



Louis XV Period Flat-top Desk In Vernis Martin With Chinese Decorations, Circa 1760



15 000 EUR

Period : 18th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Lacquer

Length : 120

Height : 75

Depth : 59

Description

Louis XV Period Flat-Top Desk in Vernis Martin with Chinoiserie Decor, circa 1760

An exceptional flat-top desk, fully finished in Vernis Martin, featuring three belt drawers and imitating Chinese and Japanese lacquer. It is adorned with chinoiserie decorations in gold, red, and green polychrome on a black background, depicting lakeside landscapes animated with figures and fishermen--a refined example of French craftsmanship. The top, covered in patinated red leather, is centered with a black leather marquetry inlaid with gold tooling. The desk stands on four elegantly curved legs.

Origin and Dating:

Created around 1760, this desk exemplifies the

Dealer

MLD Antiquités

Mobilier, tableaux, objets d'Art et lustres des XVIIIème et XIXème siècle

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art of Vernis Martin, a technique perfected in 1728 by the Martin brothers of Paris. They developed a closely guarded lacquer imitation formula designed to rival the costly imported lacquers of Japan and China.

Condition:

Overall excellent condition. Routine restorations and maintenance performed in our workshops. The leather has been replaced.

Dimensions:

Height: 29.5 in

Length: 47.2 in

Depth: 23.2 in

Historical and Technical Context:

Vernis Martin, made from copal resin, was invented to compete with Asian lacquer. It provided a more affordable and flexible alternative, perfectly suited to the curved forms of French furniture. Beyond its practical advantages, it became a medium for artistic expression, reproducing contemporary paintings on furniture. Note: In the late 19th century, the term "vernis Martin" was incorrectly applied to folding fans, which had no connection to the original 18th-century technique.

Biography:

The Martin Brothers, Pioneers of Vernis Martin in 18th-Century France During the Age of Enlightenment, Parisian craftsmen Guillaume and Étienne-Simon Martin revolutionized furniture design with their invention of Vernis Martin. Patented in 1728, their innovative formula--composed of copal, pigments, and resins--mimicked the lustrous effect of Oriental lacquer at a fraction of the cost, while adapting seamlessly to the curves of French furniture, unlike rigid and expensive lacquer panels. Based in the artisan quarter of Faubourg-Saint-Antoine, the Martin brothers catered to a growing demand for exotic decor.

Their workshop produced pieces adorned with landscapes, floral motifs, and chinoiserie, captivating the elite of the time. Though less resistant to moisture than authentic lacquer, their varnish remained popular well into the 19th century.

Their contribution to decorative arts is significant: they made luxury accessible to a broader audience. Today, their work is celebrated and studied, as seen in the 2014 retrospective at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, which highlighted their unique expertise.

Notable Works:

In 1742, Mathieu Criaerd (1689-1776, master in 1738) crafted a commode, a corner cupboard, and a writing table in blue and white for Madame de Mailly, commissioned by the merchant Hébert. Only the commode and the base of the corner cupboard survive today, preserved in the Louvre.

Exhibition:

2014: "The Secrets of French Lacquer: Vernis Martin," Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (February 13-June 8).

Bibliography:

Thibaut Wolvesperges, *French Lacquer Furniture in the 18th Century*, Éditions de l'Amateur. Anne Forray-Carlier and Monika Kopplin (eds.), *The Secrets of French Lacquer: Vernis Martin*, Paris, Les Arts Décoratifs, 2014.