Finch & Co



RARE AND SUPERB PAIR OF CHINESE CANTON SILVER ENAMEL AND IVORY PORTRAIT FIGURES

A RARE AND SUPERB PAIR OF CHINESE CANTON SILVER ENAMEL AND IVORY PORTRAIT FIGURES OF A MANDARIN AND HIS WIFE DRESSED IN EMBROIDERED CEREMONIAL ROBES SEATED UPON MINIATURE ZITAN WOOD CHAIRS WITH ARMRESTS CARVED AS DRAGON'S HEADS THEIR IVORY HEADS AND HANDS ARTICULATED AND NODDING WHEN GENTLY TOUCHED THE MAN WITH LONG PLAITED QUEUE OF NATURAL HAIR HIS RANK INDICATED BY THE MANDARIN SQUARE TO THE FRONT OF HIS ROBE SHE WITH TRADITIONAL TINY FEET AND ELABORATE JEWELLED COIFFURE HOLDING A BOUQUET OF PEONY FLOWERS AND A FAN

OLD TRADE LABEL TO THE BACK OF ONE CHAIR 'NO. 150 Â€¦.'

QING DYNASTY / CIRCA 1760 - 1780

SIZE: 19CM HIGH - 7½ INS HIGH AND 18CM HIGH - 7 INS HIGH

LITERATURE

CANTON WAS THE SECOND CITY OF THE CHINESE EMPIRE AND THE CHIEF ENTREPÍ´T FOR ITS OVERSEAS TRADE. THE CITY BOASTED ONE OF THE LARGEST AND MOST DIVERSE ARTISAN COMMUNITIES WHICH WAS HIGHLY RESPONSIVE TO FOREIGN NEEDS AND INFLUENCES. WITH A STEADY SUPPLY OF SILVER IN THE FORM OF SPANISH EIGHT 'REALE' PIECES BROUGHT BY FOREIGNERS TO PAY FOR CHINESE GOODS, CANTONESE SILVERSMITHS PRODUCED, IN THE LATE 18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURIES, FINE SILVERWARE AT A FRACTION OF ITS LABOUR COST IN LONDON.

THE MAJORITY OF CHINESE PORTRAIT FIGURES WERE MADE FROM CLAY AND IT IS OFTEN ASSUMED THAT THEY WERE PRODUCED FOR THE EXPORT MARKET. HOWEVER, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT MANY OF THEM WERE ALSO MADE FOR THE INTERNAL MARKET IN CHINA AS ANCESTOR FIGURES. THIS EXTRAORDINARY PAIR OF SILVER FILIGREE FIGURES WITH LIFE-LIKE EXPRESSIONS, DRESSED IN ELABORATELY DECORATED ENAMELLED SILVER CLOTHING APPROPRIATE TO THEIR RANK, WOULD SEEM NOT TO BE MADE FOR EXPORT, BUT AS REVERED ANCESTOR FIGURES FOR A NATIVE CHINESE MARKET.