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Charon Frères, Julien-Nicolas Rivart, Pierre-Joseph Guérou, Jewel Case of Empress Eugénie, 1855. National Museum of the Chateau, Compiègne.



Julien-Nicolas Rivart, Pierre Joseph Guérou, Table, 1852. Museum Murska Sobota, Slovenia.



Tahan, Desk with Rivart porcelain inlays painted by Pierre-Joseph Guérou. Painting dated 1853. Marc Maison Gallery.



Tahan Desk, Rivart inlays painted by Pierre-Joseph Guérou. Marc Maison Gallery.



Pierre-Joseph Guérou's signature on a porcelain inlay of a desk from Tahan, « Guérou 1853 ». Marc Maison Gallery.

Born in 1818.

A painter of flowers, **Pierre-Joseph Guérou** perpetuates a difficult art to which Pierre-Joseph **Redouté**, "the Raphael of flowers", had given its nobility in the Age of Enlightenment, both by the illustration of the most important botanical textbooks, and by painting. Classified as a minor genre of painting, landscape becomes a noble and grandiose subject with the **romantics**. Thus, in 1849, George Sand had seen **Delacroix** "*in ecstasy in front of a yellow lily whose beautiful architecture he had just understood*" (*La Revue des Deux Mondes*, June 1, 1860). The painting of flowers is thus revalued by this poetic sensibility, and invades the **interiors decoration**. It is also not uncommon for small merchants to commission flower paintings from young **bohemians** for their clientele.

A member of the 1830s youth, which had turned to painting, engraving and literature in France, Pierre-Joseph Guérou appeared for the first time when he was only 18 in **1836**, for having proposed two Watercolors at the **annual painting Salon**, a *Carnation Study* and a *Hollyhock.* Guérou is indeed from the generation growing up in the romantic years, like Théodore **Chassériau** or Gustave **Courbet**, where reigns the **cult of Nature**. Thus, he might have wished to follow the footsteps of Simon **Saint-Jean**, the young painter who in 1833 had made a great impression with *Flowery Hat, flowers and fruits*, a still life where a bouquet of flowers was staged in a landscape.

Gifted in the reproduction of flowers, Guérou probably earned his living as a **porcelain painter** for about ten years and was finally employed by the famous **Sèvres Manufactory** as a "*flower painter*" between 1847 and 1848. Far from being reserved only for secondary talents, porcelain workshops received the most promising brushes, as was the case of **Auguste Renoir** employee of Lévy Frères in his youth.

In the year **1849**, Guérou sent two porcelain paintings to the annual Salon of the Tuileries Palace, *Bouquet of Flowers* and *Flowers and Fruits*. The exhibition opens on June 15, and it is perhaps there that **Julien-Nicolas Rivart** prospects to find a collaborator in porcelain decoration. The latter registered on next September 18th a patent for a new method of **inlaying porcelain** in wood and in all other types of materials. Shortly afterwards, Pierre-Joseph Guérou was his collaborator in a bold and **successful** undertaking, the Rivart porcelains enjoying great enthusiasm.

In particular, he signed the flowers adorning **Empress Eugénie's Jewel Case**, which she bought after the World's Fair of 1855 , and is today kept at the National Museum of the Chateau of Compiègne. In 1852, he painted the inlays of a table preserved in the Murska Sobota Museum (Slovenia), then in 1853, those to be inlaid by **Tahan** in an impressive flat desk, entered in the Marc Maison Gallery collections. The Gallery contributes in **a continuous research** to identify his various contributions to Rivart's porcelain inlays, and also identified his signature on a pair of side cabinets, signed 1854.

We can guess the painter Guérou was absorbed in the 1850s by **the Rivart adventure**, in which he made the most of his art, suddenly stepping from the status of Sevres' employee to that of craftsman in the service of His Imperial Majesty. Without a trace of him at Sèvres after 1848, and knowing no other painter signing Rivart's incrustations, **Pierre-Joseph Guérou** is likely to be the painter of a very large part, perhaps the totality, of porcelain inlays.

For Rivart and Guérou, the porcelain flowers, certainly have a **poetic**, oxymoron interest, which explains their omnipresence. With the Rivart process and Guérou's delicate brush, these innovative decorations **immortalize** the ephemeral work of nature. Guérou, meanwhile, will take advantage of his experience with Rivart to return to the Salon every year between 1863 and 1866, with paintings of **flowers on porcelain**. In 1863 he exhibited *Flowers and fruits*, then *Flowers after Saint-Jean* in 1864. Finally, in 1865 and 1866, he returned to back his first love with two **watercolors**, *Flowers and fruits*, and *Peonies*, demonstrating his personal attachment to these jewels of nature, as an authentic nineteenth-century painter.

## See also

Alphonse Giroux — Sèvres porcelain — 1855 World's Fair — Napoleon III style — Louis XV style

See our 19th-century objets d'art



Pierre-Joseph Guérou’s signature on a porcelain inlay of a side cabinet, « Guérou 1854 ». Marc Maison Gallery.



Pierre-Joseph Guérou, painting on porcelain, inlay manufactured by Rivart in a side cabinet. Painting dated 1854. Marc Maison Gallery.



Pierre-Joseph Guérou, painting on porcelain, inlay manufactured by Rivart in a side cabinet. Painting dated 1854. Marc Maison Gallery.



Watercolor by Pierre-Joseph Guérou, Branches of Roses in a Vase, that was certainly sold by Francis Petit in March 1867.



Simon Saint Jean, Flowered hat, flowers and fruits, oil on canvas, 1833. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.