

MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL D'HORLOGERIE

LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS / SUISSE / MA-DI / 10H-17H

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ARTISANS
DU
TEMPS

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PRESS RELEASE

ARTISANS DU TEMPS THIRTY YEARS OF THE ACADEMIE HORLOGERE DES CREATEURS INDEPENDANTS

In 2015, the Académie horlogère des créateurs indépendants (AHCI) is commemorating its 30th anniversary. To celebrate this event, the Musée international d'horlogerie is welcoming the AHCI and devoting an exhibition to exploring its history, of which the museum, the home of the association's archives since 2009, is already the custodian.

In the space of thirty years, the AHCI has achieved a leading status in the modern world of watchmaking, as evidenced by the many awards won by the Académie and its members. Within this world, it upholds a vision of watchmaking as an art form and promotes the values of independence, excellence, creativity and innovation, both technical and aesthetic. While the notion of the "academy" brings to mind the symposia of philosophers in the Classical world, it also harks back to the learned societies which, in the eighteenth century, saw watchmakers take up the fight to gain social and intellectual recognition for their expertise.

Beginnings

The Académie was founded on the idea of creating a community of independent watchmakers who wished to showcase their creations through exhibitions. On 8th September 1984, an "Appeal to all artists and craftsmen working in watchmaking" was launched in the trade press. Its authors, the independent watchmakers Vincent Calabrese and Svend Andersen, shared the same concerns about the difficulties faced by watchmakers wishing to develop and sell their own products independently.

The AHCI in dates

1985	Founding of the AHCI; exhibition at the Le Locle Watchmaking Museum (June-September)
1986	AHCI's first attendance of the Basel trade fair
1995	Anniversary exhibition at the Le Locle Watchmaking Museum (June-September)
2000	To celebrate its 25th anniversary, the AHCI published <i>The Hands of Time</i> , a work conceived by Peter Speake-Marin and written by Ian Skellern
2009	Archives of the AHCI first deposited in the Musée international d'horlogerie
2010	The AHCI receives the Special Jury Prize at the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève

Organisation

With a structure unique in the industry, the AHCI is an institution with almost no hierarchy. The articles of association which govern it allow it a flexible approach to accepting members. The Académie currently has around forty members. Membership, which is fee-based, is open to independent watchmakers of any nationality; the key criterion is the assessment of pieces designed by the watchmaker.

The AHCI's articles of association define a "code of honour" governing the conduct of each member, as in the learned societies of the past. A watchmaker who is a member of the AHCI is not necessarily obliged to take part in the entire manufacturing process, but he or she must have produced at least a part of the work or significantly transformed some of its components.

Independence

In the 1980s, the watchmaking industry was in crisis. The first to feel its effects, independents had to struggle to survive, with only dim prospects for maintaining their autonomy. Now, being independent has become a way of differentiating yourself within a watchmaking industry monopolised by a few large industrial groups.

While assumed to have full control of all stages in the manufacture of their creations, due to the high costs of producing in very small quantities, independents tend not to create every part of their works themselves. They procure blanks or components from other manufacturers.

If they meet with great success, many independent companies adopt a strategy of industrial growth, sooner or later attracting offers from larger brands or powerful groups wishing to buy them out, providing competition for the independents.

Mediatisation

For many years, the AHCI has enjoyed broad media coverage, bolstered by the regular exhibitions that it organises. Having attended trade fairs and shows since its first appearance at the Basel trade fair in 1987, the AHCI has an exhibition space and a label which its members can make use of.



AHCI at Basel trade in 1987, © AHCI

On the one hand, exhibitions stimulate innovation and invite emulation. On the other, they create a certain amount of competition between members. Of course, the exhibitors are representing the AHCI, but above all, they represent their own brands and their own strategy to position themselves within a "hand-made" market which is both competitive and increasingly popular.

Nowadays, pieces created by independent watchmakers are aimed at a wealthy clientèle wishing to form links with an artisan rather than a brand. Independence, creativity and intricate manual work are all sales arguments which distinguish this craft from high-end industrial production.

Heritage

The Académie does not have any premises or a training programme. Nevertheless, its members undertake to pass on their expertise. This takes place directly in the workshops. By regularly accepting new members, approved by their peers, the Académie promotes the passing on of the craft by ensuring certain codes and practices are adhered to. It encourages watchmakers to work on their behalf, with the aim of fostering creativity within technical construction. Any competition that may result between members reinforces this state of mind.

The fact that the independents work within a watchmaking tradition, as symbolised by their exhibitions in the museums, reflects a need for institutional recognition which grows year on year. Eight members of the Académie have been awarded the Musée international d'horlogerie's Prix Gaïa for craftsmanship/creation. The AHCI has received the Special Jury Prize at the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève 2010, the year of its 25th anniversary. In addition, seventeen works by members of the AHCI have received awards at the Grand Prix de Genève.

The application that Switzerland will send UNESCO in a few years' time to have mechanical watchmaking expertise enshrined in the list of mankind's intangible cultural heritage will place independent watchmakers at the heart of the history of Swiss watchmaking tradition.

With the participation of

Members

Svend Andersen
Felix Baumgartner
Aaron Becsei
Vincent Calabrese
Konstantin Chaykin
Miki Eleta
Paul Gerber
Beat Haldimann
Vianney Halter
Marc Jenni
Frank Jutzi
Xushu Ma

Rainer Nienaber
Aniceto Jimenez Pita
Thomas Prescher
Antoine Prezioso
Andreas Strehler
Christiaan van der Klaauw
Kari Voutilainen
Peter Wibmer
Philippe Wurtz

Candidates

Andreas Fritsch
Raúl Pagès

Invitees

Christophe Claret
Greubel & Forsey

Photographs



Montre aux heures du monde "1884",
Svend Andersen, 2004



Montre-bracelet "Esprit Platine", Vincent
Calabrese, 1989



Détail de la pendule de table "Tourbillon n°1", Aaron Becsei



Montre de poche tourbillon "GP1", Kari
Voutilainen



Dessin montre bracelet "UR-105M",
Felix Baumgartner



Montre bracelet "Trio", Vianney Halter



Montre bracelet "Lunokhod", Konstantin Chaykin



Montre bracelet "Papillon", Andreas
Strehler, 2008

Other photographs on demand

Practical information

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