

A large pair of North-Italian polychrome-painted *papier-maché* decorated figures, known as Magots, of a mandarin official and his consort, with tilting heads with lead weights. Each figure with a detachable weighted head, wearing long multi-layered robes with floral decorations and hands raised to their chest, standing on a rectangular base. Chinese nodding figures are rare.

Piedmont, 1800 circa

Height: 32,7 in (83cm)
Base: 11,2 x 9 in (28,5 x 23 cm)



Literature:

E. Quaglino, *Il Mobile Piemontese*, De Agostini- Görlich, 1997, p. 148.

The present pair of Magots exemplify the European artistic production in imitation of Chinese styles and motifs typical of the eighteenth century. Colonial routes and commercial networks between Europe and China intensified beginning in the early 1700s. Among the traded goods, Chinese statuettes and figures such as the present ones were much appreciated by the western aristocracy, whether they were made of terracotta or glazed ceramic, or reproduced in biscuit or wood. The taste for chinoiserie – artworks, decorative objects, or entire rooms made of genuinely Chinese artefacts or of European products inspired by the Orient – thus spread all over the continent, and so also in Italy and in the Kingdom of Sardinia.

As other contemporary sovereigns, also members of the Savoy dynasty commissioned entire rooms to showcase Chinese treasures in their residences, such as the Chinese Cabinet realized in the Royal Palace of Turin after a design by the architect and scenographer Filippo Juvarra. The Hunting Lodge at Stupinigi, renovated in 1729 under Vittorio Amedeo II again under the direction of Juvarra, contained no less than two Chinese Cabinets, each decorated with objects and furnishings coming from Asia.

In this context that emerged local – i.e. Piedmontese – workshops specializing in the production of chinoiserie, as is demonstrated by the present pair of Magots in papier-maché. This kind of material was used for the entire XVIII C. until the beginning of XIX century, included a set of six chinoiserie wall lights in Palazzina di caccia di Stupinigi, all other later examples were made in plaster.

Of exquisite execution and fine technical quality, the two sculptures are of notable dimensions, suggesting a prestigious original destination. Although only inspired by the Chinese iconography, the sculptures suggest an informed understanding of Chinese court dress: the man's hat betrays in fact a direct knowledge of the hats worn by high officials at the contemporary Qing court, as do the robes of both figures, in

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lavish colours and painted with ornamental designs in gold, in imitation of rich embroideries.

A possible iconographic source for the present sculptures can be found either in Chinese export porcelain figurines or, more convincingly still, in western prints that documented Chinese costumes of the period. A well-studied case is the series of prints after designs by Joseph-Marie Vien, published in London by Jefferys between 1757 and 1772.



A room of Villa la Vagnola of Valentino, designed by the interior designer Renzo Mongiardino, 1980, with four large-scale nodding-head magots.