

# ADRIAN ALAN

*Fine Art & Antiques*



## **A Fine Italian Carved Giltwood Low Centre Table with A Pietre Dure Marble Top**

Circa: Italian, Circa 1860

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64 x 112 x 61 cm (25 1/4 x 44 1/4 x 24 inches)

Carved Giltwood Pietre Dure

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This impressive giltwood low table has a fine pietre dure inlaid marble top inset within a gadrooned border above a shaped foliate carved apron, the table is raised on 'S'-scroll and acanthus carved legs with ball feet, united by a corresponding carved central stretcher.

The rectangular pietre dure top has canted corners and is centred by a Belgian black marble cartouche inlaid with ribbon tied flowers of shaded agates, marble, and lapis, within a wide border of pink brocatelle marble, framed by a wide outer border of Belgian black marble, inlaid to the angles with further foliate sprays.

Italian, Circa 1860.

Pietre dure or hard stone mosaic was a costly and time-intensive art form perfected during the Renaissance in Florence, under the patronage of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, the Medici.

Rome in the early Sixteenth Century was the catalysing centre of High Renaissance culture. It was here

that the cult of the Antique, and the excitement of archaeological discovery was fostering a lasting passion for the marbles and rare stones that had adorned Imperial Rome in the days of her splendour. In Rome there was also a tradition of skilled marble working that had survived throughout the Middle Ages and made possible the revival of ingenious techniques such as 'opus sectile'. This was a composition of irregular sections of coloured stone, used since the days of the Roman Empire, mainly for the covering of pavements and walls. The Renaissance brought about a revival and refining of this technique and saw its adoption for display furniture for the homes of rich and cultivated patrons, in a form known as 'intarsia'.

The Medici family were amongst the keenest admirers of Roman 'intarsia' work, and it is clear that it played an important part in the birth of 'Florentine mosaic', later to be known as 'Pietre Dure', which was far more complex, and involved the creation of motifs and pictures, not just the geometrical shapes of the earlier 'intarsias'.

In 1588 Grand Duke Ferdinando I founded in Florence the 'Galleria de' Lavori in Pietre Dure', a hardstone workshop combining all the Grand Ducal workshops. He hired local craftsmen and trained them to restore ancient carved-stone objects as well as create original works in 'pietre dure'. These artists soon perfected the art of making pictures with thin pieces of brightly coloured semi-precious stones. By the end of the century, Florence was to hold an international supremacy in the highly specialised field of 'pietre dure' that was to last for nearly three Centuries.

During the 1600's the Galleria's work was mainly restricted to Florence, concentrating on the decorations of the Medici family's chapel in the church of San Lorenzo, begun in 1605, and the Tribune in the Uffizi, intended to be a showcase for the finest pieces in the Medici collections. But by the 1700's, when 'pietre dure' became increasingly fashionable, artists trained in the workshop travelled all over Europe to work for other noble or royal households.

Brilliantly coloured flowers, fruits, and birds on a ground of black porphyry were consistently the favourite compositions for 'pietre dure' works. In these designs the memory of Ligozzi's (1547 - 1626) naturalism coexists with extreme stylisation. The plant theme was also to be continued in the festoons of bronze foliage and 'pietre dure' fruits, for which the Galleria even created a new job of 'fruttista'.

The end of the Tuscan Grand Duchy in 1859 was to see the end of the Galleria's dominance, since it had always been so closely linked to the Court. The House of Savoy almost completely ignored the manufactory, preferring to obtain their furnishings and gifts from private Florentine workshops, most notably that of Enrico Bosi. The 1870's did see commissions to the Galleria from other monarchs such as Ludwig II of Bavaria and Alexander II of Russia, for pieces in the grand tradition of the past, and such productions maintained earlier levels of quality and taste.