

# ADRIAN ALAN

*Fine Art & Antiques*



**PAUL SORMANI (1817 - 1877)**

## **A Louis XVI Style Centre Table After The Model By Riesener**

Circa: Circa 1890

71 x 83 x 49 cm (28 x 32<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches)

Mahogany Gilt-Bronze

France

1890

Stamped 'Paul Sormani 10 rue Charlot a Paris'.

A Louis XVI Style Mahogany Gilt-Bronze Centre Table After The Model By Jean-Henri Riesener by Paul Sormani.

This fine mahogany centre table has a lattice parquetry top with a pierced gallery above a gilt-bronze foliate frieze opening to a central drawer flanked by two short drawers. The table is raised on tapering legs terminating in foliate-cast sabots.

The table is a variation on the famous model by Jean-Henri Riesener, known as the Table des Muses, supplied in 1783 at a cost of 6,000 livres for the Cabinet Interieur of Madame Elizabeth (sister of Louis XVI) at Versailles.

During the Directory, the table was used in the salle du Conseil des Directeurs; later moved by the Empress Eugenie to the Petit Trianon, where it remains today. The eighteenth century version by Riesener incorporated a marquetry top depicting the muses of Astronomy and Science.

The famous portrait of Riesener by Antoine Vestier (1785), depicts Riesener sitting at the same model of table as the present example.

Jean-Henri Riesener (1735-1806) lived in Paris and was the foremost cabinet-maker of his generation and the successor to the court patronage of Jean-Francois Oeben, whose widow he married in 1767.

From 1774 to 1784, Riesener supplied more than 938,000 livres worth of furniture to the Garde Meuble Royal. He was responsible for many important contributions to the formation of the Louis XVI style in France, of which he was undoubtedly the master.

Riesener began his career for the monarchy with the roll-top desk for Louis XV placed in his inner study. Commissioned in 1760 from his father-in-law and master Oeben, it is a piece of furniture exceptional for its novelty, the refinement of its marquetry, the quality of its bronze details and above all the ingeniousness of its mechanism: all the desk closes with a single turn of the key and opens just by pressing a button. Completed in 1769, it was modified by him during the Revolution when he had to remove the royal symbols. The prestige of this piece of furniture was immense and definitively established the reputation of Riesener.

From this time on, there was no shortage of commissions from the court and for ten years he was the principal supplier to the royal residences. But his outrageous prices lost him a part of his clientele which turned to his rival Beneman. Marie-Antoinette, however, remained faithful to him. Riesener produced his most graceful and innovative pieces of furniture for Marie-Antoinette: In particular for her boudoir at Fontainebleau, he produced fragile furniture decorated with mother-of-pearl that was unique in its genre. Pearl was a particularly exotic material at that time and using it to cover the entire surface of an object was the height of luxury.

His furniture was much copied during the nineteenth century, in particular the 'Bureau du Roi' at Versailles, of which a superb version was made for the 4th Marquess of Hertford and is now in the Wallace Collection.

#### **Literature:**

Alcouffe, Doin-Tenenbaum, Lefebure, The Furniture Collection in the Louvre, Vol I, Edition Faton, Dijon, 1993.p.272

#### **Artist description:**

Born in Venice in 1817, Paul Sormani (1817-1877), was a Parisian maker of fine 'meubles de luxe'. His work was described in the catalogue of the 1867 Exposition Universelle as: 'toute sa production révèle une qualité d'exécution de tout premier ordre' (all of his production reveals a quality of execution all of the first order).

Sormani exhibited at the International Exhibitions in Paris in 1849, 1855, 1867, 1878 and 1900, and in London in 1862, winning numerous medals.

Paul Sormani established the firm in 1847 at 7, Cimetière Saint-Nicholas in Paris, moving in 1854 to 114, Rue du Temple, and in 1867 to 10, rue Charlot.

After his death in 1877 Sormani's son Paul-Charles took over the business that later moved to 134 boulevard Haussmann.

It can be difficult to date Sormani's work, as the firm produced furniture for nearly ninety years. However, when Paul Sormani died in 1877, his wife and son took over the business and from this date onwards pieces are normally signed 'Veuve Sormani & Fils'.

#### **Maker Bibliography:**

Mestdagh, Camille and Pierre Lécoules, L'Ameublement d'art français : 1850-1900, Editions de l'Amateur, (Paris) 2010.

Meyer, Jonathan, Great Exhibitions - London, New York, Paris, Philadelphia, 1851-1900, Antique Collectors' Club, (Woodbridge, UK), 2006.

Ledoux - Lebard, Denise, Les ébénistes du XIXe Siècle, Editions de L'Amateur (Paris), 1984. pp. 583-588.