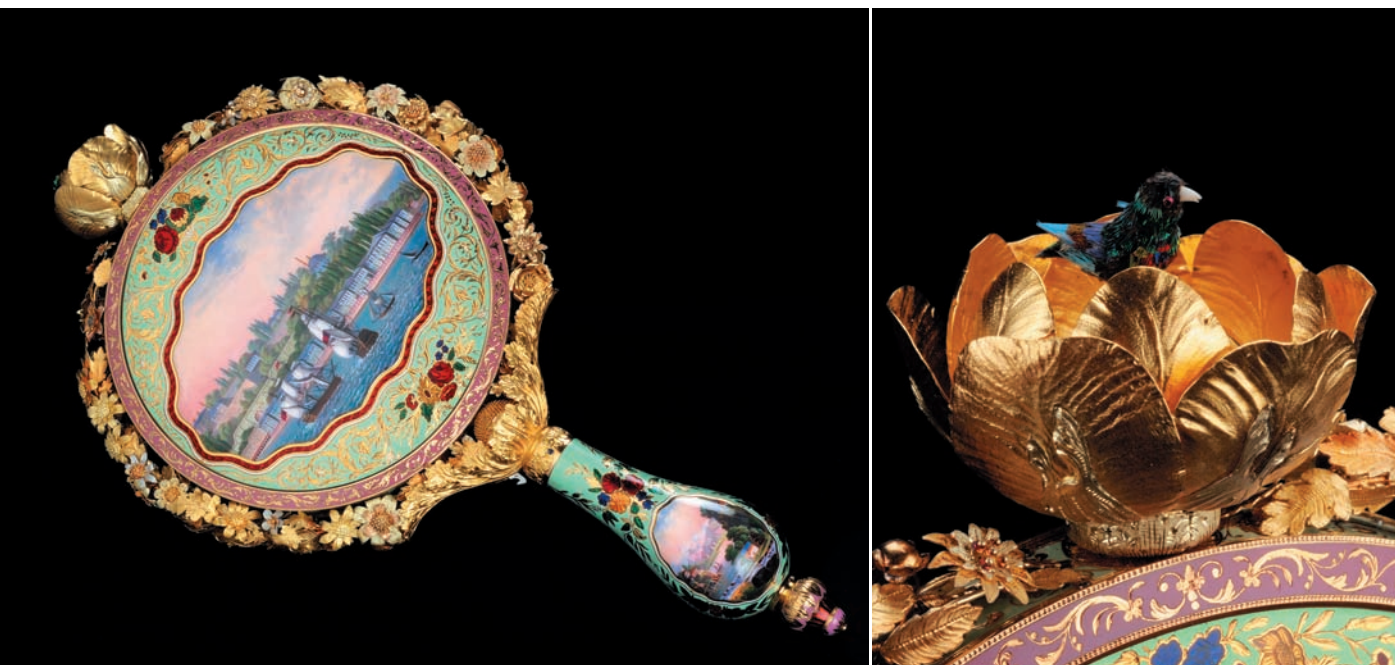


A rare view of the **Sandoz** collection



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This enameled looking glass, where a singing bird emerges from an opening rose, is a unique piece from the early 19th century.

Brigitte Rebetez

The Maurice Sandoz collection of around 100 watches and exceptional automata is being shown to the public for the first time since 1976 in an exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of the Horological Museum in Le Locle.

“They are simply brilliant!” exclaims Michel Parmigiani. The founder of the eponymous watch brand is undoubtedly one of the people most intimately acquainted with the collection, which he has been looking after for almost 30 years. Hundreds of hours have been devoted to restoring the movements of these museum pieces. Five hundred years of horological history have thus passed through the hands of Michel Parmigiani, who has thereby discovered “a constant quest for excellence and a fine match between aesthetic and technical concerns.” He gives the example of the *Miroir à oiseau chantant* (singing bird mirror) created by the Rochat Brothers in Geneva in the early 19th century. “The object is magnificently enameled and a tiny

gold rose opens to reveal a bird which pops out to sing before returning to nestle in the flower. It is simply unique,” marvels the watchmaker.

His sense of wonder can now be shared by the public until the end of October. This exhibition is a rare event, since it’s been more than 30 years since the last one was held in the museum’s Château des Monts that was so dear to Maurice Sandoz. The son of the founder of the Sandoz pharmaceutical company held a doctoral degree in chemistry and was also an author, composer and an avid collector who bequeathed 30 of his pieces to the future horological museum in his native town of Le Locle. He visited the Château des Monts on several occasions while the institution was taking shape, and helped to define the layout of the room that was to host his watches and automata. Nonetheless, the dedicated patron was not to witness the culmination of this project, since he died the year before the museum was inaugurated on May 23, 1959.



The crone that might turn into a beautiful princess lives on at the Château des Monts.

Filmed in 3D. The exhibition features innovative film technology that reveals the full range of otherwise invisible technical feats. Filmed over several months by a specialist team headed by Philippe Nicolet, the works are shown close-up and in three dimensions. Visitors can thus examine the exquisite details of a raised guilloché motif, a tiny mechanism or a delicate enamel in the watches, automata and ceremonial objects, the oldest of which date back to the Renaissance.

These exceptional objects are extremely diverse, ranging from a snuffbox disguised as a book to a singing bird in a cage. Whether unique pieces or made in two or three subtly different versions, they were generally produced by craftsmen in different areas. "The movement of a given watch might have been crafted in the Joux Valley and then finished in Geneva", explains the museum's scientific advisor, Morghan Mootoosamy. "Some watchmakers had branches in London or Germany, which

makes it hard to trace the origins of their work." He points out that, whatever their history, these works "reveal a strong heritage through magnificent gold and enamelled finishes. They help us grasp the full measure of the expertise attained by watchmakers and goldsmiths."

Organised around three main themes – games and music, nature and romanticism, jewellery and society – the exhibition has been set up with several external partners. The design was entrusted to Woodtli of Zurich and the texts to the historian Sharon Kerman. The result is a magnificent stage worthy of the exceptional pieces patiently collected by Maurice Sandoz. ●

Horological Museum of Le Locle, Château des Monts. "Masterpieces of the Sandoz collection" exhibition until October 31, 2009.