

RESTORATION OF A NEO-EMPIRE-STYLE CHAIR

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ABOUT

The chair was made in 1910, Russia. The year it was made points to Neoclassical style that began in 1905 as a response to the decorative excess of Art Nouveau. The term Neoclassicism in Latvian is used similarly as in German and other Central and Eastern European languages to denote one of the traditional art and architecture styles that were popular in the first half of the 20th c. Europe. The name of the style refers to the classical examples of architecture and influence from Classicism and other architectural styles based on classical tradition. During this period, furniture of the following styles was copied and produced en masse: Louis XVI style, English and German furniture of the first half of the 19th c., Russian Biedermeier and Empire furniture.

The heavy form of the chair and the materials used – polished mahogany with bright bronze décor – point to the influence of the Russian Empire style. Similar to Classicism, the Empire style has architectural elements from Greek and Roman antique culture; however, the Empire style furniture is more massive, has a very heavy form, saturated with decorative elements and contrasting colours.

DESCRIPTION

The chair has a solid construction, curved half-circle backrest and an upholstered seat. All the wooden parts of the chair are richly decorated with decorative bronze elements, thus creating a sense of excessive luxury and gravity. The chair is a perfect example of Neo-Empire style, containing all its characteristic design and decorative elements. Ornamentation of the bronze elements: laurel wreaths, ribbons, rosettes, palmettes, flower ornament band or anthemion, military emblems and lion heads. The chair legs end in a decorative element – bronze lion's feet.

OBJECT: Neo-Empire style chair
DATE, ORIGIN: 1910, Russia
MATERIAL: wood (birch), mahogany veneer, shellac, bronze, brocade;
TECHNIQUE: carpentry, veneering, bronze castings, upholstery, shellac polishing;
DIMENSIONS: 80cm x 64cm x 60cm
YEARS OF RESTORATION: 2017 / 2018
OWNER: Rundāle Palace Museum



Chair after restoration.

TECHNICAL CONDITION BEFORE RESTORATION

The chair is in a very bad condition. A layer of dust and dirt covers the entire object. Many mechanical damages. The connecting links are unstable. Legs, sides and the upper part of the backrest have separated from the seat frame. Large loss of bronze elements. The wooden front of the seat frame is visibly burnt. The backrest has large losses of veneer, raised areas, cracks and small loss of wood. The upholstery of the seat is worn out, in a few places the springs are covered in corrosion products, thus damaging other upholstery materials.

THE PROCESS OF RESTORATION

The object's damages were monitored, documented and photographed for documentation. The lost wooden details were remade and the veneer was secured and restored. The raised areas, cracks and mechanical damages of veneer were fixed. The upholstery was changed and the original top cover was used. The existing bronze details were cleaned and the lost ones were recast. The original top cover of the seat was restored by Aina Ābolniece – Āboliņa, the Master restorer of fabric at Rundāle Palace Museum. The fabric was cleaned on a vacuum table. The damaged parts were lined on a canvas.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESTORATION PROCESS

The object is disassembled and bronze details taken off. Clean off dust and dirt, polish surfaces with a fine polishing felt. Afterwards, the entire surface is brushed over using a cotton swab moistened with ethyl alcohol. Areas of wood and veneer loss are filled with new wood and mahogany veneer; gluten glue, i.e. carpenter's glue, is used. The steaming method is used to strengthen the veneer and flatten the raised areas; veneer is glued with gluten glue.

Mechanical damages, small veneer losses and cracks are filled with Mahagoni water-based acrylic filling paste produced by BORMA WACHS.

The areas filled with filling paste are then varnished and toned with ethanol-based woodstain. After the wooden parts are restored, the object is assembled using polyvinylacetate glue (PVA). The object is varnished with shellac and polished with shellac polish. The old upholstery is taken off, except the springs. The spring core has remained firm and covered by an even layer of corrosion. Springs are mechanically cleaned and covered by a rust converter ("BUVANOLS" KT-1 rust modifier produced by Spodriība), then the springs are washed in running water and dried. New, authentic upholstery is added by using the same materials as the original: jute ribbons, linen fabric, jute fabric, original springs, seaweeds, batting, cotton fabric and the original brocade top cover.

The bronze details are chemically cleaned in a calcium ethylene diaminetetraacetate solution (trilon B), then rinsed in running water. The deepest parts of the bronze relief are cleaned mechanically with a brush. The losses of bronze parts are replaced with details from the chair RPM 116/1; the missing parts are ordered and recast according to the original example. The bronze details are attached using brass nails and screws.



Chair before restoration.



Process of restoration: bronze details are removed from the legs and other parts of the chair.



Process of restoration: The bronze details are cleaned and added to the chair.



Process of restoration: The upholstery of the seat is worn out, in a few places the springs are covered in corrosion products, thus damaging other upholstery materials. Damage upholstery removed from the seat.



Process of restoration: new upholstery is created by using the same materials as the original.



Fragment of the backrest before restoration.



Process of restoration: The backrest has large losses of veneer, raised areas, cracks. Veneer was reinforced and restored.



Process of restoration: bronze details are removed from the backrest.



Process of restoration: the areas filled with filling paste are then varnished and toned with ethanol-based woodstain.



Process of restoration: damages of wood and veneer are fixed.