

Watch Journal

Featuring: The Parmigiani Fleurier Ovale Pantographe Or.

Also: Gérald Genta's Horological Icons.
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Exploring Watchmaker and Designer Partnerships.



Art Watch

The fields of horology and design are enduringly related, and recent collaborations have strengthened those bonds even further.

By Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle

The past year was marked by the emergence of numerous high-profile alliances between watch brands and accomplished artists and designers who have already made names for themselves in their fields. Building bridges between materials, techniques, and creativity, the distinctive worlds of horology and art have come together to form powerful synergies. They created timepieces that pushed the limits of haute horlogerie and even those of art and design, adding to the collaborative equation what neither of them could have achieved alone. Here, we profile four recent partnerships forged by Hermès, Linde Werdelin, Rado, and Voutilainen that see mechanical innovation matched with aesthetic talent, showing that two minds are greater than one.



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HERMÈS SLIM D'HERMÈS MILLE FLEURS DU MEXIQUE X LAETITIA BIANCHI

The starting point for this six-piece, limited-edition, nature-inspired watch was a silk scarf that French-Mexican graphic designer and writer Laetitia Bianchi designed for Hermès, whose motif was painted in miniature onto its mother-of-pearl dial. After sketching the outlines of the image, the artisan prepared the color palette, delicately applying a first layer of paint followed by approximately 20 more, punctuated each time by firings in a 90°C furnace to dry the paint. As brushstrokes of color are added, the thousand-flower motif gradually appears, revealing cut leaves and blossoms that recall the 15th- and 16th-century tapestries after which the design was named. Referencing the Mexican cultural roots of Bianchi, stylized feathers, flowers, leaves, and a bird alternately materialize or vanish on the dial. Born in 1976, Bianchi is known for her graphic novel *Le Livre des Serpents et des Échelles*, which won the Mission Stendhal award. She also edited and designed the respected news magazine *Le Tigre*, which has published many writers, designers, and avant-garde photographers.

Philippe Delhotal, creative director of La Montre Hermès, describes how the brand chose Bianchi's design: "We were fascinated by the richness of the colors and the motifs," he says. "I see Laetitia as a very creative and passionate woman sharing the values of the house and a taste for beautiful objects. Artists and designers bring creativity and freshness, free from any watch-business constraints, giving a new perspective and opening a new playground for our timepieces."

The busy and vibrant dial decorating this timepiece, crafted entirely in-house, is paired with a refined 39.5 mm white-gold case featuring clean lines. Animated by the Swiss-made, ultrathin Manufacture Hermès H1950 self-winding movement decorated with the trademark "H" motif, visible through a sapphire crystal caseback, the watch comes on a green alligator strap made in the house's workshops.

OPENING: Slim d'Hermès Mille Fleurs du Mexique.
CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: Hand-painting
the Slim d'Hermès Mille Fleurs. Assorted pig-
ments. Close-up of the dial.



RADO CERAMICA X KONSTANTIN GRČIĆ

Among the contemporary design world's most familiar faces, German industrial designer Konstantin Grcic was Rado's natural choice for redesigning an icon boasting a strong geometric shape and a purist, modern appearance. Grcic's avant-garde furniture marries an industrial aesthetic with experimental, artistic, and playful elements. This design is the result of in-depth investigations of materials, technologies, and production processes coupled with long moments of deep reflection—tackling complex ideas and observing the relationship between human beings and objects. Rado CEO Matthias Breschan explains: “The Ceramica became an icon because of its daring, minimalist shape and glossy, high-tech ceramic construction, both of which were almost unheard of when the watch was first launched in 1990.”

About three years ago, Rado decided the Ceramica needed a more modern update. In 2012, the brand introduced the first full ceramic monobloc case. “We wanted to create a new Ceramica with the possibilities offered by our new technologies, and Konstantin Grcic seemed to be an obvious choice of design partner to make this happen,” says Breschan. “The new look would require a deep understanding of timeless design, something which he truly grasps and that is reflected in his work. We were also drawn to his work because he has the same design philosophy as Rado: pure and minimalistic, yet with a love of materials and innovation.” For Grcic's first-ever watch collaboration, he asked himself how he could transform the classic into a timepiece he would wear today.

Out of the 11 models that make up the new Ceramica collection, the 701-piece signature limited edition opts for a velvety matte-black finish in favor of the usual high gloss for the monobloc case and bracelet, accompanied by a titanium caseback and a bold, legible, black lacquered dial with clear graphics inspired by pilots' watches. The Superluminova-filled triangle and Arabic numerals are paired with matte-gray printed indexes, hands, and the Rado logo. The line's smaller-sized women's timepieces include two diamond-set pieces, available in either glossy black or white ceramic.

The new Rado Ceramica.
OPPOSITE: The Voutilainen Kaen X Unryan.

VOUTILAINEN KAEN X UNRYUAN

Kari Voutilainen has made six watches so far with Unryuan, a lacquer studio located in Wajima, a city on Japan's west coast known for its lacquer expertise. Creating exquisite works of art, including writing cases, incense boxes and tea ware, Unryuan is run by Kitamura Tatsuo, one of Japan's leading contemporary lacquer artists, whom Voutilainen first met in 2012. Kitamura has succeeded in bringing a craft that has existed for centuries into the present, in the process retaining the spirit and identity of traditional Japanese culture as expressed during the Edo period. An exercise in patience and dedication, the lacquering techniques evident on the Kaen's dial and bridges require more than 1,000 hours of work and incorporate *kinpun* (gold dust), *kyunkin-itakane* (gold leaf), *yakou-gai* (great green turban shell), and *awabi-gai* (New Zealand abalone shell), while the vermilion-lacquered seconds dial with gold depicts the burning heart of a flame.

Limited to one piece, the watch is equipped with a unique, in-house-designed movement with a 65-hour power reserve and a 39 mm white-gold case with a sapphire crystal front and back. While the manufacturing, construction, fabrication, hand-finishing, and assembly were carried out in the Voutilainen workshop, the lacquer work was performed in the Unryuan atelier, with Voutilainen providing the titanium bridge plate and the dial plate onto which the decorations were added. Voutilainen notes, "I decided to collaborate thanks to my Japanese friend Masahito Hayashi, a watchmaker who runs his family's watch import business and has known Mr. Kitamura for years. Through this connection, I started to collaborate. I went to visit their workshop and was very positively surprised about the quality of the work—the execution is just top-class. We appreciate the quality of each other's work—we both enjoy daily life in the workshop and we enjoy sharing our knowledge with colleagues. As he creates only unique pieces, it fits perfectly with my philosophy. Our values are the same and I think this benefits both of us."





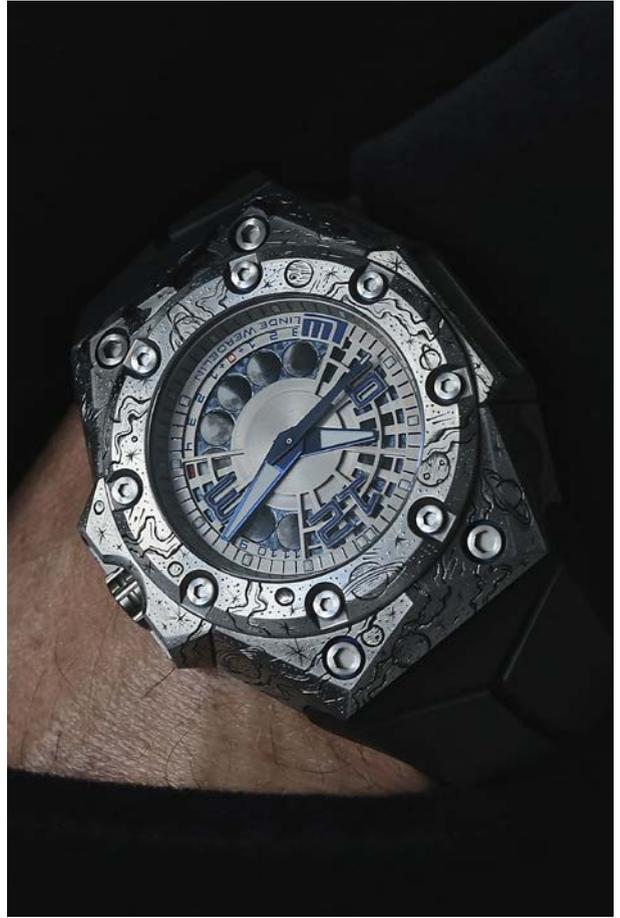
LINDE WERDELIN X JOHNNY DOWELL

He might be known as “KingNerd” across his social media accounts, but expert engraver Johnny Dowell was in no way socially awkward when approaching Morten Linde and Jorn Werdelin about partnering with their brand. The rose-gold Oktopus Reef was the result of their first collaboration and today this is followed by the Oktopus Crazy Universe. Taking the existing Oktopus BluMoon as a base, Dowell transformed it with a full case and bezel engraving. Dowell learned the art of hand-engraving after being encouraged by his uncle, who worked in firearms manufacturing. He spent five years in the late '90s and early 2000's mastering gun engraving before moving on to jewelry and watches. While the Oktopus Reef portrays the ocean's depths, the Crazy Universe references outer space, with images of the sun, the moon, shooting stars, Earth, Mars, Saturn, and Pluto.

Linde explains: “As a child, I dreamed of being an astronaut. Even though people are exploring space—there is such mystery contained within it—what else could be discovered. Creating a space theme was an obvious extension of the watch's moonphase complication, and it was a delight to discover space was a passion for Johnny, too.”

From initial design to finished product, the entire engraving process requires up to 100 hours of work, with details painstakingly cut under a microscope or magnifying loupe. “Working on grade-five titanium was a great test for me; I doubt I will ever engrave a harder material in my life,” says Dowell. “My everyday tools snapped and shattered as soon as I even touched the titanium. I switched to tungsten carbide tools, which were definitely better suited to the task, but even they were pushed to the limit.”

Linde Werdelin Oktopus watches
engraved by Johnny Dowell.



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