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Christofle & Cie

A Lavish “Fruits” Centrepiece

Silver

Paris, circa 1900

Maker’s Mark of Christofle & Cie

Length: 63 cm, 24 3/4 in.

Weight: 6150 gr., 197.72 oz.

£23,000

Of lobe shape with a border of reeds and chased waves, lushly adorned with cast and applied ornament of pears, grapes, strawberries, redcurrants, raspberries, plums, and other fruits. Removable liner with pierced and cast cherry frieze.

Signed Christofle Orfèvre, model no. 3315. Produced in silver “argent massif”, this piece is of the highest quality silverware produced by Christofle, a company that tended to work with silver-plate.

Artist description:

Christofle is a name which has endured over one hundred and fifty years and is synonymous with quality and prestigious French silverware throughout the world. Founded and managed until the present day by the Bouilhet-Christofle family, it is a firm that has endured and expanded constantly to not only meet high demand but also play a key role in the artistic life of its time.

Charles Christofle founded the company in 1830. Though originally a jeweller, he revolutionised techniques of electroplating in France and developed new methods of producing silverware at more affordable and economic prices, thus bolstering the French silverware industry. His methods were more durable and less harmful than traditional techniques and made it possible to manufacture pieces on a much larger scale than had previously been seen. He became the promoter of the new silver plate industry. It was thought that, through his firm, France was bestowed a new industry in silverware that had

formerly thought of predominantly as craft. His workshops grew and were at constant work in order to meet increasingly large orders. One of his first clients was the French King, Louis-Philippe I, ordering a full service for the Chateau d'Eu in Normandy.

In 1842 he bought the patents for silver plating and electrolytic gilding of gold. As the sole holder of the patents for mercury silver and gold plating, Charles Christofle was the first to employ this technique in France, and the first to develop it from a laboratory to an industrial process - Christofle was the only patent holder in France for fifteen years. Keenly aware of the industrial potential of electroplating precious metals thinly onto a base metal, Charles filed 358 patent infringement suits during his lifetime. Christofle was also one of the first to use aluminium which was, at the time, considered a "precious" metal like gold or silver.

He also developed a sophisticated method of what has been coined 'galvanoplasty'; a method by which an electric current is used to deposit metal on an object so fine and exactly that it was possible to reproduce every detail as in the original. This technique was an art in itself and inaugurated a new age of industrial production.

In 1844 Charles bought a vast plot of land, already with buildings and shops, at 56 Rue de Bondy between the Porte Saint-Denis and the Porte Saint-Martin on which the Christofle company remained until 1933. Later generations added further buildings as the business continued to expand.

Christofle's revolutionary techniques and artistic expertise were recognised at the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1855, the first of its kind to take place in France.

After the death of Charles Christofle in 1863, the prosperous and still growing business passed to his son, Paul, and his nephew, Henri Bouilhet, who had joined Christofle's silversmith company in 1852.