

La Pendulerie



Caffieri

A Rare and Important Pair of Three-Light Gilt Bronze Neoclassical Wall Lights, Transition period

Circa: circa 1765

Attributed to Philippe Caffieri

A Rare and Important Pair of Three-Light Gilt Bronze Neoclassical Wall Lights

Paris, Transition period between Louis XV and Louis XVI, circa 1765

Height 58 cm; width 47 cm; depth 30 cm

The wall lights, made of finely chased gilt bronze with matte and burnished finishing, feature a tapering, gadrooned and rudented stem that is embellished with leaves, scrolls, knobs with cabochons and ribbon-tied laurel garlands; this central tapered stem terminates in an interlace-decorated band that is centered by gadrooning, surmounting acanthus scrolls that are linked to a laurel leaf and seed finial. Surmounting the wall light, an antique urn is supported by an architectural entablature with a molded pedestal; it is decorated with a leaf frieze and has applied scroll handles through which pass laurel garlands. It has a faux tapered lid that is surmounted by a flame motif. The stem issues the three sinuous reed-form light branches, which are adorned with knobs and wide scrolling leaves, on which a large garland of laurel leaves and seeds is draped. Each branch terminates in a drip pan decorated with striated reserves, supporting a nozzle that is embellished with stylized flowers.

The remarkable design of this rare pair of wall lights is a perfect illustration of French Neoclassicism expressed in a Parisian light fixture from the second half of the 18th century, then greatly influenced by the work of talented designers such as Jean-Charles Delafosse. At the time, the Rococo decorative vocabulary made up of curves and scrolls, which had prevailed in French ornamentation and the decorative arts for several decades, was beginning to fall out of favor. This extraordinary decorative renewal was a direct result of the fabulous discoveries that had been made during the excavations of the ancient Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, near Naples. These discoveries would influence artistic and artisanal creation, both in France and throughout Europe, over several decades. Following the discoveries of Parisian scholars and collectors such as the Count of Caylus and Lalive de Jully, as well as certain avant-garde artists and artisans, would progressively and deeply affect the artistic vision of the influential collectors of the time.

The present rare pair of wall lights was created within this particular context - that is, at the beginning of this return to French classicism, around 1765, a period during which what today is known as the "Greek taste" became predominant. One contemporary Parisian bronzier stood out for his role as an innovator:

Philippe Caffieri, a remarkable artisan to whom we attribute the present pair of wall lights. He also made a small number of comparable light fixtures. Among the rare pairs of known wall lights based on a similar design, and often attributed to Philippe Caffieri, two pairs, which during the 19th century were part of the furnishings of the Château de Saint-Cloud, are now in the Louvre in Paris (illustrated in D. Alcouffe, A. Dion-Tenenbaum and G. Mabile, *Les bronzes d'ameublement du Louvre*, Editions Faton, Dijon, 2004, p. 109, catalogue n° 50). A group of six wall lights signed Caffieri, is now in the Getty Museum in Malibu (pictured in G. Wilson and C. Hess, *Summary Catalogue of European Decorative Arts in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Los Angeles, 2001, p. 86, catalogue 172). Several other pairs of different models were delivered by Caffieri to the Royal Palace in Warsaw; several of these are still in existence (see N. Ladyka, *Inventaire général des meubles et effets mobiliers qui sont dans le château de Varsovie*, drawn up in March 1795, Warsaw, 1997). One further pair of wall lights, whose design is identical to the present pair, was formerly in the Patino collection, which was sold in America several decades ago.

Artist description:

Philippe Caffieri (1714-1774) was no doubt the most important Parisian bronze caster of the late 18th century. The brother of sculptor Jean-Jacques Caffieri (1725-1792) and the son of Jacques Caffieri (1678-1755), *Sculpteur et ciseleur ordinaire du Roi*, in 1747 he went into partnership with his father. He became a master sculptor in January 1754 and a member of the Académie de Saint-Luc. Upon the death of his father the following year, he took over the family workshop in the rue Princesse, purchasing his brother's share of the workshop's rococo models. Several months later, as a master's son, he became a master caster *en terre et sable*. Initially he continued in the rococo style his father had favored, but later developed new models in the neoclassical style. He worked on the first example of an antique-inspired piece of furniture that was commissioned by the wealthy financier Ange-Laurent Lalive de Jully. Throughout his career, Philippe Caffieri worked for the most important Parisian collectors of the time.