


Writing cabinet (secrétaire)

Furniture Collection

Accession Nr.:	79.170.1 
Artist/Maker:	Vogel, Sebestyén (1779 - 1837)
Materials:	mahogany veneer; pinewood base
Techniques:	carved; gilded; painted in indian ink
Dimensions:	height: 165 cm width: 79 cm depth: 79 cm

A type of furniture popular and characteristic of its age was the writing cabinet, or secrétaire to give it its French name. Varying in shape and in decoration, it was intended, as an item of furniture for display, to reflect the taste and material possibilities of the owners of middleclass and aristocratic salons. A common structural element of these pieces is the pull-down writing flap, behind which many larger and smaller drawers and compartments were placed. Cabinet bodies which had curving sides, which became slimmer from the top down, and which were lyre- or urn-like in shape were especially widespread in Central Europe. On account of their daring and imaginative construction solutions, some of these pieces of furniture can almost be regarded as a species of sculptural creation, and in addition they were often ornamented with carved ornaments. This writing cabinet, which once stood in the home of the Zeyk family in Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), represents the transitional furniture style that bears marks of empire and Biedermeier alike. The mythological fantasy figures holding the foot and the body of the piece the painted figure, in a frame of laurel leaves, of the young Ganymede, favoured by Zeus, on the door of the cabinet's middle part and the ensemble of addition figural and ornamental motifs from the world of antique art that lack special interconnections are a legacy of the empire style, part of that process in the course of which elements of Graeco-Roman culture having lost their original meaning turned into decoration without more profound content. The sharp depiction on the mahogany veneer is – as an emphatic decorative element – already a characteristic of Biedermeier. Sebestyén Vogel (1779?–1837), who earlier was proposed as the creator of the writing cabinet, was the 'owner of the first Hungarian furniture factory'. Although in the absence of marking its precise origin cannot be determined, the piece may in any case have been made in the workshop of this well-trained and inventive master.

Literature

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