

RÖBBIG · MÜNCHEN

*Frühe Porzellane · Kunsthandel*



### **BUREAU EN PENTE (LADY'S SECRETAIRE)**

BERNARD II VAN RISEN BURGH, NAMED B.V.R.B. (MASTER IN 1730) ATTRIB.

---

**Circa:** 1745

Paris, Louis XV period, c. 1745/55

H. 83 cm, W. 75 cm, D. 45 cm

Oak carcase, veneered on all sides with satinwood and kingswood (bois de violette); bordeaux red leather writing surface; bronze, chased and fire-gilded

The present lady's secretaire can be described as a particularly elegant piece of salon furniture that

demonstrates the great craftsmanship and artistry of Parisian ébénistes during the age of Louis XV.

Four cabriole legs set at an angle end in a curved front apron. They support the carcass with the desk and the sloped drop front. The piece is terminated at the top by a flat surface with a curved outline. The tops of the legs, like the edges of the desk, are curved strikingly inwards and outwards. The interior of the desk has two large central drawers, with two recessed small drawers with curved fronts on either side. The drawer on the lower right is separated into compartments in which ink, pounce and pens were originally kept. The floor of the desk can be slid back into the hinges by means of two push-buttons. The compartment that is then revealed contains three further secret drawers. Two striking brass knobs on the outside of the rail can be used to pull out sliding wooden rails that serve to support the writing top. This has an inset area of Bordeaux red leather on the inside face. This piece of furniture of the highest quality was intended to be positioned freely in a room (rather than against a wall) and consequently displays marquetry on all sides. The skilled exploitation of the wood grain of the veneer, which is applied to the carcass on the diagonal as well as cross-matched, is most striking. Large stylized shells and palmettes between delicately scrolling foliage serve as the central motif.

The outer edges of the piece are mounted with profiled bronze beads. The legs end in bronze sabots with acanthus leaves. All four corners of the table have finely chased mounts made of "S" and "C" curves with leaf-work and shells. The application at the centre of the front apron employs a similar ornament as does the escutcheon. The drawers have miniature bronze handles with leaf rosettes.

In contrast to the more sweeping desk secretary the present piece of furniture represents a delicate lady's secretary. The use of exotic veneers, the high quality fire-gilded bronze mounts with the finest chasing, and the exclusive use of oak as the construction timber represent a response to the most exacting demands made on Parisian ébénistes at the start of the Rococo age. Veneering the complicated multiple curvatures of the carcass was a highly complex undertaking and indicates an extremely high level of skilled craftsmanship.

Bernard II van Risam Burgh (named B.V.R.B.) was one of the most exceptional creators of this kind of furniture, which is also known as a *secrétaire en pente*. Most of his desk secretaries are decorated with floral marquetry or costly Oriental lacquerwork. The lively décor of the present piece is particularly innovative and rare – and the shell and palmette motifs are also rather unusual.

Bernard II van Risam Burgh learned his craft in his father's workshop. His exceptional talent in combining stylistic characteristics of the decades between 1730 and 1760 in an innovative way and developing them further, the lightness with which he used very different kinds of precious woods and lacquer panels from Europe and Asia, and the informed use of bronzes of the highest quality soon made him one of the most important Parisian ébénistes of his time (cf. Pierre Kjellberg, *Le Mobilier français du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1989, pp. 128-142).

The attribution to B.V.R.B. is based on numerous comparable examples that bear his stamp. A lady's secretary with an identical form but even more richly decorated with bronze mounts is in the Royal Palace of Versailles. It was made in 1745 for the private cabinet of Maria Theresia Rafaela of Spain, the spouse of the eldest son of Louis XV (published in Daniel Meyer, *Versailles. Furniture of the Royal Palace. 17th and 18th centuries*, 2 vols, vol. 1: *Prestigious Royal Furniture*, Dijon 2002, pp. 108-111, cat. no. 29.). In their summer exhibition in 1989 Partridge Fine Arts presented a further, very similar piece of writing furniture by B.V.R.B., published in Partridge Fine Arts Ltd (ed.), *Summer Exhibition 1989*, London 1989, p. 118f. A counterpart to the last mentioned piece from the Widener Collection is today in the National Gallery in Washington D.C. (accession no. 1942.9.419) aufbewahrt. An overview of small slope front secretary desks, some of them attributed to B.V.R.B. is illustrated in Wannenes (Giacomo Wannenes, *Le Mobilier français du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Milan 1998, p. 135).

