

Highlight Report

Auction for furniture and decoration from September 18, 2014

Sensational discovery of a Bureau-Plat by André-Charles Boulle

Koller Auctions is pleased to present a Bureau-Plat by the most important French cabinetmaker André-Charles Boulle to be offered at the upcoming auction for furniture and decoration on September 18. It is the discovery of a previously unknown masterpiece and the world's first auction of a Boulle desk since 2005. The estimate for this museum piece is set at CHF 1.5 to 2.5 million.

In the early 18th century, André-Charles Boulle, first cabinetmaker at the court of the Sun King Louis XIV, delivered one of his prestigious desks (Bureau-Plat) to a French aristocratic family, where it remained and was passed down over the centuries within the family until it eventually reached private castle estate in western Switzerland. Here it was rediscovered by Koller and consigned to an auction. The excellent quality of the desk, the complete provenance and the fact that this piece of furniture has been unknown to the art market and research to date, makes this current discovery a sensation.

Fine Bureau-Plat «aux têtes de satyre»

The large, four-legged Bureau-Plats by André-Charles Boulle can be divided into three categories: desks with rolled corner bronzes, desks with «têtes de femme» and desks with «têtes de satyre». The latter made by Boulle as early as 1690 in several variations, for which reason it is his largest category. Among them is the example offered at Koller Auctions on September 18. It was created around 1720 in the style of the Régence, measures 195x98x80 cm and is made of ebony and red and brown tortoiseshell. It offers an extremely fine brass inlay in the form of flowers, cartouches and leaves. The desktop is covered with black leather and rests on the typical, distinctive curved legs. The desks name derives from the lush bronze fittings, designed as satyrs, gargoyles, leaves and decorative friezes.

All known desks «aux têtes de satyre» can be found in the most prestigious museums of the world. The one to be offered at Koller is almost identical to the Bureau-Plat acquired in 1985 by the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Four other specimens are in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, the Wallace Collection in London, the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts and at the Frick Collection in New York. Boulle desks are very rarely found at auction. The last time a comparable Bureau-Plat was offered for sale was on 14 December 2005 as part of the famous Wildenstein auction in London. At that time the piece achieved 2.9 million pounds.

The exclusive Bureau-Plats by André-Charles Boulle were already much desired among the most important exponents of his time. The list of original first owners therefore stretches from family members of King Louis XIV, to King Philipp V of Spain, the Prince of Conde, Cardinal Prince de Rohan, the financier family Bernard to the ministers of Louis XV, such as his infamous Treasurer, Abbot Joseph Marie Terray. The early popularity of such desks is also apparent in the numerous illustrations from the 18th century.



Detail Nr. 1
A.C. BOULLE
BUREAU-PLAT «AUX TÊTES DE SATYRE»,
Régence, by A.C. BOULLE,
Paris, ca. 1720.



Detail Nr. 2
A.C. BOULLE
BUREAU-PLAT «AUX TÊTES DE SATYRE»,
Régence, by A.C. BOULLE,
Paris, ca. 1720.

About André-Charles Boule and his work

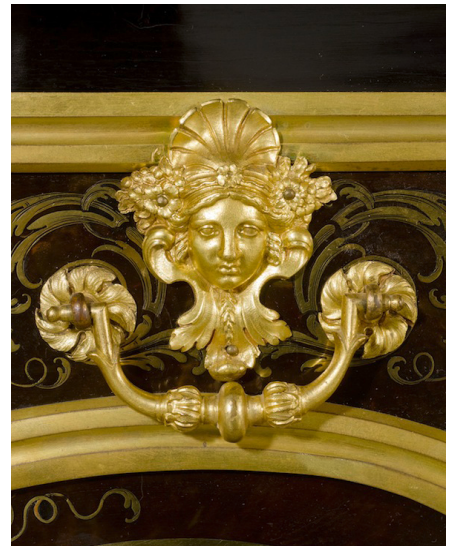
André-Charles Boule was born on November 10 1642 in Paris, where he later died, on Saturday March 1 1732. His long and successful career as a cabinetmaker makes him one of the most important figures in the history of art under King Louis XIV and the Regency era. This success is due, in addition to the perfect aesthetics of his furniture, in particular to an ambitious business plan, according to which Boule as «designer» of exclusive furniture made from innovative materials had his designs implemented by the greatest craftsmen and artists in his workshop. Thereby Boule controlled the production and guaranteed their uniformity. Already at the age of 29, on instruction of Louis XIV and by decree of Maria Theresa he received one of the coveted «logements» under the gallery of the Louvre on May 20 1672, where he worked until old age.

Due to the high degree of organisation of work, which he introduced in his workshop after bottlenecks in production and conflicts with dealers, he could still coordinate 17 Bureau-Plats at the same time at the age of 78. He was able to counter the extremely time-consuming production of luxury furniture by relying on prefabrication. The furniture, especially the desks, were stored in a kind of raw state, only completed in their basic structure with partial Marquetry and not yet decorated with bronze fittings. This made it possible for Boule's studio to adjust and complete the furniture according to the customer requirements, despite the time pressure.

Albeit his success, recurring financial difficulties, such as outstanding wage payments to his employees and tax problems, forced André-Charles Boule to sign over his company to his four sons in 1715, however without giving away the reins.



A.C. BOULLE
BUREAU-PLAT «AUX TÊTES DE SATYRE»,
Régence, by A.C. BOULLE,
Paris, ca. 1720.
Estimate: CHF 1,5 to 2,5 mio.



Detail Nr. 3
A.C. BOULLE
BUREAU-PLAT «AUX TÊTES DE SATYRE»,
Régence, by A.C. BOULLE,
Paris, ca. 1720.



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About Koller Auctions

Koller is the leading Swiss auction house with representative offices in London, Munich, Düsseldorf, Genoa, Beijing and Moscow. Every year Koller holds over 30 auctions in Zurich and Geneva in 20 categories with areas of interest to collectors ranging from Asian Art, Old Masters and Contemporary Art to Jewellery and Wine. Koller regularly achieves record prices and enjoys a broadly based international clientele. With a team of dedicated experts for each specialist area, as well as its membership of "International Auctioneers", this family business combines the advantages of an international auction house with Swiss efficiency and reliability.