Finch & Co



A RARE EXPORT LACQUER PORTRAIT MEDALLION ON COPPER DECORATED IN GOLD HIRAHAKI-E AND KINJI ON A ROIRONURI GROUND

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LATE 18TH CENTURY

DEPICTING FRANCOIS-MARIE AROUET KNOWN AS VOLTAIRE (21ST NOVEMBER, 1694, PARIS - MAY 30TH 1778, PARIS)

SIZE: APPROX: 12CM HIGH, 9.5CM WIDE – 4¾INS HIGH, 3¾ INS WIDE

14CM HIGH – 5½ INS HIGH

PROVENANCE: EX AMERICAN PRIVATE COLLECTION

LITERATURE

SEE: JAPANESE EXPORT LACQUER, OLIVER IMPEY & CHRISTIAAN JORG, HOTEI PUBLISHING, AMSTERDAM, 2005

THIS PORTRAIT MEDALLION WAS MADE BY JAPANESE CRAFTSMEN IN SASAYA, JAPAN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIES COMPANY EXPRESSLY FOR EXPORT TO THE EUROPEAN MARKET. ALL EXECUTED MORE OR LESS IN THE SAME STYLE AND TECHNIQUE THEY FORM PART OF SEVERAL SERIES OF PORTRAITS DEPICTING FAMOUS HISTORICAL PERSONALITIES. THE JAPANESE LACQUERER FINELY AND CAREFULLY COPIED PRINTS FROM 'L'EUROPE ILLUSTRÉ' COMPILED BY DREUX DU RADIER IN SIX VOLUMES BETWEEN 1755 AND 1765 AND PUBLISHED IN PARIS. IT CONTAINED 593 DEPICTIONS OF FAMOUS PEOPLE FROM THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES TO THE MID 18TH CENTURY ENGRAVED BY DIFFERENT ARTISTS WHO WOULD OFTEN USE EARLIER PRINTS, DRAWINGS OR PAINTINGS AS THEIR MODELS.

THE RIJKSMUSEUM IN AMSTERDAM HAS A COLLECTION OF 19 MEDALLIONS; SOME WITH PORTRAITS OF HISTORICAL FIGURES OTHERS ILLUSTRATING ROMAN EMPERORS, WHICH IS REGARDED AS OF DOCUMENTARY IMPORTANCE BECAUSE OF THEIR NUMBER AND THAT THEY WERE ALL ACQUIRED IN 1829 AS PART OF THE ROYAL CABINET OF CURIOSITIES OF KING WILLIAM I IN THE HAGUE.

THE JAPANESE EXPORT LACQUER PORTRAIT MEDALLIONS ENTERING ENGLAND IN THE 1770'S MAY WELL HAVE INFLUENCED JOSIAH WEDGWOOD TO COMMERCIALLY EXPLOIT THEIR POPULARITY AND PRODUCE HIS OWN CERAMIC MEDALLIONS OF FAMOUS FIGURES IN BLUE JASPER AND BLACK BASALT WARE, ESPECIALLY AS HE MADE A SPECIAL SERIES FOR THE NETHERLANDS DEPICTING FAMOUS DUTCH PERSONALITIES.

FRANÍ§OIS-MARIE AROUET (21 NOVEMBER 1694 – 30 MAY 1778), KNOWN BY HIS NOM DE PLUME VOLTAIRE, WAS A FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT WRITER, HISTORIAN AND PHILOSOPHER FAMOUS FOR HIS WIT, HIS ATTACKS ON THE ESTABLISHED CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND HIS ADVOCACY OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. VOLTAIRE WAS A VERSATILE WRITER, PRODUCING WORKS IN ALMOST EVERY LITERARY FORM, INCLUDING PLAYS, POEMS, NOVELS, ESSAYS, AND HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC WORKS. HE WROTE MORE THAN 20,000 LETTERS AND MORE THAN 2,000 BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS. HE WAS AN OUTSPOKEN ADVOCATE, DESPITE STRICT CENSORSHIP LAWS WITH HARSH PENALTIES FOR THOSE WHO BROKE THEM. AS A SATIRICAL POLEMICIST, HE FREQUENTLY MADE USE OF HIS WORKS TO CRITICIZE INTOLERANCE, RELIGIOUS DOGMA, AND THE FRENCH INSTITUTIONS OF HIS DAY.