# Antique Wooden Camera With Besset Mechanical Shutter. France, C. 1885



1 200 EUR

Period : 19th century

Condition : Bon état

Length : 18,5 cms (7,28 in.)

Height : 25,5 cms (10 in.)

## Description

Magnificent French field camera manufactured circa 1885, built entirely in fine hardwood with brass fittings and burgundy leather bellows. It is a large-format example, designed for 13×18 cm plates, intended for professional use in studios and outdoor photography during the late nineteenth century. The camera is preserved in excellent overall condition and retains all its original components, including the focusing guides and the bellows extension system, which preserves its original flexibility and colour without tears or light leaks. The set includes three high-quality wooden holders, perfectly fitted to the rear frame, also original from the period and in very good structural condition.

The body is constructed in solid walnut wood

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with brass reinforcements on hinges, locks and guides. The surface shows a beautiful golden patina that highlights the grain of the material. All metallic hinges, locks and knobs function precisely and without looseness. The structure remains outstandingly stable, and both the ground glass and the bellows extension mechanism operate correctly. The bellows, made of burgundy leather, is preserved in exceptional condition, with intact folds, deep colour and total light-tightness.

The most notable feature of this camera is the French mechanical shutter Besset & Cie, manufactured in Paris between 1885 and 1895. It is one of the earliest vertical guillotine or sliding-plate shutters, precursor to later blind shutters. Its mechanism, visible on the blackened front plate, includes the notched wheel for diaphragm adjustment and the lower trigger characteristic of the firm. This type of shutter marked a decisive transition in the history of photography: for the first time it allowed exposure time to be controlled mechanically.

The metal front shows the partial inscription "BESS CT PARIS", which clearly identifies the manufacturer Besset Constructeur. This Parisian workshop was active between 1880 and 1900 and specialized in accessories and shutters for high-end field cameras. The mechanism is preserved complete and operational. This model allowed instantaneous exposures equivalent to 1/30-1/50 of a second, as well as pose and prolonged exposure modes.

The camera bears no visible maker's mark, which was common in many models sold to distributors or assemblers in the late nineteenth century. Its design, however, clearly corresponds to the French workshops that produced tropical or studio cameras between 1880 and 1890, with a sober aesthetic, excellent wood finishing and polished brass fittings. The entire set is visually

striking: the combination of the burgundy leather bellows with the warm shine of the wood and the contrast of the black shutter give this piece a museum-quality presence.

For its rarity, excellent preservation and the presence of the complete original Besset shutter, this camera is a jewel of photographic history. It represents the technical evolution that allowed photographers to abandon the lens cap and achieve timed exposures, one of the fundamental milestones in the development of photography.

This piece is ideal for display, collecting or museum exhibition, and will undoubtedly be a point of attraction in any decorative or technical environment related to the history of photography. Its excellent structural condition, authenticity and complete set of accessories make it an exceptional opportunity for demanding collectors.

Every detail of this camera reflects the definitive transition from artisanal photography to the mechanical era. It is a direct testimony to the birth of controlled exposure, a milestone that forever transformed photographic practice around 1885. When contemplating it, one perceives the intact emotion of those early photographers who, for the first time, were able to stop time with precision and intention; a piece that not only documents history, but embodies it with soul and origin.

Dimensions: 18,5 x 25,5 cms (7,28 x 10 in.)

History of Besset & Cie

The manufacturer Besset Constructeur was a French workshop active in Paris during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Specialized in mechanical shutters, guillotine devices and accessories for large-format cameras, Besset belonged to the group of engineers and

mechanics who drove the transition from artisanal photography to technical precision. Its products were aimed at professional photographers and portrait studios, and were marketed in France and Belgium through specialized catalogues.

The period of activity of the Besset firm coincided with the rise of other Parisian manufacturers such as Derogy, Darlot or Carpentier, all dedicated to perfecting exposure control systems and mechanizing field photography. Besset shutters were distinguished by their square metal structure, blackened front plate and the presence of a notched retaining wheel, an element that gave them an unmistakable appearance.

These mechanisms represented a decisive step in the history of photographic technology. Before their invention, exposures were carried out manually using the lens cap, with unpredictable results. The guillotine shutters developed by Besset, Jousset or Gaumont allowed, for the first time, exposure to be measured with relative precision, which transformed photographic practice worldwide.

Although the company disappeared around 1900, its shutters continued to be mounted on cameras from various manufacturers for years. Today, pieces signed or attributable to Besset are very scarce, and are especially valued when they preserve their integrity and functionality. The example described here constitutes a magnificent testimony to that pioneering stage in the technical history of photography.

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