

ADRIAN ALAN

Fine Art & Antiques



Bontems (1814 - 1881)

A Gilt-Bronze Double Singing Bird Automaton

Circa: 1880

1880

50 x 26 cm (19 ³/₁₆ x 10 ¹/₁₆ inches)

France

A Gilt-Bronze and Sèvres Style Porcelain Mounted Double Singing Bird Automaton, By *Bontems*,
Paris.

With going-barrel movement, whistle, bellows and stop/start.

This rare double bird automaton is fitted with two exotic taxidermy birds with emerald-green and electric blue toned plumage, beneath a domed octagonal cage with slender fluted columns and a square section base with canted corners. The base is fitted with fine Sèvres style rectangular porcelain plaques, depicting scenes from the *fête galante* in the manner of Watteau. The cage has a hanging ring and a key winding mechanism which is housed in the base.

The upper bird is perched on a T-Bar to the centre of the cage, the lower bird standing to the front of the base. When wound with the key and the start/stop lever actuated, the birds begin to sing their chorus, the beaks, heads and tail feathers moving in a naturalistic fashion to the birdsong. As with the finest Bontems examples, the birds take it in turn to sing. The complicated mechanism has two cams, one for song, beaks and tailfeathers, the other for the heads; allowing the singing bird's beak to move whilst both birds' heads move continually from side to side.

Bontems' range of superb gilt-bronze automaton cages decorated with Sèvres panels, represented the

haute luxe end of the firm's production. A cage of identical size, with canted corners and porcelain panels is illustrated as Model 525 (*Cage à pans coupés*) in the Bontems catalog of c. 1910, priced at 340 Francs in comparison to 126 Francs for a cage of the same dimensions on a giltwood base.