



**A FRENCH MUSICAL AUTOMATON DEPICTING
MOUNT VESUVIUS**

Dimensions (framed): H: 41 in / 104 cm | W: 47.5 in / 120 cm | D: 10.5 in / 26 cm

Dimensions (sight size): H: 25 in / 63 cm | W: 33 in / 84 cm

10549



A French Musical Automaton
Depicting Mount Vesuvius
Attributed to Xavier Tharin

The giltwood framed and glazed diorama showing a seaside Italian village with the Bay of Naples in the background, painted in gouache, populated with village characters and sailors surrounded by buildings along the seashore including a medieval clock tower, the sea waves with bobbing sailboats, the Naples lighthouse of San Vincenzo, the seafront fortress Castel dell'Ovo and the erupting volcano Mount Vesuvius in the background.

With a plethora of animated components, incorporating a two air cylinder music box movement, and numerous automaton movements, including animated waves, billowing volcano smoke, figures bobbing their heads, a spinning weather vane & more, all driven by a spring driven motor fitted inside the case, and operating a complex system of levers and pulleys, operated by a stop/start lever.

French, circa 1860

Literature:

Xavier Tharin

Active in Paris between 1840 and 1880, Xavier Tharin was a master mechanician who elevated the musical automaton into a sophisticated form of 'domestic theatre.' His signature works, often called 'moving pictures,' integrated traditional horology with complex, multi-layered animations and high-fidelity cylinder music boxes.

Tharin specialized in synchronizing mechanical movement with music, notably in his 'Blacksmith Shops' and 'Mediterranean Harbor' scenes. These pieces featured layered painting or lithography, creating a 3D effect where ships swayed and figures performed rhythmic tasks, like hammering or playing instruments, in time with operatic airs. By collaborating with experts like Joseph Olbrich, Tharin blended Parisian clockmaking with musical precision, marking a pinnacle in the 19th-century golden age of mechanical art.