of Egypt. Both are made of gold and inlaid hardstone by Johann Christian Neuber, the most famous of the court goldsmiths at Dresden in the late eighteenth century. One is a circular box mounted with 77 numbered specimens of different stones from Saxony – a miniature museum of geology which could be carried in the pocket. Each stone and the location of its source are identified in a book inside the box. The other piece by Neuber has been described as the finest chatelaine he ever made. It is a declaration of love in French, richly decorated with amatory symbols and words of passion.

The eleven pieces in the Cultural Gift Scheme are gifted to the V&A at the same time as a generous presentation made through Art Fund by Nicholas Snowman of a ring enamelled with flowers and mounted with a cameo of Elizabeth I.

**The donor, Nicholas Snowman, said:** “In 1977 my father, Kenneth Snowman, curated a major Fabergé exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum to honour the Queen's Silver Jubilee. He was devoted to the V&A, lending a rare enamelled ring mounted with a cameo of Elizabeth I in 1975 and a selection of eighteenth-century gold boxes after my mother died in 1995.

“Following his death it seemed a fitting tribute in 2003 to their connoisseurship to extend the loan from the Kenneth and Sallie Snowman Collection to include work by Fabergé. They would have been delighted that the spiral display of Fabergé pieces has become one of the best-loved features of the jewellery gallery. It includes four of Queen Alexandra's Fabergé animals and a rock crystal letter opener which was a present from the Tsarina Alexandra to her English governess.

“Now, fourteen years later, it gives me great pleasure that a major part of the Kenneth and Sallie Snowman Collection has been accepted by the Cultural Gifts Scheme for donation to the V&A. I am delighted that in addition the Elizabeth I ring, on loan for over forty years, will find a permanent place in the V&A, presented through Art Fund. Consequently the Museum now possesses the most significant public collection of Fabergé in Britain and its important collection of gold boxes has been enriched enormously.”

**Edward Harley, Chairman of the Acceptance in Lieu Panel, said:** “The eleven objects accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme illustrate the

extraordinary workmanship of some of the finest jewellers and goldsmiths of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. Many of the objects are of great charm and some have truly fascinating provenance. I am very pleased that the Cultural Gifts Scheme has been able to help these items find a home in a public collection where visitors and scholars alike can study their history and marvel at their beauty.”

**Matt Hancock, Minister of State for Digital and Culture, said:** “It is fantastic that this outstanding collection from world-renowned jewellers and goldsmiths will be on public display at the V&A.

“The Cultural Gifts Scheme is a great success and last year alone works of art worth almost £50 million were acquired for the whole nation and our visitors to enjoy.

“It has brought great benefits for museums and everyone can visit and enjoy many more wonderful treasures in our national collections as a result.”

**Tristram Hunt, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, said:**

“Nicholas Snowman’s Cultural Gift is the most important donation of Fabergé ever made to a British public collection and will greatly enrich the V&A’s jewellery holdings. It is an act of great generosity and cultural philanthropy. The collection evokes the Russia of Nicholas and Alexandra as well as court life in Edwardian Britain. Like the box and chatelaine by Neuber, and the Elizabeth I cameo ring, which has been presented through Art Fund, their virtuoso craftsmanship will be inspirational.”

**Stephen Deuchar, Art Fund Director, said:**

“We’re immensely pleased that Nicholas Snowman, a treasured Art Fund supporter, has gifted this very special Elizabeth I cameo ring to the V&A through us - in recognition of our recent campaign to save the Armada Portrait for Royal Museums Greenwich. We’re delighted that this beautiful piece of jewellery has found a permanent public home at the V&A.”

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## Notes to editors

### **The Cultural Gift comprises the following items:**

**(1)** A cigarette case, woven in red and green gold and platinum, with a brilliant-cut diamond push. St Petersburg, 1899-1908. Carl Fabergé. Workmaster: August Hollming.

**(2)** A letter opener, rock crystal, red and yellow gold set with rose-cut diamonds, accompanied by a note from the Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna to her English governess: 'For dear Miss Jackson with loving Xmas wishes from Alix 1900'. Carl Fabergé.

**(3)** A chinchilla, chalcedony and gold, with cabochon sapphire eyes. Carl Fabergé. Formerly in the collection of Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII.

**(4)** A hissing baboon, chalcedony, with rose-cut diamond eyes. Carl Fabergé. Formerly in the collection of Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII.

**(5)** A sturgeon, grey-black banded agate. Carl Fabergé. Formerly in the collection of Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII.

**(6)** A hare, smoky quartz with rose-cut diamond eyes. Carl Fabergé.

**(7)** A kangaroo, banded agate with rose-cut diamond eyes. Carl Fabergé. Formerly in the collection of Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII.

**(8)** A seal, obsidian with rose-cut diamond eyes. Carl Fabergé.

**(9)** A box, gold, decorated with white enamel stripes, the lid set with a layered agate cameo of Aurora, goddess of the dawn, driving a two-horse chariot, 1886-1899. Carl Fabergé. Workmaster: Mikhail Perkin.

**(10)** A circular gold snuff box set with 77 numbered specimen stones by Johann Christian Neuber, identified in a book contained in the box. All the stones were mined in Saxony. The centre of the cover is encrusted with a spray of flowers and leaves, within a border of simulated half-pearls, Dresden, ca. 1775.

**(11)** A gold watch and chatelaine set with hardstones, including cornelian, jasper, turquoise, lapis lazuli, quartzite, agate and pyrite. Johann Christian Neuber, Dresden. The movement is by Lépine, Paris, 1770-75. The chatelaine is two-sided, designed to be looped around a lady's girdle. Above a watch inlaid with courting doves, forget-me-nots and fruiting laurel symbolising the triumph of love, comes the declaration of the lover who is making the gift. Each word is accompanied by a symbol. He is 'TENDRE' (heart), 'FIDEL' (dog), 'ARDENT' (altar of love), 'SINCERE' (mirror), 'SECRET' (padlock), 'CONSTANT' (fortress). The lovers are united for ever, 'UNIS POUR TOUJOURS', their hearts tied in a lover's knot. The pendants depict Adam and Eve, the first lovers, a caged owl (wisdom enslaved by love), and a butterfly (symbol of the soul).

A separate presentation from the Kenneth and Sallie Snowman Collection has been made by Nicholas Snowman through **Art Fund**:

Ring, enamelled gold set with a sardonyx cameo of Elizabeth I  
England, the cameo, 1570-1600; the ring, 1630-45.

The acceptance of the 11 objects under the Cultural Gifts Scheme will generate a tax reduction of £615,000.

The **Cultural Gifts Scheme** was launched by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport in March 2013 as an important element of its expanding programme to encourage philanthropy for the arts. The Acceptance in Lieu Panel, chaired by Edward Harley, advises Ministers on all objects offered under the Cultural Gifts Scheme. The Scheme is administered by the Arts Council and enables UK taxpayers to donate important objects to the nation during their lifetime. Items accepted under the Scheme are allocated to public collections and are available for all. In return, donors will receive a reduction in their income tax, capital gains tax or corporation tax liability, based on a set percentage of the value of the object they are donating: 30 per cent for individuals and 20 per cent for companies.

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/tax-incentives/cultural-gifts-scheme>

**The Arts Council** champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2015 and 2018, we plan to invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and an estimated £700 million from the National Lottery

to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.  
[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

**The V&A** is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 5000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform. [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

**Art Fund** is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. It also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 123,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant-giving, Art Fund's support for museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by the V&A, London, in 2016) and a range of digital platforms.

Find out more about Art Fund and the National Art Pass at [www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org)