koopman rare art



A Floral Swiss Gold & Enamel Box

Gold & enamel

Probably Geneva, circa 1820

Incuse mark of workshop no. 3079

Length: 8 cm, 3.14 in.

The oval gold box with a fabulous array of pastel colour enamels together with contrasting orange enamels. The central base and cover with intricate arrays of flowers. The surrounding panels with foliate and geometric designs. This box was most probably made for the Ottoman market.

During the late 18th century, turqueries were used to decorate snuff boxes made in Switzerland. The choice of decoration reflected the European interest in the mysterious and fascinating world hiding behind the harem wall. The figurative decorations that generally adorned the Swiss gold boxes were considered unsuitable for the Turkish export market, in which the Swiss goldsmiths wanted to trade. For this reason, new ornamental motifs were introduced.

A first attempt was represented by adopting landscapes with the representation of suggestive buildings that one could have found on the shores of the Bosphorus. The frame decorations presented various repetitive motifs against coloured backgrounds. The evolution of this design consisted of expanding those borders and adopting a contrasting palette of lime green, cerulean blue, and pastel pink. The enamel was opaque, which was suitable for further decoration as coloured painted flowers, musical instruments, or martial trophies.

This type of decoration became the Swiss standard for the Turkish export market and remained unchanged for a few decades. The only minor changes can be found in the use of wavy edges or in the size of the central panel and the frame. On the other hand, the common feature remained the absence of hallmarks and maker's mark. The dating of these objects, which is usually traced back to 1820-40 is, therefore, purely speculative.