

Table Cabinet, Mid-17th Century, Flemish Baroque, Ebonized and Tortoiseshell

£7,200



REF: 11281

Height: 61 cm (24")

Width: 97.5 cm (38.4")

Depth: 21 cm (8.3")

Description

This cabinet was made in Flanders in the mid-17th century as a prestigious item for an affluent member of the professional classes. The significant amount of tortoiseshell employed demonstrates that it was conceived as an expensive, exotic item. The restrained form of the cabinet allows the grain of the tortoiseshell to be the dominant feature and woodwork has been ebonized to maximize the aesthetic of the coloring of the tortoiseshell. This cabinet is in good condition commensurate with its age and use.

The ebonized case enclosing eight small drawers (arranged as two singles, double drawer, two singles, double drawer) either side of a central door with a drawer above and below. The exterior drawers all with central tortoiseshell panels surrounded by deep reeded ebonized mouldings with ebonized knobs and lined with pine. The central door with original hinges opening with a key to reveal a cupboard with six small drawers, the top pair with central fruitwood panels and the other two pairs with exotic burr-wood panels, all with centrally fitted ebonized knobs. The bottom central drawer with an architectural front and three central tortoiseshell panels surrounded by an ebonized border. The top central drawer with a central tortoiseshell panel surrounded by a narrow moulding and two ebonized knobs. On bun feet.

Condition report: Minor losses, wear to the ebonizing and nibbles to the woodwork commensurate with age. The fruitwood veneers on the two top drawers of the interior cupboard period but possibly replaced. Lock to door later. Old repair to ebonized front on top central drawer. Some knobs replaced. Bun feet recent replacement.

Measures: Length 97.5cm., height 61cm., depth 29cm.

The port of Bruges created great prosperity in Flanders which was also known as the Spanish Netherlands because the Habsburg overlord was also King of Spain. It was the region where the important production centres for art and furniture and trade with foreign countries were located. It is most likely that this cabinet was made in one of the main cities; Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and Brussels.

Cabinet furniture was a luxury item. Analysis of 17th century inventories demonstrates that it was almost exclusively owned by the aristocracy and professionals with significant positions in society and its prestigious status is shown by the fact that cabinets were placed in the most important rooms. In Flemish regions cabinets were decorated with precious materials, the prerogative of the carpenters guild, and ebony-workers developed their own style of lacquer decoration. Tortoiseshell was widely used for inlay from 1640 which the ebony-workers bought from art dealers.

Most tortoiseshell was a luxury item imported from the West Indies and sold in Spanish and Portuguese ports from where it was shipped to Bruges. It was a precious, expensive material and as early as 1664 was being copied using less costly materials such as colored ox Horn.

A base of vermillion was used to prevent the wood carcass from being seen through the transparent tortoiseshell which was kept supply in sand-filled heated cushions. Before the tortoiseshell veneer was applied, a sticky, colored underlay was put on the back of the shell and covered with paper or parchment...