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Fine Art & Antiques



Joseph-Emmanuel Zwiener (1848 - 1895)

An Important Pair of Louis XVI Style Vitrines with Wedgwood Plaques

Circa: Circa 1880

165 x 99 x 38 cm (65 x 39 inches)

France

1880

Stamped 'NZ', 'NZ.309' and 'ZJ' to the reverse of the bronze mounts. Signed to the reverse of the lockplate 'Mon THEAU THIEFFINE Succ./SERRURIER PARIS'.

An Important Pair of Louis XVI Style Gilt-Bronze Mounted Vitrines with Wedgwood Jasperware Plaques, by Joseph-Emmanuel Zwiener.

This rare pair of vitrines, each have a shaped Carrera marble top above a frieze centred by a round classical Jasperware plaque flanked by gilt-bronze putti figures and scrolling acanthus running pattern.

Below is a gilt-bronze framed bevelled glass door above a panel centred by a finely modelled Jasperware plaque of a putto representing the seasons. The door is flanked to either side by gilt-bronze monnaie pattern and headed by a pair of exceptionally fine female canephor figures. The shaped sides have corresponding bevelled glass panels and the vitrine is raised on tapering fluted legs.

The distinctive canephor figures, finely cast as female caryatids with ringlets in their hair and supporting baskets of fruit upon their heads, is a distinctive and celebrated model unique to Zwiener. Many of Zwiener's bronzes are executed in the Louis XV style, with flowers and scrolling acanthus leaves and an emphasis on asymmetry, typical of the work of his bronze sculptor Léon Messagé. The mounts employed on this rare pair of vitrines however sees Zwiener creating his own up-to-date reinterpretation of the Louis XVI style, drawing inspiration from established Louis XVI models such as those designed by Weisweiler for Marie-Antoinette's Dressing table. [See Mestdagh, p.305].

A second distinctive feature of the vitrines is the finely modelled Wedgwood Jasperware plaques incorporated in the frieze of each vitrine and beneath the doors. Wedgwood exhibited at nearly all of the Universal Exhibitions held in 19th century France, displaying amongst other pieces, plaques specifically intended to be mounted on to furniture. The first vitrine displays to the frieze a finely modelled plaque in the classical style, depicting a group of putti at play, one being pushed on a swing, while another plays a trumpet and a small attentive dog watches from below. Beneath the glass panelled door a larger Jasperware plaque is incorporated depicting a putto figure with a garland of flowers, emblematic of

spring.

The second vitrine has a classical plaque to the frieze depicting the 'Dipping of Achilles'. A baby Achilles is held by an ankle by his mother Thetis who holds a flaming torch, above a large urn representing the river Styx. To the right Achilles' father Peleus kneels towards the urn with a torch over each shoulder. A ram's skull is hung on the trunk of the young tree to the left of the trio. Below the door is a large plaque depicting a putto with a sickle and wheat sheaf, emblematic of summer.

Artist description:

Joseph-Emmanuel Zwiener (1848- 1895) was one of the leading furniture makers of the end of the nineteenth century. Of German extraction he established a very successful studio in Paris, producing the very finest furniture, often inspired by the public collections in France. He employed as his sculptor, Léon Messagé, the genius Parisian sculptor.

Zwiener's pieces were acquired by many of the leading collectors of the nineteenth century. In particular he supplied his interpretation of the famous Bureau de Roi to Ludwig II at Herrenchiemsee, which was placed in the King's study in 1884.

Zwiener exhibited at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, where he was awarded a gold medal, for a stand which included an exceptional cabinet designed by Messagé (illustrated in Meyer, pl. H14). In 1898, Zwiener received an extensive Royal commission from the King of Prussia, and was recalled to Berlin as the King would not order furniture from overseas makers when furnishing his palaces, preferring to order work only from native Germans. The Berlin Sculptor Otto Rohloff, whose bronze work is very similar to that of Messagé, may well have been hired by Zwiener for this Royal commission.

In 1895 his Paris workshop was taken over by the important émigré and ébéniste, François Linke. Christopher Payne, in his book on Linke, speculates that Linke may have worked for Zwiener when he first arrived in Paris in 1875. Linke is known to have also taken on Zwiener's sculptor Léon Messagé.

For this reason many of Zwiener's pieces have often been mistakenly attributed to Linke. In order to differentiate between Messagé's commissions, the gilt bronze mounts were often marked to the reverse with the maker's initials. Several of Zwiener's mounts have been found to have a 'Z', 'Zw', a 'IZ', 'NZ', 'ZN' or a 'ZJ' on the reverse. This was primarily for the purpose of differentiation, rather than an artist's signature. Some of Zwiener's work was stamped but not exclusively, and only a few pieces have been found with a full signature and /or a date.

It can be speculated that Zwiener continued to work in Germany, after giving up his Paris workshop in 1895, as in 1900 he participated in the German section of the Paris Exhibition, where he exhibited the famous bedroom suite made for the Kaiser.

Makers Bibliography:

Camille Mestdagh, Pierre Lécoules: *L'Ameublement d'art français : 1850-1900* ; Editions de l'Amateur, 2010; pp. 301-305.

Payne, Christopher (2003), *François Linke, 1855-1946, The Belle Epoque of French Furniture*, Antique Collectors' Club, (Woodbridge).

Meyer, Jonathan, *Great Exhibitions - London, New York, Paris, Philadelphia, 1851-1900*, Antique Collectors' Club, (Woodbridge); 2006, p. 270, pls. H14; p. 299, p.302.

Maze-Sencier, *Les Livres des Collectionneurs*, (Paris), 1885