

PATRICK JEFFERSON



GEORGE III SERPENTINE MAHOGANY COMMODE

England *circa* 1790.

Attributed to Gillows.

Height 34½" (87.8 cm)

Width 41½" (105.5 cm)

Depth 24¾" (63 cm)

The shaped top with Albuera cross-banding and chequerboard stringing, over a slim brushing slide and four graduated oak-lined drawers retaining the original gilt-brass handles, raised on bracket feet; old restorations and minor marks.

This form of elegant, low-waisted, serpentine-fronted chest of drawers was often described in eighteenth century inventories as a 'commode chest', and is typical of examples illustrated in fashionable pattern books towards the end of the century such as George Hepplewhite's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, 1788, which illustrates chests of this distinctive French profile that are lighter and sleeker in character than those promoted twenty years earlier by Chippendale.

Although unsigned – which was not unusual for many of Gillows' more important patrons, including the Crown – a number of idiosyncratic elements support this attribution. The exceptional timbers are typical of those used by the firm: the vigorously 'quilted' mahogany drawer fronts are contrasted by a straight grain cut for the top, which is crossbanded with the rare Brazilian hardwood variously known as zebrawood, goncalo alves (*genus astronium*), or Albuera, the name favoured by Gillows, who particularly valued the timber for its dense, stripy lustre. Furthermore, the highly distinctive oval brass handle centred by a 'floating' oval patera was used repeatedly by Gillows in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Susan Stuart points out that the 'Oval drop handle with oval patera in the centre... [was] A popular Gillow handle described as new about 1786', and illustrates an identical handle from a chest of drawers of the same date.¹

£18,000

¹ Susan E. Stuart, *Gillows of Lancaster and London*, vol. II, page 335, fig. b