



## 18th Century Antique

A George III Statuary, Blue Jasper, Bardiglio, Yellow Sicilian Jasper and Spanish Brocatello with Blue John plaques and central tablet depicting a Gypsy fortune-teller. *See following pages for further details.*

### Dimensions

Height 60in (152.5cm) width 75<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>in (191.5cm)

Internal height 41<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in (106cm) width 44<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>in (113cm)

Footblock to Footblock 67<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>in (171 cm)

Shelf depth 8<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>in (22cm)

### Reference

G442

## Further Details

The breakfront shelf in white statuary marble with fine leaf and twisted mouldings is supported by a frieze in Bardiglio. The popular subject of the gypsy fortune-teller and a shepherdess is carved in bas-relief 'à jour' in white marble on a Bardiglio background on the central tablet. A variety of precious marbles adds colour to this chimneypiece; Siena marble frame the opening, while fine fluted inlays in jasper run down the Ionic hermed pilasters.

This architectural yet ornate composition represents the marriage of the style of two pivotal figures of the 18th century, Henry Cheere (1703–1781) and James Paine (1717–1789). Both personalities – Cheere mainly as sculptor and Paine as architect – greatly contributed to shaping the taste for interiors of their century through prolific productions that often crossed path. Both designers made great use of coloured marbles in their chimneypieces compositions to create strong visual contrasts that emulated opulence, with the purpose of attracting the wealthy classes. Rococo elements such as the central tablet added a light and lively tone to traditional compositions. The subjects carved on the tablets convey a graceful and exuberant rusticity, moving away from mythological subjects and favouring topics of genteel pleasure and leisure, with a light-hearted atmosphere.

An album of watercolours conserved at the V&A museum attests the attribution of the tablet design to Cheere. The popular theme of the gypsy fortune teller, originally found in literature and theatre during the 15th century, had later been developed by 16th and 17th-century Italian, French and Dutch painters. The fortune teller is typically portrayed as an elderly woman, wearing the ragged garments of a traveller, accompanied by children. The numerous representations of women having their palms read generally emphasize the client's innocence and naïveté and juxtapose her refined and affluent youthful beauty with the advanced age and rough poverty of the fortune teller. It's a theme that hints at exoticism, sensuality, and a venture into the unknown. Specifically in the context of the rococo, this subject acquires a positive connotation, where ugliness and poverty are eternally absent and only good fortune is foretold.

William Collins (1721–1793) was one of most successful pupils within Cheere's prolific workshop, being in charge of carving the tablets for his chimneypieces. It is very plausible that the tablet here in question was designed by Cheere and then executed by Collins, as it happened for most of the design illustrated in the V&A album of watercolours. Collins was most likely in this instance the connection between Cheere and Paine: during his lifetime he famously supplied numerous architects with carved tablets, including Robert Adam and James Paine himself.

Comparably to the chimneypiece here in question, the design of a fireplace sold at Christie's in 2007 is also attributed to Paine, while the central tablet to Collins. Pupil of Henry Cheere, Paine followed his the steps and this can be seen

especially in the work of the young architect for interior decoration. He was distinguished for adapting Palladian prototypes through the lightness and delicacy of the newly introduced Rococo style, and this is visible particularly in his chimneypieces.

The Christie's chimneypiece was certainly not the only instance where Paine used a tablet executed by Collins: another example is the fireplace in the ballroom at Sandbeck Park in Yorkshire. Around 1763 Richard Lumley-Saunderson, 4th Earl of Scarbrough hired Paine to convert the house to the fashionable Neo-Palladian style. The ballroom's chimneypiece, presumably designed by Paine, shows a central tablet that depicts a shepherd seated under a tree with his dog. Collins is considered responsible for this tablet, based on a design by Cheere which can also be identified in the V&A album.

It is recorded that Collins was the sculptor of a pediment in the Portico at Sandbeck, testifying his presence and engagement in decorating this notable house. Interestingly another chimneypiece at Sandbeck Park strongly recalls to the one here in question. The tapered pilaster are unmistakably characteristic of Paine's style, also in this case married with Rococo elements and precious coloured marbles.