OUAISS ANTIQUITÉS
Galerie des Arts

Rare freemasonry gilt bronze inkwell designed as a hive

Era: First part of the 19th century.

Materials: gilt bronze, porcelain.

Dim: H: 15 cm/ D: 15 cm/ W: 12 cm.

Small ormolu inkwell with a beehive-shaped system decorated with bees at the top, on a base animated with flowers and vegetation. The basket-shaped receptacle is decorated with wheat sheaves and bees. This inkwell is embellished with two lidded cups, one with a stopper featuring an eagle. Since the 18th century, the bee and the hive have featured prominently in the iconography of Freemasonry, for the social harmony that reigns in the hive, and the hard-working, altruistic nature of the bees. The beehive surrounded by bees is a strong symbol of Freemasonry, appearing on many Masonic aprons from the late 18th century onwards. The beehive represents the Masonic Temple, and the bees the Freemasons who inhabit it. The beehive and the bees are generally associated with the Mason's work on himself. Masonic symbolism does not vary whether the hive is closed or surrounded by bees, because closed does not mean empty. Porcelain inner pot broken at the top and glued back together. The small porcelain ink cup hides this defect.