
Koopman Rare Art

Director's Choice – Timo Koopman The Countess Branicki Tureens

These sumptuous tureens form part of one of the most famous dinner services that Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot was commissioned to make amongst other such as the Borghese or Demidoff services. They epitomise the pure essence of the High Empire style with elegant proportions and exquisite detail, they are my director's choice and we are proud to present their beauty and history.



A Pair of French Silver Tureens, Covers & Liners from The Branicki Service

By Jean-Baptiste-Claude Odiot
Paris, Circa 1819

*12 5/8 in. (32 cm) wide over handles
139 oz. (4,324 g)*

Cylindrical with circular base on four leaf and openwork scroll paw feet, the base applied with a gryphon and female mask frieze, the shoulder applied with a further frieze of animals and masks within foliage, with two cast putto handles, the detachable cover with

fruiting finial, the liner engraved with a coat-of-arms, marked under base, on foot rim, inside cover, on cover bezel, under liner and on border of liner, the base and cover further stamped 'J.BTE.CDE ODIOT'

The arms are those of Branicki for General Count Francois-Xavier Branicki (1731-1819) who married Alexandra Vasil'evna Engelhardt (1754-1838) in 1781.

Provenance:

Countess Branicki (1754-1838) and then by descent probably to Adam Branicki, who transferred most of the service to state ownership, circa 1920.

The soup-tureens form part of the extensive service commissioned by the newly widowed Countess Branicka in 1819. The bill for the service, dated May 13 of that year, is preserved in the archives of the Maison Odier in Paris. The service comprised 140 pieces and cost in excess of 300,000 francs.

Empire Design

The period of Napoleonic rule lends its name to the late Neoclassical style that characterizes artistic creations of the era. Napoleon I encourage increased production for the greater glory of France, and all of the arts served to promote his regime. Revolutionary conquests were echoed in the fine and decorative arts, in which figures of Fame and Victory abounded.

Courts across Europe adopted the Empire style, especially in Russia, where it became a staple. In Germany and Austria, it coexisted with the gentler Biedermeier associated with modest domestic interiors. Charles Percier (1764–1838) and Pierre François Léonard Fontaine (1762–1853) were the two most influential figures in the field of Empire decoration and furnishing. Official architects to the court of Napoleon, their main responsibility was the renovation of the various royal residences.

Egyptian elements and themes were imported and distributed principally by Baron Dominique Vivant Denon (1747–1825), the archaeologist to the Middle East expedition. In 1802, he published *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte pendant les campagnes du Général Bonaparte*, in which drawings and etchings of herms, palm leaves, mummified Egyptians, caryatids, and other exotica are copied directly from temples, funeral columns, and royal tombs. Later appointed director of the Central Museum of Arts (Louvre), Denon was instrumental in associating the future emperor with Egyptianized design in France, though Egyptomania already had become à la mode in the eighteenth century.

Neoclassical and Egyptian images enlivened Empire objects of every description. Goldsmith Pierre Philippe Thomire (1751–1843) drew recognition as a skilled maker of

bronze mounts for such pieces Henri Auguste (1759–1816), Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot (1763–1850) and Martin Guillaume Biennais (1764–1843) crafted elegant services, nefs, jewels, and snuffboxes in precious metals for the emperor and empress, sometimes after Percier and Fontaine designs.

Alexandra Branitskaya



The Countess Branicka was a woman of contrasts; her love of the rich and splendid is exemplified by Odiot's magnificent service but her collection of art and precious objects were housed in rooms panelled in plain wood. Her true passion was for horticulture, and both of the houses where she spent her last years, wintering at Belaya-Tserkov and spending her summers at Alexandria, had famous parks and gardens.

As niece of Prince Potemkin, Alexandra Vasil'evna Engelhardt was presented at the court in St. Petersburg in 1772, when she was eighteen. She immediately became a favourite of the Empress Catherine and accompanied her on many of her travels. Stories later circulated that Alexandra was Catherine's daughter by Potemkin; these were put about in the later years of her life by French writers without proof, but it is fairly well-documented that she was Potemkin's mistress as well as his niece.

In 1781, Alexandra married Count François-Xavier Petrovich Branicki, of an old and powerful Polish family. Trained as a soldier and diplomat, Count Branicki held several posts before being sent to St. Petersburg. He became great friends with Stanislaus Poniatowski, who had been Catherine's lover. Branicki enjoyed the favour of Catherine and, after supporting Russian suzerainty over the Sejm, or Polish parliament, he was awarded vast estates in Belaya-Tserkov after the province was ceded to Russia after the Partition of Poland in 1793.



A sugar dish from the Branicki service with Koopman Rare Art 2002

Countess Branicki accompanied the Empress on her journey to the Crimea in 1787. After Catherine's death, she and her husband retired to their estates where the Count died in 1819. The Countess did not return to court until 1824 when she accepted the post of ober-gofmeistrina, or Senior Court Chamberlain. Having inherited the estates of her uncle Potemkin and her husband, she was thought to be worth 28 million roubles.

The Branicki service was exhibited by Odier in the exhibition *Produits de l'Industrie Française* at the Louvre from August 25 to September 30, 1819. After Countess Branicki's death in 1838, the magnificent dinner service remained in the Branicki family and was probably transferred to Wilanowo, when the family inherited that property in 1892. The tea and coffee service remain at Wilanowo, but the majority of the pieces were sold by the Russian government in the late 1920s. Much of the service was acquired by a German banker Dr. Fritz Mannheimer, who subsequently settled in Amsterdam. Many of those pieces are now in the Rijksmuseum. Other pieces were dispersed; a pair of soup-tureens, matching one in the Rijksmuseum, sold from the collection of C. Ruxton Love, Christie's New York, April 28, 1992, and another single tureen sold at Sotheby's Geneva, November 12, 1990, lot 98. A wine-cooler sold at Sotheby's New York, November 5, 1986, lot 72.

Franciszek Ksawery Branicki



Franciszek Ksawery Branicki (1730–1819) was a Polish nobleman, magnate, French count, diplomat, politician, military commander, and one of the leaders of the Targowica Confederation.

Born into the mighty House of Branicki, he was the son Piotr Branicki, Chorąży of Halicz, Castellan of Bratslav (1708-1762) and his wife, Melania Teresa Szembek (b. 1712). He was the brother of Princess Elżbieta Sapieha.

He was appointed Great Crown Podstoli in 1764, Ambassador to Berlin in 1765, Master of the Hunt of the Crown in 1766–1773, Artillery General of Lithuania in 1768–1773, Ambassador to Moscow in 1771, Crown Hetman in 1773 and was Great Crown Hetman of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth between 1774 and 1794.

In 1774, Stanisław August Poniatowski ceded to him, as mark of his confidence and esteem, the immense estate of Bila Tserkva in the Kiev Voivodeship. He opposed the reforms of the Great Sejm (1788–1792) and supported the Hetman Party instead.

Branicki was awarded the Order of the White Eagle in December 1764. He married Aleksandra von Engelhardt, member of the powerful Engelhardt family. She was supposed niece of Prince Potemkin, which made him the putative son-in-law of Empress Catherine of Russia.

In 1781 already aged 51, Branicki contracted a strategic marriage with one of the leading members of the imperial court, Alexandra von Engelhardt. The marriage sealed the Tsarina's foothold in the Commonwealth of Two Nations, already in the process of disintegration. The new Countess Branicka, who was inordinately close to Prince Potemkin

until his death, became the Chatelaine of Biała Cerkiew amidst many other possessions across territories of modern Poland and Ukraine. The marriage was said to be harmonious, due to her business acumen and contacts; she was able to cover her husband's colossal debts. In return, he spent even more money in creating Oleksandriya, an impossibly lavish summer palace and park in her honour, making it the epitome of Polish classicism.

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020 7242 7624 / info@koopman.art



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12 Dover Street
W1S 4LL, London
United Kingdom