

Kremlin-themed Cigarette Case in hallmarked silver, by the Moscow Art Jewelry Workshop with a 1932 presentation engraving, awarded by the GPU State Security to A Klimenko, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Chernyakhovskiy District, Zhitomir Region, Ukraine.

Measures 85 mm x 109 mm x 19 mm; weighs 164.3 g (including the elastic straps for the cigarettes). Blue colored cabochon thumb piece of polished glass. The beautifully detailed artwork in high profile features the Lenin's Tomb, one of the towers of the Moscow Kremlin, and the top portion of the Kremlin's Grand Palace.

The interior of the panels is gilded. Both sides show a silver hallmark "875" with a worker's head, the kind used from 1927-1954. Next to each of the silver hallmarks is the maker mark ХАЮС (KhAYuS) of the Art Jewelry Workshop, a highly regarded Moscow manufacturer of luxury items. This maker independently existed until 1967, at which point it was absorbed into the much larger Moscow Jewelry Factory (МЮЗ). However, it worked as "ХАЮС" and used this maker mark only from 1930 to 1933. After that, the name and maker mark changed.

The back has a presentation engraving in Russian that reads: "To the Chairman of the Chernyakhovskiy RIK [District Executive Committee] Comrade I. Ya. Klimenko on the day of the XV Anniversary of the Organs of the VChK-GPU. From the Team of Employees of GPU of the Chernyakhovskiy (District)." The district referred to in the text used to be an administrative part of the Zhitomir Region of Ukraine centered around the town of Chernyakhov. Recently, long after the collapse of the USSR, it merged with the Zhitomir District.

The cigarette case is in outstanding, excellent condition. The artwork is exceptionally well-preserved and crisp, practically pristine, showing almost none of the usual wear to the high points. There are a few very minor scuffs and dings on the back panel from normal use, but no serious scratches. The case is completely free of dings or dents. Its cabochon closure button functions smoothly; the hinge is completely intact; the alignment of the two panels is perfect. The gilt finish on the interior is still bright, not faded as is often the case. The retaining strips for the cigarettes are a replacement although they show age and use.

Overall, a superb and rare cigarette case! There are cigarette cases with the same artwork but in silver-plated brass rather than solid silver; those are also quite scarce, but not to the same degree as the silver pieces. We have seen at least one other example in silver by the same maker that had also been awarded by the OGPU in 1932, so it is likely that at least some of these were commissioned with that specific purpose in mind.

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