

# *Jean-Vincent Huguenin*

## *Master Engraver & Creator of automatons*

### **Birth of a vocation**

You would have liked a classic lineage, a long and noble dynasty of watchmakers and engravers; you would have liked to hear the regular tick-tock of that pendulum in Neuchâtel which was the metronome in the heart of Jean-Vincent Huguenin, the future engraver & creator of automatons. How surprising. In the 1990s, Jean-Vincent Huguenin – musician and composer – travelled throughout Europe. He performed in the most prestigious concert halls, including the Wienerkonzertsaal in Vienna and the Mozarteum in Salzburg.

At the invitation of Charte 77, he even undertook secret tours in Hungary and Czechoslovakia (where Václav Havel was incarcerated at the time). Music was his first means of artistic and political expression. In 2000, Jean-Vincent Huguenin won the European Guitar Award. This combination of sensitivity and virtuosity is the trademark of his every action. You will admit that some people acquire a great number of talents. Between his concerts, recitals and recordings, Jean-Vincent Huguenin would “escape” to la Chaux-de-Fonds to attend the School of Applied Arts. And there he decided to become an engraver! At the age of 22, he already had his diploma.

### **Engraving**

*“The style is the man”*: an artist expresses his own personality through a unique style of writing, composing or drawing. The artist thereby distinguishes himself from the craftsman, who reproduces tried-and-tested models while the artist creates new ones bearing his own mark. Jean-Vincent Huguenin, hand engraver & creator of automatons, is

both *a craftsman & an artist*. An independent artist, he is part of a dynasty of watchmakers – his father was a press tool maker while his grandfather was a watchmaker – and engravers dating back two centuries, from whom he inherited the know-how, the workbench and the tools. His years of training at the School of Applied Arts allowed him to acquire the confident and precise dexterity essential to the perfection of his work: engraving with a burin on areas the size of a watch casing, an oscillating mass or an ornate dial is high-precision work where no line can be redrawn.

Jean-Vincent Huguenin is an artist: his creations are based on original drawings, sometimes using living models. In the profession, he is one of the few people who combine this mastery of drawing with the mastery of engraving techniques; he is an engraver in full control of his style, in both senses of the word – artistic and technical for, originally, *style* meant a metallic punch used to write or draw, in an indented manner, on tablets coated with wax.

### **The anachronism of time**

Today, nothing is more precious than time. What luxury can be greater than owning a unique timepiece? Jean-Vincent Huguenin has the – rare – ability of bringing that touch of individuality to the mechanisms of the greatest watchmakers. The Master Engraver begins by producing sketches and preparatory designs; he alters and reworks them as many times as necessary. Only then does he begin the delicate work of engraving, using a burin, on the different components of the watch.

Each creation is different and requires all the talent and attention of Jean-Vincent Huguenin for about one month. Fewer than twenty unique pieces leave his workshop every year; the portrait of a loved one, abstract or realist patterns, risqué scenes or illustrations making the watch an intimate and exclusive object. Owning an ornate watch carefully decorated by this artist means belonging to one of the most privileged circles there are.

## **Collaboration on a human scale**

Since 1995, Jean-Vincent Huguenin has worked in close collaboration with Félix Baumgartner, watchmaker and founder of the URWERK house, who, together with the designer Martin Frei, has rethought watches, in particular the time display, in a series of innovative creations which are at the heart of the growing renown of this house today. Part of this exclusive production (some 150 pieces/year) is devoted to the creation of unique, engraved models.

In 2006, this collaboration came to fruition with the launch of a range of engraved watches: URWERK - J.-V. Huguenin. Through a number of unique pieces, these original creations pay homage to the great civilisations which were fascinated by man and the measurement of time: China, Sumer, the city of Ur (the very origin of URWERK), Egypt, etc.

## **Risqué watches**

Jean-Vincent Huguenin is one of the rare craftsmen to keep one of the most secret traditions of Swiss luxury timepieces alive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: that of erotic automatic watches. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, from Geneva to la Chaux-de-Fonds, pocket watches were produced in secret, on the backs of which were hidden licentious scenes animated by the same mechanism as was used for the watch hands. They were the delight of wealthy enthusiasts from around the world. Hidden in a secret compartment under a false base, these scenes involved up to a dozen articulated parts. The work of the engraver and creator of automatons is a real feat: he must imagine and draw the libertine scene, design the animation and engrave it in solid gold, highlighting its relief, its depth and its curves! In 1992, Jean-Vincent Huguenin contributed to the renaissance of this licentious form of Swiss watchmaking and, in collaboration with Blancpain, developed the first wristwatch with erotic automation. The extreme miniaturisation of these risqué scenes was

a world first. The subjects represented by the engraver and creator of automatons are as diverse and varied as has been original sin itself since it was discovered by Adam and Eve. And what a contrast between the obverse and reverse of the watch; one face so classical and pure showing the time, and the other using so many devices to hide scenes which would normally be confined to the bed sheets! The visible side carries the inscription *Pièce unique* (unique timepiece)! Remember that the next time you see this innocent inscription. Is it his talent as a musician/guitarist which allows the engraver/creator of automatons to create such beautiful harmonies? Who knows?

To find out more about this surprising art, contact Jean-Vincent Huguenin, Master Engraver & Creator of Automatons: he will tell you all... if it is not already related here.