



441 Rockwork Ornaments: Longevity & Offspring

China, Kangxi Period (1662-1722)

Height: 16cm

This pair of small ornamental rockeries, stand on high square plinths. The craggy outcrops mirror each other in shape and are covered in light 'Egg & Spinach' glazes. The finely modelled plants and animals are coloured in the same colour palette. Each of the rocks has a different decorative theme - one has a scene with a pine tree and a stork, the other has two squirrels and a grapevine. The reverse is left mostly unglazed and partially without the usual white slip. They have been hollowed out on the reverse, allowing the potter to shape the piece outwards.

The combination of squirrels and grapes, is an often seen decorative combination in Chinese art. Squirrels have great reproductive powers, just like vines - where grapes grow in large clusters. The squirrel (in Chinese songshu: rat in the pine tree) can also be a visual substitute for the first of the Chinese zodiac signs: the Rat. It is named zi - number one - which is also associated with the word zi for sons. Squirrels with grapes can therefore be read as the well-wishing expression 'abundant fortunes and offspring' (duozi duofu) – a typical example of Chinese word-play.

Pine trees and the cranes are both symbols of longevity in the Chinese visual vocabulary. Put together they mean 'may you enjoy a long life as that of the pine and the crane' (songhe changchun). This combination was common for on a birthday gift for a single person or a husband and wife, as the pine and crane here also form a couple.

It is quite possible that the combination of these two symbolic themes could indicate this pair of rocks were intended as a wedding gift, wishing the couple a long life together and many sons.

Provenance:

Private Collection, France

Literature:

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