

PROFILE



Pandamonium

MAXIMILIAN BUSSER'S INTRICATE DEVICES ARE MORE LIKE WORKS OF ART THAN MERE WATCHES, DISCOVERS **DUANGPORN CHOKTIPPATTANA**

AIR BEAR

MB&F's HM4 Only Watch will be up for auction this month



IN 2005 THE COMPANY MB&F (MAXIMILIAN Busser and Friends) – Horological Lab was founded to create what its founder, Maximilian Busser, describes as “three-dimensional machines that tell time. They are deconstructions of traditional watch movements – which are flat – into contemporary sculptural arts.” The company debuted with the mindbending Horological Machine No 1 (HM1), constructed from 376 components while boasting two dials elevated on multiple levels and a raised tourbillon. With the success of a few such remarkable timepieces, the entrepreneur decided it was time to help others by joining forces with the Monegasque

Association against Muscular Dystrophies (AMM).

In 2009 MB&F began participating in AMM's charity auction, Only Watch, by creating a limited-edition timepiece to raise funds for research into Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The HM2 Only Watch was launched, where barbed wire and a butterfly with clipped wings were added to the brand's existing HM2 watch. This month, Busser will reveal the HM4 Only Watch at the biennale auction as it returns to Monaco. In collaboration with Chinese artist Huang Hankang, an 18K gold miniature panda was mounted on MB&F's aviation-inspired HM4 Thunderbolt timepiece. “The only way boys can escape from this illness is to dream of flying. To Huang the panda represents childhood and peace. To me it is a teddy bear loved by all kids,” the chief creative officer says. And in contrast to the afflicted child gradually losing control of his muscles, the panda appears to be mastering his destiny by piloting the jet with reins crafted from gold filaments. Through this piece, Busser hopes to engage and inspire people to act for a good cause.

The 44-year-old asserts, “I received help when I least expected it in the last 20 years. So today I will go out of my way to help others.” Swiss-Indian Busser earned a master's in micro technology engineering from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in 1991. For the next six years he joined watchmaker Jaeger-LeCoultre and oversaw its product development and sales. In 1998 he moved to Harry Winston before deciding to gamble his savings on starting his own venture. As MB&F progressed, so did its founder's creativity. In 2007 the HM3 was released, the shape of its dial resembling the frogs that he loved watching during his childhood. “I let my head and hands govern the designing of all pieces. I only realise afterwards that every sketch tells a story which is intimately linked to my past,” he recounts. “I had an unhappy childhood. These watches are my autobiography and psychotherapy, helping me to settle with the past.”

The HM 4 Thunderbolt arrived in 2010, this time being a tribute to his early fascination with assembling model aircraft. Three years of working with Laurent Besse and Beranger Reynard of Les Artisans Horologers resulted in a machine powered by 311 parts. The dials culminate in two jet turbine-inspired pods, one indicating the power reserve and the other the time. “A piece of the sapphire display panel on the central case took 185 hours to shape, while the titanium in the back case required 60 hours. If the Thunderbolt hadn't sold, we'd have been bankrupt,” Busser confides. Fortunately its waiting list goes well into next year, given that only 25 pieces are available annually. “Its success gave me the courage to create even wilder pieces,” he reveals.

Towards the end of 2011, Busser plans to open an art gallery in Geneva. “My watches will be displayed alongside other similar mechanical artworks,” he concludes. “To be creative, you have to enrich your life with many experiences.”