

A DOUBLE PATINATED FRENCH SCULPTURAL MATCH SAFE

By Neil Shapiro

In the last quarter of the 19th century, French sculptor, Louis Théophile Hingre, created and signed a double patinated bronze match safe measuring 3.14" x 1.96" x 1.57". The lid simulates a basket of vegetables with a gilded snail crawling along the wicker basket.

A three-dimensional sculptural match safe is very rare, especially one signed by a well-known sculptor. The wicker work on the basket is articulated and accented with climbing vines. Clinging to those vines is the patinated garden snail. The lid is an assemblage of vegetables with the leaves of a root vegetable acting as a thumb lift.

The double patina is intact, that is, the body and lid on the match safe is a darker color and the snail is a golden patina. The striker is a ribbed area on the back of the safe and the safe is signed on the bottom.



Front view



signature

Louis Théophile Hingre was a French painter, sculptor, engraver, illustrator, and poster artist. He was born in 1832 in Écouen, where he also died, in 1911. His specialty was sculptures of animals.

Hingre, because of politics, moved to England in 1858. While in England, he worked in Birmingham as the ornamental sculptor for Elkington & Co. the renowned silver manufacturer.

Hingre continued to work for Elkington & Co until he returned to France in 1869. There Hingre regularly took part in the competitions of the *Union centrale des arts décoratifs* and exhibited almost yearly at the Paris Salon until he was 78 where he was awarded several medals.

For the creation of this match safe Hingre was undoubtedly influenced by Japonisme, the aesthetic movement that began in the 1870s and swept the Western world's design ethos for the next 40 years. This may be seen in the trailing vines sweeping through the wicker worked basket and the asymmetry of the safe. Hingre clearly embraced the Japanese idea that utilitarian objects; for example, match safes, were themselves art. That the Shinto's reverence for the natural world – an idea in which everything possess spiritual energy can and should be applied to all art seems to be expressed in this safe.



Snail on safe's body



closeup of snail



Striker on back side



side view