

PARIS - EUROPEAN SILVER FROM THE 17th, 18th AND 19th CENTURIES

Monday, 15 December 2003

A RARE 17TH CENTURY SILVER STATUE OF SAINT GENEVIEVE THE PATRON SAINT OF THE CITY OF PARIS

AN EXCEPTIONAL BLOOD JASPER CUP FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE DUC DE LUYNES BY JEAN-VALENTIN MOREL



Sotheby's will offer on Monday 15 December, 2003, in Paris an ensemble of fine French and European silver, both rare and unusual. Very few silver pieces dating back to the 17th century appear on the market, and the sale of three pieces from that period is an exceptional event.

The oldest of the French pieces in the sale is a big silver statue (32.4 cm high) of Saint Geneviève, probably made by Jean II de Laon, bearing the silversmith's mark of Paris, 1636-1637. The saint is portrayed as a shepherdess holding a dog in her left hand and a twisted crook in her right hand. She is richly dressed in a court mantle and a broad hat with a jagged brim, but her feet are bare. Born around 422 in Nanterre, in the region of Paris, Geneviève came from a rich aristocratic Gallo-Roman family. She took the veil at the age of fifteen after having miraculously cured her mother. When Attila, the King of the Huns, threatened to invade Paris, she succeeded in persuading Parisians not to flee from the city on his approach. It was she who launched the foundations for the first Basilica of Saint-Denis. Clovis and Clothilde, who were very devoted to Saint Geneviève, built a church named after her over her tomb. Geneviève is the patron saint of the city of Paris, and her relics are kept in the church of Saint Etienne du Mont behind the Pantheon, on a hill known as The Montagne Sainte-Geneviève (lot 152, estimate: € 80,000 to 120,000).

A fine silver crucifix on an oval stand is from the same period, Paris 1639-1640 (lot 149, estimate: € 8,000 to 12,000). An unusual pair of dressing-table candlesticks was made even earlier, around 1600, probably by Cristobal Joan, a Spanish silversmith from Tarragona, (lot 150, estimate: € 20,000 to 30,000).

An exceptional pair of toilet boxes, each in an oval and arched shape on six legs, bear the silversmith's mark of Guillielmus van Eesbeeck, Brussels, 1707-1711. The light and delicate chasing is remarkable. French dressing-table boxes in silver are very much sought after by collectors, and when the boxes are Belgian, they are usually older and extremely rare (lot 151, estimate: € 100,000 to 150,000).



Sets of four candlesticks of the 18th century are extremely rare. This sale offers three! The first set bears the mark of Genoa, around 1760 (lot 89, estimate: € 25,000 to 35,000). A second set was made by Hugues Lossieux de la Vallée, Saint Malo, 1707-1708, and is engraved with the arms of the Le Gobien family of Brittany (lot 95, estimate: € 15,000 to 20,000). The most extraordinary set was made by François Rigal in Paris in 1736-1737. It has the arms of the Picot de Plédran family, who were of Scottish origin. They had settled in Saint Malo in the 16th century and made their fortune from maritime trading (lot 101, estimate: € 50,000 to 80,000). Among the pairs of candlesticks, the one by the well known silversmith Louis-Joseph Lenhendrick, produced in Paris in 1766-1767 and 1768-1769, bears the arms of the de Mareuil family from Picardy (lot 118, estimate: € 25,000 to 35,000).

THE SILVER SPOON AND FORK OF THE COMTE D'ARTOIS, THE FUTURE CHARLES X

A rare historic item is included in the sale in the form of a silver set au filet, engraved with the royal coat-of-arms of the Comte d'Artois, brother of Louis XVI and Louis XVIII, who became Charles X in 1824. Despite being worn by time, this item is of great interest since it seems to be the only set identified to date, which survived the upheavals of the Revolution (lot 100, estimate: € 1,500 to 2,000). A small silver-gilt milk pot, in a sober and refined shape, was made by Robert-Joseph Auguste, Paris, 1782-1783. It was part of an exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1926 (lot 122, estimate: € 10,000 to 15,000).

THE TALENT OF THE 19th CENTURY FRENCH SILVERSMITHS

The French 19th silver in the sale is of an outstanding quality. A two-tone silver-gilt tea and coffee service, in an oriental style, is a fine example of the technical prowess of the time. The teapot, creamer and sugar bowl were made by Constant Révil, and the coffee pot by Louis Manant, in Paris around 1860. Three of the pieces are also stamped DUPONCHEL A PARIS underneath the base. Henri Duponchel (1794-1868), who had commissioned this service, led a very full life. He studied painting with Delacroix, he was the architect of Baron James de Rothschild, and a designer of theatre costumes and stage director, a career which culminated in his post as Director of the Opéra de Paris. He was also a silversmith, and for a while worked as a partner of Jean-Valentin Morel, about whom more will be said further on. He received awards at all the Expositions Universelles between 1855 and 1867, and worked for clients as prestigious as Prince Léon Radziwill, the Duc de Luynes and Emperor Napoleon III (lot 65, estimate: € 12,000 to 18,000).

A rare pair of thirteen-branched chandeliers and a pair of compotiers, in silver-plated metal, made by Jean-Baptiste-Gustave Odiot, in Paris around 1878, are part of a large table centre-piece known as "Flore et Zéphyr", designed by the sculptor François Gilbert and displayed at the Exposition Universelle in 1878 (lot 47, estimate: € 30,000 to 40,000). Also worth mentioning is a silver-gilt wine cooler by Jean-François Warnots, Brussels, 1831-1838, with handles in the form of foliage surmounted by horses. It bears the monogram of King Léopold I, the first King of the Belgians (lot 55, estimate: € 25,000 to 35,000).

AN EXCEPTIONAL BLOOD JASPER CUP FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE DUC DE LUYNES BY JEAN-VALENTIN MOREL

The most precious piece of the sale is unquestionably the last lot, an exceptional blood jasper cup, set on a piedouche and mounted in enamelled gold, made by Jean-Valentin Morel, Paris 1854-1855, for the Duc de Luynes.

Morel was born in Paris in 1794, the son of a lapidary by profession, and related through his mother to a family of Parisian silversmiths. He became an apprentice to Adrien Vachette, a supplier of gold boxes, where he learned the traditional techniques of jewellers and silversmiths. When he set up on his own, he did not work with the expensive materials usually used by silversmiths for financial reasons but turned to other inlay techniques. The quality of his work is dazzling. As he suffered from bad health, he was obliged to stop working for a year, but then became head of the Fossin workshop where he revived the process of embossed work on gold, which he applied on objects made of hard stone. He became a partner of Henri Duponchel, with whom he produced ornamental vases, table silverware, jewellery sets and accessories, as well as a wide variety of ornaments combined together with great imagination, which earned him an international reputation. For example, he made the binding of a missal for Pope Gregory XVI, a table service for the King of Sardinia and several objects for the future William III of the Netherlands, and for the Duc de Luynes in France.



In 1846, business declined, and the two partners had a dispute. Morel left to settle in London, not far from the rival firms of Piccadilly, such as Storr and Mortimer, and Garrard, but he came up against English prejudices. He nevertheless enjoyed support from the French who had sought exile in England because of the Revolution of 1848, and was recommended to Queen Victoria, who granted him a permit as an official supplier. He received modest commissions but devoted all his energy to preparing for the Exposition Universelle of 1851, where he received the highest award. The jeweller's most brilliant works were his cups in hard stone, made in the manner of the 16th century. At the end of 1852, having lost all financial backing, he was obliged to close his business and return to France. He opened a new workshop in Sèvres and made a cup in lapis lazuli for the English collector Henry Thomas Hope, which earned him the gold medal of the Exposition Universelle of 1855.

Despite his talent, Valentin Morel always had difficulty in carving a name for himself and only his courage and perseverance enabled him to win recognition. The Duc de Luynes (1802-1867), a great art lover and patron, supplied ideas and materials to silversmiths as they suffered from the economic difficulties of that period. Morel benefited from the generosity of the Duc de Luynes, who became one of his principal patrons. In 1854, he commissioned the circular blood jasper and gold mounted cup, in this sale, and gave Morel two antique cameos to decorate it. They were inlaid in garlands of small, multicoloured, enamelled flowers, to complete the ornamentation of the handles in the form of two enamelled mermaids with green, red and blue wings. This object, of a rare quality, has remained among the descendants of the Duc de Luynes to this day (lot 154, estimate: € 80,000 to 120,000).

EXHIBITION IN PARIS
on Wednesday 10 December from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Thursday 11 and Friday 12 December from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
and Saturday 13 December from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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