



Canton Enamel Bowl And Display Stand, Dragon Handles, Eight Buddhist Emblems, Late 18th Century

2 500 EUR

Signature : Canton

Period : 18th century

Condition : Parfait état

Material : Enamel



Description

This is not an ordinary cup and saucer but a complete, carefully conceived set in which form, technique and symbolism answer one another. A small wine cup with two hollow handles in the form of stylised chilong dragons sits in the raised, flower-shaped well of its stand. The form is known from Qianlong court wares: the Palace Museum, Beijing, preserves a cup with gilt handles and a dish rising at its centre into a well to receive it, both in painted enamel on gold and bearing Qianlong marks.

Technique. Painted enamel on copper (hua falang), known as Canton enamel: a white ground, coloured enamels and several successive firings, where a single kiln accident destroyed all the work. The pink of the palette was obtained

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with gold.

The handles. Each is assembled from two mirror-image halves, shaped under pressure, precisely fitted and joined so firmly that they have held for more than two centuries; the two handles match. A cast handle would have been simpler and cheaper; the maker chose the long road. Being hollow, the handles lighten the set (cup 81 g, stand 141 g) and conduct less heat. They were mounted before firing, so the enamel runs unbroken from handle to bowl.

Rarity. Hollow, assembled chilong handles are exceptionally rare in Canton enamel. The only published parallel known to us is a Qianlong-period (1736-1795) Canton enamel twin-handled cup with stylised chilong handles, sold by Guest and Gray, a member of the British Antique Dealers' Association.

Iconography.

Inside the cup: the Buddhist wan symbol 卐, a sacred sign used here in its original religious meaning. It is a variant of the character 十, "ten thousand"; in Buddhism the seal of the Buddha's heart, in China a sign of endless longevity.

In the well of the stand: the round character shou 寿, "longevity", in iron red on a yellow medallion within pink petals.

Together: wan shou 卐寿, "ten thousand years of longevity". With the cup in place, wan rests exactly above shou, and the wish is fulfilled only when the pieces are united. This is the very formula of imperial wine sets: the Palace Museum preserves a gold cup and dish with handles pierced as the characters wan shou and wu jiang ("without limit"), the dish rising at its centre into a support for the cup. The museum considers it to have served at mid-Qing imperial birthdays.

The Eight Buddhist Emblems (bajixiang), a complete series divided between the two pieces.

On the stand: the Wheel of the Dharma, the Conch, the Parasol and the Endless Knot. On the cup: the Canopy, the Lotus, the Vase and the Pair of Fish. Respectively they stand for the teaching, the voice of the Dharma, protection, the interdependence of all things, the victory of wisdom, purity, abundance and freedom in the ocean of existence.

The pair of fish, round-eyed and cheerful, their mouths joined by a ribbon, also evoke marital happiness and fertility. Yu ?, "fish", sounds like yu ?, "surplus": may every year bring abundance. Borders: lotus petals beneath the cup, a pendant festoon at the rim, blue cloud scrolls inside, dense scrolling foliage on the stand.

Patronage. A complete series of the Eight Emblems deliberately divided between two pieces and joined to the wan shou rebus is no casual decoration. It was conceived by someone versed in the language of symbols, for an owner able to read it in full, which points to a wealthy and learned patron. The longevity theme suggests a birthday gift, though this cannot be proven.

Rare from the moment it was made, the set has become rarer still: hollow handles are fragile, and cup and stand have come down to us together. As the Chinese proverb says, ?????: a fine thing is never cheap.

Attribution: China, Guangzhou (Canton), Qing dynasty, late 18th century

Material: copper, painted enamels, remains of gilding

Dimensions: stand 12.4 cm diameter, 2 cm high; cup 5.2 cm high, 6.9 cm diameter, 11.8 cm across the handles

Weight: cup 81 g; stand 141 g

Condition: Very good for its age. Enamel stable, with no flaking or cracks (checked under UV light) and no restoration detected; fine natural surface crazing to the underside of the stand.

Cup: small enamel loss of c. 4 mm at the base of one handle; pinhead chip to the interior; enamel worn along the handle seams, where the join of the two halves is visible.

Stand: very slight, barely visible bend to the rim on one side; visible joint of the copper foot ring, as made.

Rims and foot rings with natural wear and remains of gilding.

Photographs form part of the description; please examine them carefully. The set will be packed with great care and sent by insured, tracked delivery.