
Marina Nikolaevna Lopato

(1942-2020)



Marina Lopato, who has died at the age of seventy-eight, was for nearly fifty years, Curator of Silver in the Western European Department at the Hermitage in St Petersburg (Leningrad). A small bundle of energy, she was under five feet tall, and with a cigarette in her hand whenever and wherever it was allowed, she was well known to scholars of European silver around the world.

Marina completed medical training and started work in a hospital before deciding to requalify, gaining a second degree from the Repin School (the Academy of Fine Arts) in Leningrad (St Petersburg) in 1967. She entered the Hermitage's postgraduate course in the following year and was taken on as Junior Curator of Silver in 1971, defending her *kandidatskaya* (PhD) on the subject of German Renaissance plaques in 1974. That year she was appointed Head of the Metal and Stone Sector in the Western European Department, a post she held until her death.

During her early years at the Hermitage she was mentored by Marina Torneus (1909–81), who had joined the Hermitage in 1932 and had trained under two of the great names in the study of the decorative arts in the early twentieth century, Sergey Troinitsky (1882–1946) and Pavel von Derviz (1897–1942). It was Torneus who reinstated order to the collections after the upheavals of their evacuation during the Second World War but it was Marina who engaged in the investigation of the archival sources that would throw new light on their history.

At the core of the Hermitage's collection are the silver services and table decorations, made for practical use in the Imperial household, and turned into museum displays in the late nineteenth century as part of the Court Museum of

Porcelain and Silver Objects in 1885, and transferred to the Hermitage in 1911. Baron Armin von Foelkersam (1861–1917) had published his *Inventaire de l'Argenterie conservée dans les Gardes-Meubles des Palais Impériaux* in two volumes in 1907, citing numerous archive documents, but the post-revolutionary removal of government archives to Moscow and the renumbering of the files made the documents he cited almost impossible for modern scholars to find. Marina dug deep to rediscover them and extensively supplemented and corrected von Foelkersam's findings. She also did much work in establishing the provenance of various pieces that, in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, joined the collections as part of the vast influx of material from nationalised collections, and in tracking down items sold by the Soviet state in the 1920s and 1930s.

Marina always had contact with international experts but the changing political situation in the USSR from the late 1980s allowed her to expand those contacts and to work in libraries abroad. This led to a rush of important publications: her catalogue of German silver appeared in 2002¹, she presented the Dutch and Polish silver in 2004², her fascinating study of some of the silver bought or commissioned by Nicholas I in London in the 1840s in 2010³, and with the encouragement and support of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art she completed her catalogue of the British silver, published in Russian in 2013 and in English in 2015⁴.

In her unfinished last article⁵, Marina reviewed the history of Fabergé studies in Russia, in which she had been such a central figure. Thanks in part to the association with the last tsar, Nicholas II, and his wife Alexandra, Fabergé came to be seen in the latter part of the Soviet



FIG 1
Wine cooler, London, 1734-35, maker's mark of Charles Kandler.
(© The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg)

FIG 2
Detail of handle of
Fig 1, wine cooler,
London, 1734-35,
maker's mark of
Charles Kandler
(© The State
Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg)



1. Marina Nikolaevna Lopato, *Немецкое художественное серебро в собрании Эрмитажа* [German Silver in the Hermitage Collection], St Petersburg, 2002.
2. Marina Lopato, *Голландское серебро в собрании Эрмитажа* [Dutch Silver in the Hermitage Collection], *Государственный Эрмитаж* [The State Hermitage], no 3, Winter 2004–5; Marina Lopato, *Польское художественное серебро XVI – первой половины XIX века в Эрмитаже* [Polish Silver of the Sixteenth to First Half of the Nineteenth Century in the Hermitage], exhibition catalogue, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2004.
3. Marina Nikolaevna Lopato, *Кубки императора Николая I на скачках в Эскоте* [Nicholas I's Cups from the Races at Ascot], *Под Высочайшим покровительством. Материалы научной конференции* [Under the Highest Patronage. Materials from a Scholarly Conference], St Petersburg, 2010, pp 124–34.
4. Marina Lopato, *British Silver 1572–1700 in The State Hermitage Museum*, London and New Haven, 2015.
5. Marina Lopato and Catherine Phillips, 'Fabergé – A cultural phenomenon of the Modern Age, a mirror of the times', *Silver Studies, the Journal of the Silver Society*, no 36, 2020, pp 40-5.
6. Marina Lopato, *Ювелирные изделия Фаберже* [Metalwork by Fabergé], *Декоративное искусство СССР* [Decorative Arts in the USSR], 6, 1983, pp 41-3.
7. Marina Lopato, 'Fresh Light on Faberge', *Apollo*, January 1984, no 263, pp 43-9; Marina Lopato, "'Faberge Eggs". Re-dating from New Evidence', *Apollo*, February 1991, no 348, pp 91-4.
8. Geza von Hapsburg and Marina Lopato, *Fabergé: Imperial Jeweller*, exhibition catalogue, State Hermitage Museum; Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; 1993-94.
9. Marina Lopato, *Фабержизм* [Fabergism], *Эрмитажные чтения в память Б. Б. Piotrovского* [Hermitage Readings in Memory of B B Piotrovsky], St Petersburg, 2001, pp 40-5.

era as a symbol of a lost paradise and as a model of impeccable taste. This not only meant that study of, and publications on, Fabergé were, to say the least, discouraged in the Soviet era, but it led to the production of large numbers of fakes, to which the authorities turned a blind eye until those fakes started to emerge on the foreign market. It was therefore, partially in response to a practical need that Marina first delved into the archives in order to be able to differentiate real Fabergé from the fake. Her discovery of documents relating to the first Fabergé Easter eggs and other material led initially to a small publication in Russian in 1983⁶. It seems hard to comprehend now, but back then she needed the permission of the Ministry of Culture to make this material available in English. Permission was granted and she published articles in *Apollo* in 1984 and 1991.⁷

As Fabergé studies in Russia took off ever larger exhibitions were held and Marina was inevitably involved with them. She was central to the large show organised by the American Fabergé Arts Foundation and the Hermitage which opened in the Winter Palace in 1993 and later moved to Paris and London,⁸

and from 1996 to 2003 she was an Expert to the Fabergé Arts Foundation. Marina, however, began to lose interest as Fabergé studies became what she herself called 'Fabergism':⁹ a brand and a money-making machine, with at least half of the objects on the market, in museums and private collections estimated to be fakes and not original creations. Marina was increasingly exhausted by requests from individuals to 'authenticate' their property or to lend her name to dubious Fabergé initiatives. She was, therefore, initially cautious when asked to create a permanent Fabergé room, the Carl Fabergé Memorial Room, in the General Staff Building at the Hermitage, which opened in December 2015. The display does much to present the firm in a more factual and historically accurate light than the 'blockbuster entertainments' of so many Fabergé shows nowadays. Marina was perhaps more interested in a temporary exhibition in a neighbouring room, 'Fabergé and the Great War', which revealed a much less well-known aspect of Fabergé's activities, as the maker of functional silver for prestigious Imperial practical projects. The Russian



FIG 3
 Lord Marmion centrepiece, London, 1840-41,
 maker's mark of R and S Garrard and modelled by
 Edmund Cotterill.
 From of the London Service made for Tsar
 Nicholas I
 (© The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg)

National Museum in Moscow loaned an array of medical utensils, kettles and samovars, saucepans and swab bowls, even syringes and other metalware, produced for the infirmary, opened in the Winter Palace during the First World War, and the field military hospital train financed by Tsarina Alexandra.

As Marina moved away from the study of Fabergé she broadened her interests to the work of silversmiths and jewellers active in St Petersburg since the eighteenth century: the subject of her *habilitation* (Russian doctorate) in 2006¹⁰ and, increasingly, to contemporary crafts. Inspired in part by her passionate desire that silversmiths and jewellers cease producing Fabergé imitations, which prevented them experimenting and creating new work, she was an ardent promoter of young talent. Ever

10. Published in book form that year: Marina Lopato, *Ювелиры Старого Петербурга* [Jewellers of Old Petersburg], St Petersburg, 2006.

11. E.g. *Ювелирный авангард. Истоки. Параллели* [The Avant-garde in Jewellery. Sources and Parallels], exhibition catalogue, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2002.

FIG 4
 Altar, silver and tortoiseshell, Augsburg, 1719,
 maker's mark of Johann Andreas Thelott.
 Conserved for, and studied by, Marina Lopato in
 2019.
 (© The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg)



ready to be a member of a competition jury, she also supported the display of contemporary works in the Hermitage,¹¹ insisting on the combined importance of tradition and innovation.

Marina was no less generous in making materials available to other scholars working on the history of silver. She was, as they say in Russian, a veritable 'fountain of ideas': inventive in coming up with new ways to present familiar objects by taking thematic or material approaches, and in the weeks before she died, unphased by isolation measures resulting from the Covid pandemic. Marina divided her time between her dacha and the city and was, to the last, full of energy and plans for the future, for new exhibitions and for publications.

Catherine Phillips