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PAIR OF LOUIS XVI CANDELABRA

Circa: 1785

Paris, c. 1785

The figures after the model by Etienne-Maurice Falconet (1716–1791), the gilt bronzes attributed to François Rémond (c. 1745–1812)

H. 90 cm (35½ inches), W. 40 cm (15¾ inches)

These two superb three-armed candelabra both stand on a semi-circular plinth of rouge griotte marble decorated with bronze mounts in the form of beading and acanthus leaves, while the front of the base bears a gilded bronze frieze of putti (after Clodion) and foliate swags. The scroll-shaped arms with foliate decoration end in herms in the Egyptian manner. Beading runs around the edges of the wax pans, while the fluted candle-holders taper downwards like funnels. Branches of lilies issue from the shaft, which is formed as a wheat sheaf. In front of the

lower part of the shaft sit two figures in burnished bronze, Cupid and a young girl. The girl is seated on a rock with her head turned to the left and her hair tied into a knot on her neck; she is hiding Cupid's bow down by her feet to the right. The winged Cupid is seated on a similar rock holding a finger to his lips while with his left hand he takes an arrow from the quiver at his feet, beside which lies a rose.

The model for the figure of Cupid was presented at the Paris Salon in 1755 by Etienne-Maurice Falconet (1716–1791); at the exhibition two years later his realization in marble was received with great acclaim on account of its refinement and skilful execution. The precision in the details and delicate balance between realism and idealization in the figures' features are characteristic of Falconet. The statue's enormous success led to copies being made in all possible materials, including several marble replicas attributed to Falconet himself. Such was its fame that it even found its way into Fragonard's *The Swing* of 1767 (Wallace Collection, London) as the model for the spirit presiding over the amorous encounter depicted in that celebrated painting.

Cupid's pendant, the figure of the young girl, was originally presented as a plaster model at the Salon in 1761. It has all the charm and grace of its partner, with which it playfully interacts. The two figures were also realized in biscuit porcelain by the Sèvres manufactory after Falconet had been appointed director of its department of sculpture in 1757. The models proved highly popular, as is shown by the numerous pairs that appear in the manufactory sales records, where the French royal family figures frequently among the purchasers (see Réau 1922; Levtine 1972).

Falconet generally appears not to have made any small-scale bronzes himself. We know that he had no knowledge of casting in bronze before he left France for Russia in 1766, after which point in time he had no further works produced in this medium.

The bronzes that are associated with Falconet, such as the figures on the present candelabra, must have been made by specialist founders who had access to his models. In 1775, for instance, the sale of the estate of the celebrated *fondeur-sculpteur* Philippe Caffiéri (1714–1774) featured a number of plaster models made either after Falconet or even perhaps by Falconet himself.

Decorative bronzes cast after models by Falconet such the present pair of candelabra presumably came into being in a similar manner, probably through the mediation of one of the *marchands merciers*, who were in contact with the various craftsmen and used them on a subcontractual basis.

The question of the copyright of bronzes made after Falconet's models is unclear. From 1766, bronziers were obliged to register their models or drawings to prevent their use by others, in particular the *marchands merciers*. However, the latter will have been able to acquire cast bronze mounts on the open market, which could be modified and then passed off as independent creations. There are also documented instances of such dealers possessing original models and thereby being in a position to hold the *de facto* copyright on bronzes cast from them.

Dominique Daguerre, for example, held the legal ownership of models made for him by the gilder François Rémond. It is interesting to note that a pair of candelabra identical to the present pair was sold by Daguerre at Christie's as lot 53 in the sale of 25 March 1791 (Hughes 1996, vol.3, pp. 1264–1271).

The execution of the branches of the present candelabra with their bronze casts of Falconet's seated Cupid and young girl can in fact be convincingly attributed to François Rémond (1747–1812), very likely working for Daguerre. The figures must have been made and supplied by another workshop, perhaps via Daguerre, before

the component elements were assembled by Rémond.

A convincing account of the attribution to Rémond has been presented by Christian Baulez and Peter Hughes, based on the similarity with other works executed by Rémond and other factors.

As most of the comparable pieces (see below in Catalogue) display twisted arms and a shaft ending in a flaming torch but have no foliate swags on the base, while the present candelabra, by contrast, have scroll-shaped arms with foliate decoration that terminate with herms in the Egyptian manner, a central shaft composed of ears of wheat and lilies, and foliate swags on the base, the present pair possesses particular value on account of its rarity.

Only one further pair from the collection of the Earl of Essex, Cassiobury Park, which was sold as lot 283 by Knight, Frank and Rutley in London on 12 June 1922, corresponds with respect to nearly all its features to the present pair, with the exception of the arms, which terminate in female busts, and the foliate swags, in which certain variations may be noted.

Literature:

Hughes 1996

P. Hughes, *The Wallace Collection, Catalogue of Furniture*, 3 vols., London 1996

Levtine 1972

G. Levtine, *The Sculpture of Falconet*, New York, 1972

Réau 1922

Louis Réau, *Etienne-Maurice Falconet*, 2 vols., Paris, 1922

