THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (18TH CENTURY)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, wearing white gown, her hair powdered, set into a vari-coloured gold and painted papier-mache carnet-de-bal

Circa: Circa 1785

Circa 1785

Watercolour on ivory

Set into a vari-coloured gold and painted papier-mache carnet-de-bal;

the rectangular case of slightly tapering shape, all sides set within within chased gold borders, the sides of the top applied with gold inscription "Keppsake", the borders chased with bands of laurel in gold, one side of the base with oval portrait miniature within a gold mount, the back within identical frame containing a gold monogram "AC" on a green silk ground, under glass; inside tablets and miniature pencil

The whole 97 mm (3 $^{7}/_{8}$ inches) high

The carnet-de-bal, a cherished possession among fashionable 18th-century ladies, served as a multifunctional accessory, most notably in grandiose society balls. Its purpose is explained by its title; it is a dance card, a tablet for note taking, and a sentimental keepsake. Encased in an ornate box, it typically included a gold-handled stylus and fan ivory sheets secured by a gold pin. They were used by women to note down the of the dances for the evening, and for each of them, the dancers who proposed themselves.

Carnets-de-bal were also known as ‘souvenir’, French for “to remember”. Small in size and compact, and often adorned with portrait miniatures, they were popular gifts exchanged among friends and lovers, symbolizing an elegant way to convey sentimental messages. Along with snuffboxes, carnets-de-bal were even given a royal gifts, used in courts in lieu of cash payments.

In 18th century Europe, Parisian goldsmiths, renowned for their craftsmanship, led the production of high quality carnets-de-bal, alongside other personal artifacts/accessories such as snuff boxes and sewing utensils. These boxes were coveted and admired among high society, produced from a variety of materials, the most luxurious ones being encrusted with diamonds, (see Met example). They were so fashionable as accessories, completely entrenched in social ritual, to the point that merchants advertised new carnets-de-bal with each changing season.

By the 19th century, the fashion for carnets-de-bal would evolve into little printed pasteboard booklets, often dangling on silken cords from a lady's wrist (see Sotheby's, Fabergé, Gold Boxes & Objects de Luxe, 15 November 2022, Lot 1271). This particular carnet-de-bal is a classic example of one, revealing a set of implements comprising of a pencil and ivory note-pad as you open it.