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POUR L'ART



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*Casket with putti decoration*

c. 1550

Limoges

Painted enamel, gilt highlights and engraved gilded copper on wooden substructure

11.5 x 19 x 13 cm

“IE SUIS ARDIR VALIAN : ARDIS” in gold on lower left enamel panel on back; “LE DIEU BACUS : AP[...] S : VALIA” in gold on lower enamel panel on left side; “L[ou ]E [...] SANS SUIS.” in gold on lower enamel panel on right side

FGA-AD-OBJ-0058

**Provenance**

Canning family Collection

Alfred de Rothschild Collection

Almina, Countess of Carnarvon Collection

Christie's London, 19 May 1925, lot 184

Mr Webster Collection, UK

Christie's London, 18 April 1989, lot 72

Christie's London, 9 February 2012, lot 636



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This small rectangular casket with trapezoidal lid is decorated with twelve painted enamel panels, on which are represented naked or clothed putti, set in a landscape reduced to a strip of green grass under a blue sky.



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On the main faces of the base and lid, divided vertically into two parts by gilded and engraved copper plates, the putti are occupied in playing music, dancing or handling weapons.



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The shorter sides are more clearly triumphal in character, with, on the one hand, a chariot drawn by putti, and on the other, an enthroned putto. These two scenes are placed below classical style portraits within medallions from which emanate arabesques, an ensemble of motifs from the Renaissance formal lexicon, as are the pilasters with Corinthian capitals at the corners, terminating in feet in the form of busts of naked women.



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The casket belonging to the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art is one of a set of around twenty similar examples, representing "children's games" accompanied by mottos or proverbs in gold lettering, attributed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Colin Nouailher<sup>1</sup>. This attribution has been questioned by Sophie Baratte who, on the basis of a comparison of the style of these caskets with that of works signed by the enameller, proposes, more reasonably, to remain with the notion of anonymity<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Higgott 2011, pp. 220-231.

<sup>2</sup> Baratte 2000, pp. 62 and 83-84.



True jewels in themselves, these caskets were probably intended to hold precious objects, given as gifts for engagements, weddings, or births. The representation of multitudes of putti amusing themselves playing war games could thus be better understood in this context, calling on a newborn son to acquire courage and valour, as the partially-erased inscriptions suggest.

The provenance of this casket, as detailed in the sales catalogue description, is particularly prestigious<sup>3</sup>: it might have passed through the hands of François I of France, Cardinal Wolsey (d. 1530), Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn and finally Elizabeth, Countess of Worcester (d. 1565). Established on the basis of a document published in 1781 in Treadway Nash's *Collections for the History of Worcestershire*, such a provenance is however incompatible with the stylistic dating of the casket<sup>4</sup>. It is possible that the author of this document, dated 1684, Thomas Abington, invented this genealogy, which does however contain other interesting information: the names of the subsequent owners, and the handing down of the casket to him by inheritance, from girl to girl, a process then reinstated at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century within the Canning family.

Dr Brigitte Roux  
for the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art  
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<sup>3</sup> *Living with Art, A Private European Collection*, sales catalogue, Christie's, London, 9 February 2012, lot 636.

<sup>4</sup> The original document on parchment in the Worcestershire archives used by Treadway Nash was rediscovered by Mrs. Sara Fox, who sent us the transcript of it in 2015.



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