

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Tortoiseshell and Mother-of-Pearl Shaving Box

Probably Lima, Peru, 18th century

21cm high, 10.3cm wide, 9.5cm deep

Provenance: Private UK Collection

Stock no.: A4983

This wooden box is of cubic form and entirely decorated with shimmering mother-of-pearl geometrically-shaped flower heads and pendants. The beautiful, naturally flowing mother-of-pearl decoration is inlaid on a tortoiseshell base. The lid is of slanted form. There is a silver loop handle attached to the top of the box. An elaborately ornamented silver lock plate to the front opens up to reveal a red-velvet interior. The reverse of the lid is connected by two silver hinges decorated with four incised flower heads and eleven old nails hammered onto a punched silver ground. The body rests on four short wooden bun feet.

This rare container was most probably used to store shaving tools. The mother-of-pearl decoration seen on this shaving box shares stylistic similarities with lacquered and mother-of-pearl boxes from Korea, Japan and Gujarat, Western India. In particular, the lacquered and inlaid mother-of-pearl boxes from the Korean Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) share the same family of high-quality enconchado (shell inlay) decoration as seen on our box. According to Rivas, this categorical style of enconchado work is in the 17th-century Korean Choson style.[1] Craftsmen in South America combined traditions of Spanish Mudejar inlaid and marquetry work with Asian-inspired motifs in order to create a new style of furniture to suit the demand for 'Chinoiserie' luxury goods.[2]

Literature:

Carr, D. *Made in Americas: The New World Discovers Asia*, MFA Publications, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2015.

Rishel, J.J. and Stratton-Pruitt, S. *The Arts in Latin America 1492- 1820*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2006

[1] See Rivas in Rishel and Stratton-Pruitt, p. 490

[2] Carr, p. 62