

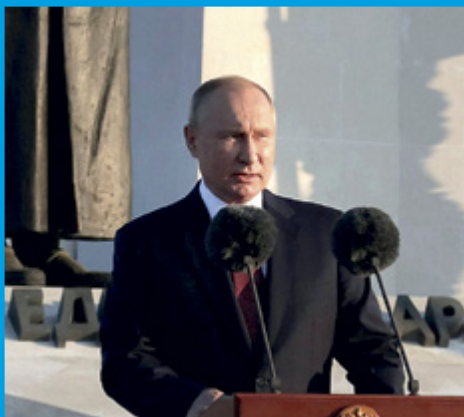
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60TH ANNIVERSARY
OF YURI GAGARIN'S
FLIGHT

REFLECTING ON 2021



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PETER THE GREAT
BECAME EMPEROR



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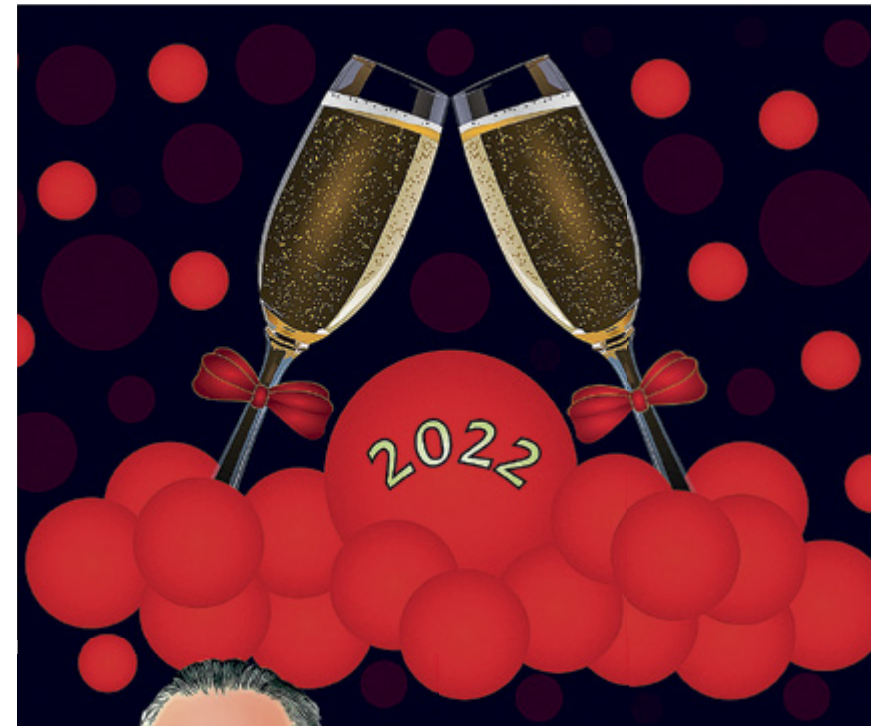
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EDITOR'S LETTER NEW HAPPINESS



When we congratulate each other “Happy New Year!”, the addition “Happy New Happiness!” appears from nowhere. And many of us do not even guess to what extent this expression has a typical Soviet origin.

It became widely known, when New Year was popularised as a holiday and Christmas faded into the background. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the New Year was celebrated rarely, but Christmas and Easter were instead. However, in Soviet times, holidays of a religious nature were tacitly banned. And as a usual stereotyped attachment to any congratulation on any occasion, people sent wishes of happiness, health, good luck, etc.

Thus, the phrase “Happy New Year, Happy New Happiness!” likely successfully combined both congratulations and wishes. It was so fortunate, that there was no longer any sense to add or resume something, because the phrase had a bold, content character.

At the same time, the expression “Happy New Happiness!” means nothing. The concept of “new happiness” implies the presence of some kind of “old happiness”. Happiness which needs to be updated...

For all of us, COVID-led year of 2021 was a year of social restrictions, prohibitions, limits, concerns, fears. The year of 2022 seems to become COVID themed again, and maybe even harder. I personally do not expect any happiness in this trend. Although, as the song says, “people meet, people fall in love, and get married”. Life goes on no matter what, and hope, as always, is the last to die.

Happy New Year, dear readers!
Victor Loupan

Russian Mind
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JANUARY 2022

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design@russianmind.com

TRANSLATOR:
Liliya Sergeeva

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DISTRIBUTION:
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HIGHLIGHTS

YEAR 2021 IN REVIEW

Writing about the results of the year is not always an easy task, and not only because the outcomes are different in topics and content, but also because the very concept of “outcome” is quite stretchy

VICTOR LOUPAN,
Head of the Editorial Board

The result implies a finished paradigm, which can be speculated about as something complete, however, we know very well that in reality everything is far from the case. Let's try to divide the story into several topics.

300th anniversary of the proclamation of the Russian Empire and 30th anniversary of the collapse of the USSR

In Russia, the title of emperor has been used in diplomatic documents since 1713, but the official imperial period of Russian history began on October 22 (November 2, new style), 1721. On this day, in the Holy Trinity Cathedral of Saint Petersburg, the Senate awarded Tsar Peter I the title of “Father of the Fatherland, Peter the Great, Emperor of All Russia”, and the Moscow kingdom began to be called an empire.

The imperial title of the Russian tsars signified the increased importance of Russia, which, as a result of the Nystad peace treaty with Sweden, established itself on the shores of the Baltic Sea.

In fact, Russia has never been either a nation state, or a nation itself in the sense of an ethnic community with a single language and identity. It has always been a multinational country with a clear tendency towards expansion, as a result of which, by the beginning of the World War I, the Russian Empire became a state of simply

unheard-of geographical proportions.

The Russian Empire ceased to exist be-

cause of the February Revolution of 1917, which led to the overthrow of the last All-Russian Emperor Nicholas II. The Bolsheviks who came to power in October 1917 quickly restored the



The Great Coat of Arms of the Russian Federation



empire almost within its pre-war borders, calling it the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Soviet empire, in turn, lasted until December 25, 1991, and collapsed without any external influence. The Russian Federation that appeared to succeed it, although being smaller in size, retains its imperial nature, multi-ethnicity and the unacceptability of nationalism.

Politics

For many years now, a seemingly strange confrontation has been growing between Russia and the Western world. Russia condemns Western military structures for aggressively approaching its borders. But the West argues that Russia should be contained, because it threatens the sovereignty and independence of the former Soviet republics and thereby threatens peaceful coexistence on the Europe-

an continent. The 2014 coup in Kiev, the referendum in Crimea and its joining Russia, the proclamation of the people's republics of Donbass – all this triggered a new round of confrontation which reached its peak in 2021. Although there was no ideological conflict between the West and Russia. Actually, there has never been, and still is not.

On December 17, an important political event took place, clearly finalising a certain stage of relationship. The Russian Foreign Ministry unexpectedly published the documents developed by the Russian Federation to summarise the summit between Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden. Based on them, Russia proposes to the United States to stop NATO expansion and its military activity in the post-Soviet republics, abandon the idea of Ukraine joining the alliance, and mutually renounce the deployment of short- and medium-range missiles in Europe. And which is most important, not to deploy weapons outside the military bloc borders as they were in 1997. Plus, Russia offers NATO to cancel the legal definition of each other as enemies.

So, the documents exclude the further expansion of the alliance to the east and the acceptance of Ukraine into it, the deployment of additional troops and weapons outside of the member countries borders as they

were in May 1997, and also provide for the abandonment of any NATO military activities in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia.

What is for the United States specifically, both countries are encouraged to avoid deployment of nuclear weapons abroad and eliminate the infrastructure that allows them to do so. Russia also offers the United States to step back from

the engagement of third countries in attacking each other.

The message of the Foreign Ministry reads, in particular, the following: “We hope that, the United States will enter into serious talks with Russia in the near future regarding this matter, which has critical importance for maintaining peace and stability, using the Russian draft treaty and agreement as a starting point.”

Russia's offensive voice surprised many experts. For, until now, it most often reacted to events, but did not precede them. But here, the pursued goal is to fix tough positions indicating that Russia is no longer ready to make compromises. Indeed, its demands clearly limit bargaining power. However, it is not clear what will happen if the US rejects the Russian initiative. Many experts, both Russian and Western, actually believe that a number of points put forward by Russia are obviously unacceptable for the West.

Experts think that Washington is unlikely to discuss the items on the non-deployment of nuclear weapons and the refusal to train its allies to use them. Although in Europe itself there is a movement opposing the deployment of American nuclear weapons. And it may well perceive this as an opportunity to improve the security level.

Russia's initiative is so unusual, that it is extremely difficult to understand

where it is ready to concede, and where the Americans can concede. After all, there are no contracts without concessions.

One of the explanations for such an unexpected and offensive initiative by Russia is its amazing military technological breakthrough.

Si vis pacem, para bellum

“If you want peace, prepare for war,” a wise Latin expression says. In this regard, the successful completion of the tests of the Zircon airborne hypersonic cruise missile is one of the notable results of the year, which once again confirms the news about Russia’s technological superiority over the United States. Because this flock missile (they are launched in flocks, several at a time) flies at such a speed that the American anti-missile systems do not have time to either detect it, or react to the attack. The speed of 10,200 kilometers per hour (or 2.65 kilometers per second) is so great, the controllability and mobility of the new Russian missiles are so unusual, that American military and civilian targets on land and water are essentially defenseless. This is not a fantasy born among Russian military enthusiasts. Hearings on this matter held in the US Congress confirm the fact that the US was left, in fact, without protection. American experts believe that they will not be able to shoot down such a missile in the next 15–20 years. Therefore, they are agitating for the return to the development of laser weapons, hoping that the speed of light much exceeds the speed of hypersound. However, they also emphasise the fact that Russian hypersonic missiles are highly mobile, which makes the use of laser weapons extremely difficult.

This is what the American edition of *Military Watch Magazine* specialising in military affairs, writes: “Russian Yasen Class submarines can be armed with several dozen Zircon hy-



Russian Yasen Class submarines can be armed with several dozen Zircon hypersonic missiles

personic missiles developing speeds of up to 10,000 km/h, which lies between Mach 8 and Mach 9. These submarines are capable of delivering strikes from a depth of 40 m, and the rocket goes into the upper layer of the stratosphere to an altitude of 40 km, where the air density is ten times less, which makes it possible to develop tremendous speed. Such missiles are highly likely to penetrate all available missile defence systems in the US. If we take into account the ability of the Zircon to disable any large ship with one hit, it turns out that the firepower of each such submarine will be enough to disable an aircraft carrier strike group, of which there are 11 in the US Navy.”

And another American magazine *The National Interest* even declared Zircon. For until now, the unsurpassed power of the US Navy has been the main instrument of the US global political and military domination.

It is probably this unexpected new balance of power that led Russia in 2021 to change its geopolitical and military-diplomatic behaviour. Moreover, the documents contain a warning that, in case of failure to reach an agreement or refusal to negotiate on the part of the United States, Russia will take care of its own security, using its own military and technical capabilities.

But, apparently, things will not go to extremes, because Jake Sullivan,

who serves as the United States National Security Advisor to President Joe Biden, said, speaking before the Council of Foreign Relations, that the United States was ready for a dialogue with Russia. According to him, Moscow has listed its concerns, and Washington will invite it to discuss its own.

Arts and culture

Against the background of unprecedented hostility and political confrontation between the EU countries and Russia, Paris unexpectedly became the European capital of the great Russian art.

The first bold expression of “Russian glory” was the opening of an exhibition of the Morozov brothers’ collection on September 22. The exhibition was so successful that the organisers extended it until February 22, 2022. It is expected that the exhibition will be attended by one and a half million French and foreigners. This is an absolute record for attendance at events of this kind.

The exhibition takes place in the modern showroom of the Foundation Louis Vuitton. It features 200 masterpieces from the joint collections of Mikhail and Ivan Morozov.

Works nationalised by the Bolsheviks are presented in Paris. Until now, they have never been exhibited outside of Russia. The exhibition is the fruit of cooperation between the French transnational group *LVMH*, the

world leader in the luxury market, with Russian museums, as well as the personal acquaintance of Bernard Arnault, the owner of the enterprise, and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The exhibition was opened by French President Emmanuel Macron, which is extremely unusual!

“Morozov brothers Mikhail and Ivan, together with Sergei Shchukin, established a collection that was to be donated to the Tretyakov Gallery to create a museum of French contemporary art,” Anne Baldassari, curator of the exhibition, says. The peculiarity of the museum they had conceived was that it was intended for new art that was just being created. That is, it was not an ordinary retrospective,

but a retrospective with all sensitivity to the vibrant Parisian art scene, to the art movement, which thirsted for a revolution in everything. In 1947, these collections were distributed among various Soviet collections. They were saved, however they were kept in boxes at the Hermitage and the Pushkin Museum. And only after the death of Stalin, with the “thaw”, with the first Picasso exhibition in 1956 in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the ban began to relax gradually to release the opportunity to see the works of the Impressionists. We had to wait for a long time to see the French avant-garde, especially Matisse.”

It is also significant that the exhibition presents not only French, but also Russian masters of painting. Together with Manet, Rodin, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, the works of Vroubel, Korovin, Serov, Goncharova, Malevich, Konchalovsky were brought to Paris. A total of 47 artists are represented, 17 of which are Russian.

Works for the exhibition were provided by the largest Russian, and not only Russian, museums: the Pushkin Museum, Hermitage, Tretyakov Gallery, Russian Museum, Ukrainian Art Museum (Dnipro), National Art Museum of Belarus, Moscow Museum of Avant-Garde Art (MAGMA) and some private collectors. It should be noted here that the *LVMH* group sponsored the restoration of many of the exhibited masterpieces.

By a strange coincidence, another, more “classical” exhibition – a retrospective of Ilya Repin held simultaneously with the exhibition of the Morozov collection in Paris – is enjoying great success. The genius of Russian painting appeared in all his greatness and all his glory. By the way, he is very correctly represented by the wonderful Parisian Museum Petit Palais as “the singer of the Russian soul”, because the “Russian soul” concept is well known to the French.

The exposition features about 100



Valentin Serov. Portrait of Ivan Abramovich Morozov. 1910

works from the Tretyakov Gallery, the Russian Museum, other museums and private collections.

Repin had lived for some time in France, including in Paris. The exhibition lays special emphasis on the Parisian period of Repin's life. But the main thing is that the exhibition includes almost all the famous paintings of the artist, in particular "Barge Haulers on the Volga", "Religious Procession in Kursk Governorate", two versions of the canvas "They Did Not Expect Him", and "The Duel".

Russia itself appears on the artist's canvases. It is peasant, aristocratic, popular, tsarist, revolutionary, and artistic. His portraits are especially impressive. "Leo Tolstoy Barefoot" is

brilliant. The painting "Negro Woman" is unusually beautiful.

For the exhibition, the Tretyakov Gallery provided the Paris museum with 57 paintings by the artist, including masterpieces from its permanent exhibition.

Exhibitions "Ilya Repin" at the Petit Palais and "The Morozov Collection. Icons of Modern Art" at the Fondation Louis Vuitton mark the "Russian autumn" in the French capital.

Shame of the year

Our great writer and playwright Anton Pavlovich Chekhov said that a kind person is ashamed even in front of a dog.

I sit here and think: what can we call the shame of the year? Probably what is happening on the Polish-Belarusian border, where the Poles starve and freeze about three thousand people huddling in Belovezhskaya Pushcha, who are not even going to stay in Poland. They were already beaten with truncheons and gassed, and they were watered with cannons at sub-zero temperatures, and even women and children were thrown onto the barbed wire covered with razors. This carnage has been going on for several months and only now, before the end of the year, petitions of the human rights organizations began to appear in the Western press. They finally felt ashamed of

such a clear demonstration of "European values".

Elon Musk — Person of the Year

I like extravagant Elon Musk. That is why I was delighted when the prestigious British newspaper *Financial Times* chose him as the person of the year, because he has triggered "a historic shift in the world's auto industry towards electric vehicles". "For a long time, the rest of the auto industry was basically calling Tesla and me fools and frauds", Musk said in an interview with the publication.

Two days earlier, on December 13, Musk received similar acclaim from *Time* magazine. A photograph of the engineer was placed on the cover of the December issue, in which the publication traditionally announces the person of the year.



Before the end of the year, as you might expect, a new strain had emerged in South Africa. And they again began to frighten us at first, and then drive us into a queue, at the end of which a man with a syringe is waiting for you. Without a third injection, in Paris, you will no longer go to a cafe or restaurant, museum, theatre or cinema.

Here are the results of the year we got...

Happy New Year, dear readers!

Closings and openings

The famous Eliseevsky grocery store has closed in Moscow. It was closed, because the "owner" failed to prove the ownership of the purchased premises. However, the Moscow government intends to preserve the "unique object under the jurisdiction of the city" regardless of who will be its owner or user in the future. A "protection agreement with obligations to preserve an architectural monument, an object of cultural heritage of federal significance" will be concluded with future tenants.

And the Parisian-adored department store La Samaritaine has reopened in Paris. They have been waiting for its opening for over 15 years. This is not just a shop, but also an ar-



chitectural monument of the first half of the 20th century.

COVID-19

One cannot list the results of the past year without remembering the damned infection that continues to spoil not only our mood, but our life in general too.



CULTURE

FABERGÉ IN LONDON: ROMANCE TO REVOLUTION

By ANNA GAVRILOVA



Fabergé's premises at 173 New Bond Street in 1911. Photo: The Fersman Mineralogical Museum, Moscow and Wartski, London

Fabergé in London: Romance to Revolution is the first major exhibition devoted to the international prominence of the legendary Russian goldsmith, Carl Fabergé, and the importance of his little-known London branch. The exhibition runs at London's renowned Victoria and Albert Museum until May 8, 2022.

With a focus on Fabergé's Edwardian high society clientele, the exhibition shines a light on his triumphs in Britain as well as a global fascination with the joyful opulence of his creations. The largest collection of the legendary Imperial Easter Eggs in a generation are on display together as part of the exhibition's dramatic finale, several of which are being shown in the UK for the first time.

Showcasing over 200 objects across three main sections, the exhibition tells the story of Carl Fabergé, the man, and his internationally recognised firm that symbolised Russian craftsmanship and elegance – an association further strengthened by its connection to the romance, glamour and tragedy of the Russian Imperial family.

The exhibition explores the Anglo-Russian nature of his enterprise with his only branch outside of Russia opening in London in 1903. Royalty, aristocrats, American heiresses, exiled Russian Grand Dukes, Maharajas, financiers with newly-made fortunes, and socialites flocked there to buy gifts of unparalleled luxury for each other. Fabergé works were as popular in Britain as they were in Russia.

The first section of the exhibition highlights the important patronage of the Romanov family. A miniature of the Imperial Regalia, lent by the Hermitage Museum, made for the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle will capture Carl Fabergé's role as official goldsmith to the Imperial family. Its members often gave each other intimate Fabergé gifts, and this will be explored through bespoke, ornate objects including flowers made from rock crystal,



The Alexander Palace Egg, Fabergé. Chief Workmaster Henrik Wigstrom, 1908. Photo: The Moscow Kremlin Museums

gold and rose-cut diamonds and exquisite family portrait miniatures.

This section also touches upon Carl Fabergé's youth, his travels throughout Europe, and entry into the family firm. Commissioned by Emperor Nicholas II, a figurine portrait taken from life of the private bodyguard of the Dowager Empress is on display – a sculpture on a level of rarity with the Imperial Easter eggs. A prayer book gifted by Emperor Nicholas II to Empress Alexandra Feodorovna on his Coronation Day

also sits alongside early photography of the Imperial family with their prized possessions.

Next, this section explores the mastery of techniques and intricate detailing that became synonymous with Carl Fabergé and his firm. Creating a culture of creativity throughout his workshops, Carl Fabergé's restless imagination inspired daring material choices and designs, while the integration of designers, craftsmen, and retailers under one roof galvanised creative collaboration. The dazzling

Copy of the Imperial Regalia, Fabergé. Master Julius Rappoport, Master August Wilhelm Holmstrom, 1900. Photo: The State Hermitage Museum



beauty of Fabergé's work is shown by a sparkling aquamarine and diamond tiara – a token of love from Frederick Francis IV, Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin to his bride Princess Alexandra of Hanover and Cumberland on their wedding day.

The only known example of solid gold tea service crafted by Fabergé is also on display, one of the most magnificent items to emerge from the firm's Moscow branch.

The nurturing spirit of Fabergé is shown in the work of one of his best-



Aquamarine and diamond tiara by Fabergé, aquamarine, diamond, silver, gold. Workmaster Albert Holmstrom, St. Petersburg, circa 1904. Photo: HMNS, Mike Rathke

known female designers, Alma Pihl. Some of her most innovative and enduring works are on show including a scintillating ‘ice crystal’ pendant made from rock crystal, diamonds and platinum.

The second section of the exhibition tells the story of Fabergé’s time in London, including how the firm flourished under royal patronage, and how its creations became a social currency for gift giving and ostentatious displays of wealth, amongst the cosmopolitan elite who gathered in the city.

Huge success at the 1900 Paris Exposition made it clear that Fabergé would have a keen customer base outside Russia, should he expand. Fabergé’s choice of London for its new premises was partly because it was the financial capital of the world, a luxury retail destination able to draw a wealthy and international clientele. It was also the home of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra who were already avid Fabergé collectors,

making royal patronage in London highly likely. A transitional section in the exhibition transports visitors from Russia to a bustling London and highlight the strong links between the British and Russian Royal Families.

Royal photography in Fabergé frames, and gifts presented by Emperor Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna to their British relatives are shown, including a notebook given by Tsar and Tsarina to Queen Victoria for Christmas in 1896.

Fabergé carefully tailored his works to his British clientele. He created hardstone portraits of the farm animals King Edward and Queen Alexandra bred at Sandringham, their favourite country estate, and objects enamelled in The King’s horse racing colours. Highlight objects include a commission from The King of his faithful wire-haired fox terrier Caesar, a silver model portrait of Persimmon, his most loved and successful racehorse, and one of the firm’s rarest

creations – a figurine of a veteran English soldier.

Fabergé became the most exclusive and fashionable place to buy gifts. The King’s mistress, Mrs George Keppel, gifted The King an elegant art-nouveau cigarette case with a snake laid in diamonds biting its tail – a symbol of unbroken and everlasting love. Snuffboxes decorated with topographical views, buildings and monuments were also popular. A nephrite cigar box, set with a sepia enamelled view of the Houses of Parliament, was bought by Grand Duke Michael of Russia on 5 November 1908, the day of Guy Fawkes, and given to King Edward VII.

Other highlights include a sumptuous rock crystal vase that was presented to King George V and Queen Mary on the day of their coronation. The end of the exhibition’s second part moves towards the fateful impact of the Great War and Russian Revolution on Fabergé. With Russia’s entry into the war in 1914, Fabergé’s production suddenly shifted. The workshops focused their output on the war effort and went from creating exquisite objects to producing munitions. Their meticulous craftsmanship switched from jewels and precious metals to copper, brass and steel. In 1917, as the Revolution hit Fabergé’s workshops in Russia, its outpost in London ceased to operate.

The final section of the exhibition will celebrate the legacy of Fabergé through the iconic Imperial Easter Eggs with a kaleidoscopic display of 15 of these famous treasures. This is the largest collection on public display for over 25 years.



Romanov Tercentenary Egg, Fabergé. Chief Workmaster Henrik Wigstrom, 1913. Photo: The Moscow Kremlin Museums

The collection on display includes several that have never before been shown in the UK including the largest Imperial Egg – the Moscow Kremlin Egg – inspired by the architecture of the Dormition Cathedral, on

ing a surprise of an enamelled gold peacock automaton and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna’s Basket of Flowers Egg, lent by Her Majesty The Queen from the Royal Collection will also be on display.



Basket of flowers egg, by Fabergé. Silver, parcel-gilt, gold, guilloché enamel, diamonds, 1901. Photo: Royal Collection Trust

loan from the Moscow Kremlin Museums. The Alexander Palace Egg, featuring watercolour portraits of the children of Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra – and containing a surprise model of the palace inside – also takes centre stage alongside the Tercentenary Egg, created to celebrate 300 years of the Romanov dynasty, only a few years before the dynasty crumbled. Other eggs that feature include the recently rediscovered Third Imperial Egg of 1887, found by a scrap dealer in 2011 – one of the ‘missing’ eggs created by Fabergé that was lost for many years. The Peacock Egg of 1907–8, shown on public display for the first time in over a decade, contain-

While the Russian Revolution and the war irrevocably changed the social order in Russia and Europe, the taste for Fabergé survived, especially in London, where the firm’s works continued to be prized. From the 1920s, dealers and auction houses in London acquired confiscated Fabergé objects sold by Soviet Russia. In the 1930s, the art dealers Wartski purchased several Imperial Eggs, which it sold to Fabergé’s London clients and to new gen-

erations of collectors in Europe and the United States. Lately, motivated by patriotic repatriation, Russians have become significant collectors of Fabergé’s work.

Although Carl Fabergé’s firm ceased to exist, the myth crystallised around the Imperial Easter Eggs and the demand for Fabergé pieces has endured with his designs continuing to inspire, captivate and delight.

Kieran McCarthy and Hanne Faurby, Curators of Fabergé in London: Romance to Revolution, said: “The story of Carl Fabergé, the legendary Russian Imperial goldsmith, is one of supreme luxury and unsurpassed craftsmanship. Celebrating Fabergé’s extraordinary achievements, this exhibition focuses on the over-looked importance of his London branch, the only one outside of Russia. It attracted a global clientele of Royalty, aristocrats, business titans and socialites.

Through Fabergé’s creations the exhibition explores timeless stories of love, friendship and unashamed social climbing. It takes the visitor on a journey of sublime artistry and patronage towards the revolution that tragically closed Fabergé – but sends visitors away on a high, by honouring Fabergé’s greatest legacy, with a dazzling final display of his iconic Easter Eggs.”

CULTURE

LUNCHEON ON THE GRASS

190th anniversary of the birth of Edouard Manet

OKSANA KOPENKINA,
art analyst, founder of the Arts Diary & Pad website

In 1863, Edouard Manet suffered a double defeat. At first, his work “Luncheon on the Grass” was not accepted into the Paris Salon. This was the main exhibition where you could show the public your work.

But that year many were refused. Therefore, Emperor Napoleon III ordered an exhibition for such works. But even there, among the “Les Misérables”, the painting “Luncheon on the Grass” was perceived as the main misunderstanding of the exhibition. It is difficult for the modern viewer to understand what so annoyed everyone in this work back in 1863. Let’s figure it out.

In the foreground, a naked woman sits, having thrown off her bathing dress. Two dressed men are sitting next to her and talking about something. In the background, another woman is washing herself in her undershirt. It seems that Manet did not come up with anything special. However, he violated a very important rule of academic painting. Only deities or ancient heroes could be naked on the canvases. And here the artist depicted his contemporaries, the Parisians. The nude red-haired woman is Victorine Meurent, model and muse of artists. She also later became an artist. Men are the brother of Edouard Manet and the brother of his wife. The bather is the wife of Emile Zola (presumably), a writer and friend of the artist.

For the public, this was outrageous, because the characters played... inhabitants of Paris, who sometimes had fun like this with young women of easy virtue. Manet seemed to put

on display the dirty linen of society! Of course, everyone was embarrassed. And as a result – a surge of aggressive attacks on the artist.

This is how Emile Zola describes the reaction of the public: “It seems to me that in the middle of the street I met a gang of boys throwing stones at Edouard Manet’s back ...”

By the way, it was in the “Rural Concert” that Manet got the idea to depict dressed men next to naked women. True, Giorgione painted



Edouard Manet

muses. Whereas Manet’s women are real.

Classicists painted nudity for the delight of the eyes. Therefore, the heroine without clothes very rarely looked at the viewer. After all, she is

depicted in order to be examined. There is no need to confuse a viewer!

But sometimes nude women looked into the eyes of a viewer from the canvases. But these were almost always languid and seductive looks. While the heroine Manet looks at us in a completely different way! She is confident and calm. She doesn’t try to seduce. Moreover, she does not look like a woman offended by fate. With the same look, it is quite possible to imagine her in a beautiful dress at a social event. This behavior irritated the public.

Edouard Manet constructed the composition of the painting in a very non-trivial way. There were also many questions about how the artist arranged the characters on the canvas.

To begin with, Manet originally called his painting “The Bather”. That is, the woman in the background is kind of like the main character! This is already strange, since there is a group of people in the foreground. And according to the rules of academic painting, the main character is the closest to a viewer. At a minimum, it is highlighted in colour or size so that all other shapes are perceived as secondary.

The audience still did not understand such an arrangement of the main character of Manet. Therefore, the artist later renamed the painting into “Luncheon on the Grass”.

Also notice how strangely the figure of the bather is positioned. She lowered her hand into the water, but a strange illusion is created. As if she was about to grab the finger of the man in the foreground.

In general, when building a composition, artists always try to avoid such awkward illusions. And a classicist would have moved the bather to the side to avoid this oddity. But Manet did just that on purpose. What for? Because he was for vitality. After all, such oddities arise all the time in reality! Why do everything perfectly?

It immediately strikes us that the bather in the background is too big. It is even larger than the boat, which is not far from it! A classicist would have made the figure smaller, in accordance with the law of linear perspective.

Manet, on the other hand, deliberately went to increase the figure. Remember, he even called the painting “Bather”, emphasizing the important role of women. And it would be strange to portray her small sized in the background.

In addition, Manet was influenced by the work of Japanese masters. In these works, the masters built the space in a slightly different way. Different scenes were placed next to each other, like in a collage. That is, there is no concept of foreground and background at all. And the figures are about the same size.

Manet also violated another rule of perspective. To emphasize the depth of space, a classicist used warm shades of paint for the foreground. And for the back – cool. But Manet does everything almost the other way around! In the foreground is a large, cold spot of a blue dress. But on the far side, the warm ochre shades of the boat and vegetation are burning.

The heroine Manet is the owner of a very white skin of a cool shade. Which, in principle, corresponded to reality. Meurent was red-haired,



Edouard Manet. *Luncheon on the Grass*. 1863. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

with the typical white and thin skin of such people. Most of the body is painted in almost the same colour. At the same time, the heroine is realistic! There is no feeling that the woman is cut out of paper and pasted onto the background. So what’s the secret? Manet was very eager for realism. And he showed how direct light behaves in reality when it illuminates a person. In this case, chiaroscuro is almost not formed on the body.

Critics were also outraged that Manet had left all brush strokes visible. Moreover, they are wide, sweeping. This is especially true for the background. This did not at all correspond to people’s ideas about how the painting should look. Manet ignored many details. Trees, grass, water do rather form a single space when one flows into another. But the artist still draws some details. For example, a flying bullfinch at the top of the canvas.

Manet tried to convey the peculiarities of our vision. Something is in focus, and some is not. We cannot see

everything clearly at the same time. And in this, too, in fact, there is much more realism than in the works of refined and accurate classicists.

So, we looked at the confrontation between two opponents.

On the one hand, there is academic painting. This is the so-called classical (at that time) art, which is created using certain techniques. They were approved and taught at art academies.

On the other side of the barricades – Edouard Manet, who himself studied at the academy and generally wanted recognition in society. But he chose his own path and went to revise many techniques. The result is “Luncheon on the Grass”.

Edouard Manet is considered to be the one with whom modern art began. “Luncheon on the Grass” is a dividing line between old and new art. This is the moment when the artist renounced almost all the rules of academic painting. And he said “YES” to the opportunity to experiment and go his own way.

THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

The Nativity of Christ has tremendous theological and religious significance that cannot be exhausted

AUGUSTIN SOKOLOVSKI,
Doctor of Theology, Priest

There are so many meanings hidden in the great and saving Nativity of Christ that on the day of the feast it is important to be able to focus on the important things. The main proclamation, a kind of motto of the Orthodox Christmas celebrations, can truly be found in the biblical proclamation: “God is with us!” “The Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel,” says Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14). This very name “Emmanuel” translated into our language means “God is with us”.

The Nativity of Christ has tremendous theological and religious significance that cannot be exhausted. However, the meaning of the event and the celebration can also be translated into secular language. In this way, what humanity has dreamed, dreamed of and will long for is fulfilled, has come true in Christmas. To transcend oneself, to escape from limitation, to go to heaven, to learn to fly. It is done, it is accomplished. At the same time, it has been accomplished in a way that no dream could ever have been, in the dreams of no one alive today. God is with us, God became human. Not as a fantasy, nor as an idea or a notion. God became the answer to humanity’s unanswered prayer. A prayer that, for centuries and millennia, continues and goes on in silence.

The tragedy of the original sin can be understood in different ways. As inescapable curse on human and planetary existence, which is tragically inexplicable but obvious to

everyone. The tragedy of the fall into sin as the absence of an answer – to God’s Covenant, call, commandment, gift. It demanded an answer to the divine call and commandment, but this answer could not come from men. Then God Himself became that answer. He made us happy, became for us a gift and a gift above which there can be no higher in our being, nor in the being of the world. “The Lord Jesus, Faithful and True Witness and Martyr, the Beginning of God’s creation”, as the Book of Revelation calls Him (Rev. 3:14).

Celebrating Jesus’ birthday, which is what the word *Christmas* literally means, as a remembrance and celebration at the same time, it is important to be able to see this celebration as a call, not just as a historical remembrance. For in this beautifully designed appeal to every citizen of our planet, the very essence of human existence revealed is really present. God became human, His flesh and His blood vivifies people with the Eucharist. The Bible tells us that believers live His life, the life of the Lord. The Lord who became man and lives in our midst. Jesus dwells in our midst because He gave Himself for us. He abides in Churches, Communities and Families. After all, the family is a small Church. God is with us!

More than two thousand years ago the Lord was born in Bethlehem. By greeting one another with the words “Christ is born”, the members of the Community find the opportunity to experience the one Christmas reality through the sacramental retrospec-

tion of sacramentality. For the event of the Lord’s birth is revealed in the Paschal Mystery of Christ crucified and risen. She, as both memory and presence, embraces all past and all present, every day and every moment, even the future. In this way, the celebration of the Nativity is able to bring us into the eternity of the divine existence (2 Pet. 1:4). In the words of the ancient Church: “God became human in order that human might become God. God became human in order that human might know the divine within himself”.

Like any true celebration, Christmas is not limited to a single day. Therefore, on 8 January, the second day of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, the Church continues to celebrate Christmas by celebrating the Feast of the Synaxis of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The word “Synaxis”, literally from the Greek original meaning “assem-

bly”, in this case means the common solemn worship and the celebration of the Eucharist in honour of the One whom Scripture calls Mary, the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14).

Like many of the liturgical traditions in our Orthodox Church, the celebration of the Synaxis of the Blessed Virgin Mary owes its origin to the ancient Church of Constantinople. At that time the religious

life of the Capital of the Empire was organized around two ecclesial centres: the Cathedral of Saint Sophia and the Church of the Theotokos in Blachernae. It was here, in the miraculous Church in honour of the Blessed Virgin, that the Patriarch served the liturgy on the second day of Christmas. If we draw an analogy with our Russian contemporaneity, then the Church of St. Sophia in its

ecclesiastical significance was similar to the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, while the Temple of the Mother of God in Blachernae – the place of numerous apparitions and miracles of the Mother of God – is the prototype of our Holy Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius.

This historical explanation of the origin of the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God does not contradict another theological one. According to ancient accounts, on this day the Church remembered the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt. Indeed, according to the Gospel of Matthew, immediately after the birth of the Divine Child, Joseph and Mary were forced to flee to Egypt from the wrath of Herod, about whom is said, having commanded to exterminate the infants in Bethlehem. When the Magi departed, behold, an Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: “Arise, take the Divine Child and His Mother and flee into Egypt and remain there until I tell you, for Herod wishes to seek the Child to destroy Him” (Matthew 2:13).

To understand the essence of the feast of the Synaxis of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is important to turn to the holy of holies of Orthodox worship – the text of the Eucharistic Prayer. Thus,



Albrecht Dürer. Adoration of the Magi. 1504

after the consecration of the Blessed Sacrament, when the bread and wine, by the power of the Holy Spirit become the Body and Blood of the Lord, the Church, through the mouth of the priest, in her prayer remembers all “who rested in faith, the forefathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, ascetics and every spirit that is just, who died in the faith”. Then, with the words “in remembrance of the Most Holy, Immaculate, Blessed, and Glorious Mother of God and the Ever-Virgin Mary”, the congregation remembers the Blessed Virgin. After the commemoration of the Baptist and the Saints of the Day, there follows the commemoration of the deceased by name.

The following is extremely important in this commemoration. Firstly, the original commemoration of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is framed by the theological titles of the Mother of God. Secondly, the name of Mary with the saints, in the text, is a kind of bridge or transition to the names of the deceased who have not reached, or have not yet reached, sainthood. Thirdly, the way in which the prayer speaks of the Virgin Mary, simply listing her, albeit with praiseworthy epithets, along with other names of the living and the deceased, indicates that the text of this prayer was originally composed by the Virgin's contemporaries. By those for whom she was the living Mother of the Messiah and Saviour of the World, Jesus Christ. Mary is one of us. The understanding of this is awe-inspiring.

On the third day of Christmas, the Church commemorates the Apostle, the First Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen. The ancient church calendars

contain two possible dates for the commemoration of Stephen in relation to Christmas. This is the day after the Nativity of Christ, as it is fixed in the Roman and Carthaginian Church Calendar, or the day after the feast of the Synaxis of Mary: in the Church of Constantinople the memory of Stephen was commemorated in this way. This difference is due to the fact that the first date refers to the day of discovering the relics of the First Martyr in Palestine and the second to the day of their translation to the city of Jerusalem in the year 415.

The direct coincidence of the day of the memory of the First Martyr Stephen, with the days of Christmas at the same time, is both accidental and symbolic. It is accidental because it is linked “only” with the discovery and transfer of Stephen's relics at the beginning of the fifth century. It is symbolic because it puts the memory of Stephen in the days of Christmas, when the Church also remembers all those who in this world were closest to the Lord in the flesh: King David, the Righteous Joseph, the Apostle James, whom the Tradition of the Church called the brother of the Lord.

However, both the words “accidental, by chance” and the word “symbolic” must be taken by us in the con-

text of its biblical original meaning. For God is Accidental par excellence. He is an Accident whose non-accidentality is perceived in the context of man's and the world's awareness of its own accidentality – our common accidentality in relation to the original, revealed in Revelation and Scripture, sovereign, infinite, non-accidental, distinctive personal Being called God. God as Accidental is one of the definitions of God important in the context of our postmodern modernity.

The personality and work of Stephen, the correlation of his celebration to the celebration of Christmas, were already extremely important to the Church Fathers of the fourth century, who devoted their thought-provoking meditations to this theme. Thus, both traditions of celebrating Stephen's memory – on the Second or Third Day of Christmas – are deeply symbolic and indicate, as St. Augustine says in his homily on Stephen, “the special will of God for his saint”.

On the twelfth day after Christmas, the Church celebrates Epiphany Day. This feast is also referred to as the Baptism of the Lord. The period from Christmas until Epiphany is called the “holy days” or in Russian “sviatki”. It is a continuation of the Nativity Feast. The texts of the divine service also speak of the event of the Baptism of the Lord.

Originally, Epiphany was the only pivotal, major Christian Feast after Easter. While the latter was a celebration in honour of the Lord Jesus, who rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father, Epiphany was a celebration in honour of the Incarnation of God and the Word. It combined

the whole range of meanings relating to the earthly life of the Lord. Gradually, with the beginning of the separate celebration of Christmas in the West and later in the East, Epiphany began to be “shared” with the meaning and significance of the other feasts. Nowadays, in the Christian West it means the Adoration of the Magi, while in Orthodoxy it means the Baptism of the Lord Jesus, His coming out to preach, the beginning of His earthly ministry. It is worth noting that the ancient Oriental Churches, Armenian, Coptic, and others, as in ancient times, don't celebrate Christmas separately, but only Epiphany.

When the Christian Church started to celebrate Christmas in different churches, the Feast of the Epiphany seems to have taken a back seat. This downplaying of Epiphany is only superficial.

Epiphany also means the Baptism of the Lord Jesus. And the return of God to the Garden of Adam – our world, our planet, and our creation. Epiphany is the renewal of nature and the expulsion of all that is evil and all that is demonic from it. Epiphany is a testimony that God in Christ Jesus lived among us here, knows us, our time, and our world. Epiphany means that the Lord Jesus has truly lived His human life. He knows this world and loves it. In genuine human terms, the Lord, who sits at the right hand of the Fa-



Baptism of Christ. 1497. Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God, Killo-Byelozhsk

ther, remembers this world of ours, we are dear to Him. He truly misses us, and He hurries back.

Finally, Epiphany is also a warning to kings and rulers. In the words of Revelation: “And the Gentiles were enraged; and Thy wrath came, and the time to judge the dead, and to give vengeance to Thy servants, to the prophets and to the saints and to

those who fear Thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev.11:18). “To destroy those who destroy the earth...” God has loved this world and will never leave it. “Outside the Church there is no salvation.” Paraphrasing this axiom of Christian antiquity, the Church believes that outside the world there is no salvation.



Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos

FIVE ANCIENT NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATIONS

By EVAN ANDREWS,
History Channel

Get the facts on the ways five ancient civilizations rang in the New Year.

Babylonian Akitu

Following the first new moon after the vernal equinox in late March, the Babylonians of ancient Mesopotamia would honor the rebirth of the natural world with a multi-day festival called Akitu. This early New Year's celebration dates back to around 2000 B.C., and is believed to have been deeply intertwined with religion and mythology. During the Akitu, statues of the gods were paraded through the city streets, and rites were enacted to symbolize their victory over the forces of chaos. Through these rituals the Babylonians believed the world was symbolically cleansed and recreated by the gods in preparation for the new year and the return of spring.

One fascinating aspect of the Akitu involved a kind of ritual humiliation endured by the Babylonian king. This peculiar tradition saw the king brought before a statue of the god Marduk, stripped of his royal regalia and forced to swear that he had led the city with honor. A high priest would then slap the monarch and drag him by his ears in the hope of making him cry. If royal tears were shed, it was seen as a sign that Marduk was satisfied and had symbolically extended the king's rule. Some historians have since argued that these political elements suggest the Akitu was used by the monarchy as a tool for reaffirming the king's divine power over his people.



Ancient Roman Celebration of Janus

The Roman New Year also originally corresponded with the vernal equinox, but years of tampering with the solar calendar eventually saw the holiday established on its more familiar date of January 1. For the Romans,

was seen as symbolically looking back at the old and ahead to the new, and this idea became tied to the concept of transition from one year to the next.

Romans would celebrate January 1 by giving offerings to Janus in the hope of gaining good fortune for the new year. This day was seen as setting the stage for the next twelve months, and it was common for friends and neighbors to make a positive start to

at least part of New Year's Day, as idleness was seen as a bad omen for the rest of the year.

Ancient Egyptian Wepet Renpet

Ancient Egyptian culture was closely tied to the Nile River, and it appears their New Year corresponded with its annual flood.

According to the Roman writer Censorinus, the Egyptian New Year was predicted when Sirius – the brightest star in the night sky – first became visible after a 70-day absence. Better known as a heliacal rising, this phenomenon typically occurred in mid-July just before the annual inundation of the Nile River, which helped ensure that farmlands remained fertile for the coming year. Egyptians celebrated this new beginning with a festival known as Wepet Renpet, which means “opening of the year.” The New Year was seen as a time of rebirth and rejuvenation, and it was honored with feasts and special religious rites.

Not unlike many people today, the Egyptians may have also used this as an excuse for getting a bit tipsy. Recent discoveries at the Temple of Mut show that during the reign of Hatshepsut the first month of the year played host to a “Festival of Drunkenness.” This massive party was tied to the myth of Sekhmet, a war goddess who had planned to kill all of humanity until the sun god Ra tricked her into drinking herself



the month of January carried a special significance. Its name was derived from the two-faced deity Janus, the god of change and beginnings. Janus

the year by exchanging well wishes and gifts of figs and honey with one another. According to the poet Ovid, most Romans also chose to work for

ty was tied to the myth of Sekhmet, a war goddess who had planned to kill all of humanity until the sun god Ra tricked her into drinking herself



unconscious. In honor of mankind's salvation, the Egyptians would celebrate with music, sex, revelry and – perhaps most important of all – copious amounts of beer.

Chinese New Year

One of the oldest traditions still celebrated today is Chinese New Year, which is believed to have originated over 3,000 years ago during the

Shang Dynasty. The holiday began as a way of celebrating the new beginnings of the spring planting season, but it later became entangled with myth and legend. According to one popular tale, there was once a bloodthirsty creature called Nian – now the Chinese word for “year”—that preyed on villages every New Year. In order to frighten the hungry beast, the villagers took to decorating their homes with red trimmings, burning bamboo and making loud noises. The



Photo: Jacon Buchhave

ruse worked, and the bright colors and lights associated with scaring off Nian eventually became integrated into the celebration.

Festivities traditionally last 15 days and tend to center on the home and the family. People clean their houses to rid them of bad luck, and some

repay old debts as a way of settling the previous year's affairs. In order to encourage an auspicious start to the year they also decorate their doors with paper scrolls and gather with relatives for a feast. Following the invention of gunpowder in the 10th century, the Chinese were also



the first to ring in the New Year with fireworks. Since Chinese New Year is still based on a lunar calendar that dates back to the second millennium BC, the holiday typically falls in late January or early February on the second new moon after the winter solstice. Each year is associated with one of 12 zodiacal animals: the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

Nowruz

While it is still celebrated in Iran and other parts of the Middle East and Asia, the roots of Nowruz (or “New Day”) reach far back into antiquity. Often called the “Persian New Year,” this 13-day spring festival falls on or around the vernal equinox in March and is believed to have originated in modern day Iran as part of the Zoroastrian religion. Official records of Nowruz did not appear until the 2nd century, but most historians believe its celebration dates back at least as far as the 6th century

B.C. and the rule of the Achaemenid Empire. Unlike many other ancient Persian festivals, Nowruz persisted as an important holiday even after Iran's conquest by Alexander the Great in 333 BC and the rise of Islamic rule in the 7th century A.D.

Ancient observances of Nowruz focused on the rebirth that accompanied the return of spring. Monarchs would use the holiday to host lavish banquets, dispense gifts and hold audiences with their subjects. Other traditions included feasts, exchanging presents with family members and neighbors, lighting bonfires, dyeing eggs and sprinkling water to symbolize creation. One unique ritual that arose around the 10th century involved electing a “Nowruzian Ruler”: a commoner who would pretend to be king for several days before being “dethroned” near the end of the festival. Nowruz has evolved considerably over time, but many of its ancient traditions – particularly the use of bonfires and colored eggs – remain a part of the modern holiday, which is observed by an estimated 300 million people each year.

CELEBRATING WORLD BRAILLE DAY

By ELLA LARINA

International World Braille Day is celebrated yearly in recognition of the birth of Louis Braille, born on January 4th, 1809. World Braille Day was created in 2019 by the United Nations General Assembly and serves as the commencement event for Braille Literacy Month, an event throughout January that aims to raise awareness about the importance of braille and braille literacy.

World Braille Day is a reminder of the importance of accessibility and independence for people who are blind or visually impaired. Today's reality is that many establishments such as restaurants, banks, and hospitals don't offer braille versions of their print materials like menus, statements, and bills. Because of this,

people with blindness or visual impairments often don't have the freedom to choose a meal on their own or keep their finances private.

This day spreads awareness about braille and other accessible forms of communication. Everyone deserves (and is legally entitled to) the same accommodations and service, regardless of ability. Let's remember that and do our part to make our workplaces more accessible for everyone.

Even under normal circumstances, persons with disabilities – one billion people worldwide – are less likely to access health care, education, employment and to participate in the community. They are more likely to live in poverty, experience higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse,

and are among the most marginalized in any crisis-affected community.

For the visually impaired, life under lockdown has posed several issues in terms of independence and isolation, especially for people who rely on the use of touch to communicate their needs and access information. The pandemic has revealed how critically important it is to produce essential information in accessible formats, including in Braille and audible formats. Otherwise, many persons with disabilities could face a higher risk of contamination due to a lack of access of guidelines and precautions to protect and reduce the spreading of a pandemic. COVID-19 has also emphasized the need to intensify all activities related

to digital accessibility to ensure digital inclusion of all people.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many good practices have been implemented by parts of the United Nations system to promote a disability-inclusive response to the COVID-19 and disseminate information in Braille.

In Malawi, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has produced 4,050 braille materials on awareness and prevention of COVID-19. In Ethiopia, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) disseminated audio information, and education and communication materials, to media professionals, and has developed Braille versions of the educational messages.

UNICEF has produced guidance notes that are available in multiple languages and accessible formats (including Braille and 'easy-to-read'). 'COVID-19: Considerations for Children and Adults with Disabilities' addresses such issues as access to information; water, sanitation and hygiene; health care; education; child protection; and mental health and psychosocial support, as well as

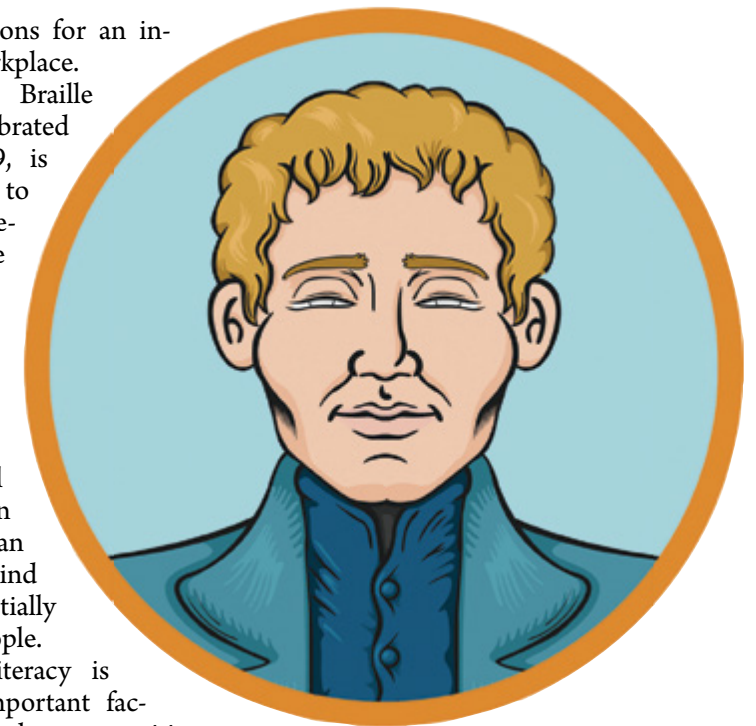
considerations for an inclusive workplace.

World Braille Day, celebrated since 2019, is observed to raise awareness of the importance of Braille as a means of communication in the full realization of the human rights for blind and partially sighted people.

Braille literacy is also an important factor in equal opportunities for people with blindness. You can learn more about how literacy inequality affects those with a visual disability in our blog, *Inequality in Literacy for People with Visual Disabilities*. Unfortunately, Louis Braille didn't get to see just how helpful his invention became. He died in 1852; two years before his alma mater, France's Royal Institute for the Blind Youth, adopted a braille curriculum. By 1916, schools around the United States taught braille to their students with blindness.

Six facts about Braille

- 1 Braille is used in nearly every country in the world, and there is a braille code for almost every language.
- 2 The inventor of braille has an interesting story. At the age of 3, Louis Braille punctured his eye with an awl, or leather embosser, leading to a severe infection that eventually caused him to lose his vision in both eyes. Ironically, an awl is similar to the stylus, a tool used today to emboss braille by hand.



Louis Braille

- 3 Braille can be typed in many different ways. It can be embossed with a slate and styles, which is largely considered as braille handwriting, or it can be printed with the use of a braille typewriter.
- 4 Castle Sant'Elmo, a popular tourist attraction, not only offers a sweeping view of the Italian city of Napoli from the top. The fortress is home to an art installation by Paolo Puddu titled "Follow the Shape", a handrail embossed in braille which includes a poetic description of the view. An image of this installation was used as the photo for this blog.
- 5 In recent years, more toys have become available in braille including a Rubik's Cube, the popular card game UNO, and LEGOs.
- 6 The braille typewriter is different from a typical typewriter. Brailers have six keys correlating to each of the six dots in the braille cell as well as a space key, an enter button, and a backspace.



Photo: UN

TRAVEL

WHERE THE HEART SPEAKS

By ANJA KEUL,
Bavaria Travel

As you plan for the year ahead, do you just want to unwind, become quiet, reflect on your own desires, dreams and breaks in life? The Oberzell Monastery near Würzburg is a great place for that.

Out and Amen

Regina Postner has become accustomed to the fact that a lot of tears are shed in her job. And also to the fact that many energetic and dynamic self-optimisation plans quickly evaporate behind the walls of her monastery in the community of Zell am Main.

For example, when she sends the new “time-out” guests for a walk or suggests that they simply get a good night’s sleep. “Most of them come to us very tense and want to get involved somehow, help in the monastery garden or do something else.

But it is so important to calm down first and to allow emotions such as anger or sadness. Only when the mouth is silent does the heart speak!”

Conversations at the fountain

When the heart speaks, Regina Postner listens well. On request, she meets with each time-out guest once a day for a talk, gladly at the splashing fountain in front of Haus Klara, the



The monastery church of the Oberzell Franciscan Sisters. Photo: Angelika Jakob

monastery’s own education centre. The resolutely committed theologian, who even has a PhD, worked as a pastoral counsellor for 20 years and sees herself as a source of inspiration. She asks questions, provides suggestions, often with reference to the Bible.

Guidance in times of crisis

Since autumn 2018, the director of the Bildungshaus has been offering this “time out in the monastery”. On average, the guests stay for five days, each stay is arranged individually in advance by phone or email, an additional donation for the talks is requested.

Normally, the time-out guests stay in wonderfully nostalgic rooms with private bathrooms in the convent

building, but during the Covid-19 period they are accommodated in the stylishly simple rooms of Haus Klara for the protection of the older sisters.

The pandemic also brought about a significant change in the guest structure. While women previously outnumbered men by two-thirds, far more men sought inspiration and orientation in the monastery during the crisis, says Regina Postner.

Students working on their master’s or doctoral theses have also discovered the Oberzell monastery, which is close to the city but lives completely according to its own rhythm.

Social commitment beyond the monastery

Sister Rut, a member of the order’s leadership and responsible for the

motherhouse convent with thirty elderly sisters, explains the daily life of the hundred or so Franciscan nuns in Oberzell.

“To be there for people, that is our mission”

Following the tradition of their founder Antonia Werr, who established the Oberzell community in 1855 as a congregation within the Catholic Church and the Franciscan religious family, the sisters are committed to helping disadvantaged women and girls in many ways.

Outside the convent, the community maintains social institutions such as the Antonia Werr Centre, a large curative-therapeutic girls’ home, as well as a variety of services for women in crisis situations. “To be there for people, that is our mission,” says Sister Ruth. That is why the younger sisters go about their work as doctors, nurses, social workers, environmental engineers or educators in civilian clothes.

From baroque convent to factory and back

Founded as a men’s monastery near the Main River in 1128, the ensemble reached its prime in the 18th century when Würzburg’s master architect Balthasar Neumann created the new Baroque building. After all Bavarian monasteries were dissolved in 1803



Elegant dining hall: The baroque refectory. Photo: Angelika Jakob

in the course of secularisation, the church served as a warehouse for a factory, and other buildings had to serve as production facilities.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the community succeeded in buying back the monastery in Zell am Main and, at considerable expense, “transformed it into a spiritual place again”, says Sister Ruth. As in Antonia Werr’s time, women’s issues played a major role. Dr Katharina Ganz, the Superior General elected by the sisters, actively campaigns for equal rights for women in the Catholic Church and for admission to the ordained ministry.

Unwinding at the organ

The sisters treat each other with love and mutual respect. Here, each one is not just a “cog in the wheel”, but is seen fully as an individual and is happy to take on tasks as far as she can, even into old age. Sister Linhildis, for example, who is over 80 years old, takes great pleasure in decorating the flowers in the baroque refectory, the sisters’ dining room.

Apart from meals, the sisters meet three times a day at prayer times, the Horen. The time-out guests are welcome to take part and experience these spiritual highlights of the monastery’s everyday life, for example at Vespers, the evening prayer, or at the Eucharist celebration in the beautifully restored monastery church.

When she has time, young Sister Juliana,



Sister Erentrud. Photo: Angelika Jakob

who works in a Würzburg communal accommodation for asylum seekers, sits at the organ in the monastery church of St. Michael.

Monastery garden and Way of St James

In the evening, some sisters like to pray in the silence of the monastery garden. This fragrant retreat with its countless medicinal plants and large herb garden is also a favourite place for guests to do a little gardening.

A saying on a slate near a majestic mullein might motivate them particularly to make good use of the monastery time-out. “Do good to your soul, that it may desire to live in you!”

There is also plenty of opportunity to do good for the body. Würzburg, just a few kilometres from Zell am Main, is the intersection of the Franconian-Swabian Way of St. James and the Lower Franconian Way of St. James. In the old bishop’s town, time-out guests should of course also visit the Residenz, Balthasar Neumann’s monumental masterpiece. In the tranquillity of the Oberzell Monastery, they will then be able to recognise many details of the master’s hand.

FUTURE OUTLOOK: ETHICS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

By ALAN MILLS

As we enter 2022 thinking about what the future holds, one thing is for certain: artificial intelligence will be an important part of it.

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UNESCO presented the first ever global standard on the ethics of artificial intelligence adopted by the member states of UNESCO at the General Conference. This historical text defines the common values and principles which will guide the construction of the necessary legal infrastructure to ensure the healthy development of AI.

AI technologies are delivering remarkable results in highly specialized fields. They also help combat global problems like climate change and world hunger.

But the technology is also bringing new unprecedented challenges. We see increased dangers of mass surveillance, and increased use of unreliable AI technologies in law enforcement, to name a few. Until now, there were no universal standards to provide an answer to these issues.

In 2018, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, launched an ambitious project: to give the world an ethical framework for the use of artificial intelligence. Three years later, thanks to the mobilization of hundreds of experts from around the world and intense international negotiations, the 193 UNESCO's member states have just officially adopted this ethical framework.

The Recommendation aims to realize the advantages AI brings to society and reduce the risks it entails. It ensures that digital transformations

promote human rights and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, addressing issues around transparency, accountability and privacy, with action-oriented policy chapters on data governance, education, culture, labour, healthcare and the economy.

The Recommendation calls for action beyond what tech firms and governments are doing to guarantee individuals more protection by ensuring transparency, agency and control over their personal data. It states that individuals should all be able to access or even erase records of their personal data. It also includes actions to improve data



protection and an individual's knowledge of, and right to control, their own data. It also increases the ability of regulatory bodies around the world to enforce this.

The Recommendation explicitly bans the use of AI systems for social scoring and mass surveillance. These types of technologies are very invasive, they infringe on human rights and fundamental freedoms, and they are used

in a broad way. The Recommendation stresses that when developing regulatory frameworks, Member States should consider that ultimate responsibility and accountability must always lie with humans and that AI technologies should not be given legal personality themselves.

The Recommendation sets the ground for tools that will assist in its implementation. Ethical Impact Assessment is intended to help countries and companies developing and deploying AI systems to assess the impact of those systems on individuals, on society and on the environment. This tool will assist in enhancing the institutional capacity of countries and recommend appropriate measures to be taken in order to ensure that ethics are implemented in practice. In addition, the Recommendation encourages Member States to consider adding the role of an independent AI Ethics Officer or some other mechanism to oversee auditing and continuous monitoring efforts.

The Recommendation emphasises that AI actors should favour data, energy and resource-efficient AI methods that will help ensure that AI becomes a more prominent tool in the fight against climate change and on tackling environmental issues. It asks governments to assess the direct and indirect environmental impact throughout the AI system life cycle. It incentivizes governments to invest in green tech, and if there are disproportionate negative impact of AI systems on the environment, the Recommendation instruct that they should not be used.



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