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## V&A museum accused of displaying fake Fabergé egg in new exhibition

A row over the Third Imperial egg, rediscovered in 2014, is believed to stem from a rivalry between two wealthy Russian collectors

By **Anita Singh**, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

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Few objects can match the intricate beauty of Fabergé eggs, as a new exhibition at the V&A attests.

Fabergé in London: Romance to Revolution features 15 of the treasures, the largest number to be displayed together in a generation.

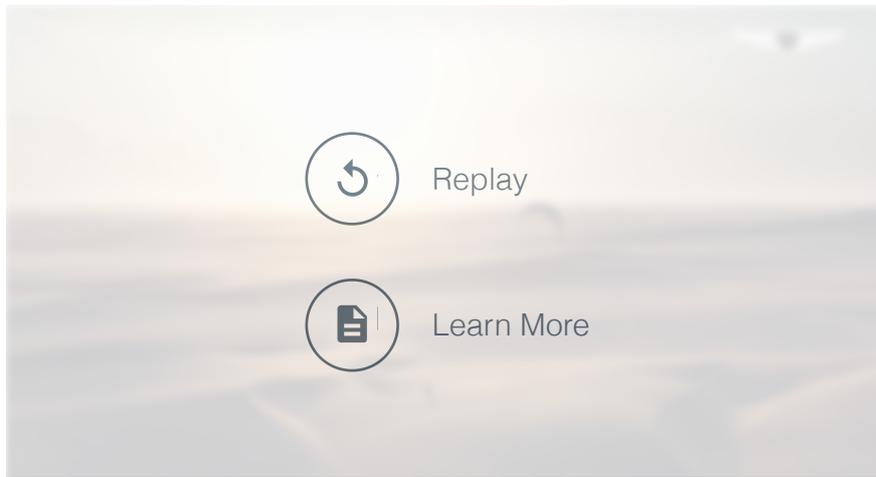
But the V&A has found itself at the centre of a rather indelicate row. The Fabergé Museum in Baden-Baden, Germany, has claimed that one of the eggs included in the exhibition is a fake.

The Third Imperial Easter Egg is dated to 1887 and comes with an extraordinary backstory – [bought in the 2000s for £8,000 by a scrap metal dealer](#) in the American Midwest, who kept it in his kitchen for years until a Google search revealed that he had a lost treasure on his hands.

In a post on its website, the Baden-Baden museum dismissed the story, declaring: “There is simply nothing to say, except, ‘What nonsense!’”

The museum claimed that the Vacheron Constantin pocket watch concealed within the egg was produced “much later than 1887”, and that “similar cheap eggs were produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries”.





The V&A said in response that “all objects in the exhibition comply with the V&A’s due diligence procedures”.



The Third Imperial egg, pictured, contains a Vacheron Constantin watch sitting within an elaborate jewelled gold stand and measures 8.2 cm in height | CREDIT: Julian Simmonds

Behind the row lies a fierce rivalry between two Russian tycoons – each of whom has founded their own museum dedicated to the craft of jeweller Carl Fabergé.

The Fabergé Museum in Baden-Baden, a popular tourist destination for wealthy Russians, was founded by Alexander Ivanov.

Ivanov made his fortune importing Amstrad computers to Russia. He ended up with “large holdalls stuffed with dollars ... there was nothing to buy in the shops, so I started to buy antiques”.

He began to focus on Fabergé and in 2007 paid £9 million for an egg at auction in London, declaring it “cheap” at the price.

Ivanov has faced [accusations of buying fakes himself](#). Andrew Ruzhnikov, a London-based Russian art dealer, alleged last year that several objects acquired by Ivanov and on display at the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg were fakes. Ivanov denied the claims.

The V&A has not loaned any of the Baden-Baden museum eggs, which may have ruffled feathers. It has instead borrowed items from the Fabergé Museum in St Petersburg, owned by Ivanov’s rival, billionaire Viktor Vekselberg.

The co-curator of the V&A exhibition is Kieran McCarthy, director of Mayfair jewellery Wartski and a Fabergé expert. It was Mr McCarthy who verified the discovery of the Third Imperial Easter Egg, and he is also on the advisory board of the St Petersburg museum.

### 'He literally fell to the floor'

The Third Imperial Easter Egg came to light in 2014, in what Mr McCarthy likened to "Indiana Jones being presented with the Lost Ark".

The US scrap metal dealer who bought it from an antiques stall had tried to sell it on but prospective buyers thought he was over-estimating the price.

It languished in his kitchen for years, according to Mr McCarthy, until one night he Googled "egg" and "Vacherin Constantin" – the name on the timepiece inside – and found [a 2011 Daily Telegraph article](#) with the headline: "Is this £20 million nest-egg on your mantelpiece?"

He contacted Mr McCarthy, who was named in the piece and who flew over to see it. "He's from another world entirely. It's a world of diners and pick-up trucks," the art expert said at the time.

"I examined it and said, 'You have an Imperial Fabergé Easter Egg.' He literally fell to the floor in astonishment."

Carl Fabergé made 50 Imperial Easter Eggs for the Tsar and his family. The first – known as the "Hen Egg" because it contains a gold "yolk" – was created in 1885.

Seized by the Bolsheviks, many were sold overseas; three are in the Royal Collection. Seven remain unaccounted for.

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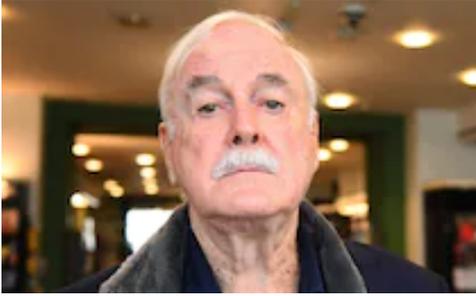


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