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XVIII-XIX CENTURY
FURNITURE & DECORATIVE ARTS



**A RARE ENGLISH 'GRAND TOUR' CABINET WITH
FLORENTINE PIETRA DURA PANELS**

Dimensions: H: 42.5 in / 108 cm | W: 76.5 in 194 cm | D: 21.5 in / 55 cm

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A Rare English 'Grand Tour' Cabinet
with Florentine Pietra Dura Panels

- This English cabinet has 16 Florentine pietra dura panels, featuring Sicilian Jasper, Brocatelle d'Espagne, verde antico, griotte rouge marbles
- The cabinet embodies the 'Grand Tour' era when British aristocrats collected art and antiques, especially prized pietra dura inlays from Florence

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- These pieces integrated pietra dura plaques into Neo-Baroque designs, cherished by elite patrons, including King George IV

The 19th century black marble top inlaid with a central cartouche of Sicilian Jasper surrounded by Brocatelle d'Espagne and specimens of verde antico, the cabinet of breakfront outline constructed of burr walnut with ebonised ripple mouldings and banding incorporating 16 Florentine pietra dura panels and no less than 22 marble specimens of griotte rouge and verde antico, the central door with a single pietra dura flower flanked by marble specimens and having pictorial pietra dura to the four corners depicting birds, flanked by a door to either side equally inlaid with a pietra dura panel depicting flowers, interspersed by marble-inlaid pilasters, all opening to reveal a shelved interior; the sides of conforming design with a central pietra dura panel of a flower in bloom, within a panelled and ripple moulded configuration surrounded by a pair of marble specimens, the frieze dressed with four pietra dura panels depicting butterflies interspersed by a further three pictorial pietra dura panels depicting flowers and birds.

Circa 1840, the Italian pietra dura panels early 18th century.

A Masterpiece from the Era of the Grand Tour

In the 1700s and early 1800s, wealthy aristocrats from Britain went on the 'Grand Tour' - a journey across Europe. The purpose was to gain an enlightened understanding of ancient cultures and history. For these educated patrons, collecting art and antiques was more than just getting souvenirs. It was an intellectual pursuit, reflecting the deep classical knowledge they had acquired through studious travels.

The most prized acquisitions were the intricate pietra dura inlays made by skilled artisans at the renowned Grand Ducal workshop in Florence, Italy. This centuries-old art involved creating pictorial mosaics using different colored semi-precious stones carefully inlaid with great precision. To properly display these treasures, the best cabinetmakers of that era, like Robert Hume, created luxurious furniture pieces that served as elaborate frames for the inlaid stone panels.

Hume's genius was in seamlessly integrating the pietra dura plaques into grand Neo-Baroque furniture designs for important clients. One of his finest works was an ebony cabinet made around 1820 for the famous art collector William Beckford at Fonthill Abbey. This magnificent piece featured



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dazzling Grand Ducal pietra dura inlays from the 17th to 19th centuries. Some of Hume's most iconic cabinets had even rarer 17th century Parisian pietra dura works made by masters like Dominique Cucci of the Gobelins workshop.

Such extraordinary artistic achievements captivated elite patrons like King George IV, who in 1828 commissioned a luxurious satinwood cabinet decorated with 18th century Florentine pietra dura for Windsor Castle. This royal appreciation led to an "Antiquarian movement" later, exemplified by masterpieces like this cabinet.

The lifelike pietra dura plaques on this piece depict vivid birds, butterflies and botanical scenes, reminiscent of a famous 17th century Florentine design. By artfully combining nature's beauty with human craftsmanship, this cabinet captures the enlightened spirit that defined that golden age of elite travel and passionate art collecting among Europe's most cultivated connoisseurs.