

ADRIAN ALAN

Fine Art & Antiques



Possibly by François Linke (1855 - 1946)

A Louis XV Style Gilt-Bronze Mounted Commode

Circa: Circa 1900

96 x 131 x 50 cm (37³/₄ x 51⁵/₈ inches)

Gilt-Bronze

France

1900

Stamped 'Mon LEGER' to the back of the commode for the retailer Émile Léger et Cie.

A Louis XV Style Gilt-Bronze Mounted Marquetry Commode with a Marble Top, Possibly by *François Linke*.

This unusual marquetry and gilt-bronze mounted commode is of exceptional quality. It has a shaped marble top above two drawers finely inlaid with scrolling foliate marquetry. The most striking aspect of the commode is the unusual treatment of the gilt-bronze corner mounts, with the inclusion of finely cast wings to the fronded acanthus scrolls.

This winged motif would suggest the design of the famous Parisian sculptor *Léon Messagé* who worked extensively with *François Linke*. He incorporated the 'wing motif' on a number of different designs for Linke furniture, most notably as the handles for the '*Commode Louis XV à trois tiroirs avec marquetry violette*' no. 245 and the Bureau Plat, no. 132. It might be assumed that this device is Messagé's idea of an amusing play on his own family name, the wings being the attributes of Mercury the messenger.

Émile Léger in partnership with Albert Albrecht was trading in Paris at 3, Boulevard Richard Lenoir as early as 1866 with additional premises at 4 boulevard Beaumarchais and workshops at the famous rue de Charonne. In 1885 Léger took sole control of the company and began a process of expansion, the

business moving to the prestigious Place des Vosges in 1893. The company was extremely successful, commissioning work from some of the finest makers of the day, including François Linke, and exhibiting their own work at many of the important international exhibitions of the period. Emile Léger was awarded a silver medal at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878 and again in 1889.

Literature:

Payne, Christopher, François Linke, (1855 - 1946), *The Belle Époque of French Furniture*, Antique Collectors' Club, (Woodbridge), 2003, pp. 71-96, pl. 88

Artist description:

François Linke (1855 - 1946) was the most important Parisian cabinet maker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and possibly the most sought after cabinet maker of his period.

He was born in 1855 in the small village of Pankraz, in what is now the Czech Republic. Records show that Linke served an apprenticeship with the master cabinetmaker Neumann, then in 1875 at the age of 20 he arrived in Paris where he lived until he died in 1946.

It is known that the fledgling Linke workshops were active in Paris in the Faubourg St. Antoine as early as 1881, and during this time he supplied furniture for other more established makers such as Jansen and Krieger.

The quality of Linke's craftsmanship was unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries and reached its peak with his spectacular stand at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900, where his Grand Bureau took the gold medal. He gambled his fortune and reputation on this stand, exhibiting several breathtaking items of furniture with sculptural mounts of the most exceptional quality and proportion. His gamble worked and his reputation was established to such an extent that Linke continued to be the pre-eminent furniture house in Paris until the Second World War.

As the Art Journal reported in 1900 on Linke's stand:

The work of M. Linke ... was an example of what can be done by seeking inspiration amongst the classic examples of Louis XV and XVI without in any great sense copying these great works. M. Linke's work was original in the true sense of the word, and as such commended itself to the intelligent seeker after the really artistic things of the Exhibition. Wonderful talent was employed in producing the magnificent pieces of furniture displayed....

The formation of Linke's distinctive style was made possible by his collaboration with the sculptor Léon Messagé.

Together Linke and Messagé designed furniture for Linke's 1900 exhibition stand, with exuberant allegorical figures cast in high relief, that exemplified Linke's ability to seamlessly merge the different mediums of wood carving, bronze and marquetry into a dynamic unified whole.

Today Linke is best known for the exceptionally high quality of his work, as well as his individualism and inventiveness. All of his work has the finest, most lavish mounts, very often applied to comparatively simple carcasses of quarter veneered kingwood or tulipwood. The technical brilliance of his work and the artistic change that it represented were never to be repeated.