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Directors Choice – Timo Koopman
The Viceroy of Italy's Egoiste Coffee Pot



A Highly Important French Empire Egoiste Coffee Pot

Paris, 1797-1809

Maker's mark of Martin-Guillaume Biennais

Bearing the applied coat-of-arms of Eugène de Beauharnais as Viceroy of Italy

Bijoux and perfect is this splendid Egoiste coffee pot made for Eugène de Beauharnais. Resting on three sphynxes paw feet which terminate on the main ovoid body on fabulous palmettes. The main body with a frieze, stippled to its background with cast and applied Bacchic children holding festoons of grape and vines. The front and centre with the cast and applied arms of Eugène de Beauharnais as Viceroy of Italy. The stippled spout with Anthemion. The cover with egg and dart décor with an acanthus flower bud finial.

Superbly executed elements framed by plain surfaces, exquisite design and elegant proportions make this an easy Director's Choice.



Eugène de Beauharnais was born in Paris on 3rd September, 1781, and he was to have a remarkable career. The death of his father Viscount Alexandre de Beauharnais (guillotined during the Terror in July 1794) brought Eugène considerably closer to his sister, Hortense (1783-1837), and his mother Marie Joséphe Rose, future Josephine (1763-1814). In 1795, Hortense and Eugène were sent to board at Madame Campan's school and at the McDermott Irish College in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, respectively.

Their mother's liaison with Napoleon Bonaparte, young general newly promoted for his decisive action in the repression of the Royalist insurrection of 13 Vendémiaire Year IV (5th October 1795), was to change their lives forever; though Eugène was not initially in favour of their marriage on 9 March 1796. The connection with his stepfather was however to help his life's vocation, namely, that of a soldier. After a year spent completing his education, at the age of 15, he was made sub-lieutenant auxiliary in the 1st Hussars Regiment in the Army of Italy and appointed ADC to General Bonaparte in June 1797, shortly after the end of hostilities.

After a brief spell in the Ionian Islands following the Treaty of Campo Formio (18th October 1797), he also served in Rome before returning to France for the Egyptian campaign. Once again as General Bonaparte's ADC, Eugene distinguished himself in the deadly battles at Jaffa, Saint-Jean-d'Acre – where he was wounded – and the land battle of Aboukir. Eugène revealed his qualities to Bonaparte, and the young general developed a real esteem for his step-son. Naturally, the 17-year-old Eugene was included (with a small circle of intimates) on the secret return to France on 23 August 1799 aboard La Muiron.

After the coup d'état of 18-Brumaire (9 and 10 November, 1799), the First Consul Bonaparte appointed him (now aged 18) a captain in the 1st regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval of the Consular Guard.

Eugène accompanied the First Consul in the Second Campaign of Italy. He distinguished himself alongside General Bessières at the Battle of Marengo on 14 June, 1800, at the end of which he earned his stripes as Chef d'Escadron. Eugène was soon to be appointed colonel in 1802, and after the proclamation of the Empire in May 1804, he was to receive promotion to Grand Officer of the Empire at the rank of Colonel General; he was also made

Brigadier General, not to mention commander of the Légion d'Honneur (4 June 1804). The 23-year-old Eugène was to receive the ultimate honour when Napoleon, who became King of Italy on 17 March, 1805, appointed him Viceroy of the country. Despite the centralisation required by the Emperor, Eugène worked hard administering his Kingdom of Italy, barely leaving it from June 1805 to May 1809. At the end of the Austerlitz campaign of 1805, the Emperor made Eugène Prince of Venice (territory newly annexed to the Kingdom of Italy), formally adopted Eugène as his son and as such heir apparent to the crown of Italy, and wedded him to Princess Augusta-Amélie of Bavaria.

Eugène administered the kingdom until 1809. He distinguished himself via the victory of Raab, 14th June 1809, after an initial defeat at Sacile, finally combining with imperial troops at the battle of Wagram, for which Napoleon proclaimed himself very grateful. That same year, Eugène's loyalty to Napoleon was put to the test when he learned of the divorce from his mother, Josephine. In spite of the difficulty of the situation, he agreed in dignified manner to read the declaration in which the Empress submitted herself "to the obligation of sacrificing all her affections to the interests of France" in the Senate.

In 1812, during the Russian campaign, Eugène was given command over the IV French-Italian Corps of the Grande Armée. After having distinguished himself in Smolensk (August 17, 1812) and Moskova (September 7, 1812) during the taking of the Great Redoubt from the Russians under Kutuzov, he performed miracles at Malo Jaroslavetz, leading merely 17,000 men in the face of the entire Russian army. When Joachim Murat returned to his kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies, Eugène received command of the debris of the Grande Armée and nobly brought the army back across Poland and Germany. Despite the attempts of Bavarian agents – sent by his father-in-law Maximilian I – to prise him from the French alliance by promising him the kingdom of Italy if he joined the Coalition, Eugène remained loyal to the Emperor despite being in a desperate situation. He fought on until the abdication on 6th April 1814.

The Milan uprising of 20th April 1814, as well as the lynching of the Minister of Finance of the kingdom, Giuseppe Prina, forced Eugène to flee Italy and to find refuge with his family-in-law in Bavaria. He was present at the Congress of Vienna, disapproved of Napoleon's return from Elba, and took no part (whether military or political) in the Hundred Days. After Waterloo (18th June 1815), and with the return of the Ancien Régime in Europe, Eugène received the duchy of Leuchtenberg from Maximilien I of Bavaria. Eugène administered his duchy as he had done the kingdom of Italy, happily managing his fortune and organising the marriages of his seven children with other nobles families (his eldest daughter, Joséphine Maximilienne Eugénie Napoléone (1807-1876), married the Crown Prince of Sweden and Norway, becoming Queen of Sweden and Norway from 1844 to 1859). Eugène died of a cerebral haemorrhage on 21 February 1824, in Munich, at the age of 42. After a majestic funeral, Eugène's coffin was placed in the Michaelkirche in Munich, where it lies today amidst those of members of the Wittelsbach royal family.

The Empire Style

The Empire Style is most often given the dates of Napoleon's reign, 1804-15, but its features developed in the earlier Directoire and Consulat periods (1795-1803), and Empire Style furnishings were still being produced in Europe, particularly in Sweden, into the 1830s. Napoleon's domination of the world stage until 1815 provided the means for the

Empire Style to spread throughout Europe and make its way to artistically Francophile England.



Napoleon's promotion of Classical-inspired decoration was intended as a powerful counterpoint to the stylistic excesses of the Baroque and Rococo and the anciens régimes that supported such effects. Antique themes and motifs were used to promote France's civic and martial ideals. Cabinetry and metalwork by Jacob-Desmalter, Biennais, Thomire, and Odier were rendered in the bold new Empire Style. The interrelationship of architectural setting, furniture, and decoration assumed great importance in the eyes of Percier and Fontaine and other purveyors of the style.



Napoleon I visited French textile, porcelain, and furniture workshops to encourage their 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. Antique forms and ornament, already seen in the Louis XVI style, blended with Napoleon's imperial symbols, which included the bee, the letter N surrounded by a laurel wreath, stars, the eagle, and exotic hieroglyphic motifs culled from the Egyptian campaign (May 1795–October 1799). Empress Joséphine was fond of swans; they decorate the chair arms, curtains, carpets, and porcelain in the state rooms of her home at Malmaison.



Madame Mere's Inkstand by Jean-Baptiste Claude Odier – A Private Collection

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. Their 'Recueil de décorations intérieures' (1812) was an essential handbook of the Empire style and this pattern book was developed by the two architects. Percier and Fontaine favoured symbolic and ornamental motifs that made their way into the working repertoire of the Empire Style. They also believed that furniture and interiors had a significant interrelationship.

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, including wall decorations, silver, *papiers peints* (wallpaper) by Jean Zuber and Joseph Dufour, fabrics from Jouy and Lyon Gobelins tapestries, Sèvres and Dagoty china, and furniture.

Usually made of mahogany from Cuba and the Antilles (which replaced the variety of precious woods previously used) and fitted with brass and ormolu figurines drawn from myth and history, Empire furniture was largely austere and geometric. 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 Odier (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.

The early nineteenth century saw the production of enormous quantities of large, heavy silver items that were a visual expression of power, status and wealth and were intended to promote rulers, nations or individual aristocrats.

Many of the services were mercury gilded at great cost to give a more opulent and regal feel to the silver.

For more information on the availability and price of any treasures we mention, please visit our website, email or call us.



All works shown, unless otherwise indicated, are available to view and purchase in our gallery located in 12 Dover Street, London, W1S 4LL

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