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19th-century Mantel Clock, Empire Style



3 500 EUR

Period : 19th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Bronze

Width : 34 cm

Height : 54 cm

Depth : 13 cm

Description

This splendid early 19th-century French Empire-style mantel clock is a remarkable example of the artistic refinement, technical mastery, and allegorical richness that characterized the decorative arts during the reign of Emperor Napoleon I. Finely chased and gilded with gilt bronze (ormolu), this clock embodies the Neoclassical ideals of harmony, symmetry, and timeless beauty inspired by the art and mythology of ancient Greece and Rome. Design and Composition: The composition centers around an antique-draped figure of a young musician, possibly Apollo, the Greek god of music, poetry, and the arts. The figure stands gracefully beside a lyre, a symbol closely associated with Apollo, delicately resting a hand on the strings, as if captured in a moment of inspiration. The

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sculptural modeling of the figure reveals a refined sense of anatomy and movement, typical of the Empire period's fascination with classical sculpture and the idealized human form. The lyre is placed atop the clock's rectangular case, which houses a circular white enamel dial with Roman numerals and openwork gilt hands. The dial is framed by a finely chased bronze ring, adorned with delicate floral and foliate motifs. The clock's movement, likely an eight-day movement, exemplifies the horological expertise of the great Parisian masters of the early 19th century--perhaps from one of the renowned workshops of Lepaute, Feuchère, or Thomire, whose creations embodied the luxurious taste of the Napoleonic court. Base and Ornamentation The rectangular base is richly decorated with finely chased reliefs depicting laurel wreaths, rosettes, and musical trophies such as lyres, scrolls, and garlands--all symbols of artistic triumph and cultural enlightenment. The central panel features a medallion of a swan beside a lyre, another classical motif associated with Apollo and the Muses, evoking purity, grace, and creative inspiration. The whole rests on small spherical feet, lending the composition a lightness and elegance that contrast with its monumental character. Every detail--from the crisp chasing of the bronze to the delicate gilding--reflects the exceptional quality of Empire-period gilt-bronze work, intended for an elite clientele in early 19th-century Paris. Historical Context During the Empire period (1804-1815), French decorative arts reached their zenith under the patronage of Napoleon Bonaparte. Artists and artisans drew inspiration from the models of ancient Rome and Greece, exalting strength, order, and imperial grandeur. Gilt-bronze clocks like this one were among the most prestigious interior ornaments of the era, adorning the salons of Parisian aristocrats and European courts. Often placed on mantelpieces or consoles, they served not only as timekeeping instruments but also as powerful symbols of intellect, refinement, and artistic

culture. Summary: This exquisite Empire mantel clock stands as both a technical and artistic masterpiece--a synthesis of fine horology, sculpture, and Neoclassical symbolism. Its sumptuous gilding, allegorical subject matter, and impeccable execution make it an emblematic example of early 19th-century French decorative arts, a lasting testament to the elegance and cultural ambition of the Napoleonic era.