

La Pendulerie



Thomire

An Important Pair of Large Seven-Light Patinated and Gilt Bronze Neoclassical Candelabra with Matte and Burnished Finishing, Empire period

Circa: circa 1805-1810

Attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire

An Important Pair of Large Seven-Light Patinated and Gilt Bronze Neoclassical Candelabra with Matte and Burnished Finishing

The Priestesses

Paris, Empire period, circa 1805-1810

Height 117 cm; width of the arms 33 cm; width of the bases 27 cm.

Provenance:

- Given by Charles de Beistegui in 1970, along with another similar pair, as a wedding gift (1895-1970) to Juan Guillermo de Beistegui (1930-2017) and Annick de Rohan-Chabot.

- The mansion of Mr. and Mrs. Juan Guillermo de Beistegui, rue de Varenne in Paris.

Bibliography:

- E. Schlumberger, "Révélation d'un salon voué au fastes de l'Empire", dans *Connaissance des Arts*, Paris, July 1965, p. 35-36.

- C. Bizot, *Mobilier Directoire Empire*, Editions Charles Massin, Paris, p. 33.

Made entirely of finely chased gilt and patinated bronze with matte and burnished finishing, the candelabra feature an anthropomorphic stem depicting a magnificently sculpted priestess in a solemn pose, who is wearing a long tunic with zigzag embroidery. Each figure brandishes an oil lamp with an elongated mid-portion, which is surmounted by two winged Victory figures that are leaning against the faux lid, with an acorn finial. Their bodies terminate in scrolling leaves; they stretch their hands out toward a double flower adorned with rosettes, upon which a dove is perching. The oil lamp terminates, on either end, in the heads of imaginary beasts with open mouths; the pedestal is decorated with gadrooned rings resting upon round bases adorned with stylized palm friezes and embellished with beadwork. Each priestess supports on her head a leaf-decorated cylinder with a stylized frieze, which issues the light branches; the tapering baluster-form stem terminates in a nozzle and drip pan to which are attached three cornices adorned with scrolls upon which butterflies are perched. To the stem are attached six further sinuous light branches, arranged on two levels. They are elaborately adorned with scrolling, masks, gadrooned friezes and ewers with applied handles decorated with lions' heads, and basins with nozzles and drip pans decorated with palm motifs, leaves, Greek key motifs, and flowers. The female figures stand on a tall triangular base with concave sides, which is lavishly decorated with egg-and-dart friezes, rams' heads, beadwork, and applied motifs depicting Psyche standing on an entablature that is supported by C-scrolls adorned with palms and flowers. On the base there are rosettes and busts of winged griffons with claws. The triangular plinth has canted corners and slightly concave sides.

In 1798 and 1801, France led an expedition to Egypt, with the aim of countering Britain's ambitions in the Orient, and of dominating the region politically and economically. This military operation, originally led by General Napoleon Bonaparte and later by his successors, was known as the Egyptian Campaign. It was a veritable research mission, manned by eminent scientists, historians and artists. After its return to France, the mission's repercussions were extraordinarily influential, particularly in the field of the decorative arts. By 1802, Baron Vivant-Denon had published his *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte*, which became a great success. Subsequently, architects, painters, and artisans began to produce their own interpretations of Egyptian models, of which they produced many variations and which they introduced into their own creations. In the field of lighting, there are many candelabra that are adorned with solemn female figures that were inspired by the monumental sculpture of the Egypt of the Pharaohs. The present pair of candelabra was made within that particular context. Its unusual design, as well as the exceptional quality of its chasing and gilding, support an attribution to Pierre-Philippe Thomire, the most talented Parisian bronzier of the early decades of the 19th century. Today, among the rare identical pairs of candelabra known to exist – though with certain variations in their decor - one pair, also offered by La Pendulerie, has the same provenance. Another pair, made entirely of gilt bronze, is illustrated in G. and R. Wannenes, *Les bronzes ornementaux et les objets montés de Louis XIV à Napoléon III*, Milan, 2004, p. 387. One further pair, which was formerly in the Mancel collection, is pictured in S. Chadenet, *Les styles Empire & Restauration*, Editions Baschet et Cie, Paris, p. 25.

The Beistegui: A Dynasty of Great Collectors

Descendants of a powerful family that made its fortune in silver mines in Mexico, the Beisteguis settled in France during the last quarter of the 19th century, after the fall of Emperor Maximilian. The founder's grandson, Carlos de Beistegui (1863-1953), became interested in art in general, and in the French decorative arts in particular, at an early age. An insatiable collector, within just a few decades he had amassed a considerable collection of artworks, including a group of 18th century portraits, which was given, subject to usufruct, to the Louvre Museum. It may be seen today in a room that bears the family name. His nephew Charles de Beistegui (1895-1970) followed in his uncle's footsteps, famously acquiring, decorating, and completely overhauling the Château de Groussay in Montfort-l'Amaury. That remarkable achievement grew out of his partnership with the interior decorator Emilio Terry, as well as the "Ball of the Century" that was held in September in the Palazzo Labia in Venice, his Italian residence. Several years later, in 1970, Charles gave two pairs of candelabra, including the present pair, to his nephew Juan Guillermo de Beistegui, upon the latter's marriage to Annick de Rohan-

Chabot. Like his uncle and great-uncle, Juan Guillermo de Beistegui was a great lover of the French decorative art of the 18th and 19th centuries. The son of Juan Francisco de Beistegui e Yturbe and Carmen de Landa y Osio, the daughter of the governor of Mexico, Juan Guillermo and his wife lavishly furnished their Parisian mansion in the rue de Varenne – formerly the residence of Marshal Lannes - carefully selecting furniture, seating, sculpture, objets d'art and bronze furnishings from the 18th century and the Napoleonic period.

Artist description:

Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1757-1843)

Having become a master founder on May 18, 1772, he was the most important Parisian bronzier of the first quarter of the 18th century and the early years of the following century. Initially he worked for Pierre Gouthière, chaser-founder to the king, and as of the mid-1770s he worked with Louis Prieur. He later became one of the official bronziers of the Royal Sèvres Factory, creating bronze he bought the stock of Martin-Eloi Lignereux and became the main supplier of bronze furnishings for the imperial palaces. He also had a number of wealthy several of Napoleon's marshals. He retired in the mid-1820s and died in 1843.