

A pair of 17th century silvered & gilded leather wall panels, ex Marquis of Queensbury, in Spanish gilded frames

Sold



REF: 10189

Height: 168 cm (66.1")

Width: 168 cm (66.1")

Description

Decorated with stylised foliage. Conserved and mounted on boards. In gilded, Spanish frames.
Provenance : Private Collection. Bought at a sale of the Marquess of Queensbury, 1984

Each panel 160cm., 5ft., 3in high, 165cm., 5ft., 5in long
Frame Height 176 cm., 5ft., 9 in., Length 177 cm., 5ft., 9 ½

These are fine examples of gilt leather hangings which were the height of fashion between the 16th and the early-18th century, when they became synonymous with splendour in the gilded palaces of the wealthy. In the 17th century, as fashions changed, designs became more naturalistic and were embossed in high relief with the introduction of wooden moulds and counter-moulds, instead of metal plates, which suited the new pictorial themes based on flowers, fruit and foliage, with the inclusion of cherubs and birds in some of them.

In England, Royalty and aristocracy have shown a taste for gilt leather hangings since the time of Henry VIII (perhaps introduced into England as part of Catherine of Aragon's dowry as was done earlier by Eleanor of Castile with her Oriental carpets) during whose reign also the art of gold-tooling for bindings seems to have been introduced in this country. "Most richly appointed houses," writes John Waterer, "at one time had some gilt leather hangings or furnishings although very few survive today, and although many, perhaps most, were of foreign origin, import on any considerable scale would inevitably have stimulated production here, as happened continually in other fields."

Between 1716 and 1785 there was a small community of leather gilders in the vicinity of St Paul's Cathedral.

For almost 10 centuries, leather mural hangings represented a form of decorative art which is now practically forgotten. Sumptuous panels of 'Spanish' or 'C6rdoban' leather as they became known to the world adorned the walls and halls of castles and palaces of the Middle Ages, and the grand houses of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, where they "vied for pride of place with the contemporary silk velvets and rich tapestry hangings."

The origins of this art, and many of the decorative techniques involved dyeing, gilding, blind stamping, embossing, modelling can be traced to the city of C6rdoba in Moorish Spain, the earliest developments dating from 800 A.D. The Moorish civilization influenced design and introduced many artistic concepts, such as the use of carpets and leather panels for interior decoration, which then spread to the rest of Europe. "Probably the principal stimulus behind all the developments resulting in leather hangings of good repute, in the making of which all kinds of both new and established skills were employed, was the manner in which these increasingly luxurious decorations fitted into the pattern of exotic magnificence that marked the great days of the Khalifs," is the description given by John W. Waterer in his unique study of this subject, 'Spanish Leather.'

At first, a uniquely soft leather -alumed hair sheep skin- was produced in C6rdoba. This was a pure white, and was also dyed in a beautiful red obtained from madder. This leather became famous in a very short time: in France it was called cord...