

ADRIAN ALAN

Fine Art & Antiques



A Napoleon III Empire Style Pedestal Desk

Circa: Circa 1870

79 x 150 x 85 cm (31" x 59 inches)

Gilt-Bronze Mahogany

France

1870

A Fine Napoleon III Gilt-Bronze Mounted Empire Style Mahogany Pedestal Desk.

This imposing Empire style pedestal desk is mounted with fine gilt-bronze Egyptian revival neo-classical mounts, on finely figured mahogany veneers.

The desk has a rectangular inset gilt-tooled leather top above three frieze drawers, flanked by gilt-bronze anthemion mounts and three corresponding dummy drawers to the front; the sides with pull out leather inset slides. The two pedestal sections, each containing three drawers, flanked by tapering pilasters, headed by finely cast gilt-bronze female heads in the Egyptian manner and raised on plinth bases.

The Empire Style

In 1804 Napoléon 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 Napoléon's court as its cornerstone.

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

Napoléon'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 Napoléon, 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 Napoléon 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.