

ADRIAN ALAN

Fine Art & Antiques



A.M. E. Fournier (1850 -)

A Highly Important Pair of Empire Style Mahogany Side Cabinets

Circa: Circa 1880

210 x 87 x 39 cm (82⁵/₁₆ x 34¹/₁₆ inches)

Mahogany Gilt-Bronze

France

1880

Stamped 'FOURNIER' on the back of the lock plate.

An Impressive and Highly Important Pair of Empire Style Mahogany Side Cabinets. One with an Integral Clock, The Other a Barometer, by Fournier.

Each cabinet has an arched pediment, surmounted by a bronze bust of Napoleon after the model by the French sculptor Antoine-Denis Chaudet (1763-1810). The centre of the pediment of one cabinet is fitted with the clock, with a eight day striking movement. The other cabinet is fitted with an aneroid barometer. Each enamel dial is framed by exceptional gilt and patinated bronze roundels depicting the signs of the zodiac. Flanking the clock and barometer each cabinet has a gilt-bronze frieze applied with classical masks and ribbon hung floral swags, above conforming cases headed by gilt-bronze anthemion friezes. The central cupboard doors are centred by lozenges containing gilt-bronze plaques depicting Flora holding a garland of flowers and Mercury with the Caduceus staff. Both cabinets open to reveal an interior fitted with three shelves.

The Empire Style:

In 1804 Napoleon I, crowned himself Emperor of France, ending years of political instability and signalling the dawning of the Empire period. During this time, the economy was booming and a new aristocracy was forming, with Napoleon's court as its cornerstone.

The period was to see the revival of classical ideas and influences, primarily in the decorative arts.

Napoleon's court was quick to adopt the classical designs discovered in the archaeological excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum, together with exotic hieroglyphic motifs from the Egyptian campaigns. Revolutionary conquests were echoed in the use of antique forms in architecture and the decorative arts, proclaiming 'fame' and 'victory'. The use of these ancient designs and motifs celebrated France as the heir to these great civilisations imbuing it with the grandeur of Greece, the glory of Rome and the magnificence of the Pharaohs.

Typical Empire motifs included the acanthus leaf, anthemion (stylised honeysuckle), animal-paw feet, cornucopia, classical figures, dolphin, eagle, lyre and rosette. For ornamentation, gilt-bronze was a prerequisite.

The most influential architects of the Empire style were Charles Percier (1764-1838) and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine (1762-1853). Official architects to Napoleon, their main responsibility was the renovation of the various royal residences, including Malmaison. Their 'Recueil des décorations intérieures' (1812) became the essential handbook of the Empire style.

After the fall of Napoleon the Empire style continued to be in favour for many decades, with only minor adaptations. The second half of the nineteenth century was to see a revival of the style, and the popularity of its strong but simple lines continues to the present day.

Literature:

Ledoux - Lebard Denise (1984), *Les Ébénistes du XIXe Siècle*, Editions de L'Amateur, Paris; p. 209.

Artist description:

A.M.E Fournier was established by 1850 in Paris at 109 boulevard Beaumarchais, and later at boulevard des Capucines.

As well as exceptional carved furniture, Fournier was famed for his upholstered work, shown at many of the great exhibitions of the period, including the 1867 Exposition Universelle. His most famous creation was a wonderfully naturalistic giltwood rope twist stool, which was as highly sought after in his own period as it is today.

Makers Bibliography:

Ledoux - Lebard, Denise, *Les ébénistes du XIXe Siècle*, Editions de L'Amateur, (Paris), 1984; p. 209.