

Antip Kuzmichev

Antip Ivanovich Kuzmichev (active c. 1856-1900), born in Moscow, is one of the most famous silversmiths and enamellers amongst his contemporaries many others. Liang Yi Museum houses a number of enamel objects made by Kuzmichev.

Biography

Antip Kuzmichev founded his business in 1856 specialising in the production of cloisonné enamel works. It is known that the majority of his later creations were made to be retailed by Tiffany & Co¹ through Henry Winans Hiller (1838-1926), a pioneer in Russian-American trade², who worked as buyer for the company for four decades from the 1880s through 1914.

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, the design of Russian enamelware was mainly influenced by Westernised styles, and it was not until the 1840s that the revival of Russian art styles came into light³. Products of the Kuzmichev firm were recognisable for the application of cloisonné enamel. Designs are made by first soldering thin metal strips to create *cloisons* of scrolling foliage, or any desired patterns, and then filling these cells with enamel pastes of turquoise, blue, white, red and green on a stippled metal ground⁴. Works from this time were largely influenced by ‘Antiquities of the Russian State’ published by Fyodor Solntsev⁵ in the 1840-50s, presenting a Pan-Slavic artistic style.

In 1885, a Russian department was set up by Tiffany & Co. specifically for retailing imported Russian products with Hiller as the supplier⁶. With growing American demand for Russian enamels, Kuzmichev’s firm was able to maintain a contract with Tiffany & Co. in producing Russian-style enamel wares for its Herald Street store based in New York⁷. Through this partnership, Kuzmichev stood out as the pioneer of Russian cloisonné among his contemporaries. In the Pan-American Exposition of 1901, Tiffany & Co. was appointed by the Russian imperial family as the royal supplier, thus enabling Kuzmichev’s products to be sold indirectly to the court. Figure 1 is an example of Kuzmichev’s work.

¹ Antiques and the Arts Weekly (2022)

² Mystic Seaport Museum, n.d.

³ Chitra Collection (2022)

⁴ Ruzhnikov (2019)

⁵ Ruzhnikov (2019)

⁶ Odom (2011)

⁷ Chitra Collection (2022)



Figure 1. A Tea Caddy, Maker: Antip Kuzmichev, (Retailled by Tiffany & Co.), Moscow, ca. 1895, Materials: silver-gilt and cloisonné enamel, internal cork stopper, The Chitra Collection.

In the Collection

Liang Yi Museum houses a set of Russian Tea and Coffee Service (fig. 2) made by Antip Kuzmichev in its collection. This set was produced in the early 1900s, and was retailled by Tiffany & Co. at that time. The entire set is comprised of a coffee pot, a tea pot, a milk jug, a pair of sugar tongs, a tea strainer and a tray with two handles, each rendered in the typical Russian decorative art style. The surface is applied with cloisonné enamel of foliage scrolls represented in a range of coloured enamels, including yellow, turquoise, blue and white to name a few. It is extremely fortunate that this set remains complete in an overall unharmed condition, as the process of production is immensely ravelled on its own, while the delicate enamelling technique can be damaged easily⁸.

⁸ Daniel Roberts, Kate Flitcroft and Gerry Kong (2021)



Figure 2. A Russian Tea and Coffee Service, Maker: Antip Kuzmichev, (Retailled by Tiffany & Co.), Moscow, 1899-1908, Materials: silver-gilt and cloisonné enamel, Tray width 38cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Liang Yi Museum also houses a nécessaire produced around the years of 1896-1908 by Kuzmichev (fig. 3). The shape of the nécessaire is manifested as rectangular, yet demonstrates a sense of roundness with its smoothed edges. Decorated with scrolling foliage formed by dots of red, turquoise, purplish and bluish shades of enamels, it gives off a luminous essence once light reaches its surface, catching the eyes of many. In the upper centre, a focal point is guided towards the rather large floral design of a combination of vibrant colours. Usage of plant motif reflects the pursuit of an Eastern style of ornament⁹ in the late 19th to early 20th century, as it relates much to the floral forms expressed in Byzantine art. The main body of this box is formed by two compartments sealed by hinged shutters, and a mirror is attached to the reverse of its cover.

⁹ Liang Yi Museum (2016)

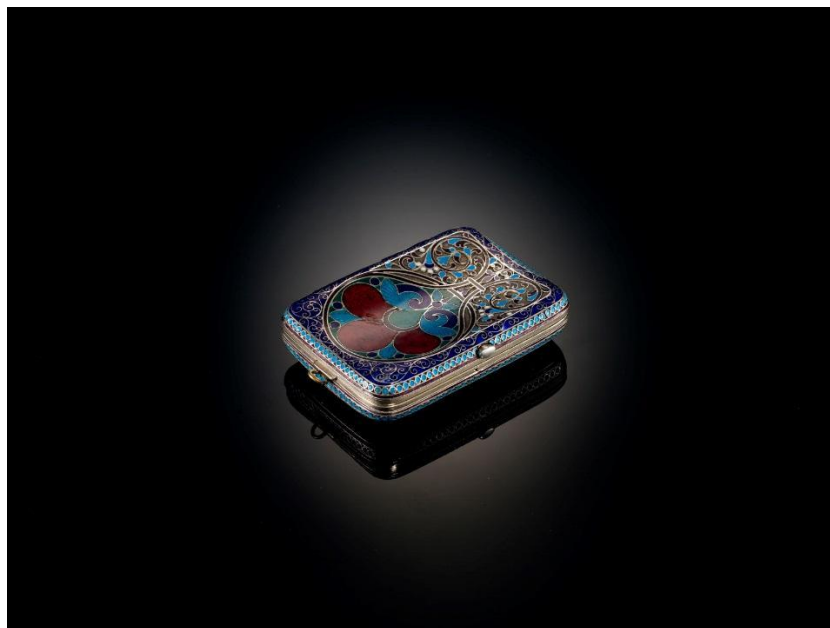


Figure 3. Necessaire, Maker: Antip Kuzmichev, Moscow, 1896-1908, Materials: silver, enamel and silver-gilt, Measurements: Length 9cm x Width 6.2cm x Height 1.7cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Similarly, this carnet de bal (fig. 4) demonstrates a floral pattern enamelled in a mosaic-like manner with red, blue and white pellets to simulate a textile design¹⁰. A *carnet de bal*, literally translated as a ‘dance card’, is a fashionable item adored by many 19th and 20th century women. It was either used for noting down the names of men with whom a woman has agreed to dance at balls or banquets, or functioned as a personal memento of a particular social event¹¹. It opens with a cabochon-set clasp to reveal its vacant interior (fig. 5), the space intended for a notepad and an integral pencil holder.

¹⁰ Christies (2022)

¹¹ Faberge (2022)

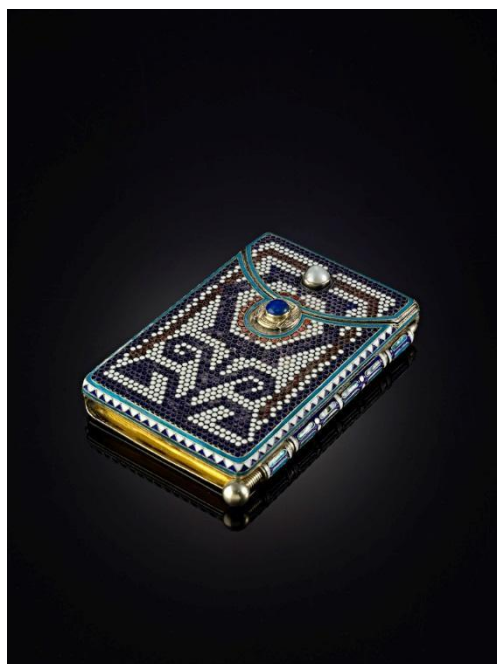


Figure 4. Carnet de bal, Maker: Antip Kuzmichev, (Retailed by Tiffany & Co.), Moscow, 1894, Materials: enamel, silver, lapis, lazuli, pearl and gold, Measurements: Length 10cm x Width 6.8cm x Height 1.6cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 5. A view of the interior of the Carnet de bal.

By exhibiting at various local and international exhibitions, and securing a long-term trade partnership with Tiffany & Co., Kuzmichev's firm was immensely successful in securing the overseas market in comparison with his contemporaries. To date, written records of Antip Ivanovich Kuzmichev remain relatively scarce¹². Nonetheless, Kuzmichev's works are still vastly sought-after by many antique silver collectors around the globe.

¹² Antiques and the Arts Weekly (2022)

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