

Ivan Khlebnikov

Ivan Petrovich Khlebnikov (1819-1881) was born in the Luzhniki region in Moscow, Russia to a burgher family. Information regarding Khlebnikov's life before his firm Partnership Ivan Khlebnikov, Sons and Co. was established is ambiguous. As the son of a jewellery and diamond merchant, he first opened a shop in St. Petersburg in 1867 before moving the business to Moscow in 1870¹. He once wrote, "Being engaged in the silver and gold articles trading for about 40 years, I opened a manufactory of my own..."²

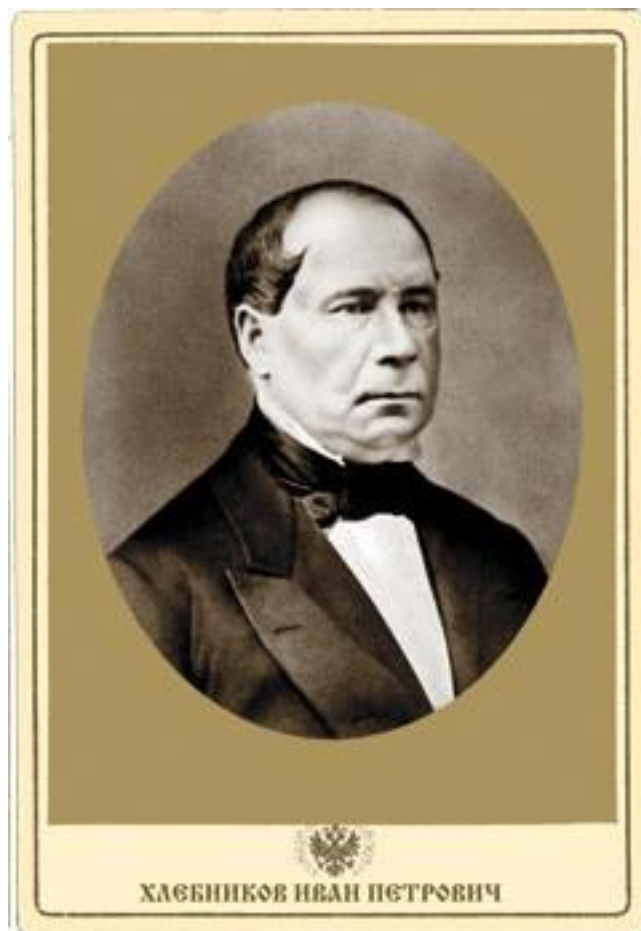


Figure 1. Ivan Petrovich Khlebnikov.

¹ Sotheby's (2022)

² Museum COLLECTION (2022)

In 1871, Khlebnikov's main factory employed over a hundred individuals with a production turnover of 56 thousand rubles³. It was equipped with the latest technology, and specialised in all types of works in all major art styles at the time, such as the Russian style, modern style, neo-baroque, neo-rococo, and neo-classical styles. In addition to the main factory, specialised workshops for painting, sculpting, stone cutting and metal processing employed over 200 individuals and an annual turnover reaching 300 thousand rubles⁴.

Khlebnikov also began to participate in various exhibitions, such as the Moscow Polytechnic exhibition in 1872 along with P.A. Ovchinnikov (1830-1888), where his works were awarded with two gold medals; and the World Exhibition in Vienna in 1873, the first time Khlebnikov became known outside of Russia and won two medals⁵.

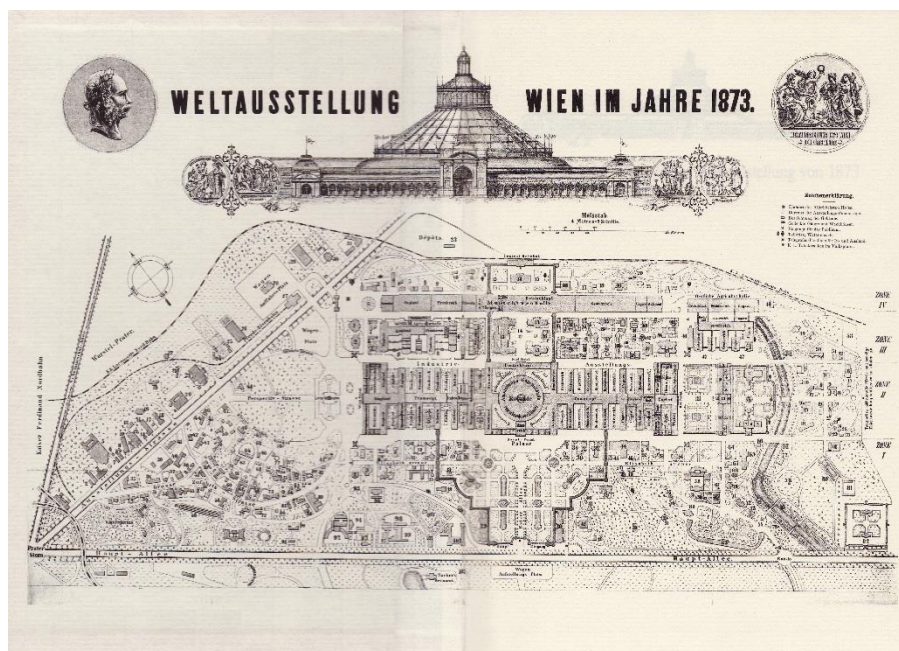


Figure 2. Plan of the 1873 World Exhibition in Vienna.

³ Museum COLLECTION (2022)

⁴ Museum COLLECTION (2022)

⁵ Sotheby's (2022)

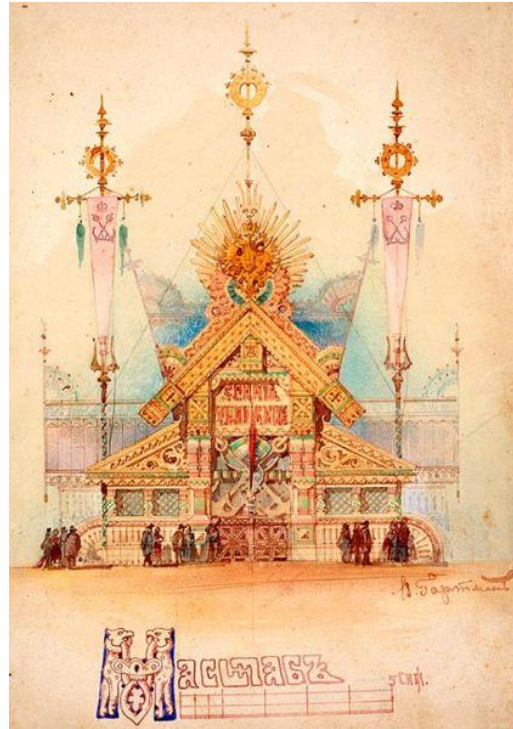


Figure 3. Design for the naval department of Russia's pavilion at the Vienna World Exhibition, 1873, by Viktor Hartmann (1834-1873).

Due to the high quality of the silver and gold products, Khlebnikov was titled the supplier of the court of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich in 1869, and received orders to decorate the wardrobe of Her Majesty Empress Maria Alexandrovna since 1873⁶. In 1875, Khlebnikov wrote, “the right to be titled the Supplier of the court... will serve me and my heirs, the successors of my business – the most invaluable encouragement to continue honest labour and precious estimation of my firm.”⁷ In 1879, he received the title ‘The Supplier of Russian Imperial Court’, and his firm was also awarded with the titles ‘The Supplier of the Danish, Dutch and Serbian Kings’ and ‘The Supplier of Montenegrin Prince Court’⁸.

At the age of 62, Ivan Khlebnikov passed away and was buried in the Spaso-Andronikov monastery in Moscow. His business was succeeded by his sons Michael, Alex, Nicholas and Vladimir.

⁶ Sotheby's (2022)

⁷ Museum COLLECTION (2022)

⁸ Sotheby's (2022)

In the collection

As aforementioned, Khlebnikov is known for their diverse range of products but are most well known for their decorative silver, and immaculate *plique-à-jour* and *cloisonné* enamel⁹ work which often reinterprets a traditional Russian style through a bright colour palette. This enamel and silver-gilt purse (fig. 3) is made by the Khlebnikov factory circa 1890. The rounded rectangular form of the purse is paired with a two-tone blue diaper work on a white background, and a border of dark blue scrollwork. The panels are made up of dark blue scrollwork, flowers and foliage in blue, red and green.



Figure 3. Purse, Maker: Khlebnikov, c. 1890, Materials: enamel and vermeil, Height 2.2 x Width 4.7 x Length 8.1 cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Another example of Khlebnikov's exemplary enamel work is this enamel silver-gilt plate (fig. 4) which combines *guilloché*, *champlevé* and *plique-à-jour* enamel techniques in a singular piece, and silver gilt and *cloisonné* enamel tazza (fig. 5). Not only does this require a mastery over technical skills, but also a long production time. The plate is composed of a circular form with *champlevé* enamel stylised foliage, a green *guilloché* enamel border, and a *plique-à-jour* enamel rim contained with a chased edge, and is marked Khlebnikov with an imperial warrant on the base. On the other hand, the tazza was a popular form of plate in Europe since the 16th century¹⁰. The tazza is composed of white, blue, red and green enamel to form flower and geometric motifs raised on four scroll feet.

⁹ *Plique-à-jour* and *cloisonné* enamel work are both vitreous enamelling (porcelain) techniques applied in cells, but *plique-à-jour* has no backing in the final product for light to shine through. *Plique-à-jour* is very technically challenging requiring a long time to create (up to 4 months per item) and a high rate of failure.

¹⁰ Michael Kamidian (2021), p. 93



Figure 4. An enamel silver-gilt plate, Maker: Khlebnikov, Russia, 1908-1917, Materials: *guilloché*, *champlevé*, *plique-à-jour* enamel and silver-gilt, Diameter 19.1 x Height 1.3 cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 5. Tazza, Maker: Khlebnikov, c. 1880, Materials: *cloisonné* enamel and silver, Height: 12.5 x Diameter 19cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Similarly, this rectangular box with rounded corners (fig. 6) is composed of *cloisonné* enamel and parcel-gilt silver. The enamel is used to create foliage and flower patterns on the silver-gilt surface. Both pieces are very colourful and bright, a characteristic of Russian folk designs which was popularised in a revival during the late 19th century by the nobility¹¹. Elements of folk style and interest in the life of the common folk became popular in the search of national identity, and was reflected in all aspects of the visual and decorative arts (fig. 7 and fig. 8).



Figure 6. A rectangular box with rounded corners, Maker: Khlebnikov, Russia, 1883, Materials: parcel-gilt silver and cloisonné enamel, Height 2.3 x Width 8.7 x Length 3.5 cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

¹¹ Alexandra Guzeva (2020)

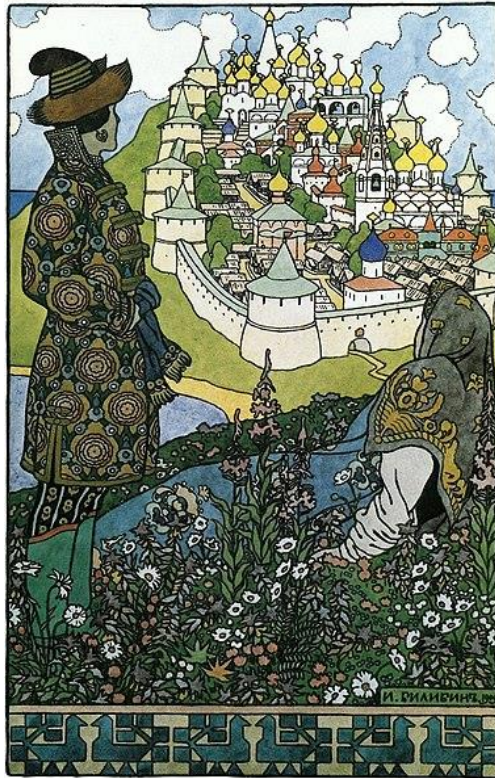


Figure 7. Island of Buyan, *Illustration for Alexander Pushkin's 'Fairytale of the Tsar Saltan'*, Maker: Ivan Bilibin, 1905.



Figure 8. Ensemble, Russia, 19th century, Materials: silk, metal, linen and cotton, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection.

In addition to enamel work, Khlebnikov is also known for their silverware; two of their most important projects being the renovation of the Palace silver dinner sets alongside Nichols & Plinke, P.A. Ovchinnikov and I.E. Morozov (1825-1885); and the decoration of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, producing over 50 religious objects such as lamps, incense burners and chalices.

This silver and enamel tureen (fig. 9) is of a bulbous form on a circular foot. The bowl has a monogram of the initials 'W.S.' in blue and white enamel, and the lid of the tureen is decorated with a loop finial branch with a cluster of grapes emerging. Traditionally, the tureen is used to serve soup and silver tureens gradually became a symbol of wealth. Though the origin of the tureen is contested, the anecdotal legend prescribes the origin of the tureen to Viscomte de Turenne, a French military leader in the 17th century, who ate his broth from an upturned helmet¹².



Figure 9. A Russian silver tureen and cover, Maker: Khlebnikov, 1885, Materials: silver and enamel, Height 30 x Diameter 35cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Last but not least, this parcel-gilt silver covered beaker (fig. 10) is decorated with a *repoussé* and chased galloping horse in high relief within a strapwork cartouche on a matted ground. The lid of the cup is a partly-domed and detachable with a baluster finial. This piece is stylistically unique compared to other pieces in the collection.

¹² AC Silver (2022)



Figure 10. A Russian parcel-gilt silver covered beaker, Maker: Khlebnikov, Russia, 1893, Materials: parcel-gilt silver, Diameter 13 x Height 25 cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

After Ivan Khlebnikov's sons inherited the business, the fame and influence of the firm did not diminish, rather it continued to grow and expand, raking in annual turnover of 172,372 rubles by 1897. By 1882, the firm employed over 200 workers, and even opened an in-house school of design and sculpture for 35 students. By the will of the Khlebnikov sons, the firm and factory closed on 24th June 1917 in light of the Russian Revolution, and was donated to the Moscow county local government¹³.

¹³ Sotheby's (2022)

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