

Miki Eleta - THE PICASSO OF

ELABORATE DESIGNS BY THE SELF-TAUGHT INDEPENDENT CLOCKMAKER - WHOSE FIRST CREATION WAS 'UGLY AS HELL' - ARE SOUGHT AFTER BY COLLECTORS WORLDWIDE

WORDS DEBBIE HATHWAY

Yugoslavian-born Miki Eleta, a former football coach, musician and kinetic artist with a background in the social sciences, decided rather late in life – because of a chance encounter – to pursue a career as a clockmaker.

After relocating to Switzerland as a young man, he lived more than half his life in the heart of watchmaking territory without entering the industry, until an opportunity arose through a bet. "About 23 years ago, when I was around 50, I was looking for new things to do – despite a busy programme – so I developed a kinetic mechanism for a clock," says Miki.

When he presented this work, called Chaos, at an exhibition, a visitor who did not understand the machine described the work as "raw" and said he could never make anything "precise". Miki accepted this challenge and promised to deliver a clock in a year, duly presenting and selling it immediately, even though he said it was "ugly as hell".

While the inventor of the clock and the date of its invention are unknown, author GH Baillie writes in his book *Watches* that the date is probably near the end of the 13th century. Because the use of the same word – *horologium*, *orologio*, *reloge*, *uhr*, etc – by different nationalities for a sundial, water clock, sandglass, hour bell and clock, makes it difficult to interpret the records, some writers take it as far back as the ninth century.

Miki's approach to clockmaking, which was entirely self-taught over almost three decades, is underpinned by artistic achievements in the kinetic space. Some of his notable artworks include the fountain at the Musée International de l'Horlogerie's entrance in La Chaux-de-Fonds and a captivating kinetic sculpture featuring musical harlequins above the entrance to the CIMA (Centre International de la Mécanique d'Art) museum in Sainte-Croix, Switzerland. Additionally, his work has been showcased at the MB&F MAD Gallery in Geneva.



CLOCKMAKING



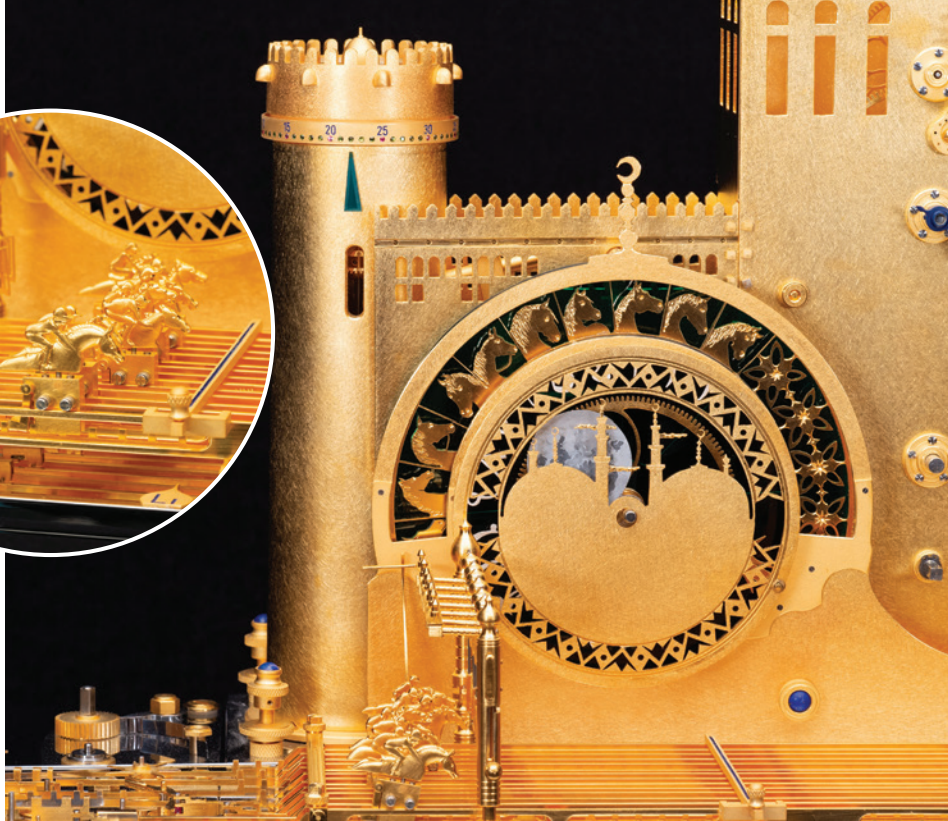
Miki's most recent accolade is the nomination of his exceptional work, *The Passage of Time*, in the Mechanical Clock category of the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève (GPHG) Awards 2022. The clock (previous page), which took 10 months to complete, is 70cm high and weighs about 20kg. With 28 complications, it has an eight-day power reserve. Features include an hour display (sun for the day, moon for the night), a retrograde minute display, a day-of-the-week display, 365 days, date and zodiac signs, moon phase and universal time, and a figure that raises his left arm and lowers his head to read the time approximately every 20 seconds. "The philosophy refers to today's always-stressed people," says Miki. Each piece is handcrafted from brass or steel before being sent for gold or chrome plating.

"For me, a clock is much more than just a timepiece. Through its shape and message, I can pass on some of my experience in making it. The joy of precise movements, of sounds, of harmonic shapes, and of the inexhaustible possibilities to answer the questions: What exactly is a clock, what do we want to express with it, and how must the mechanics work?", says Miki.

He likes to arouse curiosity with his creations, and enjoys having customers who don't know exactly what to expect until they see the final product in front of them. "I make the clock and try to create a 'wow' effect. If you like it, I'm happy. But it's important that the work of art has a character, a message. It's not about money, it's about art. It's more about me being an artist. I feel what I want to do," he says.

Long-time friend, industry expert and translator for this interview, Kurt Kupper, explains that Miki personally delivers the final product, no matter where the customer is. "He takes it with him on the plane, on the seat next to him, ensuring that it's delivered safely and everything works perfectly on site. It's a different approach. Emotional. He's not selling you a product – he's trusting you with his baby. He puts it in your hands," says Kurt.

Miki loves the challenge of clockmaking and is not afraid of failure, calling his experience fascinating, playful and adventurous. "He's a talented artist who likes to be at the workbench. His studio in Zurich is fantastic. Because he does everything himself, it's chaotic. Creative chaos – but he says he finds everything," laughs Kurt. ■



WHEN TIME AND ART COLLIDE

PERFORMANCE ART: A finalist in the Mechanical Clocks category of the GPHG Awards, the *Éveil du Cyclamen* by Van Cleef & Arpels (below left) is priced at a jaw-dropping CHF 2,580,000. This unique work of art, created in partnership with the François Junod workshop, is about 30cm tall. Inspired by nature, it combines the reading of time on the base with a magical spectacle: the opening of a flower on demand, revealing a butterfly inside. Its wings move realistically, batting a few seconds at a time for a natural rhythm leading to a meticulously researched take-off. The butterfly then returns to its place at the centre of the flower, triggering the gentle closing of the petals. Specially composed crystalline music accompanies the flower's opening and closing scenes.

EXCEPTIONAL MOTORS: This dome table clock (20149M-001 "Racing Cars", below middle), featured in Patek Philippe's Rare Handcrafts Exhibition 2023, is a unique piece in Grand Feu cloisonné enamel, conjuring up all the excitement and panache of sports car motor racing along mountain roads from the 1940s to 1960s. The artist used approximately 8.17m of 0.2mm x 0.6mm gold wire and 71 enamel colours for the car and figure contours. Each enamelled plate required eight to 12 firings at temperatures between 890°C and 900°C. The unique hour circle, resembling a steering wheel, was made from amboyna burl and has 12 hour markers. Pierced rhodium-plated hands add racing-inspired elements and a rhodium-plated, engine-turned dashboard recalls the interiors of classic cars. A leather-clad seat completes the motoring theme.

EXTRAORDINARY MECHANISM: Jaeger-LeCoultre's Atmos Hybris Mechanica Calibre 590 (below right), nicknamed Atmos Tellurium, features a groundbreaking complication that closely replicates the Earth, sun, and moon cycles in three dimensions and real-time precision. A unique perpetual clock that runs on air, it's the most intricate Atmos clock ever created. Blending precision and aesthetics, it inspired the artisans of the maison's Métiers Rares® atelier to decorate it with techniques like miniature-painting, laser-engraving, lacquer-work, and meteorite inlay. It took more than four years of research and development to reach this pinnacle of precision and design, making this clock a remarkable timekeeping device and an artistic masterpiece.



IMAGES SUPPLIED



A CELEBRATION OF Coco Chanel



On until 25 February 2024 at London's Victoria & Alfred Museum and presented in partnership with Palais Galliera – the Fashion Museum of the City of Paris – and Paris Musées, the exhibition charts the evolution of Chanel's iconic style and the establishment of the House of Chanel. Visitors will see it all – from the opening of Chanel's first millinery boutique in Paris in 1910 to the showing of Coco's final collection in 1971.

Coco Chanel's pioneering approach to fashion design – which included designing first and foremost for herself, creating clothes suited to independent and active lifestyles – paved the way for a new elegance. Her introduction of minimalism and precision in clothing – and the iconic little black dress – have stood the test of time, and continue to influence the way women dress today.

"Gabrielle Chanel devoted her life to creating, perfecting and promoting a

GABRIELLE CHANEL. FASHION MANIFESTO IS THE FIRST UK-BASED EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO PIONEERING DESIGNER AND THE PROFOUND IMPACT HER WORK HAD ON THE WORLD OF FASHION



new kind of elegance based on freedom of movement, a natural and casual pose, a subtle elegance that shuns all extravagances, and a timeless style for a new kind of woman. That was her fashion manifesto, a legacy that has never gone out of style," says director of the Palais Galliera, Miren Arzalluz. "Her success was based not only on the functionality, comfort and chic elegance of her designs, but also on her ability to grasp and interpret the needs and desires of the women of her time."

Showcasing an array of Chanel's most notable designs from her 60 years in fashion, visitors to the exhibition will be treated to almost 200 looks seen together for the first time, complete with accessories, jewellery and her iconic perfume, Chanel N°5. Ten themed sections explore Coco's innovative approach to fabrics, silhouette and construction, and illustrates how she drafted a new framework for fashion in the 20th century. Highlights include one of the earliest surviving Chanel garments from 1916, outfits created for legendary Hollywood stars Lauren Bacall and Marlene Dietrich, and ensembles from Coco Chanel's final collection.

YourLuxury will be a guest at the exhibition in January 2024. Follow updates on yourLuxury.Africa and our social media platforms. For more info on the exhibition, visit vam.ac.uk.