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OBJECT OF THE MONTH

November 2026

A Louis XIV Gilt Bronze Cartel Clock

in Boulle marquetry, with its original bracket

By Nicolas Gribelin à Paris, the case attributed to the workshop of André Charles Boulle. Paris, circa 1700 to 1710.



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VIEWING BY APPOINTMENT

AT A GLANCE

A rare survival, complete with its bracket

Each month I present one exceptional piece. This November it is a superb cartel clock in première partie Boulle marquetry, engraved brass on tortoiseshell, still accompanied by its original matching bracket.

Most clocks of this type lost their bracket (cul de lampe) long ago, which makes this ensemble a rare survival. The movement is signed twice by Nicolas Gribelin, Horloger de Monsieur le Dauphin and one of the greatest clockmakers of the reign of Louis XIV. The case, of exceptional quality in its chasing, gilding and marquetry, is attributed to the workshop of André Charles Boulle, Premier ébéniste du Roi and the most celebrated cabinetmaker of his age. A documented Gribelin movement in a case of this calibre, with its bracket intact, very seldom appears on the market.

MAKER	CASE	DATE	OVERALL
Nicolas Gribelin à Paris	Workshop of A. C. Boulle	Circa 1700 to 1710	H 125 · W 40 · D 20 cm

The movement

Three train movement with pendulum, verge escapement and silk thread suspension. One barrel drives the going train, a second sounds the hours and half hours on a bell, and a third sounds the quarters on two smaller bells. Signed on the backplate, and again on an engraved brass plate below VI o'clock: *Gribelin à Paris.*



The case opened, showing the movement, bells and pendulum



The backplate, signed Gribelin à Paris

DESCRIPTION

Dial and case

The dial

Finely chased and gilded, with blue Roman numerals on shaped white enamel cartouches, an outer minute track and a pair of blued steel hands.



The enamel chapter ring and the chased gilt centre

The case

Of architectural form, with an arched cornice bordered in gilt bronze, four gadrooned urn and foliate finials, and mask heads at each corner beneath flaming finials. The case is veneered throughout in première partie Boulle marquetry, engraved brass ornament laid into a tortoiseshell ground. The sides carry finely inlaid decoration in the taste of Jean Berain: winged female terms, mask heads, fantastical creatures, birds and a butterfly amid strapwork and grotesques. Each corner is framed by one of the four Muses standing above vine leaves and grapes, on scrolled, foliate mounted supports and turned feet.



The arched cornice, urn finials and winged terms



Side profile, with the Boulle ground

DESCRIPTION

Figures and bracket

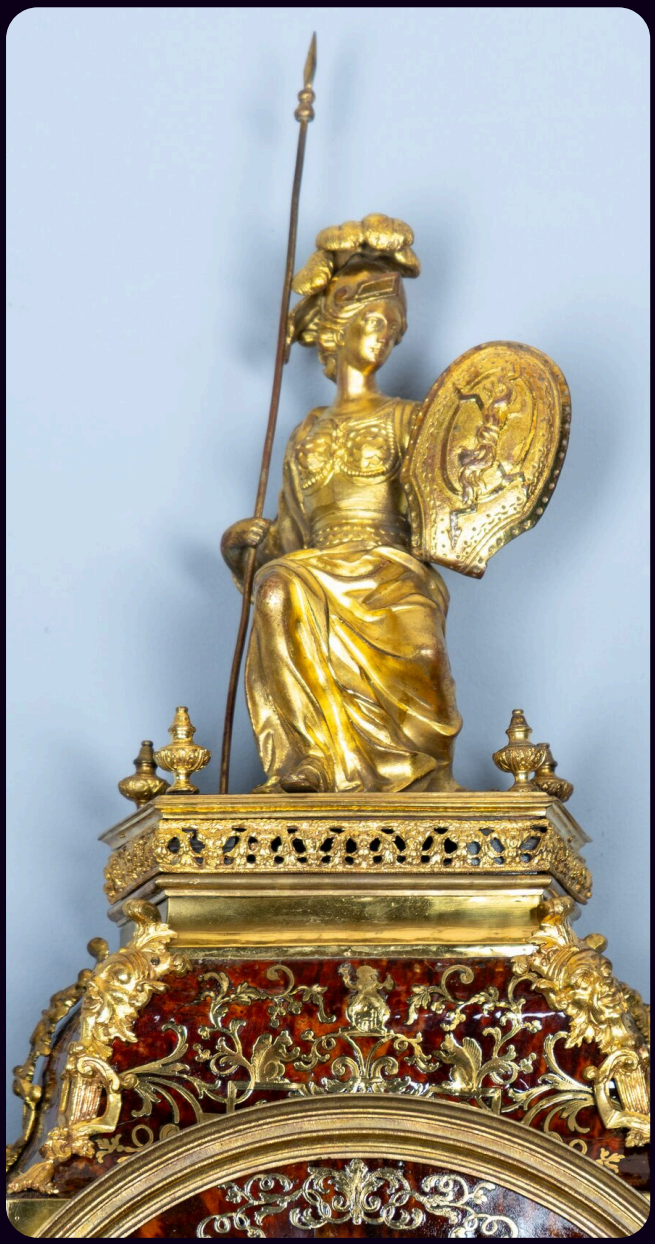
The figural mounts

The case is crowned by a gilt bronze figure of Minerva, goddess of war and protectress of the arts and letters, seated in a plumed helmet with spear and shield. Below the dial, gilt bronze figures of Flora and Urania seem to support it on either side of a putto poised above a globe, flanked by a crown and an artist's palette with brushes.

The bracket

A shaped shelf with a lambrequin frieze rests on four serpentine supports headed by rosettes. At the centre, a demi lune back is mounted with a magnificent gilt bronze mask of Apollo, beneath a generous foliate and berried boss.

Dimensions Height 125 cm, width 40 cm, depth 20 cm (clock and bracket overall)



Minerva, surmounting the case



The bracket, with its Apollo mask and lambrequin frieze

THE CLOCKMAKER

Nicolas Gribelin, 1637 to 1715

Born in Blois on 27 November 1637, the son of the royal clockmaker Abraham Gribelin, Nicolas Gribelin trained under his father before being received master clockmaker in the Faubourg Saint Germain des Prés around 1660, and in Paris on 5 June 1675. He served as garde visiteur of his guild (1676 to 1678 and 1684 to 1686) and, before 1674, received the title Horloger de Monsieur le Dauphin, clockmaker to the Grand Dauphin, son of Louis XIV.

His clocks moved in the highest circles of the court. Four are recorded in the Dauphin's inventory of 1689 and one in the posthumous inventory of Louis XIV himself, while further examples belonged to the duc du Maine, the comte de Toulouse, the duc de Bourbon and other leading nobles and financiers of the day.

> *Gribelin's work is held today at the Musée du Louvre, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and the Château de Versailles, as well as in Dresden, the British Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Indianapolis Museum of Art.*

THE CASE

The workshop of André Charles Boulle, 1642 to 1732

Given the exceptional quality of the mounts and marquetry, and their close kinship with documented works by Boulle, this case and its bracket are attributed to his workshop. Appointed Premier ébéniste du Roi in 1672 on Colbert's recommendation, Boulle furnished the royal palaces, Versailles above all, as well as foreign courts, among them that of Philip V of Spain.

His name remains inseparable from the technique seen here: sheets of engraved brass and tortoiseshell cut together with a fretsaw, so that each material fits precisely into the other. The result is a première partie ground, brass on tortoiseshell as on this clock, or its inverse, contre partie. Boulle's workshop in the Louvre stood close to that of the designer Jean Berain, with whom he often collaborated, and the grotesques and strapwork on the sides of this case speak that shared decorative language.



Chased gilt bronze and Boulle marquetry, at the height of the Louis XIV style

LITERATURE

Comparable examples

Tardy, *La Pendule Française, 1re partie, de l'Horloge Gothique à la Pendule Louis XV*, 1967, p. 98: a similarly shaped clock by J. Mornand, Musée Saint Pierre, Lyon, with the same figures of Flora and Urania below the dial.

Pierre Kjellberg, *Encyclopédie de la Pendule Française du Moyen Âge au XXe Siècle*, 1997: p. 45, an important Louis XIV Boulle clock bearing the same figures of Flora and Urania; p. 48, pl. A, a clock signed Jacques Cogniet à Paris, with a moon phase dial in place of the globe; p. 49, a further example with its bracket; p. 50, pl. B, a red tortoiseshell cartel clock by Nicolas Gribelin with a very comparable bracket and central Apollo mask.

The same pairing of Flora and Urania is also thought to appear on a Boulle clock depicted in Watteau's *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* (1721, Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin).

CONDITION

Very good overall

The clock and its bracket have been cleaned and conservatively restored.

PROVENANCE

Swiss private collection

The clock comes directly from a private collection in Switzerland.



Blue Roman numerals on white enamel cartouches



The clock in its entirety, with its original bracket

WHY THIS PIECE

Craftsmanship at its height

This clock is, quite simply, a wonderful example of the craftsmanship of its period. The confident architectural form, the crispness of the chasing and the harmony between the gilt bronze figures and the Boulle marquetry all speak of a maker and a workshop working at the height of their powers.

Clocks that unite a documented Gribelin movement with a case of this quality, complete with its original bracket, rarely come to the market. For a collector drawn to the golden age of Parisian craftsmanship, it is exactly the kind of piece one hopes to find, and simply cannot pass by.

Gregory Redding

ENQUIRIES AND VIEWING

I would be pleased to show you this clock in person

Viewings in Zurich by appointment. Price and further photographs on request.

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