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A Boulle chest for the Nelson-Atkins Museum

Julie Demarle — Thursday 7 November 2024 — All the versions of this article: English , français

7/11/24 - **Acquisition - Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art** - Galerie Léage recently announced that the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City has acquired the chest attributed to André-Charles Boulle that it presented at the last two editions of TEFAF in Maastricht (*ill.* 1 and 2). This chest is associated with a Boulle marquetry base from the Louis XIV period (*ill.* 3), which is not original and has undergone subsequent modifications. As stated in the museum's notice [1], the two pieces appear to have been associated at least since the Christie's London sale of 20 June 1985. The ensemble, which recently featured among the thousand or so lots to be sold at Sotheby's in October 2022 from the Al-Thani collection at the Hôtel Lambert (see the news item of 11/10/22), had been acquired by the Qatari prince from the Galerie Perrin in Paris in 2008.



1. Attributed to André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732)

Chest, c. 1685-1700

Base, second half of the 18-th century

Ebony, tortoise shell, brass, pewter and gilt bronze

Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Photo: Sotheby's

👁 See the image in its page

This model of chest on base is one of the pieces of furniture by Boulle featured in the collection *Nouveaux Desseins de meubles et ouvrages de bronze et de marqueterie inventés et gravés par André Charles Boulle* published by the cabinetmaker at Mariette around 1710, of which several copies have survived, in the Bibliothèque du Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Kunstbibliothek in Berlin and the Wallace Collection in London. It should be compared with the "Coffre de toilette monté sur son pied" (Toilet chest mounted on its foot) shown on the third engraved plate, a plate that reproduces, in reverse, a large red chalk drawing by André-Charles Boulle, the *Étude pour des meubles en marqueterie d'écaille* (Study for pieces of furniture in tortoiseshell marquetry) held by

the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. This drawing and the copy in the BnF's collection of models were shown in Frankfurt during the major retrospective devoted to the cabinetmaker at the Museum Angewandte Kunst in 2009.



2. Attributed to André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732)

Coffre, c. 1685-1700

Ebony, tortoise shell, brass, pewter and gilt bronze - 37 x 58.5 x 42 cm

Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Photo: Galerie Léage

👁 See the image in its page

As Calin Demetrescu points out in his exhaustive study of the *Ébénistes de la Couronne* who worked under the reign of Louis XIV, published in 2021, while the production of André-Charles Boulle's workshop is well documented for the period 1700-1732 thanks to several preserved archive items, it has yet to be discovered for the period from 1660 to towards the end of the 17th-century. While it is possible to determine a dating limit *terminus post quem* of around 1701-1710 for the creation of the models featured in the collection of *Nouveaux desseins*, it is possible to move back this chronological reference point for the pedestal chest in particular. Indeed, the 'Comptabilité de la Maison de Condé' identifies "two marquetry toilet chests [...] made for the service of SAS Mademoiselle de Bourbon, on the occasion of her

marriage to the Prince de Conti", delivered by Boulle to the Prince de Condé on 7 August 1688. This pair, which appears to match the one from the former George Stevens Byng collection in Wrotham Park, near London, now held by the Rijksmuseum (<http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.478337>) in Amsterdam, which fetched over €3 million at Christie's London in July 2009, is very close to the model of the footed chest shown in the third plate of the collection.



3. France, 18-th century

Base

Ebony, tortoise shell, brass, pewter and gilt bronze - 80 x 74,5 x 51,5 cm

Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Photo: Sotheby's

👁 See the image in its page

In his reference work *Les ébénistes Français de Louis XIV à la Révolution* published in 1989, Alexandre Pradère identified around twenty examples of these chests in public and private collections. Two types can be distinguished within this corpus: the sarcophagus-shaped chest, conforming to the model represented in the collection of *Nouveaux desseins*, and the rectangular chest with a slightly domed lid, such as the one in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The pair in the Rijksmuseum (<http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.478337>), the Getty Museum (<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103SHD>) and Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire belong to the former type, while the examples in the Wallace Collection (<https://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org:443/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=63670&viewType=detailView>), Boughton House, Chatsworth House and the trunk without legs in the Art Institute of Chicago (<https://api.artic.edu/api/v1/artworks/156442/manifest.json>) belong to the latter. As for the support with square sheaths on the copy acquired by Kansas City, which differs from the model with scrolled legs in the collection, it can be compared with the Blenheim and Chatsworth bases. The chest and its base will join the European art galleries of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art next spring. They will complement the small but important collection of French 18th-century furniture already in the museum, which includes works by Charles Cressent, Bernard II Van Riesen Burgh and Adam Weisweiler.

— *Julie Demarle*

Footnotes

[1] We are grateful to William Keyse Rudolph, Chief Curator and Director of the Department of Architecture, Design and Decorative Arts at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art for the precise information he provided

Keywords

André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732) - Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art - Acquisitions