



## Press release

May 2012

### Patek Philippe Museum thematic exhibition: Timepieces signed Rousseau

From 11 May to 13 October 2012, the Patek Philippe Museum is hosting the Rousseau watchmaking dynasty

On the occasion of the three-hundredth anniversary celebrations of the birth of Jean-Jacques Rousseau organised by the City of Geneva and in the context of its "2012 Rousseau pour Tous" (Rousseau for All) programme, the Patek Philippe Museum and the Comité Européen Jean-Jacques Rousseau (CEJJR) present an exceptional exhibition. "Timepieces Signed Rousseau" is taking up residence at the Patek Philippe Museum from 11 May to 13 October 2012.

The exhibition showcases horological masterpieces from the 17<sup>th</sup> century: some thirty precious and rare timepieces from the collections of the Patek Philippe Museum, prominent museums and private collections. Constituting a vibrant tribute to the Rousseau watchmaking dynasty, they bear witness to the extraordinary manufacturing expertise of the Geneva *Fabrique*, an institution that from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards made the City of Calvin the cradle of fine watchmaking. Accompanied by a selection of archive documents, the watches on display invite visitors to discover a fascinating century where time won its spurs through the hand of man.

Under the name of the "*Fabrique*" were organised all of Geneva's jewellery and watchmaking industries, in the form of independent workshops based on the apprenticeship system and grouped together in the Saint-Gervais neighbourhood. Transmitting their know-how from generation to generation, the master watchmakers and jewellers, along with the goldsmiths, enamellers, miniaturists, engravers, chasers and other artisans of the corporation, were zealous in pursuing and developing their métiers. Jean Rousseau, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's great-grandfather, belonged to this aristocracy of craftsmen. His seven sons followed in his footsteps, some as watchmakers, others as goldsmiths, engravers or lapidaries. Thus did the Rousseau dynasty occupy the horologically related trades.

From his youngest age, Jean-Jacques used to observe his grandfather David in his watchmaker's atelier. It was there that he would realise the value of the craftsman's work. From this immersion into the precision of the act and of the mind, he developed a structural approach to thought as attested in this excerpt from *Emile*: "*I am like a man who sees an opened watch for the first time and, although he did not know the use of the machine and had not seen the dial, should not cease to admire the result. I*

*do not know, he would say, what all this is for, but I see that each piece is made for the others, I admire the craftsman in the detail of his work, and I am very sure that all these gears go thus in concert for a common end which I cannot perceive."* (Book IV, OC p. 578)

Among the works shown here, more than twenty were signed by a member of the Rousseau family. Through the variety of shapes, decorations and mechanisms is revealed the astonishing freedom of creation of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. From *memento mori* to cross-shaped watches, coach watches to complicated timepieces, all are imbued with exceptional aesthetic and technical creativity. Here a miniature enamel painting embellishes a cover; over there, a finely chased decoration graces a case. Every detail crystallises the mastery deployed by the makers of time from past centuries. In the course of the exhibition, viewers can take a swath of history to heart through the saga of the Rousseau dynasty and immerse themselves in the Age of Enlightenment: the century that, beyond the realm of pure philosophy, consecrated the artisan as the emblem of reasoning with one's hands.

Rousseau the philosopher, Rousseau the writer, Rousseau the politician, Rousseau the interdisciplinary sage... This man of greatness marked Western history and society for eternity. His convictions on liberty and intuitive conscience and on freedom of expression and thought, in addition to his analytical and contemplative sensibilities, have undeniably contributed to the aura of the city of Geneva.

The exhibition catalogue presents a collection of scientific and historical articles that provide a fresh perspective on the effervescent period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Highlighting the value of the Rousseau legacy, the authors portray a Geneva undergoing rapid expansion. A look at the Rousseau family tree reveals that Isaac Rousseau, the father of Jean-Jacques, worked as "watchmaker to the Sultan" on the banks of the Bosphorus. He studied the context of Calvin's sumptuary laws of 1558 and the organisation of the famous *Fabrique*, and followed the aesthetic evolution of watches from their beginnings until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A window opened onto a creative past, "*Timepieces Signed Rousseau*" has been set up as a place of memory. The exhibition's inauguration is taking place on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012, in the presence of Philippe Stern, honorary president of Patek Philippe; Rémy Hildebrand, president of the Comité Européen Jean-Jacques Rousseau (CEJJR); and Sami Kanaan, president of the Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Geneva.

The Comité Européen Jean-Jacques Rousseau, founded in 1995 in Geneva comprises a group of Rousseauistic authorities. Under the presidency of Rémy Hildebrand, the organisation unveils the highlights of Rousseau's life in Switzerland and in Europe. The CEJJR was the driving force behind the creation in 2002 of the Espace Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the house of his birth at 40, Grand-Rue in Geneva.

Since its opening in 2001, the Patek Philippe Museum has had on display one of the most prestigious horological collections in the world. Some 2,000 watches, automatons, precious objects and miniature portraits on enamel provide an overview of more than five centuries of the Genevan, Swiss and European watchmaking heritage.

**Opening hours:**

Tuesday–Friday: 2 p.m.–6 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Closed Sunday–Monday and on legal holidays

Public guided tours every Saturday: from 2 p.m., every 30 minutes alternately in French and English. Groups up to 30.

Private guided tours available in 8 languages by appointment. Call 022 807 09 14 or email <[visit@patekmuseum.com](mailto:visit@patekmuseum.com)>.