

# La Pendulerie



Thomire

## Important Burnished and Matte Gilt Bronze Centerpiece for a Surtout de Table, Empire period

Pierre-Philippe Thomire Important Burnished and Matte Gilt Bronze Centerpiece for a Surtout de Table  
Paris, Empire period, circa 1805 -1810 Height 71 cm; diameter 35 cm

Made entirely of finely chased matte and burnished gilt bronze, this exceptional centerpiece from a surtout de table stands out due to the extraordinary quality of its chasing and gilding. Three sculptural figures, representing three dancing bacchantes, all dressed in short tunics and coiffed with grape wreaths. With both hands they hold aloft a round, partially pierced basket that is adorned with grape and grape leaf motifs, with a central rosette decorating its plain interior. The high stepped cylindrical base has a plain plinth decorated with a low relief rosette like that of the basket; it is adorned with elaborate applied motifs depicting winged putti bearing flower garlands on their shoulders. The piece is supported on a plinth with sloping molding that is decorated with a stiff leaf frieze.

The very unusual design of this very rare centerpiece makes it one of the most elaborate and luxurious Parisian creations of the early 19th century; it may be confidently attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire. Today only a small number of similar pieces are known, most featuring variations. Most of these are signed by Thomire. Among them one model, featuring two bacchantes holding thyrsi, which is surmounted by candle branches, is in the San Francisco Fine Arts Museum (illustrated in H. Ottomeyer and P. Pröschel, *Vergoldete Bronzen, Die Bronzearbeiten des Spätbarock und Klassizismus*, Band I, Munich, 1986, p. 387, fig. 5.16.14). A second example, probably purchased by Lord Stuart de Rothesay, stands in the ceremonial dining room of the British Embassy in Paris (see J.N. Ronfort and J-D. Augarde, *A l'ombre de Pauline, La résidence de l'ambassadeur de Grande-Bretagne à Paris*, Paris, 2001, p. 63). A third example, with three hieratic female figures, is illustrated in Musée François

Duesberg, *Arts décoratifs 1775-1825, Pendules à sujets exotiques et bronzes dorés français*, Bruxelles, 1998, p. 24. A fourth example, with winged dancing putti, is in the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris (illustrated in L. de Groër, *Les arts décoratifs de 1790 à 1850*, Office du Livre, Fribourg, 1985, p. 284, fig. 543). A fifth piece, which is very similar to the present example, is in the Sans-Souci Palace in Postdam (see the exhibition catalogue *Russische und Französische Bronzen des Empire, Aus der Sammlung der Museen von Petrodvoretz, Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Postdam-Sanssouci*, 1990, p. 36, catalogue n° 26). A centerpiece from a surtout signed Thomire, which is identical to the present piece, but whose upper basket is much less elaborate, is today in the Hôtel de Brienne in Paris (which today houses the Defense Ministry) (illustrated in E. Pénicault, A. Gady and J-P. Samoyault, *L'Hôtel de Brienne*, Les Editions de l'Esplanade, Paris, 2016, p. 110).

#### **Artist description:**

Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1757-1853) was the most important Parisian bronzier of the last quarter of the 18th century and the first decades of the following century. Early on in his career he worked for Pierre Gouthière, ciseleur-fondeur du roi, and toward the mid-1770's began working with Louis Prieur. He later became one of the bronziars attached to the Manufacture Royale de Sèvres, creating the bronze mounts for most of the important creations of the day. After the Revolution, he purchased the stock of Martin-Eloi Lignereux, thus becoming the most important suppliers of furniture bronzes for châteaux and Imperial Palaces. In addition, he worked for a wealthy private clientele, both French and foreign, including several of Napoleon's Marshals. Thomire retired in 1823.