

Press release



Astronomical clock signed Delvart © MIH, J. Hoffman

Musée international d'horlogerie

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Tuesday – Sunday: 10 am – 5 pm

Closed January 1st, December 24th, 25th and 31st

Open on Easter Monday and Whit Monday

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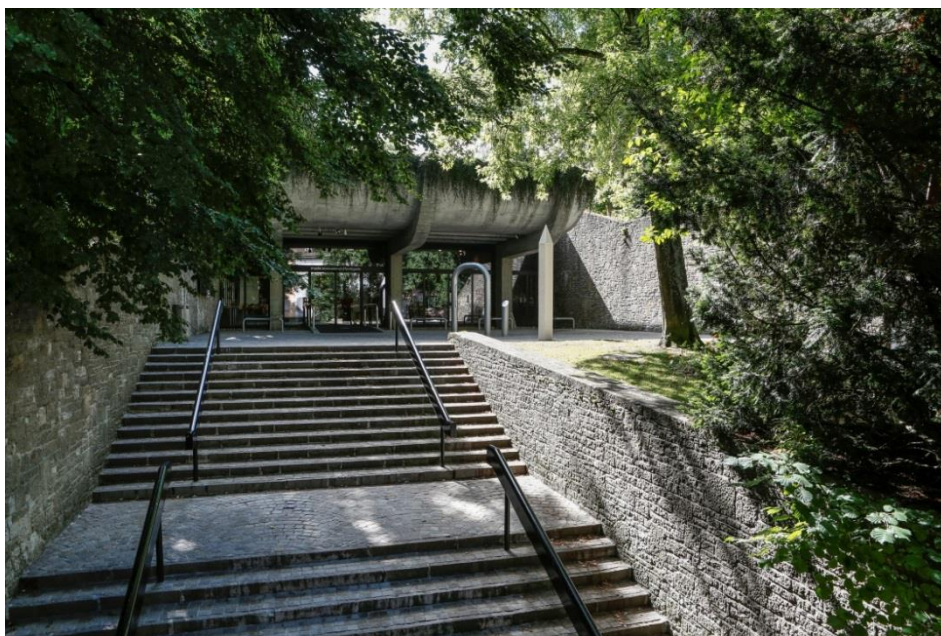
Introduction

Unique in its architectural and museographical design, the Musée international d'horlogerie (MIH) houses the world's greatest collection devoted to the measurement of time. Spanning over 2000 m², this fascinating collection reveals the mysteries of time and brings to life the technical, artistic, social, economic and cultural history of watchmaking in Switzerland and around the world, from sun dials to atomic clocks, from clocks and watches to automata and machines as well as tools dating from the 16th century to the present day.

The Musée international d'horlogerie was founded in 1902 in La Chaux-de-Fonds. It has been housed in a mostly subterranean building since 1974, in the museum park. The innovative architecture was awarded several prizes and is probably the one that is the most appropriate to housing its collections.

Wisely established in the Swiss historic birthplace of watchmaking industry, the Musée international d'horlogerie aims to conserve, valorize, study and hand over this exceptional heritage. Each year, new acquisitions come over and blend in the current collections via donations or purchases. The MIH thus makes sure that the main missions defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) are followed. Its activities are not only circumscribed to the museum field only, as the MIH has the privilege of housing a center for the restoration of old and antique clocks and also an institute dedicated to the study of time.

Thanks to the numerous activities led by the Musée international d'horlogerie, it has now become a worldwide reference in the field of history, time measurement and its most direct expression, watchmaking. Two temporary exhibitions participate in stimulating the museum along with many workshops for young people, or the awarding of the Gaïa Prize to craftspeople, manufacturers or researchers in the field of time measurement.



Monumental entrance of the MIH in the Museums Park. © MIH, J. Hoffman

Museum history

When the La Chaux-de-Fonds Watchmaking School opened its doors in 1865, the teachers were tasked with building a collection, primarily for educational purposes. By 1901, the municipal council suggested the opening of a museum, created an *ad hoc* commission, and designated a temporary building for the future museum, at the rue du Collège 9. On March 24, 1902, the authorities of the City of La Chaux-de-Fonds signed the charter of foundation for the Watchmaking Museum.

By 1904 the community begins to provide the Museum with financial support. Gifts and donations were plentiful. The Museum was successful and renowned, but the war put a halt to new acquisitions. In 1931, purchases, donations, and number of visitors to the museum were all much diminished. There followed 5 years of waiting before new perspectives opened up, thanks to the support of two large organisations, the Syndicat patronal des producteurs de la montre (SPPM) and the Bureau de contrôle des ouvrages en métaux précieux. Space being limited, the important and costly collection was housed in very tight quarters.

In 1963, Professor Georges-Henri Rivière from Paris, then Director of the International Council of Museums (Conseil international des musées, or ICOM), was entrusted by the Communal Council with a study of the city's historical, fine arts, and watchmaking museums. That study underlined the great importance of the collection of the Watchmaking Museum and emphasized the need for a new space in which to present it. *"La Chaux-de-Fonds is the world's watchmaking capital; its watchmaking museum must be the most beautiful in the world..."*.



Bell-tower clocks in the hall above the walkway. © Ville de La Chaux de Fonds, A. Henchoz

In 1968 the museum adopted the name "MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL D'HORLOGERIE" (international watchmaking museum, MIH) with the subtitle "L'HOMME ET LE TEMPS" (man and time), and an architectural competition was launched to build the museum as part of the History museum park, with the aim of creating a synergy with the latter and the neighboring Museum of fine arts. Beyond more than thirty projects submitted, it was the

architects Pierre Zoelly and Georges-Jacques Haefeli that received the commission. In 1974 the building was inaugurated. Serge Tcherdyne, Pierre Bataillard and Marion Gallopini created a brand new museographic conception for the presentation of the collections. There was a new scientific concept as well, since the Musée international d'horlogerie comprised three distinct areas of competence: the Museum proper, a center for the restoration of antique horological pieces, and a Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies.

In 1980, as the final stages of construction were taking place, the monumental carillon that completes the Museum's exterior architecture was installed. That same year, an association was founded of the Friends of the Musée international d'horlogerie, the amisMIH. Thanks largely to that group, many remarkable pieces have been acquired, that have greatly enriched the collection.



MIH Carillon. © Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds, A. Henchoz

In 1989 was created the Institute of Man and Time study center. In keeping with its goal of increasing knowledge of watchmaking, its history and its techniques, the Musée international d'horlogerie awarded the first Gaïa Prize in 1993. It honors people working in watchmaking and time measurement, whether in the fields of creation, industry, or history. The Museum constantly seeks to be adapted to new means of presentation and new museographical approaches, and therefore always looks for the best means of renewing and remodeling its displays, while preserving its characteristic atmosphere. Thematic exhibitions continue to be planned, whose primary aim is to complete and complement the permanent displays.

Key dates

1839 First thoughts about the creation of a watchmaking museum by Louis Agassiz

1865 The Watchmaking School of La Chaux-de-Fonds was created, premises of the collection

1883 An attached commission was created along with The Watchmaking School in order to present the collection

1902 The founding act of the Museum is signed on March, 24th by the authorities of La Chaux-de-Fonds

1939-1945 Collections are crafted for their own good

1952 Rooms are restored and a new room is added

1963 Georges-Henri Rivière, head of ICOM, comes and reviews the collection

1967 Maurice Favre Foundation is founded in order to collect funds

1968 The name *Musée international d'horlogerie* is officially adopted. An architectural competition is launched for the new building to be constructed

1974 The new building is inaugurated, constructed by Pierre Zoelly and Georges-Jacques Haefeli in the museum park.

1980 The Carillon is erected and the Association for Friends amisMIH was created

1989 The Institute of Man and Time Study Centre (CET) is created

1993 First Gaïa Prize event

2015 A collaborative convention starts with the University of Neuchâtel



<https://www.mih.ch/en/history/>

Architecture



The MIH is a work of contemporary architecture. *"It is Europe's first ever complete example of contemporary troglodyte architecture"* - that's how the architects of the MIH, Pierre Zoelly from Zurich and Georges-J. Haefeli from La Chaux-de-Fonds, have described it. Built between 1972 and 1974, their construction takes place on a subterranean volume of 20,000 m³, cut into the side of a slope and covered by a park. *"The wave-like walls and the eaves that counter them are inspired by the seashore and the beautiful protective structures found there. Ours are particularly prominent after a snowstorm"*, explain the two creators, whose work has been awarded the prize for concrete architecture in 1977 and the Prix Cembureau in 1978.

MIH main entrance. © Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds, A. Henchoz



Emerging parts of the MIH in the Museums Park. © MIH, J. Hoffman



<https://www.mih.ch/en/architecture/>

Visiting the MIH

The museographical shock experienced by its first visitors still resonates today. Crossing the footbridge, visitors are impressed by the hushed atmosphere, soft lighting and display cases - all fully original - in which the treasures of the collection are exhibited.

Man and Time

The MIH permanent exhibition, entitled Man and Time, offers three different visiting routes:

- An historical route based on the technical and artistic development of the timepieces
- Themed spaces covering more specific issues concerning the measurement of time.
- A constantly updated discovery of treasures from the collection



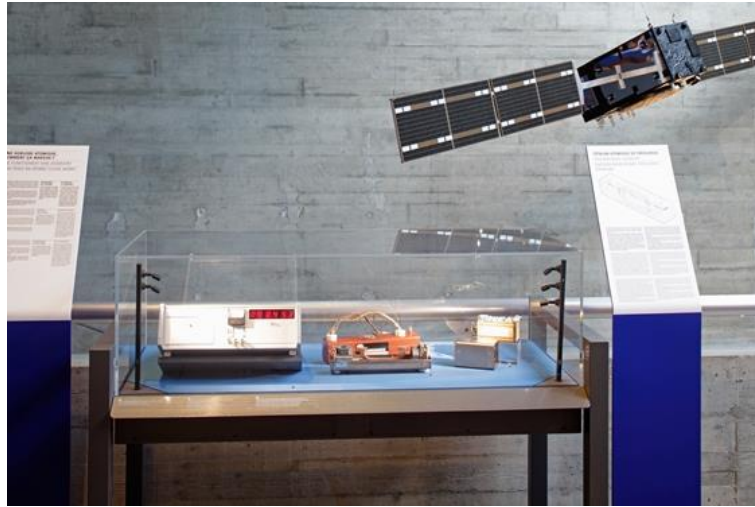
Permanent exhibition. © Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds, A. Henchoz

In order to display the collection the best way, the Museum has worked along with museographers Serge Tcherdyne, Pierre Bataillard and Mario Gallopin. Elegant materials, an idyllic atmosphere and restrained presentation characterize the interior. The indirect lighting underscores the tricks of perspective. Spherical and cylindrical windows designed to reflect the form of the dial, make for a beautifully uncluttered space.

During the visit, the visitor can watch the work of the watchmakers in the restoration workshop through a large bay window. At the end of the tour, the shop and the specialized bookshop invite visitors to bring back a souvenir of the MIH or to deepen their knowledge.

To the nearest femtosecond!

New exhibition space dedicated to the extreme precision of time measurement by atomic clocks and their daily applications.



Cesium atomic clock and Galileo satellite. © MIH, V. Savanyu

The scholarly quest for precision has been at the heart of watchmaking innovation since the 17th century. Oscillators are key to developments in this field: the pendulum, the spring balance and, later, quartz, have all increased timekeeping accuracy. From the Second World War, physicists took over from astronomers and horologists in the pursuit of accurate time measurement. From 1967, the second was no longer defined via astronomical observations such as the passage of the sun across the zenith, but by measuring a microscopic phenomenon: the oscillation of cesium atoms.

A femtosecond, or 0.000000000000001 of a second, corresponds to the imprecision in the ticking of a modern atomic clock!

This degree of precision, imperceptible to the general public, is essential to the organization of human society: geolocation, navigation, transport and telecommunications are made efficient thanks to the extreme precision of the clocks that govern them.



*Hydrogen laser and fog chamber. ©
MIH, V. Savanyu*



<https://www.mih.ch/en/temporary-exhibitions/to-the-nearest-femtosecond/>

Centre for the restoration of old and antique clocks (CRH)

The MIH carries out conservation and restoration work on the museum's collections and on certain pieces owned by individuals, chosen according to very precise criteria.



Restoration centre. © Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds, A. Henchoz

This work is governed by a very strict restoration ethic which relies in particular on the results of symposia, discussions with other restorers and tests to assess whether pieces can be brought to working order without altering their appearance or must be conserved in a non-operational state. This operation involves conserving as many of the original parts of the clock or watch, even if this carries risks for their operation or the results of the restoration are visible on the object.

Institute of Man and Time study center (CET)

The study center Man and Time has a library containing not only old and current works relating to time, its measurement and watchmaking in general, but also valuable industrial or private archives, iconographic documents, press kits of watchmaking companies, specialized magazines, etc. The MIH archive holdings are available to the public on request. This center also organizes symposia and conferences open to a wide audience.

The MIH produces its own publication and regularly publishes both exhibition catalogues and high-quality hardbacks, as well as historical and technical studies, conference papers, essays and dissertations on the subject of Time.

Programme and cultural mediation

Each year the MIH hosts two temporary exhibitions: a thematic one underlining social, economic and cultural aspects of watchmaking and time measurement; and another one that particularly emphasizes new acquisitions. Donations and purchases are thus made public and encourage the visitors to see how much the current collections have expanded – the most significant if the world, no less.

Every first Wednesday of the month (except January and August) during lunch break, a guide or a MIH curator gives a guided tour on a specific topic related to the collection.

Every first Sunday of the month, the amisMIH Foundation offers a guided tour. The guided tour is free but the museum ticket also is from October to March – but has to be paid from April to September.

Every year in May, the MIH also takes part in the *Nuit and Journée des musées neuchâtelois* (Day and Night of the museums of Neuchâtel): many discoveries and exceptional guided tours of the collection are planned by the museum staff.

In November, fifties of watchmakers-merchants, antiquarians and collectors come to the MIH for the *Bourse suisse d'horlogerie* (Swiss watchmaking trading) that the museum organizes. Watches, pendulums, tooling, books and several other objects are presented here, all related to the watchmaking industry.

Last but not least, numerous workshops target the youth between four and twelve years, offering amusing and at the same time pedagogic moments. They are scheduled at all time as long as you ask the administrative desk before. The main topics are the clepsydra, the sundial, the Volta battery and the enameling or disassembling of watches.



Workshops for children and guided tours.
© Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds, A. Henchoz



<https://www.mih.ch/en/calendar/>

The Gaïa Prize

Presented for over twenty years at the autumn equinox, the Gaïa Prize has become a benchmark distinction in the vast field of time measurement, and is awarded to craftspeople, manufacturers and researchers. It was first awarded in 1993.

The Gaïa Prize is the only award of its kind to honor men and women who have dedicated their career to the measurement of time. By awarding this distinction each year, the MIH underlines the undeniably major contribution its winners have made to the field of watchmaking, its profile and its culture.



Gaïa trophies. © MIH, V. Savanyu

The Gaïa Prize is awarded in 3 categories: History and Research in watchmaking and timekeeping, Workmanship and Design in watchmaking and Entrepreneurship in watchmaking. All nominations, excluding personal ones, are taken into consideration. Only nominations submitted before the 21st of March will be included in the current year's selection process.



<https://www.mih.ch/en/gaia-prize/>

Horizon Gaïa

Horizon Gaïa is an encouraging scholarship awarded each year to young people in the fields of interest of the Gaïa Prize:

- crafts / creation
- history /research
- entrepreneurial spirit

The scholarship finances, in principle, an individual project that can take place over a maximum of one year. The deadline for submitting applications is the same as for applications for the Prize, i.e. 21st March of each year.



<https://www.mih.ch/en/horizon-gaia/>

The most significant collection in the world

The mission of the Musée international d'horlogerie (MIH) is to collect and conserve objects relating to time, its measurement and horology in general. In 1974, when the current building was inaugurated, the collection already contained 3000 objects, originally acquired in the last quarter of the 19th century by the watchmaking school, then by the first watchmaking museum founded in 1902. Right from the start, the collections grew from objects donated by manufacturers and individuals, expanding towards the middle of the 20th century thanks to major acquisitions made possible by generous patrons including the Inspectorate of precious metal artefacts and the Employer's Union of Watchmakers.

The current collection – the world's largest dedicated to the history of time measurement - includes not only watches and clocks dating from the 16th century to the present day, both Swiss and internationally-produced, but also tools, machines, instruments, automata, models and reconstructions of objects which have now disappeared, as well as paintings, engravings and iconographic collections relating to the various areas of time measurement.



Pendulums space. © G. Perret

The museum also houses a large collection of industrial objects from the region's watchmaking heritage, which will be allocated a prime exhibition area in one of the museum's revamped spaces. In addition to collecting and conserving horological objects including watches and clocks, the museum also compiles archives and historical documents relating to time in order to shed light not only on the technical history, but also the artistic, social and economic history of watchmaking.

Overview of some masterpieces in the collection

Among about five thousand pieces kept at the MIH, here is an overview of some remarkable objects especially known for their technical, decorative or historical interest.

TREASURES FROM 14TH TO 17TH CENTURIES

1. Giovanni Dondi (Padua) and Luigi Pippa (Milan), Astrarium, reconstruction, brass, iron, silver plated. H: 110 cm ; D: 90 cm. Original piece : between 1365 and 1380 ; reconstruction : 1985. Inv. IV-625.

This astronomical clock designed more than six centuries ago by Giovanni Dondi of Padua reproduces the movements of the planets in the cosmos. It was the source of immense admiration when it was built, all the more so since it added astrology to astronomy. The original disappeared in the 16th century. However, Dondi had left behind very detailed descriptions, which is what Luigi Pippa used.



2. John or Nicolas Vallin, London, Table clock with striking-work and alarm, brass, steel, silver. 97 mm x 97 mm x 105 mm, signature on the box : *VALLIN*, handwriting engraved to the back of the bottom: "Sir Walter Ralleigh neheaded oct 29 Anno Dom 1618", around 1600, Inv. IV-141

This decorative table clock from the 17th century is made of a square base engraved with a wall with arcades opening out onto views of towns, landscapes and genre scenes.



3. Hans Troschel, Nuremberg, Diptych sundial, ivory, golden brass. 160 mm x 109 x 14 mm. Sundial with the inscription: HANNS TROSCHEL NORAEBERGE FACIEBAT 1631, 1631, Inv. IV-100

This sundial comprises two engraved ivory boards and presents numerous indications on its four sides. It is kept open by means of a hand-shaped gilded brass support on the side, with the cover parallel to the equator.



4. Edme Burnot, Brussels, Round enamelled watch, gold, enamel, brass, 60 mm x 25 mm, signed movement *Edme Burnot A Bruxelles*, around 1665, Inv. I-1120

Watches decorated with portraits became popular with the emergence of enamel painting, around 1630. The portrait of Philippe IV on the cover of the watch described here might have



been copied from the painting by Velasquez (1599-1660) sent to the archduke by the king himself in 1663. His wife Maria-Anna of Austria is presented in a pendant on the back of the case. The movement has a fuse with gut line and a verge escapement. The annular balance is protected by a gilded brass balance cock, pierced, like the pawl cover, with flowers.

EXTRAORDINARY PIECES FROM 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

5. Onion watch, case and dial in silver, signed *Sibelin the elder in Neuchâtel*, around 1700. Purchased in 2016.



6. Albert Baillon, André-Charles Boulle (?), Paris, pendulum on a pedestal, wood, shell, copper, bronze, enamel, 185 cm x 65 cm x 25 cm, signed dial. *A. Baillon*, signed movement. A Baillon A Paris, around 1710-1720, Inv. IV-543

With its impressive dimension and rich decoration, this clock evokes on several accounts the work of André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732), cabinet-maker, engraver and inlayer extraordinary to the King. Several of the bronzes are characteristic of his work: the seated figure of Time, the caryatids, the children on the cornices and the lion's paws on the base. The sculpted group on the door depicting the *Abduction of Persephone* is similar to a work by François Girardon, dating from 1699, that is found at the center of the Colonnade grove in the gardens at Versailles. The plinth for the musical mechanism (missing) is also in tortoiseshell with inlaid copper work and decorated with bronzes gilded with ground gold.



7. Ferdinand Berthoud, Paris, Marine clock No 12, wood, brass, silver steel, 50 cm x 57 cm, box: 45 cm x 35 cm, movement diameter 15 cm. Dial engraved with : H M N°12 *Inventée et exécutée par Ferdinand Berthoud 1774, 1774*, Inv. IV-84

This marine clock/chronometer was crafted by Ferdinand Berthoud, a native of Neuchâtel who had moved to Paris. His work on clocks and chronometers earned him the titles of Clockmaker to the King and to the Navy. This marine clock is fitted in a wooden box with a gimbal suspension. It has a driving weight and a pivoted-detent escapement. This piece entered the museum's collections in 1902, when it was still located in the Watchmaking School of La Chaux-de-Fonds.



8. Jaquet-Droz and Leschot, London, Watch with automatic winding, gold, enamel, golden brass, 49 mm x 20 mm, signed movement Jaquet-Droz & Leschot London, around 1785, Inv. I-494

The case described here reveals a skillful combination of the main techniques used by enamellers: translucent enamel, champlevé enamels and enamel painting. The flowered vase motif, inspired by the art of classical antiquity, was common on watches dating from the last quarter of the 18th century and from the neoclassical period in general. The names "Jaquet-Droz & Leschot" comprised three watchmakers from La Chaux-de-Fonds, all of whom acquired an international reputation during the second half of the 18th century: Pierre Jaquet-Droz, his son Henri-Louis and his adopted son Jean-Frédéric Leschot.



9. François Ducommun, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Planetarium, brass, cardboard, wood, oil painting, 1816, diameter: 120 cm. 1816. Inv. V-12

This is not a clock but a planetarium, which presents the solar system as it was known in the early 19th century. Painted with figures of the constellations, the globe houses a brass mechanism made of two distinct parts: the calendar and the planetarium. A drawing of F. Ducommun's project shows the arduous calculations he had to make to achieve his goal. In addition to the incredible precision of the mechanism, the external beauty and perfection of this piece has been realized by the engraver and lithographer Charles Girardet.



10. Ami LeCoultre Piguet, Le Brassus, Complicated watch, gold, enamel, brass, steel. 60mm x 21,2 mm, signed movement: *Ami LeCoultre Brassus Suisse*, around 1878, Inv. I-501

This watch was nicknamed "la Merveilleuse" (the marvellous) took four years to make. It is signed by Ami LeCoultre (1843-1921), who collaborated with Louis-Elisée Piguet and both worked in Le Brassus. Its seventeen complications reflect the high degree of workmanship in complicated timepieces attained at this time by watchmakers in the Joux Valley. This particular watch was shown at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1878, at which Ami LeCoultre's watches were awarded a bronze medal.



TIME IN 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

11. Hans Erni (1909-2015), "Conquering Time", monumental fresco (paint on pavatex), 290 x 350 cm, signed Erni 58, made in 1958 for the Swiss Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair, 1958.

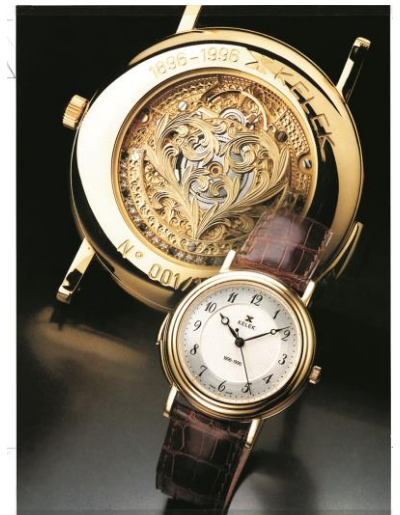


These works of art were painted in 1958 and commissioned by the Swiss Chamber of Watchmaking for the Brussels World's Fair. They decorated the watchmaking section of the Swiss pavilion, under the overall title "Conquering Time". The frescoes of the upper row show the universal philosophy of time with its scientists; the ones of the bottom row illustrate the emergence and development of watchmaking in Geneva and in the arc of the Jura Mountains. The other frescoes scattered in the museum refer to modern technology.



12. Kelek, La Chaux-de-Fonds, repeater wristwatch, gold, brass. 39,7 mm x 12 mm, engraved box. KELEK 1896-1996, N° 005/100, signed dial: KELEK 1896-1996, 1996, Inv. I-2461

Limited to 100 numbered pieces, this "Centenary watch" was made by Kelek to celebrate its 100th anniversary (1896-1996). The engraved movement can be seen through the back of the polished gold case which is fitted with a sapphire crystal. The self-winding movement has a pierced gold rotor engraved with foliage. The hour and quarter repeating mechanism, made by Dubois-Dépraz in the Joux Valley, is a module independent of the movement.



13. François Junod, Turkish automaton drinking coffee on a flying carpet, donation 2015.

This is a contemporary electromechanical piece celebrating the centenary of *La Semeuse*, a coffee roasting company from la Chaux-de-Fonds, in 2000. A simple coffee bean puts the automat in motion and the *Turkish March* by Mozart is being played while the man is drinking his coffee.



<https://www.mih.ch/en/watch-collections/>

The Association for friends of the MIH

With the inauguration of the carillon on 31st May 1980, the project to construct the MIH was achieved in full. It was also on this date that the creation of an association of friends of the museum was announced, which would take over the reins from the Maurice Favre Foundation. The main aim of this association would be to help extend the collections.

From 1981, the Association for friends, amisMIH, presided over the traditional presentation evening for the past year's donations and purchases. From this time, the number of friends has continued to increase, thanks to the tireless work of successive presidents and the committee to find corporate and private sponsors.

The majority of key purchases was made possible thanks to their financial support; these acquisitions have been especially highlighted in the museum's presentation. A few years ago, the amisMIH decided to extend their activities beyond the purchase of collection items and support the museum in other projects, such as the creation of a DVD, support for exhibitions and the establishment of conferences.

The association has members in all parts of the world and welcomes every new member.



<http://www.amismih.ch>

Contact – asking for HD pictures

For further information, please ask:



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