
Koopman Rare Art

Director's Choice – Timo Koopman

The Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich's Wine Coolers



A Magnificent Pair of Empire Wine Coolers from the Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich Service

Jean-Charles Cahier Paris, 1819 -1838

These spectacular French Wine Coolers formed part of the magnificent and important dinner service commissioned by the Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich. They capture Fontaine and Percier's designs in their perfect harmony of neo-classical elements alongside Egyptian architecture, presenting the perfect frame for the Duke's coronet and joined cyphers. French Empire at it's very best and we are proud to present this week's Director's choice.

Each wine cooler applied twice with the monogram of Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovitch of Russia. The Paris service known after Grand Duke Michail Pavlovitch, son of Tsar Paul I was made for the Mikhailovsky Palace in St Petersburg, built between 1819 and 1823. The principal Parisian goldsmiths involved were Martin Guillaume Biennais and Jean-Charles Cahier, who worked in collaboration, the latter taking over Biennais's workshop with its archive and designs, on Biennais's retirement in 1821. Following the death of Grand Duke Michail in 1849, the enormous service was inherited by his only daughter Grand Duchess Ekaterina Mikhailovna and then by his grand-daughter Elena Georgievna (1857-1936). Following the revolution and confiscation, the service was largely dispersed outside Russia being sold off to raise

currency up to around 1933, entering a number of museums and private collections. In Russia, in The Hermitage only a few items remain.

Grand Duke Michael Pavlovich was the fourth son of Tsar Paul I and his wife Marie Feodorovna, Princess of Württemberg. He received a military education and travelled extensively throughout Russia; he was appointed Commander of the Guards' Infantry Brigade, and took part in the war against Turkey to liberate Greece. He was awarded the Order of St. George and in 1831 became Chief of all Military Schools in Russia. He married his cousin Princess Helen of Württemberg by whom he had six daughters. He died in 1849 at the age of 51.

It is difficult to imagine a more perfect setting for the vast silver-gilt dinner service ordered from Martin-Guillame Biennais and Jean-Charles Cahier by Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich than the latter's magnificent Russian neoclassical palace, designed by Carlo Rossi and now the home of the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg. Paid for in part by his father, Tsar Paul I (r.1798-1801) and then by his brothers, Tsar Alexander I (r.1801-1825) and Tsar Nicholas I (r.1825-1855), the palace cost some 9 million roubles to complete. It was built between 1819 and 1823 with every detail of the interior design being overseen by its great architect. Indeed the interiors were considered to be the finest in Russia until the reconstruction of the Hermitage in 1837 following a disastrous fire.



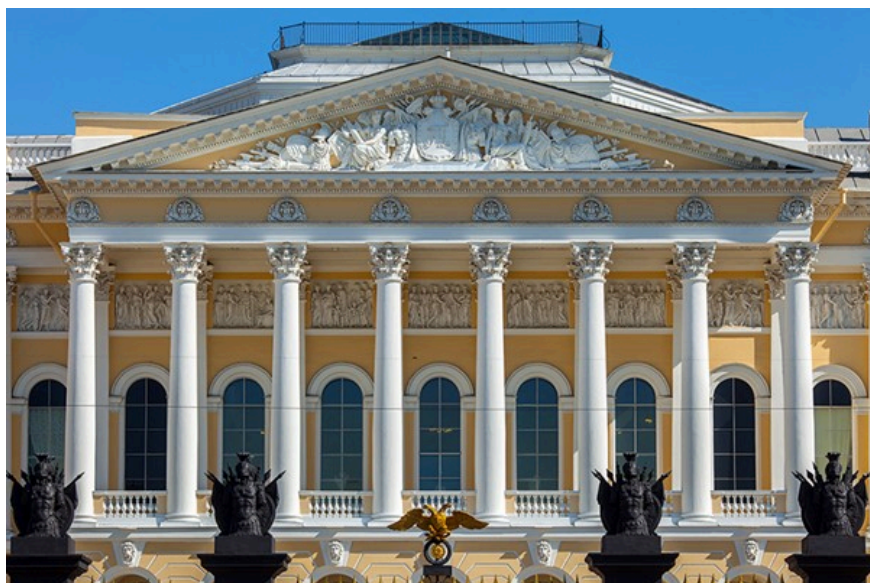
Mikhailovsky Palace St Petersburg

Both Michael and his elder brother Nicholas patronised the leading Parisian silversmiths of the day, among them Biennais and Cahier. Indeed, the two firms seem to have co-operated on Michael Pavlovich's huge commission, as their marks are found on differing but component parts of some of the same large objects. It is thought that in 1821 Biennais, who had no likely successor, sold his business, including designs and archives, to Cahier. Although he was well placed with the restored Bourbon regime, Cahier's business eventually floundered, and he went bankrupt in 1828.



Portrait by George Dawe, 1829

It appears that, like so many artistic treasures in Russia, the service was confiscated, this time from the museum founded by Baron Stieglitz, following the Revolution and sold off by the Soviet Government in the 1920s or 1930s to raise much-needed foreign currency. It is interesting to note that the vastly wealthy Baron Stieglitz adopted a daughter who was said to be the illegitimate child of Grand Duke Michael Pavlovich.



Examples from the service can be found in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. By far the most significant item, a magnificent soup-tureen and cover, weighing some 14

kilogrammes, by Cahier and clearly derived from a Percier and Fontaine design can be found in the Santo Spirito Foundation in Lisbon.



*From the Grand Duke Pavlovich's Service this Magnificent French Empire Teapot on stand also by
Charles Cahier, Paris 1819-1838
Formerly in the Koopman Rare Art Collection*

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For all enquiries please do not hesitate to call or email on:
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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