

Vargueno or Bargueno, Late-16th-Early-17th Century, Spanish Renaissance, Walnut

Sold



REF: 11214

Height: 146 cm (57.5")

Width: 104 cm (40.9")

Depth: 61 cm (24")

Description

Spanish writing desks from this period are the most distinctive pieces of Spanish furniture conceived as visual displays of incredible virtuosity. They have been highly prized since the 16th century when they were objects of status for Spanish court culture which required portable furniture to travel within Spain's global Empire. The characteristic decoration of the outer fall front of this vargueno with its metal pierced mounts over red velvet, locks and catches is arresting and the interior displays the finest, decoration of the period. Carved and gilded architectural features, turned bone columns and finials flank, painted geometric decoration within carved and gilded panels; decoration which was the height of grandeur in the Spanish Golden Age. Varguenos with open stands are almost always associated either with a modern Stand or a marriage of different pieces and this vargueno has its original Stand, probably because it reputedly passed by descent in one family ownership and one house for around two hundred years also accounting for its high degree of originality. The quality of the construction, ornamentation and decoration combined with the originality of the escritorio and its Stand together with its provenance translate into this being as good an example of an early vargueno from Salamanca as can be found.

In two parts. The outside edge of the vargueno box or escritorio has two decorative pierced metal mounts along the top, three down the sides and two on the top edge with iron catches to secure the fall-front in place when it is not locked. The elaborate double-hasps is attached to the top edge of the frame and fits into a central hexagonal framed, pierced metal escutcheon covering the working lock. This escutcheon is surrounded by five large diamond-shaped panels with pierced metal mounts, the top two have central drop handles for lowering the fall and the remaining three have central cone shaped bosses as decorative features. The four side panels have pierced metal mounts which are really charming featuring lions and an exotic birds and hearts and latches to lock and release the fall. The sides are fitted with a hexagonal panels with pierced mounts and carrying handles. All of these metal panels retain their original red velvet which is typically worn due to age and use. A pair of three iron Santiago shells at the bottom hide the fixings for the hinges which are fixed on the inside.

The fall opens to reveal a stunning architecturally inspired, fitted interior with carved and gilded ornament, black and white painted decoration and spiral bone columns. The central cupboard has a broken volute scroll pediment, spiral bone columns and floral painted cartouches and retains its original working lock and hinges. There are two long short drawers on either side above two short deep drawers with secret drawers below repeating the architectural decoration on the central cupboard beside them flanked by two pairs of short drawers all with original working locks and hinges. A deep drawer below the cupboard with a secret drawer below is flanked by two pairs of long drawers. All the cupboards and drawers are moulded and faced with chip carved decoration and the drawers retain their original Santiago shell handles. The fall front

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