

GALERIE LAMY
CHABOLLE



Candelabra-candlesticks with coupled
swan figures.

Gilt bronze

Russia

Early 19th century

h. 48 cm (h. 18.9 in.)



This impressively chased pair of two-lights candelabra is most likely Russian work, related to some pieces designed by Giacomo Quarenghi for the Imperial Manufactory of Saint Petersburg, at the end of the 18th century.

The production of gilt-bronze decorative arts, in early 19th-century Russia, relied largely on French and German artisans, who had been invited to Russia in the latter half of the previous century. This historical fact explains two notable tendencies in many Russian productions of the time : an exceptionally rich ornamental composition, that date back to 18th-century Italy, and a high level of skills in the gilding and chasing of the bronze, brought to Russia by French bronzemiths and German goldsmiths, some of which have been recorded, such as Schreiber, Baumann, and Bergenfeld.

This quality, at the verge of goldsmithing, is evident in the chiseling of these candelabra, particularly in the wings of the swans, whose iconography dominates both French decorative arts under the Empire and those of Imperial Russia. Notable too, the finely modeled and matte-finished acanthus leaves, mounted to, and not cast with, the candelabra's base. Other elements, such as the ribboned flower wreaths, mounted too, along with the scrolling light arms decorated with acanthus leaves, and the flower and fruit vases, further align these candelabra with the productions of the Saint Petersburg manufactory, the most prestigious works of which had been designed by Italian artists invited to Russia, such as architects Carlo Rossi and Giacomo Quarenghi.

Despite iconographic similarities, the stylistic and ornamental differences between early 19th-century French and Russian gilt bronzes stem from the embargo imposed under Tsar Alexander I on French bronzes. With few French art items in the new style available in Russia at the time, Russian collectors eager to

decorate their interiors with pieces in the latest style had to rely on designers based in Russia, often of Italian origin. As a result, the French Empire style, which was spreading across Europe, was reinterpreted due to the relative isolation of Russian artisans. These craftsmen created what became known as the "Russian Empire" style, blending the French Empire's classical and Egyptomania-inspired iconography with a lavish ornamental richness of Italian origin.

This pair of candelabra also doubles as torches : the vase of flowers and fruit that tops the shaft and from which the light arms emerge is in fact a nozzle.

LITERATURE

Igor Sychev, *The Russian Chandeliers 1760-1830*, Moscow, 2003 ; Igor Sychev, *Russian bronze*, Moscow, 2003.

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