
Koopman Rare Art

Directors Choice – Timo Koopman
The Progression of ‘Light’ through the Ages



Meissonnier's Masterpiece executed by George Wickes for the Earl of Kildare in 1744

Our Director's Choice this week focuses on the history of the candelabra. It is released alongside our online catalogue on **The Koopman Rare Art Collection of Candelabra** which we will be showcasing at

The Treasure House Fair here in London 28th June - 2nd July.



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In its earliest form, the candle was a torch made of slips of bark, vine tendrils, or wood dipped in wax or tallow, tied together, and held in the hand by the lower end. Candles of this type frequently figured on Classical painted vases; subsequently a cup or discus was attached to the base to catch the dripping wax or tallow. Candelabra in the form of branched candle holders eventually were used in the homes of the wealthy. Good wax candles were expensive in the early period, while tallow candles made of animal fat were smelly, smokey and burned quickly, consequently candle holders were rare in ordinary households.



Menorah on the Arch of Titus

Roman soldiers carrying a menorah, detail of a relief on the Arch of Titus, Rome, 81 CE.

Little is known of domestic candlesticks before the Middle Ages, but a number of references to

ecclesiastical candlesticks are to be found in the Old Testament. Moses was commanded to make for the Tabernacle a menorah, a candelabrum of hammered gold which was to weigh a talent and consist of a base with a shaft from which six arms sprang, supporting seven candles on the arms and central shaft.

When Solomon built his temple, he placed in it ten golden candlesticks, five on each side of the Holy Place. After the period of captivity in Babylon the golden menorah was again placed in the temple, but on the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE it was carried with other spoils to Rome. Representations of it can be seen on the Arch of Titus in Rome and in the catacombs.



The Gloucester candlestick carved and chased gilt bronze, 12th century. Victoria and Albert Museum

The bronze founders of Germany and the Low Countries, produced splendid cast bronze candlesticks for both ecclesiastical and secular purposes from the 10th century onward. The most striking is the so-called Gloucester candlestick (in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), which is generally accepted as an English work dating from the early 12th century. The whole surface is pierced and modelled with nude human figures fighting dragons among foliate scrolls.

Of the early bronze altar candlesticks, the most important is probably the Trivulzio candlestick in Milan Cathedral. Six metres in height, it was executed about 1200, but its place of manufacture is conjectural, suggestions varying between England, Lorraine, and Milan itself. It is composed of floral scrolls inhabited by realistically modelled human beings and monsters.



Trivulzio candlestick in the Milan Cathedral

Candlesticks of silver gilt, enriched with enamel, decorated the altars of the great churches and rich chapels of the nobility in the later Middle Ages, but few remain.

In England Henry VI owned a splendid pair of gold candlesticks set with 4 sapphires, 4 rubies, 4 emeralds, and 24 pearls. Subsequently, in the 16th century, Henry VIII had a set of four golden candlesticks with his initials enamelled on them in red and weighing nearly 3.5 kg, (112 oz). The inventory of Queen Elizabeth I includes 148 candlesticks and chandeliers of silver or silver gilt, a great many of which were what would now be called candelabra.

In the Renaissance period the most magnificent examples were made of rock crystal mounted in precious metal enriched with translucent enamels; among these is the set of altar cross and pair of candlesticks with rock crystal panels mounted in enamelled silver gilt, made in the mid-16th century by Valerio Belli.



Mid-16th century by Valerio Belli Victoria & Albert Museum Collection

Wall sconces were greatly favoured and were provided with reflector plates of great size, embossed with profuse ornament in high relief. The long dining halls of 17th-century houses had space for numbers of these sconces, and some of the German princely collections include large sets of them. Windsor Castle is home to some very handsome sconces with elaborately embossed reflectors made for Charles II. Many of the splendid silver furnishings of Louis XIV's palaces had to be sacrificed to contribute bullion to pay for his wars, but much silver furniture survived in England, including several huge chandeliers made entirely of silver. The finest of these, made during the reign of William III for Hampton Court Palace is still in position there; others are found at Chatsworth in Derbyshire and Drumlanrig in Scotland



Royal wall sconces London, 1713 by Anthony Nelme, formerly in the collection of Koopman Rare Art

The 18th century was the great age of candlelight, and the salons of the nobility and gentry were lit by many hundreds of candles from chandeliers, candelabra, and wall sconces. In 18th-century France some of the finest chandeliers were made of ormolu. The richest and most splendid, dating from the mid-18th century, were cast and chased in bronze with Rococo designs. Corresponding to the big chandeliers were candelabra and single candlesticks, which, designed by artists such as Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, rank as works of sculpture rather than as domestic accessories.

Table candlesticks were made in great variety of design and material. The great houses contained many dozens of pairs of silver candlesticks, and consequently candlesticks are among the commonest surviving articles of English 18th-century decorative art. The rapid change of fashion in the 18th century from the plain Queen Anne style to the elaborate Late Baroque of early Georgian and subsequently to the Rococo, Neoclassical, and Regency or Empire styles ensured variety in production.



We would love for you to join us at **The Treasure House Fair** from **28th June- 2nd July 2024** at **Stand 202**; if you would like to attend, please e-mail info@koopman.art, and we will send you a complimentary ticket.

For more information on the fair visit The Treasure House website [here](#).

We hope to see you at the Chelsea Hospital.

Lewis, Timo and the Team at Koopman Rare Art

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020 7242 7624 / info@koopman.art



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12 Dover Street
W1S 4LL, London
United Kingdom

Phone: +44 20 7242 7624

Email: info@koopman.art

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