

Exceptional ebony desk, early Louis XV period



Circa 1730, Paris

Dimensions : H. 77.5 x W. 168 cm x D. 81 cm

From the beginning of the 18th century, black desks became the hallmark of power and success in Paris. These desks were made to very different standards, depending on the client. The very high cost of ebony, imported by ship from the Caribbean, led cabinetmakers to supply desks in pearwood or other blackened fruit woods, while ebony was reserved for a wealthy clientele. Design and cabinetmaking also varied greatly, from desks with simple, often stiff lines, to the most elaborate desks like this one. Bronze fittings vary from simple, functional bronzes with serial models, to sumptuous, one-of-a-kind ornamentation, whose chasing and gilding qualities give an idea of the staggering cost of a desk like ours in 1730.

This desk opens with a central drawer and four side drawers divided into two small boxes. It is veneered with the finest ebony, over 95% of which is still original today. The desk was designed to be placed in the middle of a room, decorated in absolutely identical fashion on both long sides; to this end, 5 drawers are simulated to perfection on the large non-opening side.

The designer of this desk wanted to give an effect of richness and purity at the same time. Unlike many black desks, this one has no copper fillet. The quality of the ebony and bronzes is sufficient to create a powerful contrast between gold and pure black.

Of particular note is the recessed central drawer, which offers the user greater comfort, but required additional work on the part of the cabinetmaker. Another advantage of this recess is the positioning of the superb gilded bronze falls that flank the drawer and punctuate the line of the desk. In addition, the complex shape of the drawers posed a significant technical challenge in 1730.

The top is sheathed in superb later Lemerle leather, custom-dyed and decorated with small irons and gold leaf. The leather is encircled by an original bronze mould.

This desk features remarkable bronze ornamentation. The chasing is very detailed for the period, and the gilding is original. Preserved in the same family for several generations, this desk has not suffered from what unfortunately the vast majority of 18th-century furniture has undergone: gilding altered by oxidation has very often been cleaned with unsuitable products that have destroyed it. We photographed and filmed the process of cleaning the bronzes on this desk: beneath the oxidation and dirt of 300 years, the original intact gilding reappears.

Among the bronzes: leafy sabots, gadrooned falls decorated with acanthus leaves, lock escutcheons, falling hands, corner falls featuring a Bacchus head and a lion's head, lateral rosettes... Perfectly structuring the line of the desk, the 5 drawers, 5 simulated drawers and two small sides are all adorned with finely chased and gilded bronze frames.

THE DESK IS MOUNTED ON SPRUCE, THE LEGS IN OAK, THE VENEER IN EBONY AND THE FRAMES IN WALNUT. EXCELLENT CONDITION, FULLY RESTORED, PHOTOS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

