PROANTIC
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French Commode Napoleon III Style



11 000 EUR

Period : 19th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Painted wood

Width : 125 cm

Height : 115 cm

Depth : 45 cm

Description

This outstanding Empire style cabinet, crafted in France circa 1860 during the Second Empire under Napoleon III, exemplifies the grandeur and refinement of French decorative arts in the 19th century. Richly decorated with gilt bronze ornamentation and adorned with exquisite Pietra Dura panels, it is a work of exceptional quality, both in craftsmanship and historical significance.
Historical Context
Following the turbulence of the Napoleonic era and the fall of the First Empire, the mid-19th century in France saw a deliberate revival of earlier imperial aesthetics. Under Emperor Napoleon III, the Second Empire (1852-1870) fostered a return to opulence, drawing inspiration from the glory of Napoléon I and the neoclassical traditions of ancient Rome and Greece. This

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cabinet perfectly embodies that spirit, blending classical iconography with the technical virtuosity of France's best 19th-century artisans.

The Empire style, originally popularized between 1800 and 1815, became a powerful political and cultural symbol. By the time of Napoleon III, it had evolved into a more decorative and eclectic language--Second Empire style--which retained the symmetry and classical rigor of neoclassicism while incorporating richer materials and more sculptural ornamentation.

This cabinet was likely commissioned by a wealthy patron--possibly a high-ranking member of the imperial court or the bourgeois elite--keen to align themselves with the imperial heritage and sophistication of the era. Such pieces were often part of grand interiors in Haussmann-era Parisian residences or private hôtels particuliers.

Description

The cabinet is constructed from ebonized wood, polished to a high sheen using the French polish technique, and surmounted by a finely veined slab of Carrara marble. Its architecture is both imposing and symmetrical--hallmarks of neoclassical design--framed by boldly cast gilt bronze mounts, including anthemia, scrolling acanthus leaves, and Greco-Roman friezes. Flanking the front are two gilded caryatid figures, inspired by classical antiquity, specifically the priestesses of Artemis at Caryae or the women of Caryae--legendary figures punished for siding with Persia during the Greco-Persian wars. These sculptural female forms symbolize both strength and submission to divine order, a theme consistent with the Empire's ideological underpinnings.

The twin doors are inlaid with Pietra Dura panels, a rare and precious decorative art perfected in Renaissance Florence and prized throughout Europe. Composed of polished hardstones such as green onyx, enamel, and colored marbles, the floral arrangements in classical urns feature detailed renderings of cherries, mirabelle plums, and assorted flowers--each stone carefully

selected and fitted by hand.
Additional highlights include:
Finely detailed cartouche-style escutcheons in gilt bronze
Symmetrical gilt bronze borders framing each panel
A shaped apron with a central anthemion mount
Four oval feet with bronze accents providing a sense of elevation and lightnessMore than just a piece of furniture, this cabinet is a manifestation of 19th-century France's artistic, political, and cultural identity. It bridges the ideals of the First Empire with the decorative innovation of the Second Empire, standing as both an object of beauty and a historical artifact.