Louis XVI period Martin varnish Chest of drawers



Paris, circa 1780

Dimensions : H. 87 x W. 130 x D. 55 cm

This elegant chest of drawers has a half-moon shape, opening on the front with two drawers without a crossbar, and doors on the rounded sides. The "Martin varnish" used here for the decoration was invented by the Martin brothers in the mid 18th century. Based on copal, this varnish made it possible to imitate the Chinese and Japanese lacquers which arrived on panels from the East, and whose prices were obviously exorbitant. The Martin varnish technique has nothing to envy to the oriental lacquers because it allows a great fineness of drawing and subtle transparencies. The great period of these oriental decorations is the Louis XV period, during which the fashion for chinoiseries swept through the circles of power and aristocracy; but cabinetmakers continued under the reign of Louis XVI to decorate the most sumptuous pieces of furniture with black lacquer with Chinese decorations.

The line of this chest of drawers is superb for several reasons: the body of the furniture is very high on legs, which gives it a great lightness. The slightly curved front initiates the rounding of the sides. The two drawers are decorated with a single decorative panel, thanks to the process of drawers without crosspieces, which was reserved since the Louis XV period for the manufacture of the most beautiful furniture. Finally, the half-moon shape with a door opening reduces the massive appearance of rectangular chests of drawers. The shallow depth of this chest of drawers should be noted here.

The decoration is both pure and very fine. The aim was to create a contrast between black and gold. The Chinese design is very well balanced, taking into account the positioning of the bronzes, which are finely chiselled, and the magnificent and rare apron is particularly noteworthy. These bronzes have been simply cleaned, their "Vernis Or" is original.

This chest of drawers has just been completely restored. Its state of conservation is remarkable,

Galerie Delvaille
15, rue de Beaune 75007 Paris
Tel : + 33 (0) 1 42 61 23 88 olivier@delvaille.art www.delvaille.art

especially concerning the lacquer which for once is almost entirely original.