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Fine Art & Antiques



François Linke

An Exceptionally Rare and Important Louis XV Style Gilt-Bronze Mounted Marquetry Inlaid Centre Table, The Mounts Designed by Léon Messagé

Circa: Circa 1920

Late 19th Century

75 x 100 x 61 cm (29 1/4 x 39 3/4 x 24 inches)

Wood Marquetry Gilt-Bronze Mounted

France

The upper molding signed '*Linke*' and stamped to the carcass '*Made in France*', Stamped '*FL*' to the reverse of the bronze mounts, the feet stamped '*2029*'

An Exceptionally Rare and Important Louis XV Style Gilt-Bronze Mounted Marquetry Inlaid Centre Table by François Linke, the Mounts Designed by Léon Messagé.

Linke Index No. 930.

Signed '*Linke*' to the upper bronze moulding.

Stamped '*FL*' to the reverse of the bronze mounts.

Of exhibition quality this magnificent table has a fine marquetry inlaid top and sumptuous gilt-bronze mounts, designed and sculpted by Léon Messagé. The shaped gilt-bronze mounted serpentine top is finely inlaid with scrolling bois de bout floral marquetry, above an undulating frieze set to the front with a long drawer and centred by a female mask, the sides are mounted with exuberant scallop-shell mounts and the angles with lively and emotive female *espagnolettes* emblematic of Modestie and Coquetterie;

the table is raised on cabriole legs terminating in shell-capped scrolled sabots.

A rare example in Linke's oeuvre, the table is a variation of a larger example *index number 930*, described by Linke as *modèle riche*, which included an elaborate stretcher with banner-bearing cherubs based on Léon Messagé's celebrated sculptural group 'La Source' (*illustrated C. Payne, p.172, Pl. 186*). Linke workshop's *cliché* of the larger *modèle riche* is illustrated in C. Payne, p.483.

The exceptional sculptural mounts are characteristic of the very finest 19th Century furniture created through François Linke and Léon Messagé's collaboration. Messagé's enhanced Louis XV Rococo style embraces the asymmetrical lines of designers such as J.A. Meissonnier, to create lively and emotive figures linked by sinuous *encadrement*, but cleverly modernised to reflect the surge of popularity of the Art Nouveau.

The female busts, referred to by Linke as *Coquetterie et Modestie*, although reminiscent of the paintings of François Boucher and Flaconet have moved on in their design from the classical espagnolette, introduced by Charles Cressent in the 18th century, to become something new and vital.

Designed for the celebrated '*Commode coquille: Coquetterie et Modestie*' (*index 559*), presented at his award-winning stand at the 1900 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, (*C. Payne, p.142-144, pl. 151*), Linke was obliged to purchase their design at a tremendous cost from Messagé. First castings began in 1897 and they proved fruitful for Linke, becoming a favourite mount, repurposed by Linke for use on a number of important designs.

The larger version of the current table was intended to be displayed en suite with the commode but was not ready in time for the exhibition. It was first exhibited at the *Salon des Industries du Mobilier* in 1902, and again in Liège in 1905 (*C. Payne, p. 170-173*).

Available in three sizes, 132 cm x 72 cm, 138 x 75 cm and an even larger version (*index no. 965*) the design proved popular with Linke's clientele, which included commissions supplied to Elias Meyer in 1909 (*Illustrated C. Payne; p.243, pl. 258*), Madame d'Astoreca in 1910, Antonio Devoto in 1913 and for King Fuad I's study at Ras al-Tin, Alexandria, Egypt in the 1920s, (*Illustrated C. Payne; p.289, pl. 300*).

Léon Messagé

Léon Messagé (1842-1901) had a brilliant, but short lived career. He is best known for his incredible sculptural collaboration with François Linke for the 1900 Paris *Exposition Universelle*. A gifted sculptor, Messagé was also responsible for much of the design and creative work for Roux et Brunet and Joseph-Emmanuel Zwiener.

Messageé enjoyed great success as a designer/sculptor before his collaboration with Linke. Indeed he was mentioned as a gold medal winner at the 1889 International Exhibition and was especially praised for his work on a cabinet by Zwiener. He came into contact with Linke in 1885 and it appears from then on Linke employed him on a regular basis.

Messageé was primarily influenced by rococo ornament but he strove to re-interpret it. He did not produce slavish copies, and his original approach can be appreciated in Linke's celebrated *Grande Bibliothèque* and *Grand Bureau* exhibited at the 1900 Paris *Exposition Universelle*. A number of drawings by Messageé are recorded and after his success at the exhibition of 1889 he was encouraged to publish his designs.

'*Cahier de dessins & croquis, style Louis XV: bronzes, orfèvrerie, décoration, meubles*' was first published by the sculptor himself, from his Paris address of 40 rue Sedaine. There were five sections with an elaborate title page surmounted by the sculptor's cipher or talisman of a wing, a pun on his own name as the messenger to the Gods, a motif he used many times on the handles of furniture designed for Linke.

As a sculptor Messageé was trained to produce a wax maquette or model prior to working on a piece. It is especially interesting that his maquettes were of the piece of furniture in its entirety, a rare and exacting task occasionally seen for eighteenth century French Royal commissions. For Messageé it was not just a matter of producing decorative mounts; the piece was conceived as sculpture, bronze, timber and marquetry as one.

Literature:

Payne, Christopher. François Linke, (1855 - 1946), The Belle Époque of French Furniture, Antique Collectors' Club, (Woodbridge, UK), 2003.

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Ledoux - Lebard, Denise. Les Ébénistes du XIXe siècle, Les Editions de l'Amateur, (Paris), 1984; pp. 439-43.

Revue Artistique & Industrielle, (Paris), July-August 1900.

Coral Thomsen, D. (ed), The Paris Exhibition 1900, The Art Journal, 1901; p.341.

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.