

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Charles PERCIER (Paris 1764 - Paris 1838)

A Design for a Jardinière, with a Relief of Venus and Apollo

Watercolour, and pen and black ink.

Laid down on a larger sheet, possibly an album page.

210 x 153 mm. (8 1/4 x 6 in.)

Typical of Charles Percier's refined and highly detailed watercolours, this design for a jardinière - commissioned by a certain Monsieur E. in Paris, who remains unidentified - can be dated to between 1801 and 1805. The drawing reappeared in Percier and Fontaine's most influential work, the *Recueil de décorations intérieures*, published in 1812, a date that serves as a *terminus ante quem* for the design. The description of the jardinière in the *Recueil*, where it is illustrated together with a design for a small side table, states: 'Tea table and jardinière, made to be isolated in the center of a room. These two pieces of furniture are executed in mahogany and bronze. One can recognize from the refinement and perfection of the work that they are from the workshop of MM. Jacob.'

Many years later, the art historian Henry Havard illustrated this same jardinière in his monumental *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration*, published between 1887 and 1890. As he wrote, 'Meanwhile, on the advice of Percier, the cabinetmaker Jacob made a number of very remarkable pieces, as architecture and as ornamentation, the drawings of which have fortunately been preserved. We reproduce two of them here, and the opulence of these pieces of furniture, the care which Percier has taken of designing so many varied models, indicates that it was around this time that the jardinière completed its adaptation to elegant interiors and to take the place in Parisian houses which it has not ceased to occupy since then.'

This watercolour by Percier was formerly in the archival collection of cabinetmaker François-Honoré-Georges Jacob-Desmalter (1770-1841), who oversaw one of the most important furniture workshops in Paris in the first quarter of the 19th century. A similar jardinière was produced by Jacob-Desmalter, after a design by Alexandre Dufour, for the Princesse d'Eckmühl at the Château de Savigny.

Provenance:

The archives of the workshop of François-Honoré-Georges Jacob-Desmalter, Paris.

Literature:

Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine, *Receuil des décorations intérieures*, comprenant tout ce qui a rapport à l'ameublement, Paris, 1812, pp.34-35, pl.44 ('Jardiniere exécutée à Paris pour M. E**'); Henry Havard, *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration depuis le XIIIe siècle jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, 1894, Vol.III, pp.94-95, fig.69; Jean-François Belhoste, 'Percier and François Honoré Georges Jacob-Desmalter: The Origins of Modern Furniture Design', in Jean-Philippe Garric, ed., *Charles Percier: Architecture and Design in an Age of Revolutions*, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2016-2017, pp.176-177, note 28.

Artist description:

After winning the Prix de Rome for architecture in 1786, Charles Percier spent the next seven years as a pensionnaire at the Académie de France in Rome. Together with Pierre Fontaine (1762-1853), a fellow student of the architect Antoine-François Peyre, Percier sketched the monuments of ancient and modern Rome. Upon their return to Paris, Percier and Fontaine embarked on a long and successful partnership, working closely as architects and designers until about 1814. Together they published a number of books on architecture, ornament and furnishings, each accompanied by their illustrations, such as the *Palais, maisons, et autres édifices modernes, dessinés à Rome*, published in 1798. These were collaborative efforts in which Percier drew the architectural and sculptural elements, while Fontaine was responsible for the landscapes and figures.

Percier's first significant official commission came in 1800, when he was asked by Josephine Bonaparte to take charge of the renovation and interior decoration of her villa at Malmaison. In later years both Percier and Fontaine worked extensively for Napoleon; at the Tuileries, Saint-Cloud, Compiègne, Fontainebleau and elsewhere, as well as designing court festivities such as the coronation of Napoleon as Emperor and the ceremony of his marriage to Marie-Louise of Austria. As architects they renovated parts of the Louvre, and designed the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, completed in 1807. Indeed, such was their importance as architects and designers during the Napoleonic era that Percier and Fontaine can arguably be said to have created the Empire style. Much of their influence can be traced to their seminal publication *Receuil des décorations intérieures*, published in 1812, which served as a compendium of designs for rooms, furniture, decorations and ornament that spread the Empire style throughout Europe as well as to Russia and America. After the fall of Napoleon, the partnership of Percier and Fontaine was dissolved, although both artists continued to remain active. Percier was charged with the decoration of the cathedral in Reims for the planned coronation of King Louis XVIII, an event that never took place.