

Vassar LLI Course

Fabergé: The Art of Its Own — Art, Culture, and Diplomacy Across Empires

Course Description

This course builds on the previous Fabergé class with a broader understanding of the Fabergé family's multicultural heritage and historical lineage. Participants will explore how Fabergé's creations reflect both the personal ancestry of the firm's founders and their engagement with a network of royal families across Imperial Russia, Scandinavia, and Britain. Central to this inquiry are the Russian royal family and prominent industrial dynasties, whose cultural, scientific, and economic activities provided a vital bridge between these regions and shaped the environment in which Fabergé established its distinctive artistry.

Drawing on recent research, the course examines Fabergé objects not only as masterpieces of craftsmanship but also as political and diplomatic artifacts embedded in royal patronage, elite networks, and international diplomacy. Particular attention will be given to the Imperial Easter Eggs and other major Fabergé works, whose artistry and symbolism will be examined in detail. Participants will also study the workmasters—the highly skilled artisans within the Fabergé firm—exploring their individual craftsmanship and distinctive styles.

The course also includes a hands-on workshop in learning traditional Russian paper-cut snowflake designs. Participants will need scissors and white or colored paper, and regular printer paper is perfectly suitable for this project.

Learning Goals

Participants will:

- Deepen their understanding of Fabergé artworks, from the Imperial Easter Eggs to jewelry of political significance.
- Examine modern collections, including those of the Royal Trust, Victor Vekselberg, and others.
- Explore the Nobel family's role in shaping cultural patronage and political networks.
- Study the workmasters of the Fabergé firm and their contributions to individual objects.
- Connect Russian, Scandinavian, and British political contexts to Fabergé's production and influence.
- Engage with both historical and recent research on Fabergé beyond the framework of imperial luxury.
- Develop skills in interpreting art objects as expressions of power, ideology, and diplomacy.