

## The Empire of Maximilian

After a relatively short but distinguished career in haute horlogerie – seven years at Jaeger-LeCoultre followed by another seven at Harry Winston – 38-year-old Maximilian Busser felt it was time to go it alone. His dream was to form a small company with a maximum of 10 employees. “Just like true love, it was completely irrational,” he recalls. “It became an obsession and I just had to do it.” MB&F (Maximilian Busser and Friends) was launched in 2005.

MB&F is billed as not a watch brand but an artistic and micro-engineering concept laboratory. The aim is to design and craft one radical piece a year and a ‘dream team’ is assembled to do just that. “It’s just like *Mission Impossible*,” he says. “My approach is to say, ‘Guys, I would like to create this amazing piece, will you accept the challenge?’ The enthusiasm generated is incredible.” This amazing ‘machine’ – so-called as they are more than just wristwatches, they are mechanical sculptures – is then crafted in very limited numbers. Horological Machine No1 was unveiled in 2007 and HM2 last year.

Busser was born in Milan but raised in Lausanne; his mother is Indian. He studied micro engineering at the request of his father, a Swiss diplomat, but has always been a creator, a visionary. “I was an only child who was very often alone, I built an incredible imaginary world. My father, who was very Swiss-German, and my teachers at school always used to tell me to stop dreaming.” Luckily for watch collectors, they failed.

Maximilian Busser – creator of horological machines

## ONLY KIND

MB&F, which assembles ‘dream teams’ to build radical timepieces in very limited numbers, joined with American artist Sage Vaughn to create a one-off to be sold at a charity auction in Monaco in September. *Lily Rowan* examines an excellent use of time.

### The auction

Only Watch is a biennial auction to raise money for research into treatments and a cure for Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a rare genetic and severely degenerative disease that primarily affects boys. The auction, which premiered in 2005, is a collaboration between Patrizzi & Co., a specialised watch auctioneer headquartered in Geneva, and Luc Pettavino, who is both founder of the Association Monegasque Contre les Myopathies and president of the Monaco Yacht Show. Pettavino’s 13-year-old son, Paul, suffers from Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Only Watch is generously supported by the world’s leading watchmakers and watch companies, which each create and donate a special timepiece for the auction. The first two auctions raised 1.9 million and 2.7 million euros respectively. The 2009 sale, held on September 24 in Monaco during the Yacht Show and in the presence of Prince Albert, fetched nearly 2.3 million euros. It featured 34 unique and desirable lots. The highest selling, a Patek Philippe Ref 5106 Celestial with Date, went for 535,000 euros.

Smaller independent watchmakers created some of the most noteworthy and collectable pieces: a Cabestan Winch Tourbillon Vertical watch was sold for 220,000 euros; La Clef du Temps by Confrerie Horlogere went for 280,000 euros, and the De Bethune

Perodique Convertible (a wristwatch or pocket watch) took 90,000 euros. Also stirring the interest of collectors was the first of only seven new travel clocks made by Breguet (80,000 euros), a Bovet Amadeo Trilogy Convertible creation (pocket watch, wristwatch and clock, 90,000 euros) and Ulysee Nardin’s Freak Black Out (87,000 euros). Louis Vuitton contributed a Tambour Monogram watch trunk with a logo and travel booklets designed by young Paul Pettavino.

### MB&F and Sage Vaughn Horological Machine No2

Lot 25, a one-off collaboration between watchmaker Maximilian Busser of MB&F and American artist Sage Vaughn, was one of the most aesthetically striking and technically demanding of all the unique creations made for the auction. This special version of MB&F’s Horological Machine No2 (HM2) was bought by an anonymous Hong Kong collector for 58,000 euros.

HM2, the second timepiece – or machine – from MB&F, debuted last year. It has been described as a highly sophisticated micro-mechanical work of art that looks like a space station. “As far as I’m aware, this is the most complicated watchcase in the history of watch-making,” says Busser. “There are 102 components that go into the assembly of the case alone.” The movement, created by Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, comprises 349 parts.

## MB&F AND SAGE VAUGHN HM2

**Case** 18-carat white gold and titanium with sapphire 'double dome' glass

**Dials** Brushed sapphire for minutes and date, black disks for hours and moon phase

**Functions** Retrograde date and bi-hemisphere moon phase (left); jumping hours and concentric retrograde minutes

**Artist's sculpture** Blackened 18-carat gold barbed wire; blued 18-carat gold butterfly on movement bridge

**Dimensions** 59mm by 38mm by 13mm (exclusive of crown and lugs)

**Strap** Black hand-stitched alligator skin



For the Only Watch HM2, the case top was opened up so the movement parts can be viewed through sapphire glass. Two domes on the elongated rectangular face shelter the complications—retrograde date and northern and southern hemispheres moon phases on the left and instantaneous jumping hour and retrograde minutes on the right. "The jumping hour doesn't use up any energy," says Busser. "It is the energy of the minutes flying back which powers it, and that's why it's totally synchronised and has close to no effect on precision. It's an extremely well regulated timepiece."

Sage imprisoned the components with handmade 18-carat gold barbed wire and added one of his favourite motifs, a butterfly crafted of blued gold, to the bridge. He also signed the back of the titanium case, which is also engraved with the words 'Only

Watch – Piece Unique' and reveals a specially blued 22-carat gold 'double-axe' rotor.

"The HM2 has been softened, making it less machine-like and much more emotional," explains Busser, who was "extremely moved" when he saw a film Luc Pettavino made with his son. He vowed "to create something that has meaning even if it is going to shock" and felt Los Angeles-based Vaughn, who rarely wears a watch, was the right man to decorate this project. "Sage has gone through a lot in his life. [After seven years as a heroin addict] he is back from the dead and his art is his redemption. His message, though often disturbing, is clear: it is the tension between the innocence of childhood – the child he was – and the harsh reality of life. That really strikes a chord with me in the context of children suffering from Duchenne muscular dystrophy."

## MB&F HM3

HM3 with twin cones rising from a sculptured three-dimensional case is the third 'machine' from Busser and friends. It comes in two versions – Starcruiser (cones in line with the arm) and Sidewinder (cones perpendicular to the arm). The twin cones indicate hours and minutes respectively, with the hour cone capped by a day/night indicator. An oversized date wheel has large legible numbers with the date indicated by a neatly engraved triangle on the perimeter.

A highly complex machine, it comprises more than 300 fine-finished, high-precision components. The movement, designed by Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, is turned upside down, with the bridges, rapidly oscillating balance wheel, gearing and distinctive battle-axe shaped automatic winding rotor all open to view. The three-dimensional time-indicating cones can be read at a glance – nothing like them has been attempted before in the history of horology. Watching this mesmerising watch is like enjoying open-air theatre.

**Case** 18-carat white gold and titanium or 18-carat red gold and titanium

**Dial** Sapphire crystal cones and display backs

**Functions** Hour and day/night indicator on one cone; minutes on second cone; date around the movement

**Dimensions** 47mm by 50mm by 16mm (exclusive of crown and lugs)

**Strap** Black hand-stitched alligator skin





### Watchmakers' Friend

Famed Paris-based watch retailer, consultant and aficionado Laurent Piccioto is pictured with the MB&F HM3. Piccioto, who has collaborated with several leading watchmakers to create exclusive timepieces for his company, Chronopassion, started a trend when he was photographed with Richard Mille for the 'Mille Bravos' advertising campaign. Now other leading industry figures, including Maximilian Busser, have invited him to pose with their watches.



### MB&F HM2.2 BLACK BOX

The newest novelty from this unconventional brand is a limited edition version of HM2. With a Bauhaus-style, pure-lined case made of silicium PVD-coated titanium by French artistic watch designer Alain Silberstein, HM2.2 is nicknamed the black box. While retaining the twin porthole dials and flying-buttress lugs of HM2, Silberstein's creation is less science-fiction shock and more 1940s miniature box camera whimsy. A tiny inscription on the side states (in French) the watch architect's motto: "True happiness is having one's passion for a profession." Only eight pieces will be made.