

# ADRIAN ALAN

*Fine Art & Antiques*



**François Linke (1855 - 1946)**

## **An Important Louis XVI Style Commode After the Model by Leleu**

Circa: Circa 1900

89 x 154 x 67 cm (35 x 60<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches)

Mahogany Gilt-Bronze

France

1900

Signed 'Linke' to the right-hand side chute.

An Important Louis XVI Style Gilt-Bronze Mounted Commode, After the model by Jean-Francois Leleu  
By François Linke.

Linke Index Number: 1127.

Linke title: Commode Louis XVI, Bois d'amarante et de rose.

This distinguished commode is quarter veneered in mahogany with bois de violette banding and boxwood stringing. It is furnished with finely cast gilt-bronze mounts and surmounted by a brèche violette marble top.

It appears that Linke bought the rights to make this commode from the Vente Cueunières in 1902, although there is no trace of it being made by him until the summer of 1908 and there is no entry in the Blue Daybooks for this model. The green registres have two pages devoted to the making of the commodes, the first at a cost of 1,540 and 40 centimes, with eight more made in the intervening years, the last, a pair, in 1927 with the cost price escalating to 8,529 francs. The registre is not entirely clear, but it appears that Clément Linke, father and son, made the locks for this model. The cabinetmaking was exclusively by Guntren who took 496 hours per commode, paid 85 centimes in 1908 rising to 5 francs 75 cents for the last pair. Linke priced this commode at 3,000 French francs, noting in his book 'original est de Leleu est à Trianon.'

The original commode by Leleu, on loan from the Petit Trianon, is shown in a line engraving in the retrospective part of the Exposition de l' Union centrale des arts décoratifs, Paris, 1882, De Champeau & Others, 'Les arts du bois,' pub. Quantin, 1883, p. 80. The commode entered the Petit Trianon in 1867 on the occasion of an earlier exhibition dedicated to the memory of Marie-Antoinette, organized under the patronage of the Empress Eugénie.

## Jean-François Leleu

A pupil and later collaborator with Jean-François Oeben, Jean-François Leleu became maître on the latter's death in 1763. His work can be divided into two concurrent but distinct styles: the first owing more to the legacy of Oeben, being of large, solid forms, more noble in style; the second, although retaining the clean, definite lines of the first, being an exercise in elegance and understatement. It is this second style for which Leleu is chiefly remembered and which the present commode, with its lightly bombé form and restrained frieze mounts, is a principal example.

### **Literature:**

Payne, Christopher: François Linke, 1855 - 1946, *The Belle Epoque of French Furniture*, 2003; p. 502, for the black and white cliché of index number 1127

Meyer, Jonathan: *Great Exhibitions*, Antique Collectors club, Woodbridge, 2006, p. 298 - 300.

A. Pradère, *French Furniture Makers*, p. 340, fig. 398; and P.

Arizzoli-Clementel, *Versailles Furniture of the Royal Palace 17th and 18th Centuries*, Vol. II, pp. 122-123, for the 18th century model by Royal commission from Jean-François Leleu (1729-1807; master 176

D. Ledoux-Lebard; *Le Mobilier Français du XIX Siècle*, pp. 435-444, and p. 67, for this model by Sormani.

### **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.