

La Pendulerie



Important Gilt Bronze and Marble Antique Mantel Clock, Louis XVI period

Paris, late Louis XVI period, circa 1785-1790

Height 53.5 cm; width 50 cm; depth 13.5 cm

The round enamel dial indicates the hours in Arabic numerals and the fifteen-minute intervals by means of two pierced gilt bronze hands; the date, along the dial's outer edge, is indicated by a blued steel hand. The drum case is elaborately decorated with finely chased gilt bronze motifs. The clock is surmounted by an allegorical female figure in antique draperies, who holds an oak leaf wreath in her right hand and in her left hand, a palm and a fluted cornucopia filled with flowers and fruits. The sunray pendulum is concealed behind a fringed drapery beneath the dial. On either side two eagles hold flower and leaf garlands in their beaks. Their curved lower extremities rest on the shoulders of two winged putti who are sitting astride dogs standing on their hind legs. The dogs' front paws rest on two white marble spheres which are set on stylised mounds and draped with oak leaf and acorn garlands. The shaped rectangular base with gilt bronze bead decoration features fringed swags, two male masks framed against a textured background, and a central frieze depicting putti playing among the clouds. The base is raised upon six chased feet.

HISTORICAL

This clock's unusual design was inspired by the model known as "à la bacchante", in which the palanquin is held by putti riding goats; this model was extremely popular during the final years of the reign of Louis XVI. One such clock is illustrated in H. Ottomeyer and P. Pröschel, *Vergoldete Bronzen, Die Bronzearbeiten des Spätbarock und Klassizismus*, Band I, Munich, 1986, p. 280, fig. 4.13.1. Several variations of this model are known, including one in which the bacchante is replaced by a figure of Athena wearing armour; it is in the Royal Spanish Collections (shown in J. Ramon Colon de Carvajal,

Catalogo de Relojes del Patrimonio nacional, Madrid, 1987, p. 65, catalogue n° 48). The present clock, another variation, was directly inspired by a preparatory drawing now in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Le 30, Folio 53 (see E. Niehüser, Die französische Bronzeuhr, Eine Typologie der figürlichen Darstellungen, Munich, 1997, p. 207, fig. 193).

The present model is exceptionally rare. To the best of our knowledge only one other identical clock is known, however one of the two bronze masks on the base of that piece was replaced by a rosette sometime in the early 20th century. Purchased by the French Garde-Meuble de la Couronne for the sum of 1800 francs, it is said to have come from Prince Eugene's bedchamber in the château de Malmaison. Repertoried in June 1864, it was immediately sent to Malmaison to decorate Empress Eugenie's boudoir in the Imperial Residence. It was later attributed to the Louvre Museum and château de Compiègne, and today is in the Malmaison Museum (see the exhibition catalogue La mesure du Temps dans les collections du musée de Malmaison, May 1991-September 1991, RMN, Paris, p. 7, catalogue n° 2).