

## Interpretation of Rococo Style in the Products of Furniture Makers from Dubois Family

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**Abstract:** This study is devoted to the analysis of creation and the peculiarities style of French furniture maker style (XVIIIth century) Jacques and Rene Dubois. The interest to the works of Jacques Dubois, appeared at the end of the XIXth century. In 20-30 year of the 20th century, an increasing number of publications about him is observed and the number of works held at auctions is increased during 20-30s of the 20th century. It appears necessary now to return to the works of this master again since, they reflect not only the characteristic features of the style but also their unique researcher's interpretation. The relevance of the study is that it sets the task to show that an artist in the past, a craftsman and now a designer may combine into a single artistic whole the sense of material, to understand the specific purpose of a subject, to understand his forms in an artistic way and to find the most expressive elements of decor. All these qualities coupled together make a harmonious art style. The stylistic unity characterizes the products of Dubois Studio as well as all the furniture art of Louis XV period. The study has the prospects of development as it may join the anthology of works dedicated to the works of French Ebenists of the XVIIIth century. This anthology could be transferred from the data and their work listing but also to reveal their artistic significance and the evolution of style. The study used the stylistic analysis, the new furniture of Dubois workshop are attributed, described and put into scientific circulation. The items are in the private collections of the XVIIIth century furniture making the part of a large collection of fine arts from Mr. A.V. Semin one of the largest and competent collectors of European art in Russia.

**Key words:** Rococo, transition, bureau, cabinet, chest of drawers, corner cupboard, rosewood, French furniture of XVIIIth century, Ebenists

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### INTRODUCTION

The English word "furniture" in most European languages sounds similar to the French "mobilier" and comes from the Latin "mobilis", "moving". This largely determines the specificity of this type of arts and crafts. Furniture is a "movable property" and like any property, it always reflects the needs and tastes of different groups of the population.

In France of the 18th century, as in no other country, the style trends of furniture art were replaced every 20 year with an ease and rapidity. Since, the end of the 17th century the French court brilliance attracted the attention of the whole Europe. That is why, this country was the setter of taste and fashion. The reign period of a monarch serves here as a conditional boundary separating the period of style existence. This style was included in the history under the name of their king.

Among many artists of the 18th century furniture Jacques Dubois is the most prominent one. His works are represented in the best collections of furniture, including Louvre, the Museum of Decorative Arts and the Carnavalet museum in Paris, the Getty Museum in California, the United States (Judith, 2006) (Fig. 1, corner



Fig. 1: Jacques Dubois. Corner cabinet with candlesticks. Satin wood, marquetry, gilded bronze. Height 290 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California, USA

cabinet from the Getty collection). Several items of high quality manufacture by the workshop Dubois are in a large collection of fine arts, owned by a well-known Russian art collector A.V. Semin.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Biographical data:** During his career, Jacques Dubois was not only able to develop his own artistic handwriting but a set of individual traits peculiar to his furniture allows to talk about the creation of a grand Louis XV style, his own style “Dubois style”. All the furniture of this style have a restrained elegance and fine harmony of proportions.

Jacques Dubois was born in 1693 in the family of an old impoverished French noble family. He is called ebenist together with such outstanding masters as Bernard Van Risenburgh and Jean-Francois Eben (Pierre, 2002). Being a person with delicate feelings and creative nature, Jacques Dubois was able to reveal in his works all the variety of furniture art in the middle of the XVIIIth century the era of the rise and triumph of the furniture art in France. The quality of Dubois works was high and recognized so that other studios put their stamps on his works. They were confident in the demand for “Dubois products”. An example of this is the flat Bureau (Fr. Bureauplat). Now, this bureau is called “desk”. It was recognized by the connoisseurs of furniture, was introduced into history under an individual name of “de Vergennes” (Aurelia, 2006), derived from the name of his owner. On a clear place of this subject, there is a well-viewed stigma by the merchant Migion while the creator’s stamp (Dubois) stands on a hidden part. It can be seen inside the bureau, if you remove the top.

Now, this “de Vergennes” is in the Louvre collection in Paris. Jacques Dubois works are characterized by exquisite floral arrangements of marquetry as well as the decor by lacquer panels in chinoiserie style.

The legacy of the artist suffered during the Revolution of 1789 as the furniture made by Dubois was either in palaces or in the salons of aristocracy. Many items were destroyed. The remaining works are mostly in private collections or outside France.

The interest in Dubois works appeared among the collectors in the late XIXth, the first half of the 20th century. Most of the publications about him was published between two world wars. From them, we learn that many were the part of the collections held in Central Europe. Many of them died during the Second World War. This increases the value of remaining Dubois works. There are facts which evidence that Dubois made furniture for Russia. Pierre (2002) mentions a remarkable corner cabinet which is kept in J. Paul Getty Museum (Judith, 2006). In his view, the style in which the cabinet is performed, does not reflect a specific French taste. In

has some other elements that, without compromising an artistic quality of the subject, make it non standard for Dubois. This difference is explained by the fact that the object is made according to the image of Nicolas Pineau (Biryukova, 1972) who worked in St. Petersburg (Russia) from 1716-1727 and he was awarded the title of “The first sculptor of Her Imperial Majesty”. The customer of already mentioned corner cabinet was the Count Branicki from Warsaw, who served at the Russian court. Pino returned to France and maintained the relations with the Russian customers. That originality which was felt by Werle, was likely inspired by motifs from Pino in Russia. Interestingly, this cabinet was bought by Rothschild in one of the Central Europe countries and it is kept now in the collection that bears his name in Vienna. It is one of the most famous works of the artist.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Stylistic analysis:** Like many other ebenists Jacques Dubois took deep aesthetic features of Louis XVth style. He produced classical furniture for his time. It differed by a fine quality and was fully compatible with the customer tastes. The scope of the artist’s talent and the desire to show himself in the art of furniture determined the creation of many original and exclusive items. They allowed to express the individual characteristics of the author’s talent and define the specific traits of “Dubois style”. If the Rococo style is named by its main ornamental element as “rocaille” style, then the quintessence of rocaille may be considered “Dubois style” (Claudude-Paule, 2010). This style manifested most fully in the bronze plates that adorn its furniture. The ornamentation and aesthetic originality of Dubois design objects Dubois are revealed here. This peculiarity may be called a musical term “syncope” (an.-Greek syncepe, chopping, cutting). In music, this is the technique of weak tact share emphasizing, the offset from a metrically strong beat into the weak one. In the visual arts, we can talk about the visual syncope characteristic of Rococo. “In architecture, sculpture, painting and arts and crafts syncope is expressed in deliberately mixing of framing and filling composition elements, “smearing” of the central and side parts, the transition of the main elements in the secondary ones and vice versa. The boundaries between these elements are made invisible, there is a feeling of “sliding”, the shift of a visual movement, growth and transition from one side to the other (Vlasov, 2010)”.

A conscious dynamic variation of rhythm, its special offense, both unexpected and smooth flowing of some elements into others all this is so typical of the Rococo

and is so deeply realized by Dubois. He is not a craftsman with a professional acumen of demand but a true artist, offering a creative concept of his vision.

Rocaille is a key element in the figures of bronze articles of Dubois furniture. Their author is usually Dubois. There is an impeccably high quality of the material in his pads (Kes, 1979).

In contrast to the more restrained contemporary products (for example, Bernard Van Rizenburg) Dubois works are always refined, proportionate and sophisticated. He creates a large number of curves and rounded lines in the rhythm of syncope. Dubois covers frame the contours of objects, giving them a wavy silhouette. On the front of some drawers realistically interpreted leaves decorate effectively the corners of objects. He often uses “chute” a decorative element, bronze lining, fixed to the corners of a product and smoothly flowing on the verge of a foot to the bottom (Pierre, 2002). Dubois Bronze plates always consistent with the color and the texture of the wood used by him. The spectrum of used species is a very diverse: rosewood, rose, satin and violet wood. From the veneer of these wood, he produces masterfully marquetry in the form of flowers and leaves. Sometimes, he uses exotic Brazilian Rosewood (Rio Rosewood). The technological peculiarity of Dubois is a subtle sense of the material possibilities. This is reflected in the specific wood sawing. Along with the traditional longitudinal cut, he uses a cross, saw cut end. In addition to the traditional longitudinal and transverse cut Jean Dubois uses a specific diagonal saw cut. In this case, the cutting of wood takes place at an acute angle to the fibers. This allows you to create a moire effect or a “cat’s eye” effect that is the texture of a wood with the transition from dark to light one, iridescent from different perspectives. Especially, effective this technique was applied to satinwood. This technique was called “boisdeboit” (literally saw cut end). Dubois made the ornaments with graceful pointed leaves and the smooth curve of stems. For the decoration of his products, he often uses natural Chinese and Japanese lacquers or some European imitations. Dubois also uses the technique of Boulle (Nicole, 1992).

It is generally accepted that Dubois is the master of palace furniture only. However, a detailed study of his articles says that he made furniture not only for luxury apartments, but also for the interiors of wealthy citizens, the provincial nobility and offices. There are four main types of furniture that were created by Dubois: dressers, corner cabinets, offices and secretaries.

The large collection of Fine Arts by A. Semin has the dresser (Inv. No. 12-2004) (Bulgakova *et al.*, 2014), made by Dubois in the early 1760s. He anticipates transi-



Fig. 2: Chest of drawers Jacques Dubois. France, XVIIIth century. Rosewood, rosewood, satin lemon tree, marquetry, gilded bronze, marble BrechedeBoheme 88×114×62 cm. Inv. No. 12, 2004

style by somewhat simplified forms (Fig. 2, the dresser from A.V. Semin collection). The chest of drawers of marquetry work with three drawers and direct form of frame outer corners, gilded bronze rocaille plates on the boxes, corners, legs and larvae. The middle part of the foot has gilded bronze pad the crossbow. The thing has embossed stamps of the author and the guild of furniture makers in the upper part under a marble cover, purchased at Massol auction on 11.03.2011.

The researcher’s skill in this chest of drawers is presented by a high level of marquetry set. The diagonal saw cuts of veneer make it possible to show all the beauty of wood texture, make it change color from different angles. In accordance with the changing fashion the frames of set compositions asymmetrical in the past are converted here in strict rectangles, allowing the author to create a complicated dynamic rhythm of different shades of wood from a diamond-shaped set. Bronze plates with characteristic syncopes of composition structure make the subject both elegant and decorative. Covering handles are an exquisite combination of branch plant motifs including rocailles and stylized ormushli. The lining has no symmetry, but there is an integrity and amazing harmony with their framing marquetry. With all the variety of used techniques almost a musical consistency of all elements creates a sense of an integral artwork. A general coherent ensemble includes the marble countertop of Bohemian breccia (Jacques, 2006). The picturesque marble stains from red-brown to warm sand shades also echo the rhythm of syncope.

The cabinet from a large collection of fine arts by A. Semin (Inv. No. 19-1875) (Bulgakova *et al.*, 2014) is a corner cabinet with an arched contour top and two doors (Fig. 3, corner cabinet from A.V. Semin collection). Marquetry in the form of centrally symmetric “chess



Fig. 3: Corner cabinet Jacques Dubois France, XVIIIth century. Rosewood, satin and rosewood, marquetrie, marble VertPatricia 91×48 A.V. Semin collection, Inv. No. 19-1875

pattern” (“Damier”) in a wave-like setting. Decor is presented by gilded bronze covers on larvae and at the bottom of the legs. This cabinet with its simple appearance, at almost complete absence of overlaps, except for small larvae and the pads on the legs bears the stamp of an outstanding artist. The cabinet entered the collection as an anonymous work of the French master at the end of XVIIIth century. The assumption of this thing belonging to Dubois works was expressed at the visual examination of the cabinet. It was confirmed after the removal of the previously fixed tabletop. At the end of one of the parts the readable stamps of Jacques Dubois were found (Fig. 4, dubois stamp) adjacent to the the guild stamp (Fig. 5, the stamp of furniture guild). The belonging to Jacques Dubois works confirms the stylistic affinity of elements. For example, this is the shape of the legs, very close to the legs of Dubois cabinets in particular a corner cabinet with a door from the Gallery Segura (Paris) (Morley, 1999). The belonging to the works of the master is confirmed by all performance manner, where a creative approach is quite clear which was manifested in the simple but elegant set of doors. In the contour outline, the syncope of ornamental rhythm are read quite well: asymmetry, the overflowing of subject forms, the comparison of dark and light types of wood. It is not built on the principle of contrast but on the harmonization of colors and textures of wood. As in the case with the chest of drawers from A. Semin collection, decorating the



Fig. 4: JacquesDuboisstamp



Fig. 5: Guild of furniture stamp

marquetrie cabinet, it is combined well with the desktop made of marble VertPatricia. It is characterized by a coherent combination of light streaks with a warm dark brown background (Pierre, 2002). The cabinet was purchased at the auction Delorme and CollinduBocage on 04.11.2010.

Secretaries are a kind of a relay race that Jacques Dubois hands over to his son Rene who became known as the master of secretaires. After Dubois death the business was continued by his widow and son Rene for 20 years. He put his father’s stamp on his products. This explains the presence of the stigma “J. Dubois” on furniture of Louis XV and Louis XVI.

Rene Dubois received the title of master at the age of 19. Like his father, he has a reputation of a good master. The book “The list of the best masters” (1772) calls him one of the best ebenists of the capital (Francois, 2012). The general almanac of traders (1779) calls him “the Queen ebenist” (Francois, 2012). Indeed he worked for the court, in particular for Marie Antoinette and the Prince de Soubise. He also made the famous “wedding chest” for Marie Antoinette picturing two doves.

Rene Dubois set is especially known. He did for Louis XV. The set includes a desk and a box. He is characterized by a certain severity and rigor inherent to trasicien style and Dubois the Junior. The objects were decorated with the figures of Amur and Psyche as well as by the figures of War and Peace. This ensemble was presented to Catherine II. Then, it belonged to the Prince Kurakin, who signed the Peace of Tilsit, so this ensemble

is called "Tilsit". The career of Rene Dubois continued actively until the early 1780s, when he devoted himself entirely to the furniture trade. He retired in 1789 on the eve of the revolution. The absence of his own stigma is different from the his father's stigma, it complicates the attribution of many pieces of furniture that came from his studio.

It is likely that at the end of his father's career, Jacques Dubois, Rene took over most of the work for the production of furniture. This is evidenced by the products of transicien period and the period of Louis XVI (Bill, 1987). Most likely, this furniture was made by a son, as Jacques Dubois died in 1763 and naturally, he could not create the objects in the style of Louis XVI. Rene products are quite solid and characteristic ofneoclassicism. Rene's favorite subject is secretaire. It is usually a narrow secretaire of a direct form with the cut corners and strict lines. Sometimes, he used varnishes in the Chinese taste like his father. One of the most original models has a body in the form of a small pagoda. Like his father, Rene did the items for the middle class along with the palace furniture. An example of such a product is the secretaire from Mr. Semin's collection.

This secretaire is done with the use of rosewood, violet and rosewood. It consists of three parts: the top drawer over the bureau opening board, the secretaire body and the lower part with two doors. The legs have a straight shape, the side-bars of the middle part have the projection are in the form of a crossbow. The object is decorated with two hanging handles on a drawer and small larvae on the doors. Behind the upper cover is the compartment with small drawers. Secretaire has a gray marble countertop of SainteAnne type (Jacques, 2006). There Jacques Dubois stigma under the desktop. Secretaire is decorated with marquetry in the form of "butterfly wings" ("Ailedepapillon") (Pierre, 2002).

**Summary:** The most important quality which any master of arts and crafts should have is the sense of style, the ability to identify all the aesthetic possibilities of the material and to connect them to the shape of an object and its purpose. It is added by the ability to finish the subject so that the decorative elements adorning it did not enter in conflict with its appearance and usability. The harmonic connection of four elements form, material, function and decor is the key to the success of any master. Both representatives of Dubois family knew how to skillfully manage this whimsical quadriga. Besides Jacques and Rene several masters worked under Dubois surname. Louis Dubois, Rene's elder brother, created a highly valued exclusive furniture models. Later, he devoted himself entirely to the decorative sculpture. Rene's cousin was his full namesake. He was also engaged in the manufacture of furniture and was selling toys successfully. The literature also mentions Andrien

Dubois, who acquired the title the master on January 14, 1741 and worked on the Rue Saint Antoine in the middle of the XVIIIth century (Pierre, 2002). In the town of Mane, the poster was released which states that "the street Ekrevis executed all works in the technique of marquetry and produced dressers, desks and game tables including backgammon, by J. Dubois". We don't know if this J. Dubois was our Jacques Dubois, making posters in a province.

## CONCLUSION

All items of this collection have Jacques Dubois stigma, however, if the stylistic analysis of the examined items definitely suggests that they are made by Jacques, the same analysis determines the conclusion that the considered secretaire was made by his son Rene. It is evidenced by the severity of forms characteristic of his son as well as the proportion of products that are very close to the works definitely attributed to the work of Dubois the Junior. This is easily confirmed by comparing the secretaire of a large collection of fine arts by A. Semin with the secretaire of mesh rosewood decor with sycamore, held at the auction Francois Leage in Paris. It has the same structural parts and three similar proportional relations. They have the similar shape legs and the projection in the form of a crossbow, repeating literally Dubois pads. If the secretaire form is identical to Rene forms, the decor in the form of "butterfly wings" with the use of a diagonal cut suggests that the father's lessons were not lost for his son. The attribution of things is complicated not only by common stamp on father's and son's products but also by the fact that the works of the last one caused an imitation of other furniture makers. In particular, the furniture is stylistically similar to Rene Dubois works was made by Claude Philippe Montigny. Several objects with the stigma of both masters on the same subject were kept. Their neighborhood is explained by the same cause as the presence of double stamps on Jacques Dubois works.

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