Christopher Clarke Antiques

Dealers in Campaign Furniture
& Travel Items

Napoleon Sighting A Cannon Box

Sold

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REF: 83600

Height: 3.17 cm (1.2")

Width: 11.43 cm (4.5")

Depth: 8 cm (3.1")

Description

A papier-mâché box painted to the top with Napoleon sighting a cannon.

The French were the first in Europe to use the Oriental technique of papier-mâché, which translates simply as chewed paper. From the wear to one top edge of the box interior, it looks to be made from three laminated boards covered in gesso (to give a smooth surface) and painted to resemble a black lacquer. The top is held by two brass hinges fixed with pins to the main body and sandwiched in place between the papier-mâché to the top.

The sides and the back of the box are decorated with painted swags. The top is painted with Napoleon with the title 'Montereau' and date '1814'. In February 1814, having just defeated an Allied army led by von Blücher, Napoleon rushed to Montereau to cut off the main Allied army of Austrians and Württembergers that were closing in on Paris. The Allies tried to hold the town but were eventually overrun by Napoleon.

Napoleon started in the Artillery and was known to still sight guns during battles whilst Emperor. This box alludes to Napoleon's start and the fact that he was a 'hands on' commander. The top is well painted and time has given the paint a fine craquelure finish. In 1867, an equestrian statue of Napoleon was erected at Place de la Légion d'Honneur in Montereau to commemorate the battle. One of the bronze reliefs to the side shows Napoleon sighting a canon. Beneath is the inscription in French of 'Courage my friends, the bullet which is to kill me is not yet cast' as his guardsmen worry for his safety. The scene is not exactly the same but this was obviously an incident that became part of French army folklore. First half 19th Century.

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