



# GABRIELLE LAROCHE GALLERY

Medieval - Renaissance - 17th century

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## ***SMALL RENAISSANCE WEDDING CABINET WITH A MYTHOLOGICAL DECOR***

FRANCE, LOIRE VALLEY

EARLY 16th CENTURY, FRANÇOIS I PERIOD

**Full height : 180 cm**

Upper body	Lower body
Height : 89 cm	Height : 91 cm
Length : 84.5 cm	Length : 93.5 cm
Depth : 36 cm	Depth : 45 cm

Blond walnut wood

**Remark : On the upper body's base, a manuscript note saying « done by me Timoté »**

After having waged wars in Italy, French king François I soon commissioned Italian artists to produce major ornamental projects in France. **The School of Fontainebleau** with Rosso Fiorentino, student of Raphael, and Francesco Primaticcio set the bases for a new Italian influenced Decorative Art. The superb stucco sculpted compositions framing frescos acted as models.

This two bodies cabinet opens with four doors and three drawers. The upper body shows a slight recess. The door-leaves are delicately carved with mythological figures leaving freedom of interpretation to the artist while clearly showcasing Fontainebleau influences.





## THE UPPER BODY

Standing on a double moulding the upper body is narrower and more elongated than the lower body. The drawer is richly carved with the handle centred in a cut-out leather motif framed by two Griffon headed chimaeras turning into foliated scrolls. Fantastic creatures that have appeared during the First Renaissance take a more prominent space in compositions and mingle with vegetal motifs.

Two consoles adorned with a carved flower flank the drawer. The two door-leaves are framed by two ringed columns with a gorgerin capital emphasizing the architectural dimension of the cabinet, a characteristic of the era. The impression of depth is remarkable.

Both door-leaves are enriched with four mythological scenes framed by palm leaves.

The entablature is also adorned with carvings. In its centre, inscribed in a medallion appears Hermes the messenger god, recognizable with his winged helmet. He is framed by two putti and foliated scrolls. The composition's impression of depths is at work everywhere on the cabinet and also appears on the entablature where a frieze alternating overlapping consoles and low-relief flowers highlight the moulded cornice.



**Upper left : Apollo and the nymph Daphne**

The myth comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. To get revenge on Apollo (god of Arts) that made fun of him, Eros (god of love) shoots two arrows. A gold one to Apollo who falls madly in love with the beautiful Daphne and a lead one to the nymph who then can only feel despise for him. Apollo chases her and to escape him the nymph has no other choice but to ask her father the river god Peneus to change her into a laurel tree.



### **Upper right : Pasiphae and the bull**

Minos, legendary king of Crete, was eager to show his people how he was in good terms with the gods and asked Poseidon god of sea to give him a beautiful bull that he would sacrifice to him. Poseidon answered his prayer and gave him a bull so perfect that Minos changed his mind and hid the bull to give another animal in sacrifice to the cheated god. At the instigation of Poseidon the bull then entered a rage and devastated Cretan lands. Furthermore, Poseidon had made the wife of Minos, queen Pasiphae fall in love with the bull. She went to seek architect Dedalus' help. Dedalus built a wooden cow disguise for Pasiphae to mate with the bull. From this encounter was born the Minotaur, a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man. Oracles asked Minos to entrust to Dedalus the building of a maze where the Minotaur was to be kept.



**Lower left : Daphne hit by Eros' arrow**

See the first myth.



**Lower right : Leda and the swan (Zeus)**

According to Homer, Zeus king of Gods assumed the shape of a swan to seduce goddess Leda. From their encounter two babies were born from an egg ; Helen and Pollux.



## **THE LOWER BODY**

The lower body stands on a moulded base enriched with an acanthus leaves and foliated scrolls carved decor. Three pilasters flank the two door-leaves. These pilasters are very finely adorned with floral compositions, knots, chimaeras and arrows. A central medallion on each of the three pilasters shows nymphs and Eros holding his bow.

Above the pilasters and between the three overlapping consoles are two drawers presenting a decor similar to the upper body's drawers. Once more the architectural ternary rhythm can be found in those double consoles displaying a feather quill decor.

The door-leaves are divided in two levels following the same division as on the upper body.



### **Upper left : Hermes killing Argus**

One of Zeus' mistresses was Io, a priestess of Hera. The god would take the shape of a cloud to meet her frequently until his wife, Hera, nearly surprised them in the forest. Indeed Zeus had turned Io into a white heifer to protect her from his wife. But Hera was not a fool and was aware of the trick. She demanded that very white heifer as a gift and Zeus obeyed. He would still meet Io, this time as a bull. That's why Hera entrusted the white heifer to Argos, a giant with a thousand eyes. Zeus then asked his son Hermes to kill Argos and free Io. Hermes managed to put to sleep the giant by telling him a very long story accompanied by his lyre. When the giant was asleep Hermes cut his head off. To honor his memory Hera kept the giant's eyes and set them on a peacock's tail, her favourite animal.



### **Upper right : Apollo and Hermes**

Son of Zeus and the nymph Maia, Hermes was born in a cave of Mount Kyllini in Arcadia. Very early in his life Hermes show cunning and agility, two main characteristics in all of his attributions. When just a newborn he creates a new instrument, the lyre, with the shell of a turtle he found in a cave. Then he goes to Thessaly where he steals fifty cows from his brother Apollo distracted by love affairs. According to different stories Hermes had either the cows walk backwards or he hid their footsteps with pieces of bark. After having led the herd to Pylos he leave them in a cave and goes back to his crib. When Apollo realises it he goes to Maia to complain but Hermes' mother doesn't believe him. Zeus is amused by Hermes' wit and intervenes for him to give back the herd to his brother. Seduced by the sound of the newly made lyre Apollo agrees to let his herd to Hermes if he can have the instrument.



**Lower left : Apollo killing Python**

Python was a Greek snake guarding the sources on Mount Parnassus. Hera had asked the creature to hunt down goddess Leto with whom her husband Zeus had had an affair. Leto hid thanks to Poseidon and gave birth to Artemis (Moon) and Apollo (Sun) on Delos island. A few days after his birth Apollo went for Python who was now oracle and guardian of Delphi. He eventually killed the creature with his gold arrows.



### **Lower right : Hercules and Omphale**

After having accomplished his labours and after his episode of madness that had him killed his family Hercules has to go through a year of servitude as penance by the oracle of Delphi. Bought as a slave by Omphale queen of Lydia, Hercules perform prowess to clear her kingdom from monsters. Omphale forces Hercules to dress as a woman and spin the wool while she carries the club and wear the lion skin.



**Much more than a simple luxury cabinet this piece of furniture is an ode to love. With the depictions of various mythological scenes centred around love this cabinet was undoubtedly commissioned for a wedding.**

**With the precision of its carving work, the balance of composition and the respect of proportions this architectural cabinet is a perfect example of furniture making inspired by the School of Fontainebleau.**



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**CREDITS PHOTOS**

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