

One-off Wonders

Watch enthusiasts will gather at Only Watch 2011 in a bid to claim unique timepieces and support a good cause.



LUC PETTAVINO, a concerned parent of a teenage boy suffering from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, wanted to support research on this debilitating genetic neuromuscular condition that affects approximately 2.5 lakh boys around the globe. Pettavino founded the charity fund Monaco Association against Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy in 2001, but in order to attract attention to the cause he wanted to start a charity that went beyond the gala gathering format.

Pettavino thought of a monothematic charity auction and started by auctioning art, but in 2005, he came up with a better idea—the ‘Only Watch’ auction, where luxury watchmakers would be invited to submit sublime limited-edition pieces to attract watch connoisseurs, and thus help further medical research into Duchenne muscular dystrophy. At Only Watch, 100 per cent of the proceeds go to charity.

Devoting their expertise, technical know-how and creative resources to give shape to single-edition or first-in-a-series exceptional timepieces for the 2005

auction were more than 30 horology stalwarts such as Blancpain, Breguet, Vacheron Constantin, Audemars Piguet and Patek Philippe. This dedicated effort by each brand helped realise Pettavino’s dream as the first Only Watch charity auction raised €1.9 million. (A total of €6.8 million has been raised across the three editions of the event to date). The proceeds were donated to 18 scientific partners in five countries, namely, France, Italy, Switzerland, the UK and USA,

where teams comprising a total of 90 researchers, clinicians and chemists went on to produce a potential treatment for DMT, which underwent clinical trials. Using these funds, research has significantly progressed over the past few years and gains have been observed by the appointed scientific teams in genetic therapy.

Now, three editions old, the biennially-held Only Watch event this year will see an array of unique men’s and women’s watches go under the hammer on September 24 at Hotel Hermitage in Monaco. The sale

For the 2011 Only Watch auction, Franck Muller has created a Crazy Hours masterpiece called Totally Switzerland, which represents the Swiss residents of Monaco.

of 40 rare one-of-a-kind pieces will be orchestrated by the well-known watch auction house, Antiquorum Auctioneers. Since its inception, the event has been enjoying the patronage of Prince Albert II of Monaco.

In its modest lifespan, Only Watch has become a premier event in the diaries of watch collectors worldwide. “This project unites people and makes their energy converge. It also brings pleasure, requires creativity, research of excellence... all in a pleasant atmosphere where money is a tool to save lives,” says Pettavino. Similar to the interest shown by watchmakers for this event, watch collectors from around the world are keen to bid for these unique timepieces, with many of them being repeat bidders. According to Julien Schaerer, director, Antiquorum Auctioneers, each edition of the event sees bidders who follow the auction and are repeat buyers, including watch aficionados from India. “Typically, we do have a few Indian bidders participating in our auctions,” he says, adding that information about who these bidders might be is confidential.

Creative label MB&F (Maximilian Büsser & Friends) participated for the first time in the 2009 Only Watch event and is now a part of the upcoming edition. The

Only Watch entry by MB&F for 2009 was called ‘HM2’—it depicted a blue butterfly trapped in the complicated movement of the watch, which was surrounded by barbed wire. This work of art, where the butterfly represented innocence and hope and the barbed wire illness trapped in the child’s body, went under the hammer for €58,000. As for the coming edition, MB&F has crafted yet another emotionally-charged timepiece in what the company calls ‘performance art’—namely, the HM4 Only Watch 2011. This watch has been made in collaboration with Chinese artist Huang Hankang. Known for his take on traditional Chinese art with an emphasised use of exotic animal designs, the HM4 features a solid gold flying panda controlling the reins of the twin jet engine-inspired design of the sleek timepiece. The flying panda signifies the youthful fantasy of a boy’s dreams.

Storied watchmaker Zenith is also a part of the latest edition. “More than an event, Only Watch is a wonderful charity organisation... we have created two watches [for the event],” explains Jean-Frédéric Dufour, president and CEO, Zenith Watches. Both models, which have a proposed value of €25,000 to €30,000, are based on the El Primero movement and feature left-hand winding



Bovet Fleurier's dragon design timepiece will be part of the Only Watch auction on September 24.



and chronograph pushers that make it apt for left-handed people. However, for Van Cleef & Arpels, it is the French novel *From the Earth to the Moon* by Jules Verne that served as an inspiration. Taking a flight of fantasy, the company's artistic watch showcases a sky dotted with stars and planets made of a marquetry of fine gems and coloured enamel, and a hand-engraved rocket and moon.

On asking Schaerer if, like in every other auction, there is a standout or highlight item, the director of Antiquorum Auctioneers says, "It's a question that's almost impossible to answer. Every brand delivered a unique timepiece. The most important thing is the total contribution and not the individual result." Despite the director's reluctance to single out any one timepiece that's attracting bidder attention, there is no doubt that enthusiastic bids will come in for Richard Mille's Rafael Nadal 027, an incredibly light watch weighing less than 20 grams that has been worn by the Spanish tennis ace in every match he has played since 2010, which includes three grand slam victories. In 2005, a similar Richard Mille received the highest bid of the event at €285,000.

Despite the many vaunted watchmakers at Only Watch in 2007 and 2009, it was Patek Philippe's creations that went for the highest bids in both years.

The company's Nautilus timepiece for men sold at €525,000, while a celestial model in rose gold with date indication sold at €535,000. This year's entry is a stainless steel minute repeater with a black enamel dial and white gold numerals.

On August 26, the Only Watch 2011 collection went on a world tour, stopping over at what organisers consider "watch collecting capitals". The show will conclude on September 17 in Geneva after landing in Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Tokyo, Los Angeles, New York and Milan. This will be followed by a three-day exhibition (September 21 to September 23) at the Monaco Yacht Show, a co-organiser of Only Watch 2011, before the auction takes place on September 24.

It remains to be seen if this month's event will beat the 2007 record collection of €2.7 million. Pettavino says, "A part of me would love to organise a fifth edition in 2013, and another part of me would love for this one to be the last, meaning that we would have [found] a cure."

—AROMA SAH

Only Watch, www.onlywatch.com; *Antiquorum Auctioneers*, +41(0)22.9092.850, www.antiquorum.com; *Monaco Yacht Show*, +377.9310.4170, www.monacoyachtshow.com

From left to right: Urwerk's Phoenix watch; Van Cleef & Arpels' night sky-inspired timepiece; and Vacheron Constantin's watch with red and white doves are some of the one-of-a-kind creations for the event.