A careful study of the art and thought of Japan may indeed make us pause to ask ourselves whether there is not something at least as good as, or better than, the utilitarian civilisation of the twentieth century. With these words the Duke of Connaught, Queen Victoria’s third son, inaugurated the Japan Exhibition held in London in 1910. He also drew attention to Western ignorance of this extraordinary culture. Although Japanese works of art had been known in Europe since the 17th century they were comparatively rare until the third quarter of the 19th century. Fearing the influence of foreigners the Emperor Togugawa Iemitsu effectively closed the country from 1639. Despite the diplomatic and even military pressures placed on the Japanese by the Russians, British and Americans, the commercial and political insularity of the Edo period lasted until 1868 when the Meiji restoration took place.

The flood of Japanese works of art which followed inspired Europeans with their sheer facility, and unerring sense of design. A few specialist dealers, such as Yamanaka, established themselves in Europe and America and enthusiasts quite quickly began to assemble collections. In Paris the jeweller Henri Vever concerned himself with the very finest Japanese prints and Marcel Bing amassed an impressive collection of metalwork which inspired his own work in the Art Nouveau taste. By the 1880s Alexis Falize was making jewellery in cloisonné enamel which was, to some, quite indistinguishable from the prototypes on which it was based.

Despite being geographically removed from the centres of European taste Peter Carl Fabergé felt similarly inspired. He must have found a parallel between his own exacting, near fastidious perfectionism, and the techniques

---

Figure 1. A nephrite carving of a puppy dog the cabochon ruby eyes set in gold collets. This study has much in common with netsukes in the form of dogs carved by the Tsu School artist Kokei in the late 18th century. The boldly undercut foot would have formed the himotoshi in the original composition and Fabergé has allowed it to remain in his version of the sculpture. Provenance: Alfred Duke of Edinburgh and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (Wartski).
employed by the Japanese craftsmen; especially when they worked on the tiny mixed media sculptures called netsuke. In The Art of Carl Fabergé A. Kenneth Snowman first pointed out that Fabergé himself was an avid collector of these compelling little objects and provides (plate 7) a photograph of the interior of the apartment in Morskaya Street. The cabinet in which over 500 netsuke were kept can clearly be seen. These may have been acquired from the shop called ‘Japan’ which was situated in the Nevsky Prospect in St Petersburg at the turn of the century. (Information supplied by Dr Geza von Habsburg.) Undoubtedly an enduring source of inspiration to Fabergé, the netsuke carvings may also have been the germ from which his entire series of animal carvings grew and blossomed.

More often than not the netsuke carver chose organic materials for his work; wood, ivory and bone being most commonly found. Their relative softness allowed a minutely observed finish to be brought to the final stages of the carving. Fabergé set about achieving the same effect with stones cleverly chosen to suggest the natural qualities of the subject. For instance the velvety visual texture of the volcanic glass obsidian has been used to great effect in evoking the plumage of the splendid sparrow in Figure 3. Probably derived from a Japanese ebony netsuke of the Meiji period, when it is up-turned the feet of the bird can be seen folded against its breast.

The netsuke carver’s models are very often taken from the natural world and small mammals, birds and insects abound. Their bodies are shown in typical repose; apparently every hair, whisker, wing and scale is recorded. Often the eyes are picked out in another medium such as amber or tortoiseshell giving the carving a point d’appui. No matter how imaginative the artist, he had to work within rigid constraints as the netsuke was

Figure 2 (above). A grey chalcedony carving of a mouse the eyes set with rose diamonds. The gold tail bearing the initials of the chief workmaster Henrik Wigström and the gold standard 72. Figure 2a The detailed underneath of the carving which betrays its netsuke origins (Wartski).

Figure 3 Top row, left: A carving in citrine of a hare with rose diamond set eyes taken from an untraced netsuke prototype.

A carving of a monkey in obsidian of the three mystic apes which symbolise the injunction to see, hear and speak no evil, combined in a single animal.

Another similar in amethyst. Both the carvings are closely based on a netsuke type carved by Kwaigyokusai Masatsugu (1813-1893).

A carving in obsidian of a dust bathing sparrow, the eyes set with cabochon rubies. Horaku (Wartski). Probably inspired by an ebony netsuke by Horaku (see Sotheby’s, 13-11-86, lot 155). Provenance: Mde. Yznaga.

Second row: A bowenite carving of a toad with cabochon ruby eyes in gold collets. When this animal is turned over its feet are seen folded beneath its abdomen. It appears to derive from a netsuke carving like that by Harukimi (see Netsuke by Neil Davey no. 874).

A bowenite carving of a frog chewing a worm the eyes set with zircons; loosely based on netsuke prototypes.


Third row: A nephrite carving of a frog stretching its mouth with its forepaws; one back leg extended. The eyes set with rose diamonds. Although not a direct pastiche of a Japanese carving the aesthetic ancestry of this model is unmistakable.

A white chalcedony mouse with cabochon ruby eyes; the gold ears and tail set with rose diamonds. Bearing the initials of the chief workmaster Henrik Wigström (Wartski).

A smoky quartz carving of a mouse with rose diamond eyes seated on a hemispherical vessel. From a netsuke prototype similar to that described above.

Fourth row: A nephrite carving of a snail of unusually large proportions (The Victoria and Albert Museum).

A miniature pendant easter egg in purpurine in the form of a small bird its feet thrown up against its stomach. The eyes set with rose diamonds in gold collets and the suspension ring of gold.

A quartzite carving of a rabbit its ears thrown over its back, the eyes set with faceted rubies (Their Royal Highnesses Prince and Princess Michael of Kent).

Another similar in rhodonite with emerald eyes. Both this and the quartzite rabbit are loosely based on netsuke prototypes. (Their Royal Highnesses Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.)
Figure 4. A nephrite carving of a terrapin with diamond set eyes in gold collets. This creature is a popular subject with the netsuke carvers of Japan who generally represent it hiding within the carapace (Wartski).

Figure 5. A nephrite carving of a kingfisher in the Ittobori taste the eyes with rose diamonds (Wartski).

Figure 6 (opposite). A Meiji period articulated bronze okimono of a crab. A bell push by Carl Fabergé in the form of a crab, the eyes and legs of which are articulated in the manner of a Japanese okimono. The back of the crab is set with a blue chalcedony and the eyes are pressed to make the electric contact necessary to ring the bell. Bearing the initials of the workmaster Henrik Wigström. St. Petersburg 1908-1917. Provenance: Grand Duchess Anastasia Mikhailovna, wife of Grand Duke Friedrich Franz III of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.
Figure 7. A vari-coloured agate carving of a maribou stork, the legs of carved and chased gold. (Reproduced from The Art of Carl Fabergé by A. Kenneth Snowman, plate 43.)

Figure 8. A nephrite carving of a rearing elephant with diamond set eyes. A nephrite carving of a sparrow dust bathing, the eyes set with rose diamonds. This model is based on a common netsuke type from the Kyoto school known as a Fukura Suzume. So many versions are known that it is not possible to give a precise prototype for this carving. See Netsuke by Neil Davey, no. 161. (Both the above from the collection of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and reproduced from The Art of Carl Fabergé by A. K. Snowman, plate 248.)

Figure 9 (opposite) A rearing silver serpent guarding a block of turquoise matrix. Bearing the initials of the workmaster Johan Vikler Aarne.

designed to be worn and used. Indeed it is the toggle from which Japanese men suspended the sagemono (purse or pouch) from the belts of their pocketless kimonos. It must therefore be compactly designed and have a cord attachment called a himotoshi. This can either be two boldly drilled holes which meet within the carving or alternatively a clever stragagem such as a curling tail or a boldly undercut foot (Figures 1, 2 & 2a) can serve the same purpose.

Decorating the cord between the sagemono and the netsuke there is often a small bead called an ojime. Invariably finely worked the model is always dependant upon the constraints imposed by the function of the finished object. Although there is no evidence that Fabergé also collected ojime their influence can be felt in his animal carvings. In the foreground of Figure 3 a tiny fledgling of unmistakable Japanese ancestry can be seen, its feet thrown up against its chest in order to keep the outline of the carving ovoid. Fabergé has used the vivid red, glass based, composition called purpurine for this carving. That which was designed as a drilled bead by the Japanese has been changed by Fabergé into a pendant Easter egg to be worn hanging from a chain. Her Majesty The Queen has two similar birds in her collection drawn from the same source which are slightly larger and purely ornamental (Figures 3 and 10).

Henry C. Bainbridge was Fabergé's business manager in London from 1906 until 1917 and his book Peter Carl Fabergé published in 1949 is based on first hand experience of Fabergé's work and the society which he deeply admired it. Apart from the obvious source for the Bonsai tree illustrated by him, the influence of Japanese works of art is not touched on. Despite his close relationship with Fabergé he may not have been aware that its influence was as powerful a source as we see it today. With very few exceptions those animal studies inspired by netsuke carvings are based on images which need not necessarily be seen as oriental in character. Consider for a moment the endearing mice and rats in Figures 2, 2a & 3, or the puppy in Figure 1. These are images as readily understood in the Occident as in the Orient but the forms and technique are unmistakably Japanese. The animals are finely worked in the round and the pads on the feet of the mice are as beautifully observed as those on the dog, leaving the experienced eye in no doubt as to their aesthetic ancestry. Where the himotshi is achieved by some part of the animal's anatomy it was tolerated by Fabergé; if not it was invariably abandoned. A Fabergé animal carving in the netsuke tradition was not made as a slavish pastiche but to be enjoyed, purely and simply for its visual and tactile immediacy.

Apart from those animal carvings which are conven-
tionalised comic figures, the majority seem to owe something to the art of the netsuke carver. Thumbing through the standard work on the subject, *Netsuke* by Neil Davey, many of the illustrations will seem familiar to the Fabergé enthusiast. Snakes, rats, flat fish, stylised owls, even frogs eating worms (*Figure 3*) are all there. Fabergé has even taken the compact form of the snail coiled round its own shell and unravelled it to create the splendid example in nephrite in *Figure 3*. Bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum in April 1916 by Henry Louis Florence, it went as a result of its strongly oriental flavour, with numerous Chinese jades to the Ceramics department until its authorship was correctly established at the time of the Fabergé exhibition held in the Museum in 1977. The body is cleverly polished to simulate the slimy qualities of this creature. Although not a direct pastiche, the snail, a favourite subject of the netsuke carver, is usually shown hiding within its shell.

Another common netsuke type is the terrapin with its head retracted and tail curled round the shell for compactness. Like the snail, Fabergé has simply enticed this seemingly Primaevolved reptile to stretch out and be seen (*Figure 4*). Her Majesty The Queen has a carving of a monkey in smoky quartz so worried that it must cover its eyes with its paws to avoid witnessing some truly cataclysmic event; this too is a familiar netsuke subject (*Figure 10*). Of the few hardstone carvings which apparently owe nothing to any previous inspiration it is the studies of kingfishers, or icebirds as Fabergé called them, which are carved so economically that they seem to anticipate the geometric flavour of the Art Deco period. The technique is known in Japan as Ittobori and although no comparable netsuke kingfisher has yet been found, the style seems favoured by those who wished to represent birds (see Neil Davey, p 237). (*Figure 5*)

From time to time in order to achieve a special effect not possible with a single stone Fabergé would make a composite sculpture where for example the vivid red wattles of a turkey are picked out in purpurine (*Figure 10*). The Japanese craftsmen would have approved, just as they would have done of Fabergé’s use of brilliant and cabochon cut stones for the eyes of the hardstone animals, and the gold feet and legs which some of them have.

The idea that these enchanting hardstone animals owe their existence at least in part to netsuke carvings is not a new idea and Kenneth Snowman has written on the subject. However in recent years it has become apparent that this is not the only influence at work. Visitors to the exhibition ‘The Strange Genius of William Burges’ at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1981-2 will have seen the extraordinary wash-stand which was given by John Betjeman to Evelyn Waugh and which now belongs to his son Auberon. Decorating the shelf which supports the bowl is a 19th century Japanese bronze stork which seems to give a clue to the conception of the famous carving of a maribou by Carl Fabergé (*Figure 7*). The stance is very similar and the detail which seems to support the idea that Fabergé’s maribou is derived from a similar object is the fact that both models are seen to be standing with their webbed feet overlapping. The turkey in the collection of Her Majesty The Queen (*Figure 10*) may derive from a Meiji period bronze and specialists in such objects are equally convinced that the nephrite charging elephant in the collection of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (*Figure 8*) are well known late Japanese bronze types. The rearing silver snake on a turquoise matrix block sold in the Robert Strauss Collection of Works of Art by Carl Fabergé (Christie’s, 9 March 1976, lot 27; *Figure 9*) owes its malevolence, rare in Fabergé’s oeuvre, to a Japanese prototype, almost certainly a bronze.

Perhaps the most successful of all Fabergé’s interpretations of Japanese works of art is the silver bell push in the form of an articulated crab, its back set with a blue chalcedony and the eyes with moonstones (*Figure 6*). It derives from a type of articulated ornament known as an okimono, and in the same way that Fabergé was attracted to the realism of the netsuke carvings so also was he to this type of ornament, made from riveted plates of steel and bronze. Once again the end product is not obviously oriental in inspiration; the casual observer might easily see it as a first hand interpretation of nature.

It is interesting to speculate as to whether or not Fabergé’s clientele were aware of the Japanese sources for so many of his animal studies. Bainbridge remembers that the majority of customers for the hardstone carvings were women and this may explain why the images are generally light and carefree and why the distinctly predatory insects favoured by the Japanese were so assiduously avoided by Fabergé. However, some enthusiasts of the hardstone animals were undoubtedly collectors of netsuke also and would have understood the subtle, almost covert homage Fabergé paid to the subject. Amongst them was the eccentric Mrs A. A. Watney-Weguelin who assembled a collection of netsuke and shopped frequently at Fabergé’s London branch. When she died in 1938 it took Christie’s a week to sell her property and amongst it was a fine group of 49 Fabergé objects. Twenty of these were animal carvings and several were more Japanese than European in accent.

Fabergé was not the only goldsmith and jeweller in Russia selling hardstone animal carvings. The firm of Ovtchinnikov which was founded in Moscow in 1853 and opened in St. Petersburg some 20 years later was a competitor of Fabergé. It is known that they also sold hardstone animals (see *Cartier – Jewellers Extraordinary* by
Hans Nadelhoffer) as did Sumin, and Denissov-Oural斯基.
Absolutely in tune with Fabergé’s taste, Sumin’s animals are sometimes inspired by netsuke carvings and the stones he chose are often of a porous texture recalling the charming sugar mice of everybody’s childhood (Figure 3).

No matter how mimetically the pasticheurs and revivalists of the 19th century echoed their chosen prototypes they always created something which was modern and as time goes by becomes more obviously so. This was not always their intention but with Fabergé it was never anything else. His animal studies lose nothing as their sources gradually become more apparent; they only become more compelling and more eagerly sought after.

Bibliography
The Art of Carl Fabergé by A. Kenneth Snowman. Faber & Faber, 1953.
Carl Fabergé Goldsmith to the Imperial Court of Russia by A. Kenneth Snowman. Debellet, 1979.

Exhibition
Several items reproduced in this article will be included in an exhibition devoted to the art of Carl Fabergé at the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulmburgstting in Munich until 22 February.

Figure 10 Top row, r to l: A carving of a snake in brown and black speckled jasper set with pale olivine eyes and gold tongue, carved as a rising coil through which the head emerges, mouth open to hiss. This model recalls a netsuke of the Yamada School by Harumitsu (see Netsuke by Neil Davy, no. 707.)
An obsidian turkey with a lapis lazuli head, purpurine comb and pink gold feet. Bearing the initials of the workmaster Henrik Wigström.
A carving of a stump-tailed macaque covering its eyes with its paws, in smoky quartz.
Second row, r to l: A mustard and dark brown crocidolite tiger, the eyes set with rose diamonds. This is a very common netsuke type.
A blue chalcedony mouse with silver tail and ears set with rose diamonds.
A carving in rhodonite of a baby bird, the eyes set with olivines. This amusing egg-shaped model of a fledgeling bird recalls a Japanese ojime.
A carving in brown and black jasper of a coiled snake. The colour of the stone perfectly suggests the natural markings. The eyes set with rose diamonds. This is another well known netsuke type having much in common with the Nagoya school. (For a similar coiled snake see Netsuke by Neil Davy, no. 577.)
Third row, r to l: A carving of a toad in speckled grey labradorite, the eyes set with cabochon rubies. Like the toad in Figure 1 its underside is finely worked to represent the folded feet of the creature.
A speckled brown jasper flounder known as a Norfolk butt, the rose diamond eyes set in gold. The representation of flat fish in the art of the netsuke carving is not uncommon and an amusing example in lacquered wood and fish skin is to be found in Netsuke by Neil Davy, no. 1269.
A carving of a rat in grey agate, the ears and tail set with rose diamonds in silver.
(Reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen.)

Unless otherwise stated items illustrated are from private collections.

The Antique Collector, January 1987