

anne•marie
monin

SEBASTIEN YOUNG (1771-1850)

GUÉRIDON *EMPIRE*



PARIS

RESTORATION PERIOD, REIGN OF LOUIS XVIII, CIRCA 1815-1820

DIMENSIONS:

WITHOUT EXTENSIONS: HEIGHT 30^{11/16} IN - DIAMETER 47^{5/8} IN

WITH EXTENSIONS: HEIGHT 30^{11/16} IN - WIDTH 118 1/2 IN - DEPTH: 47^{5/8} IN

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The Revolution of 1789 brought upheaval that irrevocably changed the structure of French society. A new elite of wealthy bankers and nobility, of both the Ancien Régime and the more recent imperial aristocracy, rose to prominence. For the most part they were extravagantly proud of their newfound success and a number of them were instrumental in the creation of some of the finest works of art of the Empire period. In 1815 the Battle of Waterloo led to the fall of Napoleon and the return to power of the monarchy under Louis XVIII who immediately showed a determination to make a break from a decade of Napoleonic influence. However, decorative art represented an exception to this and the King continued the imperial style, whose magisterial compositions he felt were particularly accomplished. A real change in aesthetic styles did not in fact come until a dozen or so years later under the reign of Charles X.

The guéridon presented here illustrates this sense of stylistic continuity. It is of a simple yet powerful circular shape that reflects the neoclassicism of the imperial era. We can see that the very finest panels of beautifully nuanced mahogany crotch were selected. The base of the table is made of five curving legs that are connected to a central supporting crutch that is in the form of a five-pointed star. These violin-shaped branches are inlaid with a veneer of burr alderwood, an extremely precious wood that is very rarely seen on pieces at this time. The legs and central crutch are adorned with engraved and gilded decorative bronzes that show many of the motifs of the period: acanthus leaves, stylised rose and palm forms, fleurons, sharpened lion claws, crowns and, placed as the focal point of the base, a fretwork incense burner. This guéridon also boasts an exceptionally rare addition: two mahogany extensions with their own carved baluster legs were specifically produced to sit aside the magnificent circular green marble (marbre vert de mer) table top so as to permit the guéridon to be transformed into a dining room table.

This startling work is very much ahead of its time. If the 18th century was undoubtedly the high point of more traditional furniture and cabinet-making, for pieces such as commodes and secrétaires, the subsequent Empire period saw works such as the guéridon reach their aesthetic peak and the table here is a remarkable representation of that. This is also the case with a second piece that is identical to ours. It was purchased by the Garde-Meuble impérial of Napoleon III in March 1863 from a Parisian furniture dealer called Strauss for the sum of 600 francs. This type of private purchase by the Garde-Meuble was in fact an exceptionally rare occurrence. The following month the table was placed in the rooms of Prince Jérôme at the Chateau of Fontainebleau where it still remains as the property of the national collection (illustrated below in Figure 1). As is the case with our guéridon, the table in Fontainebleau also carries the stamp of Sébastien Youf, cabinet-maker to Princess Elisa, Grand Duchess of Tuscany and sister of Napoleon I. It shows a white marble top while our guéridon is notable for its original green marble top (marbre vert de mer).



Figure 1. Sébastien YOUNG, Mahogany veneered guéridon decorated with gilt bronze, white marble top, Château de Fontainebleau, Museum number : F759 c

Following his brother Jean-Baptiste-Gilles (1771-1850) into the profession, Sébastien Youf (1771-1850) quickly made a name for himself and the high quality of his work led to his being appointed the official cabinet-maker to Princess Elisa. When she became Princess of Lucca and Piombino in 1809 and moved to Tuscany she asked the Youf brothers to come and establish a workshop in Italy. The two brothers divided the production between them with Jean-Baptiste-Gilles maintaining the Paris workshop while Sébastien looked after the activity in Lucca. A number of major Italian museums hold pieces by Youf of this period that illustrate the fine attention to detail that is found in his work; see for example some works conserved in the Palazzo Pitti and the Villa della Petraia (illustrated in A. Gonzales-Palacios, *Il Tempo del Gusto, Le arte decorative in Italia fra classicismi e barocco*, Milan, 1986, p. 177 and 251). The stubbornly meticulous nature of Youf in fact even led to him to being reprimanded a number of times by the administration of Her Imperial Highness because the delays he caused to her move. However despite these problems Youf maintained the full confidence of the Princess and he had a monopoly on orders from her until the end of the imperial period. When Napoleon fell from power Youf was compelled to return to Paris. There, his reputation allowed him to win a huge order from a rich Norwegian collector called Morten-Michael Kallevig for over a hundred items of furniture and chairs for his residence at Arendal. From then on Youf continued unabated in his work participating mainly in the Expositions des produits de l'Industrie where he was rewarded a number of times, notably in 1827 when he brilliantly won a bronze medal. At the Exposition of 1834 he did not manage to hold on to his medal although Moléon, one of the members of the jury remarked "this can be only have been an oversight...because Monsieur Youf thoroughly deserved it so striking was his exhibition...".



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