

□ L'horlogerie à la Belle Epoque, de l'atelier au Jardin

Watchmaking during the Belle Epoque from the workshop to the garden

Celebrating the Centenary of the Higher Course of Art and Decoration at the School of Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds, all the cultural institutions of the town are contributing to the event in their own respective field. The main exhibition, «Mon beau sapin», will present the whole phenomenon of Art Nouveau in the region of the Montagnes neuchâteloises at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, from the 13th May to the 17th September 2006.

The period between 1890 and 1914 is a time of splendour as far as watchmaking is concerned; two quite distinct currents distinguish the watch production of this period: whereas the engine-turned watchcases, engraved or decorated with enamel (painted or translucent), highlight the Art Nouveau compositions, the quality of the manufacture of the movement reaches a kind of peak which ends after the introduction of the wristwatch.

The exhibition, planned in two distinct parts, leads the visitors to a workshop where watchcases are produced, that of Frainier & Son, set up in Morteau as from 1864. This workshop is preserved in the Musée d'horlogerie (watch museum) of Morteau and is equipped with an engine-turning machine and the collection of watchcases which accompanies it illustrates the work carried out during the Art Nouveau period. Let us leave the production area and go into the garden of a town where Art Nouveau has decorated windows and houses with flowers: La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Wishing to be an echo of the Art Nouveau expression which has drawn its inspiration and its force from nature, by going round its virtual groups of flowers and trees, this 1900 garden will help you discover the many facets of watchmaking of the period : impressive small clocks and watches, jewellery – both exceptional and modest – accompanied by 10 figures evoking prominent figures from La Chaux-de-Fonds from various backgrounds - are presented in the window displays, at the back of which you can see photos of some of the stained-glass windows found in the town.

Parallel to the products commercialised by the watchmakers of this period, a slide show presents another product which makes its appearance at the turn of the century and which uses, to a great extent, the Art Nouveau style in its expression: advertisements.

Musée international d'horlogerie

Exhibition open from 17th February to 22nd October 2006

Window 1 – Stained-glass window rue du Nord 123

Maurice Picard

(1870-1951)

Initiator and first President of the Musée d'horlogerie in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Maurice Picard, of French and Jewish origin by his father, is a typical example of industrialist in the Montagnes neuchâtelaises. Manufacturer of watch spare parts, he plays an important part in the cultural and sports life of the town. On the 25th May 1900, he presents a memorandum to the town authorities in which he requests the foundation of a retrospective watchmaking museum. After consultations, the Local Town Council approves this project. A commission is then formed, uniting the committee members of the Watchmaking School, the libraries and museums, together with Picard. The museum is inaugurated on the 24th March 1902 and is soon installed in the Watchmaking School in the rue du Progrès, where it remains for almost 70 years!

In 1906, Maurice Picard goes to Paris to manage the branch of the Henri Picard & Brother company, and he continues his research in the watchmaking field. In 1912 he sets up a factory producing false teeth near Versailles. During the war, from 1914, he manages a factory producing shells at Poissy. After that, he becomes a chartered accountant and, in 1944, he takes refuge in Switzerland and comes back to La Chaux-de-Fonds with his wife to escape the persecutions to Jews and deportation.

He returns to Paris in 1945, where he dies on the 7th April 1951

Piece

Pocket watch having belonged to him.

The engine-turned silver caseback is decorated with the monogram MP.

Private collection

T. Combe

(1856-1933)

As a socially and politically committed writer, she spends her whole life fighting against injustice and leads a fierce battle against alcoholism and its ravages, striving for the ban of the production and sale of absinthe, also called « la bleue » (the blue one) or « la fée verte » (the green fairy). Adèle Huguenin was born in Le Locle on the 16th August 1856. She becomes a teacher at the age of 17, more for economic reasons than by vocation. She soon decides to devote herself to writing and her first texts appear in the universal library in 1879. Then she takes up the pseudonym of T. Combe (evoking the scarps (combes) of her native Jura region) which, for some time, conceals her name and sex from the public. Her works comprise forty novels and numerous short stories of a marked social nature, in which values such as abstinence, labour, saving and self-control are exalted.

During her life, she endeavours to fight scourges such as alcoholism, unemployment, poverty and the lack of social structures. She also creates an organisation in favour of workers, refugees and the people disabled in the war. To do this, she has a house built in Les Brenets, a village in the canton of Neuchâtel on the bank of the River Doubs. This is the Capucine house where she also lives. T. Combe also expresses her ideas by means of journalism and numerous conferences. Her social and feminist discourse, nonetheless well-reflected and realistic, gives an exact image of what could be expected from a woman writer in the society of the region of the Montagnes neuchâtelaises at that time.

Pieces

Pendant watch, in gold, with raised champlevé enamelling, pearls and diamonds, inspired by Art Nouveau.

The dome is engraved with: “Easter, 31st March 1907

To my dearest Marie In memory of Arnold”.

*Collection of the Musée international
d’horlogerie, La Chaux-de-Fonds*

La Nuit Etoilée (Starry Night). Brooch, heart-shaped,

Open-worked with bust of woman

François Fleuret, Paris. *Collection of the Musée
d’horlogerie et d’émallerie de Genève*

Window 2 – Stained glass window rue du Doubs 93

Paul Mosimann

(1858-1923)

Paul Mosimann presides over the Local Council of the town of La Chaux-de-Fonds for several years, and, during that time, he signs the Local Council’s decision to create a Watch Museum and Joseph Bonnet’s master contract for stone-setting! He is an active figure in local, county and national politics and he is president of the Local Council of La Chaux-de-Fonds from 1894 to 1912 and from 1915 to 1917. He is also deputy of the Neuchâtel County Council between 1886 and 1919 and deputy for the national government from 1900. As well as his political duties, in 1917, he also becomes president of the Swiss Chamber of Watchmaking. His commitment to culture can be observed in his contribution to the creation of the Watch Museum. In actual fact, he is one of the key figures in the founding of this retrospective watch museum, one of the first to support Maurice Picard’s project presented on the 25th May 1900 to the town of La Chaux-de-Fonds. On the 18th January 1901, Paul Mosimann and the Local Council stand behind this request and an ad hoc commission is formed, consisting of members of the committees of the Watchmaking School, libraries and museums. This commission is requested to elect a president and a secretary and is given full authority to lead the matter to a successful conclusion.

As well as being an active citizen of his town, defending its interests in the county and federal parliaments, Paul Mosimann also took part in the rapid urban expansion of the town by building the property in the Rue Montbrillant 5 whose gardens also opened onto the rue du Nord.

Pièce

Pocket watch, with silver case, back engraved with flowers and leaves. Longines, St. Imier, around 1913

Collection of Longines Museum, St-Imier

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Joseph Bonnet

(1875-1941)

At the turn of the 19th Century, thanks to various prominent figures, whose creative talents rival with their talents for trade, the town of La Chaux-de-Fonds is present on the watch and jewellery markets of the whole of Europe. Joseph Bonnet is one of these figures and not one of the least important. Native of Schwäbisch Gmünd in

Württemberg, he learns his trade of gem-setter and jeweller from the age of 14. In 1895 he leaves Germany to come to La Chaux-de-Fonds, where he works for several months at the jewellers' Bolle-Landry, before setting up his own business. In March 1900 he becomes master gem-setter at the Art School on a part-time basis. As his business grows, he builds a property in 1905 with workshops and flats (rue du Bois-Gentil 9), where 25 people work, reaching 50 workers in 1909. At that time Russia becomes the main market of the Bonnet company.

In 1912, this industrialist, friend of L'Eplattenier's, close to the Art Nouveau movements, builds another factory-house complex (rue Numa-Droz 141-143) where he employs more than 100 workers: jewellers, engravers, gem-setters, polishers, gilders etc. When the war breaks out in 1914, his sales staff in Russia flee the country leaving behind a number of jewellery pieces in the safes of various banks. Joseph Bonnet therefore travels to Russia, concealing his German origin, taking advantage of his Swiss nationality, to recover his jewellery collections. During a memorable journey which leads him from the Baltic Sea to the Ural, he manages to sell his entire collection. However, the money collected could not be taken out of Russia and it was even confiscated during the Bolshevik revolution. He, himself, manages to finish his journey safely, in spite of the war and the political disturbances and he returns home to La Chaux-de-Fonds. When the war reaches an end, Joseph Bonnet is ruined, so he is forced to look for new markets. He then manufactures ladies' watchcases. In 1922 he becomes a supplier of the House of Bucherer for the American market; after the stock market crash of 1929, he creates low-cost articles. The following decade is difficult for the company. In 1939, at the start of the war, his firm slows down, the staff has been called up, the watchmaking industry is sluggish and the gold is rationed. Joseph Bonnet dies of a heart attack on the 30th July 1941. The business is then taken over by his two sons, who re-launch it completely after the war.

Pieces

Hunter pocket watch made for the South American market. A country scene surrounded by flowers is painted on the watchcase, which is in blackened steel.

Private collection

Brooches, made of moulded gold and enamel, Ophelia and the Dream, from the François Fleuret workshop, Paris, early 20th century.

Collection of the Musée d'horlogerie et d'émaillerie de Genève

Open-worked brooch, in the shape of a stylised insect. Eugène Tourette, Paris, about 1900.

Collection of the Musée d'horlogerie et d'émaillerie de Genève

Open-worked brooch, made of moulded gold and enamel, representing the bust of a woman surrounded by an iris. Durand-Leriché Workshop, Paris, about 1900.

Collection of the Musée d'horlogerie et d'émaillerie de Genève

Exhibition

Organisation Committee

Project Management Ludwig Oechslin Nicole Bosshart Jean -Michel Piguet	Text composition Jean-Michel Piguet Nicole Bosshart Clémence Schmidt
Scenography Polygone Musée international d'horlogerie	Setting and printing Verdon SA
Technical co-ordination, installation Polygone Serge Perrelet	Photos of stained glass windows Danièle Karrer, Service d'urbanisme, Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds
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<i>The Management of the Musée international d'horlogerie thanks the institutions and companies who have put their objects at disposal:</i> Ecole d'art, La Chaux-de-Fonds Musée d'horlogerie et d'émaillerie, Genève Musée de l'horlogerie du Haut-Doubs, Morteau Musée Longines, St-Imier	<i>The Management of the Musée international d'horlogerie thanks the institutions and companies who have put their objects at disposal:</i> Musée Omega, Bienne Vacheron Constantin-Patrimoine, Genève Wyss-Art-Technique, Jaime Wyss, Dübendorf Zenith International, Le Locle

Window 4 – Stained glass window rue du Nord 119

André the engraver

Engraving plays a dominating part in the decorating of watchcases in the 19th C. André the Engraver, called «La Lime» (the file) by his colleagues, trains at the School of Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds where he is one of the first students qualified. There he learns drawing, composition and particularly the different traditional techniques of engraving which decorate the backs of watchcases. He works in a small family workshop with five other engravers, all seated around a worktable, with indentations, covered with various tools such as gravers, cold chisels, sharpening stones, chisels, hammers and glass balls filled with blued water which help to diffuse the weak light given by the oil lamps after it gets dark.

In 1909 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, 375 engravers and 75 engine-turners are recorded, all employed in the decoration of watchcases. The appearance of the wristwatch is a drastic blow to this industry and new watches, which are smaller and worn on the wrist, brings about the almost total disappearance of the surface on the cases of pocket and pendant watches destined for engraving.

The period from 1890 to 1914 is also a time of troubles and social demands. The corporation of the engraving and engine-turning workers comprises 400 to 500 members, who formed the first working-union in the watchmaking world. Intelligent, enterprising, of slightly rebellious nature, the engravers were at the forefront of the union, social and artistic movements.

After a merciless struggle and several strikes, the longest of which lasted three months, they obtained the 10-hour day and a few years later the 9-hour day.

Piece

Hunter pocket watch with silver engraved case. Omega, Bienne, about 1906
Omega Museum Collection, Bienne

Window 5 - Stained glass window rue du Doubs 93

Madeleine Woog

(1892-1929)

Painter and poet born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, she is a student in Charles l'Eplattenier's Higher Course at the School of Art from 1906 to 1911, at the same time as Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) and the painter, Charles Humbert.

In her youth, Madeleine Woog is interested in numerous sports: tennis, skating and dancing. She performs the latter art to such perfection that, at one point, she thinks about making it her career. She shows just as much talent for music, notably for the piano and violin. She also composes musical pieces when not writing poetry, but, as an all-round artist, her favourite means of expression is painting. After her training at the School of Art, she goes to Paris followed and guided by the painter, Charles Humbert (1891-1958), taught at the same school. A friendship and deep complicity develop between them, to such an extent that they get married in 1920.

The works which reveal Madeleine Woog date from 1914, and their style stands out from everything else which is done at that time. Between 1914 and 1917, she also writes about sixty poems. In art, she shows herself to be mainly a colourist. She paints as she writes a poem. Taking a lot of trouble with composition, she puts her sensations in order so as to create a picture. The themes she chooses are principally scenery or flowers in pure and bright colours and portraits.

During her life, she suffers from several illnesses which force her to stop her work as an artist. Weakened by these various illnesses, she dies on 22nd April 1929.

Pieces

Pendant watch in gold with translucent enamel back and engraved and chased flowers. Vacheron Constantin, Geneva, about 1902 *Vacheron Constantin Collection, Geneva*

Pendant brooch in melted gold and enamel. Woman with wings on three-lope.

Luis Masriera, Barcelona, about 1907. *Collection of the Musée d'horlogerie et d'émaillerie de Genève*

Window 6 – Stained glass window rue du Doubs 32

Charles L'Eplattenier

(1874-1946)

This artist and sculptor, teacher at the School of Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds, becomes the « master » of a generation of artists and the emblem of Art Nouveau expression typical of the region, because of the introduction of his Higher Course of Art and Decoration. Born in the Val-de-Ruz, he spends his youth in the country surrounded by omnipresent nature, amongst pastures and forests of firtrees. He has his first drawing lessons in Neuchâtel before continuing his training in Budapest and in Paris.

In 1897, back in his native country, he is appointed teacher of drawing and decorative composition at the School of Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds, to which he manages to give an international dimension during his seventeen years of teaching. With his students, he applies his method which is based on direct observation of nature and ends up with the creation of the Style Sapin (Firtree Style), stemming from Art Nouveau. In this style, regional decorative elements like the firtree or the gentian are used in a more or less stylised form. In 1905, he creates the Higher Course of Art and Decoration within the School of Art and, after that, he lands important decorating contracts, notably, for the Fallet House (1905), the Post Office and the Crematorium of La Chaux-de-Fonds (1910), or still the Cantonal Observatory of Neuchâtel (1912). His most talented students – amongst them Madeleine Woog and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret – also participate in these works.

Throughout his life, he distinguishes himself in different artistic fields : drawing, sculpture, illustration, mosaic, furniture, stained glass windows, ceramics, jewellery and architecture.

On the 7th June 1946, during a day out painting, he has a fatal fall on the rocks along the River Doubs.

Piece

Watch with watchcase in silver with niello. Designed by Charles L'Eplattenier for the Neuchâtel Cantonal Shooting Competition, La Chaux de Fonds 1913.

Collection of the Musée international d'horlogerie, La Chaux-de-Fonds

Window 7 – Stained glass window rue Numa-Droz 76

Monique St-Héliér

(1895-1955)

The novelist Monique Saint-Héliér, has given not only her own name to the streets of her native town, but also that of the family Alérac, the surname of the family she writes about in her novels.

Born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Berthe Eimann begins her studies of the arts at the University of Lausanne when she is 21. It is there that she meets Blaise Briod, who becomes her husband, and that she converts to the Catholic religion adopting Monique as her Christian name.

The couple spend a few years in Bern, and in 1926, they go to settle down in Paris. Monique Briod becomes ill and has to constantly stay in bed. She remains bedridden until her death in 1955. It is during this period of illness that she becomes interested in painting and in writing which she starts to do. This is when she adopts her pen name «Monique Saint-Héliér». Between 1932 and 1955, she publishes several novels, such as “La Cage aux rêves” (1932), « Bois-Mort » (1943), « Le Cavalier de paille » (1936), « Le Martin-pêcheur » (1953), « Quick » (1954), « L’arrosoir rouge » (1955).

Monique Saint-Héliér creates a remarkable and fascinating work by using innovative narrative techniques taken from Anglo-Saxon novel writing. She is a friend of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, of the playwright Henri Ghéon and of the critic and philosopher Jean Paulhan, and she is very successful in the thirties and forties.

After living through the Occupation, the Briod couple settles down in the village of Chambines in Picardy, where Monique St-Héliér passes away on the 9th March 1955, leaving an unfinished work.

Pieces

Pendant watch in platinum and white gold,

The engine-turned back is covered with translucent enamel «vert de gris» (verdigris).

Vacheron Constantin, Geneva, about 1910.

Vacheron Constantin Collection, Geneva

Brooch in moulded gold and opalescent enamel.

Dragonfly lady. François Fleuret, Paris.

Collection of the Musée d’horlogerie

et d’émaillerie in Geneva

Paperweight in the shape of an open-winged butterfly, Henri Vever, Paris, about 1900.

Collection of the Musée d’horlogerie et

d’émaillerie in Geneva

Window 10 – Stained glass window rue du Commerce 17

Charles-Edouard

Jeanneret

Called Le Corbusier

(1887-1965)

The architect everyone in the world knows under the pseudonym of «Le Corbusier» was born on the 6th

October 1887 in La Chaux-de-Fonds. In 1902 Charles Edouard Jeanneret enters the School of Art of the town to take engraving and chasing courses. In 1905 he continues his studies in the Higher Course of Art and Decoration which was opened in October of the same year by Charles L’Eplattenier who initiates his most talented students into architecture. After that the young man moves more and more away from his training as an engraver and chaser of

watchcases. In 1905, influenced and encouraged by his “master”, with René Chapallaz he builds his first house, the Fallet House, ordered by a member of the Board of the School of Art.

From 1907, Ch.-E. Jeanneret undertakes his travels across Europe, discovering in particular the Carthusian Monastery by Ema de Galluzzo near Florence which, for him, represents the ideal of a habitation for a community; he spends time in the workshops of great architects in Paris (Auguste Perret) and in Berlin (Peter Behrens), thus training for his future career. The journey, which leaves an indelible impression on him, takes him to Turkey in 1911, passing through the Balkans and Greece. This journey is related in his notes « Le voyage d’Orient » (Journey to the East). In 1912, he comes back to his native town where he teaches in the New Section of the School of Art and also sets up a business as a decorator and architect. He thus designs groups of furniture and, for his parents, he builds the Jeanneret-Perret house, called “la Maison blanche” (the White House) in La Chaux-de-Fonds, and the Favre-Jacot house in Le Locle. The last buildings he realised in his region are the Scala cinema and the Schwob house, called “Villa Turque” (Turkish house).

In 1917 he goes to settle down in Paris, to become « Le Corbusier » several years later.

Piece

Watchcase in silver engraved with fir-tree-style motifs, made at the School of Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds about 1905. This piece was probably not presented at the Milan Exhibition in 1906.

Collection of the School of Art, La Chaux-de-Fonds

Georges Favre-Jacot

(1843-1917)

Important manufacturer of the canton of Neuchâtel, he founds a watchmaking company in 1865 which later becomes the Zenith Factory, from the name of the highest point in the sky and of one of the first movements created by him, carrying the emblem of the star.

After primary school, Georges Favre-Jacot carries out an apprenticeship as a watchmaker in La Sagne, village in the Neuchâtel Jura region. Being very talented and ahead of his years, and after having differences with his employer, he sets up his own business at the age of 13 years old, thus freeing himself of a guardianship which weighed heavily on him. At 18 he already trains apprentices. Before his majority, he marries Louise Jacot-Descombes, and, thanks to his wife’s dowry, he finally realises his dream of building a watch factory in Locle, in which he produces accurate fob watches in a rational way and at the lowest cost.

George Favre-Jacot seeks to free himself from the method of watch production of that period, which is done with spare parts. From then on, by creating his own factory, he proves that it is possible to produce all the components necessary for the manufacture of a watch at the same place. This company grows to such an extent that, soon, a tenth of the population of Le Locle is employed there.

Subsequently, G. Favre-Jacot continues his construction works by building flats to accommodate his workers. He buys different properties and thus becomes the most important real estate owner in the canton of Neuchâtel.

In 1911 Georges Favre-Jacot retires from the watchmaking business and his company continues to grow and flourish with his descendants.

At the same period, he requests Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), a young, talented architect, to build his house «La Forêt» (the Forest).

He dies of pneumonia on the 19th May 1917.

Pieces

Pocket watch in silver with niello, with flower and leaf decoration. Zénith, Le Locle, about 1910. *Collection Zénith SA, Le Locle*

Small mirror for advertising, the back of which represents the Zenith factory. Zénith, Le Locle, about 1915. *Collection Zénith SA, Le Locle*