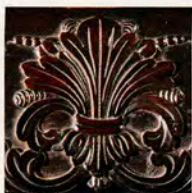


# Sotheby's



FINE CHINESE  
CERAMICS & WORKS  
OF ART

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# A EUROPÉENERIE ZITAN ARMCHAIR

CURTIS EVARTS

Commercial and cultural exchange between the East and the West was dynamic throughout the first hundred years of the Qing dynasty. *Chinoiserie*, the adaptation of Chinese inspired themes and forms to Western fine art, decorative art, architecture, and gardens during this period, is a relatively well-studied subject. Concurrent was a reverse flow from Europe to the Far East, which has also been complementarily coined "*Européenerie*". Although this phenomenon is less well documented, assimilations from the West are widely recognized in Chinese painting, science, mathematics, astronomy, cartography, architecture, and decorative art. Such is the 18th century zitan armchair offered in this sale, whose essential Chinese framework is richly embellished with carved patterns of leafy scrolls and shell motifs that are unmistakably drawn from the palate of Western decorative art.

During the *Européenerie* period, western ideas and objects entered China through two principle routes. Widely recognized is the commercial trade route through Guangzhou (also known as Canton), where Western products were brought by sea traders for sale as well as reproduction; foreign firms establishing presence there also constructed their trading houses in western architectural styles. Because Guangzhou was the principal point of contact with such foreign influence, westernized furniture decoration is often broadly qualified as Guang(zhou)-style or *Guangshi* decoration.

The second and possibly even more significant channel of Western ideas came through the Jesuits and foreign embassy officials. The European monarchs and papacy were anxious to establish scientific and cultural exchanges with China with the motive of extending political, religious, and commercial interests

in the region; through these envoys, gifts from Europe were sent, including medicinals, scientific instruments, books, prints, and objects of decorative art. The Chinese emperors were also eager to learn skills in the European arts and sciences. The western monarchs and papacy thus reciprocated, offering the talents of highly educated Jesuit priests who were also well-versed in Chinese culture and the language. The Jesuits were welcomed as foreign *literati* within the Palace where they served as a medium for exchange at the highest levels.

By 1695 of the Kangxi period, the Jesuit missionaries had established a scientific academy within the Forbidden City; four years later, Kangxi ordered an Imperial glass workshop to be established in Beijing based upon a Jesuit-managed operation in Guangzhou that could produce optical glass for surveying instruments as well as decorative enameled glass.

The Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors were both enamored with European prints and engravings as well as decorated papers—the latter being rich with a wide variety of western decorative patterns (fig. 1). Records from the palace workshop archives note decrees from Yongzheng to use patterns from the "Western gold decorated papers" (*xiyang jinhua zhi*) and the "Western enamels" (*xiyang falang*) to create brocade textiles designs and new motifs for porcelains, lacquerware, inkstone boxes and miscellaneous works. Likewise, many western patterns penetrated into the broad range of Chinese decorative art.

The succeeding Qianlong emperor became especially fond of collecting European clocks and music boxes, and also enjoyed the personal company of Jesuit court painters. Qianlong eventually directed Castiglione and fellow Jesuits to design a set of palace buildings in imitation of European models and furnished with mirrors, chandeliers, paintings and tapestries. By the Qianlong period, *Européenerie* taste in the palace culture of the Far East was mirroring that of *Chinoiserie* in the West.

The armchair in this sale reflects such a milieu of assimilated influence. Interestingly, a small engraved plaque mounted on an identical chair sold through iGavel Auctions in 2012 noted "One of a number of black carved hardwood chairs presented to emperor Chien Lung, Peking, 1736, by the Jesuit missionaries." Four years earlier in 2008, an identical pair was sold at Christie's Hong Kong. Now we know that the "number of black carved hardwood chairs" was at least four. Even larger sets were not uncommon for furnishing large halls. In any case, the iGavel chair as well as the style of the carved decoration supports the Jesuit connection with *Européenerie* vogue at the Chinese court.



Fig. 1

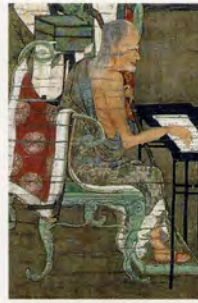


Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b



Fig. 2c

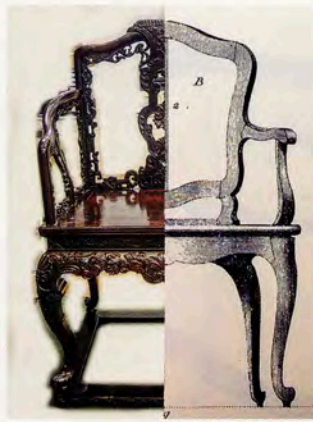


Fig. 2d



Fig. 2e

Although the chair exhibits a hybrid style, the essential frame and construction is Chinese. The upper half, with sculpted headrest, back splat, curvilinear armrests and side posts, can be compared to other traditional chairs. The lower half is of high-waisted, corner-leg form with cabriole legs with floor stretcher. Interestingly, while the cabriole leg is a component that is often perceived as a westernized convention, it is actually an ancient Chinese element and is evidenced on furniture from the earliest times—long before the form was adopted in West.

An early illustration of a cabriole leg chair appears in Lu Xinzhong's series of *Sixteen Luohan* from the Southern Song Dynasty (fig. 2a); a portrait of the Ming dynasty Xuande emperor also depicts a cabriole leg throne chair (fig. 2b); and throughout the Ming and early Qing periods, chairs and stools with cabriole legs were commonly depicted in book illustrations and paintings (figs. 2c-d). Nevertheless, due to the fragility of the S-shape form, extant examples are relatively rare. The elegantly drawn cabriole leg does not appear in Western furniture until the later half of the 17th century and at the beginning of the vogue for *Chinoiserie* within the European courts (fig. 2e).

What is most identifiable as "*Européenerie*" about the Sotheby's chair is the baroque architectural style of the *cartouche*-shaped back splat and the motifs of the carved surfaces. The sumptuous relief and

openwork carving—with curling acanthus leaves and shell patterns—appears in a style which is clearly drawn from the European rococo tradition. In Chinese, such decor was commonly termed "Western decorative pattern" (*xiyanghuawen*) or "Western scrolling lotus" (*xifanlian*). Curiously, this too, may be an example of an influence returning to itself, for one of the many factors influencing the development of the rococo style was the asymmetrical, florid and graceful lines assimilated during the age of *Chinoiserie*.

The moments are relatively rare when the hybrid styles of cross-cultural exchange can be so clearly seen. In China as well as the West, they were often quickly digested and assimilated, the contrasting elements shaped and melded once again into unique and perfected styles.

Fig 1. Examples of European early 18th century gold decorated papers, Bibliothèque et Archives du Château de Chantilly and others.

Fig 2a. Detail of cabriole leg chair from *Sixteen Luohans* by Lu Xinzhong, Southern Song.

Fig 2b. Cabriole leg chair from portrait of the Ming dynasty Xuande emperor, Early Ming period.

Fig 2c. Detail of cabriole leg chair from a book illustration, late Ming period.

Fig 2d. Detail of cabriole leg chair from album leaf painting by Jiao Bingzhen, early Qing dynasty.

Fig 2e. Detail of Louis XV cabriole leg arm chair from engraving, early 18th century.





400 alternate view



400 alternate view

400

PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE AMERICAN FAMILY COLLECTION

**A RARE AND IMPORTANT CARVED ZITAN  
ARMCHAIR  
QING DYNASTY, QIANLONG PERIOD**

well-carved in relief with European influenced *rocaille*, acanthus and foliate trails, the backspat of openwork vase-form, the shaped crestrail slightly outscrolled, the sideposts joined to the serpentine armrests, all enclosing elaborate and delicate openwork spandrels, the hard seat enclosed within a frame surmounting a recessed waist above curvilinear aprons, resting on cabriole legs terminating in slipper feet above small bun-form supports, all supported by a rectangular stretcher on bracket feet

Height 44 $\frac{1}{8}$  in., 112.5 cm; Width 25 $\frac{5}{8}$  in., 65 cm; Depth 20  $\frac{1}{4}$  in., 51.6 cm

**PROVENANCE**

Collection of Lt. Col. Robert Gray Peck (1879-1956), Military Attaché to the United States Legation in Beijing from 1903 to 1904 and thence by descent.

**EXHIBITED**

McLung Museum, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2005-2013.

The present lot appears to be the fourth of a set of armchairs to appear on the market. Two were sold at Christies Hong Kong, 3rd December 2008, lot 2503, now on display at the National History Museum, Beijing, and another was sold at I Gavel New York, 24th October 2012, item no. 2733451. Two related armchairs from the Palace Collection in Beijing are illustrated in Hu Desheng, *A Treasury of Ming & Qing Dynasty Palace Furniture*, vol. 1, Beijing, 2007, nos. 88 and 94, both dated to the Qianlong period. Another from the Qing court collection with a flamboyant *rocaille* crest is illustrated in *The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum, Furniture of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, vol. II, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 49, no. 39. In addition to the examples in the Palace museum, one of a pair with similar openwork spandrels is illustrated in Tian Jiaqing, *Classic Chinese Furniture of the Qing Dynasty*, Hong Kong, 1996, pp. 106-109, no. 36.

The opulent use of rare and Imperially controlled zitanwood in combination with fluid, deft carving are the defining characteristics of the best of the Guangzhou or Euroiserie style. The rich resinous hardwood provided the perfect medium for the elegant curvilinear lines and the delicate, refined relief and openwork carving needed to reflect the Rococo inspired furnishings favored by the Qianlong emperor. These masterpieces are infused with the spirited playfulness and organic profusion of Louis XV taste but tempered by a strength and coherent proportion that is distinctly Chinese and one achievable only in hardwood, unlike the painted softwood European examples.

The present lot was acquired in 1903 by Lt. Col. Robert Gray Peck. He was born in New Jersey, 10th April 1879 and served as a United States military attaché in Beijing in 1903 to 1904 and was then sent to the Philippines where he was joined by his family. He passed away in Illinois on 12th November 1956. The armchair has remained in the family collection.

◇ \$ 1,200,000-1,500,000

清乾隆 御製紫檀西洋花紋扶手椅