



The Luxury of Time

European Clocks And Watches

By Bob Frishman

NEW YORK CITY – Art and science combined, that is the special attraction of antique timekeepers. While many collectors focus on the insides of intricate machines, “The Luxury of Time: European Clocks and Watches” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art emphasizes their external beauty. This selection of Sixteenth through Nineteenth Century treasures graces the first-floor Wrightsman Galleries through March 27.

Right: Known as the Great Ruby Watch, this circa 1670 Augsburg single-hand watch with 85 clear rubies on its front cover has an equally impressive painted enamel dial, shown here. The movement was signed by Nicolaus Rugendas the Younger. The intrinsic value of the gold and gemstones resulted in most watches of this caliber being destroyed during hard times. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan.

Unless otherwise noted, all clocks are from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Page Above: The earliest pendulum-regulated clocks in England appeared in the 1660s, offered by Ahasuerus Fromanteel of London. The innovation provided a great leap forward in timekeeping accuracy. This example, in a hooded ebony case possibly inspired by architect Christopher Wren, includes a calendar indicator and is from that famed clockmaker and period. Bequest of Irwin Untermyer.





An elegant new book accompanies the show. Together, book and exhibition represent the culmination of 40-plus years of related work by associate curator Clare Vincent, called “the female pope of clocks and watches” in a recent Christie’s auction catalog. Vincent, who arrived at the Met in 1962, co-authored the 278-page hardcover volume with her late husband, Jan Hendrick Leopold, and associate research curator Elizabeth Sullivan, a co-organizer of the exhibition.

Sullivan recently led Jonathan Snellenburg, clock expert at Bonhams in New York, and me on a tour of the show, which consists of 46 objects from the

Perhaps the rarest and most priceless piece in the exhibit, this 1579 silver celestial globe with clockwork, carried on the back of Pegasus, showed the apparent motion of the heavens. The maker is Gerhard Emmoser. Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612) owned and probably proudly displayed this technological marvel in his *kunstammer*. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan.

Met's collection of around 600 European timepieces, most acquired decades ago and rarely out of storage, plus one clock, a circa 1610 automaton from Augsburg, Germany, loaned by Yale University Art Gallery.

In 1917, John Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913) donated about 250 watches and clocks, most of them swept up in his purchases of collections painstakingly built by Carl Heinrich Marfels, Frederick George Hilton Price and others. The American financier gave a total of around 7,000 works of art to the Met during and after his lifetime. Other early donors include Laura Frances Hearn, Mrs Simon Guggenheim, Irwin Untermyer and an anonymous benefactor who, in 1926, bequeathed more than a hundred watches in honor of Lady May Fletcher-Moulton. Mr and Mrs Charles Wrightsman gave clocks and funds for acquisitions.

This object demonstrates the close connection among science, religion and art. Made in the mid-Sixteenth Century, this monstrance or mirror clock is from Nurnberg. Multiple indicators of temporal and astronomical data are a testimony to the technical ability of the clockmaker who signed his work "CR."
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan.





Etienne Le Noir of Paris produced this wall clock circa 1735–40. Only two other such examples in Chantilly soft-paste porcelain are known. Unlike this one, which only tells time, those two have two-train movements that also strike the hours. Jack and Belle Linsky Collection.

Vincent organized the 1972 exhibit, “Northern European Clocks in New York Collections,” featuring Met-owned examples, plus others from the collections of Winthrop “Kelly” Edey and Peter Guggenheim. At Christie’s in January 2015, the Met purchased an automaton clock in the form of Urania from the Guggenheim collection for \$50,000 hammer. After the Met acquired four major timepieces last year, Sullivan and her colleagues dubbed 2015 “the year of the clock.”

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