

## FURNITURE EMPLOYED BY LEADING INTERNATIONAL INTERIOR DECORATOR TO BE SOLD AT SOTHEBY'S IN JUNE

STRIKING furniture used by internationally acclaimed Italian interior decorator Renzo Mongiardino in one of his celebrated, theatrical decorative schemes, will be offered in a sale of Important Continental Furniture and Tapestries at Sotheby's in London on Thursday, June 10, 1999.

Renzo Mongiardino was born in Genoa in 1916. The palazzo where he was born and where he lived with his parents until the mid-1930s was of enormous influence on him and became the ultimate model and source of his later work: "The memories of that house, with its vases full of flowers, its crystals and velvets, and above all its aura, its fragrance, the light filtering through the half-closed curtains, the comfortable luxury of the lives of its inhabitants...."

In 1936, Mongiardino went to Milan to study architecture under the direction of the renowned Modernist architect Giò Ponti. Driven by a strong understanding and love for classical architecture, Mongiardino extended and adapted Antique and Renaissance ideas from Vitruvius and Alberti to the lifestyle and needs of those who commissioned his work. Film director Franco Zeffirelli, the Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis and couturier Gianni Versace were among the clients who, from the financial, intellectual and social elites, commissioned Mongiardino to create stunning rooms for their homes. Mongiardino died in Milan last year.

Mongiardino's theatrical style can be described as a mixture of decadence and classicism. He had a taste for simulating materials such as marble, damask, wood, Cordoban leather and embroidery, all of which he skilfully painted to create fascinating trompe l'oeil interiors. It is known that Mongiardino once described Versailles as "cute", whereas a room overlooking the sea in Greece as "stupendous".

Sotheby's sale includes a group of 29 pieces of important and stylish Italian furniture from a house that was decorated by Mongiardino in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Of note is the fact that some of the most important pieces of this collection have a Genoese origin, undoubtedly reflecting the influence and style of his home in Genoa where he was born and lived for 20 years.

Among the most impressive pieces in the group is a pair of 18th century Genoese carved giltwood and painted sculptures, one depicting a rampant griffin with three serpents in its jaw and the other modelled as a horse with a fish tail. Each is on a wooden base simulating rocks and supports a nine-branch gilt-metal scroll candelabra. The bold carving and fantastical design of these sculptures resembles the work of the celebrated Genoese sculptor Filippo Parodi (1630-1702). They are estimated at £18,000-25,000.

From the same collection is a fine and rare set of six mid-18th century Genoese giltwood and painted armchairs, each with a cartouche-shaped padded back and serpentine seat, the whole carved with trails of grapes and vines (estimate £50,000-80,000). A pair of mid-18th century Neapolitan giltwood and silvered console tables, carved throughout with bunches of flowers tied with ribbons is estimated at £30,000-50,000.

A beautiful and highly decorative pair of 18th century Genoese parcel-gilt and painted sculptures depicting Summer and Spring, each show a half-naked standing female figure holding a cornucopia which supports a glass-beaded five-arm candelabra. The pair is estimated at £10,000-15,000.

Other highlights from this collection include: a pair of Venetian lacquered and parcel-gilt gueridons with a scallop shell shaped-top, overall inlaid with mother-of-pearl, circa 1700 (estimate £10,000-15,000); a set of 18th century Italian paintings on glass depicting mythological and biblical scenes (estimate £4,000-6,000) and a gilt-bronze mounted and mother-of-pearl lamp, possibly Viennese, early 19th century (estimate £4,000-6,000).

Property from other vendors includes an outstandingly rare and important set of four late 17th century paintings on glass of which few examples have survived, each in its contemporary ebony and tortoiseshell frame and one bearing the signature D.C. Garofalus Pictor Regis.

Such reverse paintings on glass depicted mythological, allegorical or biblical subjects and were usually framed on their own or mounted on cabinets. They are often associated with the Neapolitan painter Luca Giordano (1692-1705) who, in 1692, went to Spain where he was appointed court painter by Charles II. However, the set in Sotheby's sale

is attributed to Carlo Garofalo, one of Giordano's most gifted pupils and a fellow court painter until the King's death in 1700. The paintings depict scenes with Pan and Syrinx, Diana bathing, Venus and Cupid and the Triumph of Galatea and the set is estimated at £80,000-100,000.

Other highlights from the Italian section of the sale include a mid-18th century Italian parcel-gilt and lacquered bureau cabinet, decorated with figures in a landscape, cartouches, strapwork, foliage and hunting scenes. The drawers are painted in Arte Povera technique, simulating real lacquer. It is estimated at £60,000-80,000.

An impressive pair of scagliola or inlaid marble panels, each depicting a vase filled with flowers, birds and butterflies, one with an unidentified coat of arms, is estimated at £40,000-60,000. One of the panels is dated 1699 and signed by Mannelli, a highly skilled "scagliolista" of whom little is known. Further Italian furniture includes an early 18th century Venetian mirror, richly carved with acanthus leaf scrolls at each side, the whole inlaid with mother-of-pearl and painted with flowers. Its brown-painted ground was intended to simulate walnut and tortoiseshell (estimate £30,000-40,000). Of Anglo-Italian influence is a rare mid-18th century Maltese bureau cabinet which is ebonised and inlaid with exotic timber such as olive-wood and fruit-wood (estimate £30,000-50,000),

French furniture in the sale includes an important pair of late 18th century vases made of Egyptian porphyry in the Louis XVI style of which similar examples are in the Wallace Collection in London and in the Louvre in Paris. It has been suggested that this pair was presented to Sir Alexander Hope in 1813 by Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, the Napoleonic brigadier who later became King of Sweden.

Bernadotte, keen in making Sweden an independent nation, defied his former Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, by entering into negotiations with England. Sir Alexander Hope was sent as an emissary to Sweden and it is known that among the gifts they exchanged there were several objects made from porphyry. The pair of vases is estimated at £70,000-100,000.

A superb example of late 17th century French craftsmanship is an important Louis XIV ebonised and ivory inlaid bureau mazarin, richly decorated with grotesque masks, scrolling foliage, flowers and birds. The bureau is supported by four square tapering legs joined by two x-form stretchers, and bears distinctive jasmine flowers made from inlaid bone. A similar bureau is in the Jones Collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. It is estimated at £50,000-70,000.

From the collection of Madame Mica Salabert (d.1991), the wife of the celebrated musical editor Francis Salabert, comes an Empire-style satinwood bed stamped Jacob Frères rue Meslée, decorated with gilt-bronze mounts and inlaid with mother-of-pearl figures in the Egyptian taste.

Madame Salabert had showed a talent for art and interior decoration from an early age, and later in life, she enrolled at the Ecole du Louvre in Paris where she excelled in Egyptology. After her marriage in 1920, Madame Salabert made several educational trips to Egypt and subsequently started collecting a large number of rare objects in this field.

The bed in Sotheby's sale is of boat-shaped design and is decorated elegantly with motifs inspired by the decoration on ancient Egyptian monuments. It is estimated at £30,000-40,000,

An important pair of bronze and brass colza-oil hanging lights with the coat of arms of Louis Philippe I, King of the French (1830-1848) is estimated at £40,000-60,000, while a superb Louis XVI white marble mantel clock, its dial signed by Joseph Coteau and its case decorated with gilt-bronze doves, bands of hearts and classical figures, is estimated at £30,000-50,000.

\* Quote from Teatro Mongiardino, an article written by Umberto Pasti.