

Maximilian Büsser and his watchmaker friends
introduce a dynamic "horological machine"

Kinetic Sculpture

BY IAN SKELLERN



Jean Tinguely (1925-1991) was an internationally renowned Swiss kinetic artist who constructed moving metal sculptures with no obvious purpose but to both amuse and challenge the viewer as their various components maneuvered (apparently) haphazardly through space. Tinguely's playful attitude toward movement in art left a rich legacy of machines that leave you scratching your head working out just what it is they do . . . which is probably just what they were designed to do.

MB&F's horological machines have a much more focused purpose than Tinguely's sculptures. However, listening to Maximilian Büsser describe the philosophy of his new brand, MB&F—Maximilian Büsser and Friends—and handling the kinetic sculpture that is Horological Machine No.1, left me thinking that Jean Tinguely's spirit lives on . . . albeit in a much more sophisticated and miniaturized form.

Büsser characterizes MB&F's timepieces as machines which tell the time rather than machines to tell the time. The subtle distinction may appear moot, but it is crucial to the understanding of MB&F's horological machines. Like Tinguely's sculptures, MB&F's timepieces are first and foremost mechanical art; they are superbly designed and crafted kinetic sculptures for the wrist and, as an added bonus, they also tell the time.

Maximilian Büsser

After an extremely successful 14-year career at the top of the corporate world of Swiss watchmaking—seven years in senior management at Jaeger-LeCoultre followed by seven years as managing director of Harry Winston



Maximilian Büsser

Rare Timepieces—Maximilian Büsser appears to have made quite a radical change in direction by stepping away from the security of large brands into the uncertainty of creating his own company.

However, a closer examination of Büsser's corporate career reveals that he has always been an entrepreneur, a dynamic builder of brands, and that MB&F is a natural progression along a horological path Büsser began straight out of university.

On finishing his master's degree in micro-technology engi

The central tourbillon has been elevated to allow a full view of its superbly finished mechanism —kinetic art in action!

slowly took root: Why not create a company solely dedicated to designing and crafting small series of radical concept watches and doing so with talented professionals he respected and enjoyed working with? Initially it appeared a utopian dream; however, the more he thought about it the more Büsser became determined to make this visionary dream come true.

While the MB&F aspiration slowly took shape, it was the idea for Horological Machine No.1 that really started the ball rolling.

In 2003, while flying back home to Geneva from Asia, Büsser began doodling. The resulting sketch was an idea for a very different type of timepiece: two overlapping circles. One half representing his part of the timepiece and the other a place an independent watchmaker could play. The two-dimensional doodle did not stay two-dimensional for very long. Before the plane landed an unusual and extremely three-dimensional case shape took form . . . a form still very recognizable as the case-shape of the resulting premiere watch called HM1. The sketch may well have become the basis for another Opus watch. But as the validity of the concept behind MB&F became clearer the project took on a dynamic of its own.



“Try to find your own path, because you will always do better at what you enjoy doing,” was the advice his father had given him. Büsser resigned from Harry Winston and MB&F was born.

The first Friend on board was watch designer Eric Giroud who spent hundreds of hours turning Büsser’s ideas and sketches into workable technical plans. The HM1 collective continued to grow as other vital skills and talents were needed. Büsser’s directive for the team was to

explore horology with no limits and no taboos: just passion, soul and emotion.

A glance at Horological Machine No.1 leaves no doubt that Maximilian Büsser and his friends have done just what they set out to do. It should be noted that Büsser’s Friends are more than a few close acquaintances with whom he decided to make watches. Büsser’s Friends include some of the most ingenious, dedicated and skilled horological professionals in the world. →

MB&F has not simply stepped outside a familiar room. It has left the planet!

**Horological Machine
No.1 – HM1**

If, when looking at the images of HM1 your reaction goes along the lines of, “I don’t like it.” “I just don’t get it.” or, “That’s not what I call a watch,” then you are fairly likely to be in good com-

pany. HM1 is a challenging and polarizing timepiece: you either loathe it or love it; there appears to be no middle ground.

There is a reason most wristwatches are classical, round and basically two-dimensional: this is what the majority of poten-

tial clients are comfortable with. Stepping outside of the familiar, traditional form is a risk, even for a large, established brand. Here, MB&F has not simply stepped outside the familiar room. . .it has left the planet! And it is not enough to simply feel comfortable

A totally original movement like no other. Note the torsion plates on the side for increased rigidity and the “Ninja” inspired rotor.





The case of the HM1 is a true three-dimensional architecturally inspired work of art. Note the fine details, such as the custom-designed hexagonal screws.

Bearing in mind Büsser's work with Halter on the radical Opus 3 for Harry Winston, this is not surprising. Horological Machine No.1 is "2000 Leagues Under the Sea" meets "2001: A Space Odyssey," or Jules Verne meets George Lucas.

Close-up

The closer you examine the meticulous design details the more you are rewarded with appreciation for the work that has gone into the conception and construction of this sophisticated and complex artifact of wearable-art. The sides of the case slope inwards from the top and there is a recessed band at the bottom; these elements combine to reduce the visual size of the case.

Notice the bespoke case screws and how the shape of the case dictates that the movement must be positioned in place from the top. The three-dimensionality of the case is complemented by the multiple strata of the dial and indications. Hour and minute dials are separated by a central tourbillon elevated so that it sits proudly above the dial, allowing a view into the very center of the movement.

And what a movement! An all-new caliber is a major affair (and an enormous investment) for the largest of watch brands. But MB&F has not simply developed one of the most unusual and

with the unusual shape; HM1 virtually slaps the viewer in the face with a provocative challenge to be understood and fully appreciated.

This inevitable polarization is very much part of the underlying philosophy of MB&F: anti-marketing-driven, anti-fashion-led and anti-commercial. MB&F's horological machines are mechanical art crafted to please their creators; it is more an artist's creative label than a watch brand.

With its 376 parts, 81 functional jewels, four mainspring

barrels, hour and minutes displayed on separate dials and an elevated central tourbillon, HM1 lacks nothing when it comes to exceptional horological engineering. But it is the imposing architectural look of the case that first catches the eye, a case seamlessly blending art, sculpture, engineering, architecture, micro-mechanics and haute horlogerie.

The case details and design bring to my mind a few of the elements from Vianney Halter's Futur Anterior (Future Past) collection.

avant-garde movements in existence, it will also only be producing one hundred of them over the next three years.

The collaboration of movement designer/engineer Laurent Besse and AHCI member Peter Speake-Marin resulted in an incredibly innovative and uniquely engineered design. In addition it is a movement that Peter Speake-Marin has ensured is second to none when it comes to traditional fine levels of finish and quality.

HM1 sports four massive mainspring barrels in parallel—a world first in a wristwatch. A very special feature of the four barrels—and another world first—is that the two on the left are wound directly from the Ninja-weapon looking rotor while the two on the right are wound directly from the crown. Configuring the four parallel barrels so that power is equally distributed between all barrels—around the tourbillon—called for the

development of a sophisticated beryllium gear train. This was just one of a multitude of out-of-the-box horological solutions the HM1 team invented.

It was possible for the four mainspring barrels to provide up to fifteen days of power; however, the MB&F team decided to use smaller mainsprings. While this lowered the power autonomy to a still impressive seven days, the lower torque decreases wear and stress while increasing movement longevity, reliability and isochronism.

Another technical hurdle overcome: the hour and minute hands are on separate dials situated on separate sides of the movement, with a narrow waist and a tourbillon restricting the path between them. Connecting the hours and

minutes for time-telling and time-setting required an ultra-flat, oversized wheel, centrally located under the dial. Too thin to support itself from its central axis, this wheel ingeniously floats between layers of precision-adjusted jewels.

With a length of 41mm, width of 64mm and height of 14mm, Horological Machine No.1 has Presence with a capital P. That said, the fact that the case is wide rather than long makes it a very comfortable wearing timepiece on the wrist. HM1 is available in either a white gold or red gold case with a choice of silver or dark-gray dials. For such an original, exciting and innovative work of kinetic art, crafted in such limited quantities, prices start at approximately \$140,000 excluding taxes.

And HM1 is just the beginning for MB&F: Horological Machines 2, 3 and 4 are already in development, each with different teams/Friends, complications and case-shapes.

Jean Tinguely would approve. ☺

In the foreground, the gear train for the 7-day Power Reserve indicator transmits the state of wind of the four massive mainspring barrels.