

## **Sèvres Potpourri Vase**

This extraordinary piece was made in 1758. Although it is called a vase, it does not hold flowers, but is designed to hold Potpourri. Made of porcelain, and highly decorated in green, blue and gold, it resembles a ship - about 38 centimetres wide and 50 centimetres high.

Unlike a real ship, the vase is symmetrical. The deep blue rounded body of the vessel, glittering with hundreds of tiny gold circles, curves up each side to a point like the bowsprit of a ship. Not quite a point, though, as the blue and gold conical shapes at each side are blunted to create handles. These protrude from the gaping mouths of white marine monsters moulded at each end. On the side of the curvaceous body between them is a miniature painting within a green and gold oval frame. It shows a very different world; a simple rustic outdoor scene with three people and a dog.

Along the top of the ship's body, a row of seven circular holes are edged in gold - allowing the perfume of the potpourri to emanate around the room.

The tall lid of the vase sweeps symmetrically up almost to a point, doubling the vase's height. On the top is a golden ball from which an intricate network of emerald green seems to hang like sails. Down each side is white ladder-like rigging. Around the top an extravagant

swirl of white porcelain, decorated with golden fleurs-de-lis is like a flag, flapping in the wind as it twists and folds around the rigging.

All the piercing in the sails and rigging would have made this piece incredibly difficult to fire in one piece, and there were only 12 ever made. Only about 10 of them survive today. The vase was purchased in 1759 at the end-of-year sale at Versailles by Madame de Pompadour for 960 livres. Madame de Pompadour is known to have owned three examples of this model.