



Rare Carved And Ebonized Wood Sculpture - Francesco Toso (1846-1903) - Venice, C. 1875-1890



6 000 EUR

Signature : Francesco Toso

Period : 19th century

Condition : En l'etat

Length : 87

Description

Technical Sheet

Period: Late 19th Century (c. 1875 - 1890)

Origin: Italy, Venice

Artist / School: Francesco Toso (Murano 1846 - Venice 1903), master woodcarver and cabinetmaker

Material: Finely carved wood (likely walnut or pearwood) with ebonized and patinated details

Dimensions: Height approx. 87 cm

Condition: Excellent original condition with a rich period patina.

Description

An intriguing and highly eccentric period sculpture in finely carved and partially ebonized wood depicting a Victorian dandy or gentleman, crafted by the renowned Venetian woodcarver and cabinetmaker Francesco Toso (1846-1903).

Dealer

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1. The Artist and Historical Context

Francesco Toso was one of the most refined masters of late 19th-century Venetian woodcarving. Active in Grand Tour-era Venice, he frequently collaborated with major artistic firms of the period (such as Salviati) and shared extraordinary technical virtuosity with figures like Valentino Panciera Besarel. Renowned for his meticulous attention to detail, Toso's works entered the collections of prominent European patrons; carved furniture and sculptures by Toso are held today in prestigious public and private collections, including the Borgogna Museum in Vercelli.

2. Iconography and Stylistic Analysis

This piece belongs to the tradition of sculptural theatrical caricature and social satire, a sought-after genre among the late 19th-century elite.

The figure is depicted in a slouching, languid pose: the elongated, slender silhouette, crossed legs, and narrow waist remarkably anticipate the fluid lines of Art Nouveau and Expressionism.

Tipping his top hat in a gallant greeting, he reveals a sly, asymmetrical smile framed by prominent period sideburns.

The carving demonstrates exceptional craftsmanship:

Soft, realistic drapery folds in the coat and trousers.

Intricately carved necktie/plastron at the collar.

Fine detailing on the shoelaces and garment stitching.

3. Theme: The "Gentleman / Jack the Ripper" and the Victorian Double Life

The fascination of this sculpture also stems from its compelling narrative theme, deeply intertwined with late Victorian lore from the 1880s-1890s.

During this era, illustrated newspapers (The Illustrated Police News) and gothic literature (The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, published in 1886) popularized the concept of the "monster in high-society attire." Much like

popular depictions of Jack the Ripper in 1888 London, the figure wears the uniform of respectable upper-class society: top hat, dark overcoat, gloves, and a refined posture.

A chilling detail is found in the outstretched left hand: the fingertips emerging from the ebonized glove taper into sharp, claw-like points. This artistic device subtly signals the predatory or demonic nature hidden beneath the facade of a polished gentleman.

4. Wood Type, Technique, and Patina

Wood Species: Carved from a dense, fine-grained hardwood (attributable to walnut or pearwood), favored by Venetian cabinetmakers for its stability and suitability for micro-detail carving.

Finish: Beautiful original french-polished (shellac) patina, bringing out the warm, amber tones of the wood.

Selective Ebonizing: The top hat, gloves, and shoes were intentionally darkened/ebonized to simulate felt and leather, providing a striking chromatic contrast.

A rare find on the market, perfect for collectors of 19th-century wood sculpture, Grand Tour curiosities, and fine figurative carvings.