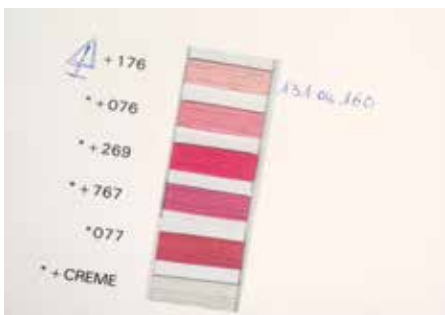




# STATE OF THE ARTS

Utilising time-honoured techniques inspired by embroidery, metalsmithing, glassworks, origami and marquetry, among others, watchmakers are imbuing 21st-century masterpieces with age-old decorative craftsmanship.

**Laurie Kahle** reports on horology's exotic *métiers*



ALTIPLANO  
38 MM

Creating the Altiplano with Yves Piaget rose embroidered dial requires six shades of silk thread and the process of *micro-peinture à l'aiguille* (needle-painting embroidery). The motif is created by first pricking the pattern into the silk base, *left on bottom row, above*, before the master embroider traces the pattern stitch by stitch, *facing page*

Before Christiaan Huygens – the Dutch mathematician, scientist and horologist – invented the balance spring in the late 17th century, watches were precious *objets d'art* more than precise timekeepers. Flaunted as badges of extreme wealth, the earliest portable timepieces were lavishly decorated with engraving, enamelling and gems, yet they had to be reset to church bells or clock towers several times each day.

After waning for decades, watchmaking's decorative arts are experiencing a 21st-century renaissance with a resurgence of extravagant treasures that harken back to their ancestors. And as this year's artistic novelties can attest, watchmakers continue to raise the creative bar with new interpretations of time-honoured crafts and exotic *métiers d'art* that previously had not been associated with horology.

The intricate craft of inlay and marquetry can be traced back to ancient Egypt and has been applied to decorate everything from furniture to *objets d'art* to watch dials over the centuries. This year, **Harry Winston** ([harrywinston.com](http://harrywinston.com)) enlisted masters of the process to create the Art Deco-infused Avenue C Precious Marquetry, combining freshwater, Tahitian, solid pink, white and beaded mother-of-pearl, the luminous nacre from the shells of pearl-producing molluscs. Artisans devote more than 50 hours to producing the multidimensional dials that layer geometric shapes and curvilinear scallops with a central triangular pattern framed by 44 brilliant-cut diamonds to highlight the hands.▶





While shimmering mother-of-pearl has been a favoured material in horology for centuries, **Cartier** ([cartier.com](http://cartier.com)) applied a decorative technique using rose petals for its unprecedented floral marquetry Ballon Bleu de Cartier 42mm Parrot watch. To create each dial of this 20-piece limited edition, artisans dye the petals and affix them to slivers of wood that are cut and shaped with a marquetry saw. The pieces are then assembled to depict a parrot's head with vibrant plumage in shades of blue, yellow and green contrasted with an onyx beak and emerald eye set against a backdrop of glittering white diamonds.

Meanwhile, **Corum** ([corum.ch](http://corum.ch)) uses actual peacock plumage to adorn the dials of a pair of new Feather Watches, which pay tribute to a 1970s classic. Craftspeople select each feather for density and stability, then clean, steam and recut it before carefully positioning it on the dial for gluing. While Harry Winston debuted feather dials in its 2012 Premier Feathers collection, *plumasserie*, or feather art, has a decades-long history at Corum.

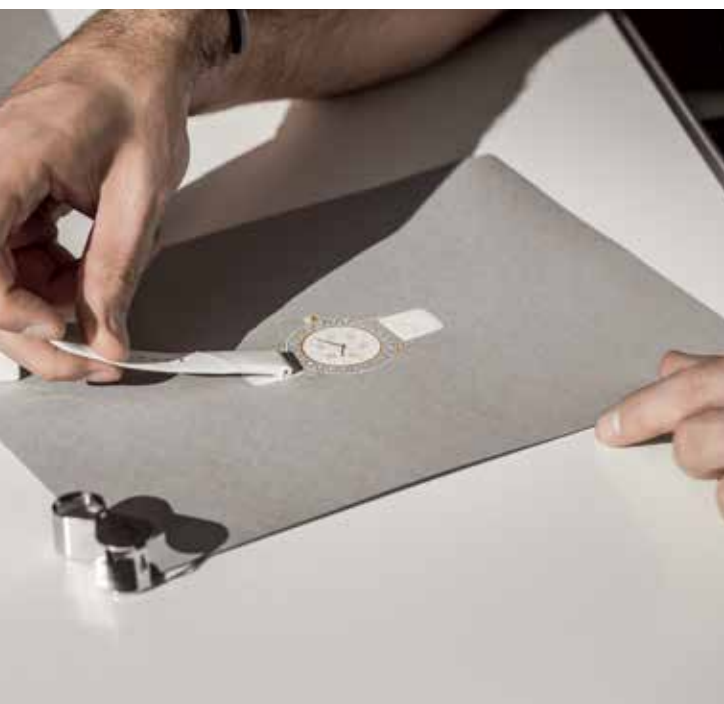
**Hermès** ([hermes.com](http://hermes.com)) ventured into uncharted creative



BALLON BLEU DE CARTIER  
PARROT WATCH



GRAND SOIR  
N°27 ORIGAMI



territory with its Arceau Millefiori models, capitalising on the considerable savoir-faire of the glass-makers at the brand's Cristalleries Royales de Saint-Louis, Europe's oldest crystal manufacturer. Saint-Louis has been crafting colourful *millefiori* paperweights since 1845, however the technique has never before been used for watches. Glass-makers create each individual "candy cane" of colourful glass inset with floral and star patterns, then fuse them together in crystal before carefully slicing the resulting cylinders into delicate dials.

A voluptuous pink Yves Piaget rose dominates the silk dial of **Piaget's** ([piaget.com](http://piaget.com)) new 38mm Altiplano, crafted using *micro-peinture à l'aiguille*, or needle-painting embroidery. The pattern is first pricked into the silk base for the master embroiderers to follow stitch by stitch using six shades of silk thread for heightened detail and dimension. Couture stitching techniques have also been employed in recent pieces from **Chanel** ([chanel.com](http://chanel.com)) and **Dior** ([dior.com](http://dior.com)).

One showstopper among the latter's offerings this year is the ▶

Masters at work:  
facing page from  
left, petals are  
painstakingly cut  
and shaped to create  
the dial for Cartier's  
floral marquetry  
Ballon Bleu de Cartier  
42mm Parrot watch;  
haute couture and  
an ancient Japanese  
craft meet in Dior's  
Grand Soir Origami  
collection; the  
artisans at Corum  
expertly trim peacock  
quills for the Feather  
Watch

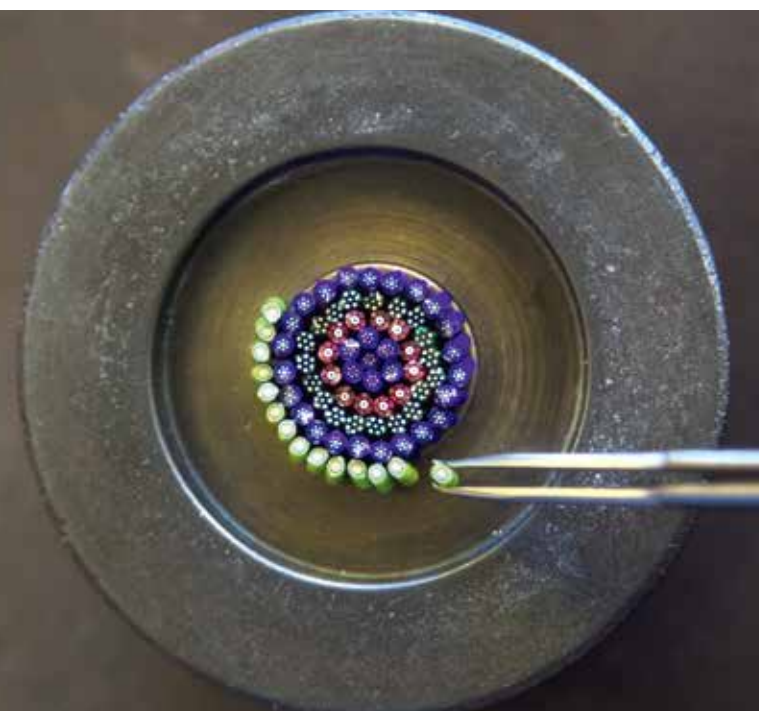


FEATHER  
WATCH





ARCEAU MILLEFIORI



For Hermès' Arceau Millefiori, techniques used in glassmaking and horology combine. The dial's flower motif is formed in a cast-iron bowl, above, using glass "candy canes", right, before being encapsulated by molten crystal, top



The faces of *métiers d'art* watches: from Chanel, Chopard and DeLaneau's Japanese-inspired creations to Harry Winston's use of the ancient Egyptian craft of marquetry



MADMOISELLE  
PRIVÉ MAKI-E



LUC XP URUSHI  
HORSE



AVENUE C PRECIOUS  
MARQUETRY



RONDO GARDEN OF  
EDEN MOKUME POPPIES

Grand Soir Origami collection of five unique pieces evoking the ancient Japanese art of paper folding as well as the intricate pleating of a haute couture gown. Artisans spend more than 50 hours constructing the layered segments that compose each mother-of-pearl marquetry dial. Geneva's renowned Maison Bunter expertly cuts and sets the triangular gems on the dials that are encircled by eye-catching bezels invisibly set with baguette helix-cut gems.

As watch collecting has taken hold in burgeoning Asian markets, brands are increasingly enticing enthusiasts with traditional themes and ancestral techniques. **DeLaneau** ([delaneau.ch](http://delaneau.ch)) commissioned Geneva-based Dutch engraver Kees Engelbarts to create the Rondo Garden of Eden Mokume Poppies, an exquisite, unique piece with a *mokume-gane* ("wood grain metal") dial. The unusual Japanese metalsmithing technique was invented by the 17th-century master sword maker Denbei Shoami and was traditionally used for decorating sword hilts and handles. Up to 25 metal layers varying in colour and thickness are fused together in an oven to create a composite material that is rolled under high pressure to reveal undulating patterns that resemble wood grain. Engelbarts masterfully engraves the *mokume-gane* material with delicately rendered poppies for the dial.

Another age-old Japanese art, *maki-e lacquer*, which originated during the Heian period (794-1185), has also emerged in watchmaking, most recently at Chanel and **Chopard** ([chopard.com](http://chopard.com)). The term *maki-e* translates to "sprinkled picture" as artisans apply precious metal powders onto wet lacquer to create scenes and patterns. Two Japanese artists spend up to three weeks creating such dials for Chanel's latest Mademoiselle Privé limited editions. The design is first drawn on silk paper and then transmitted to the dial, which is layered with resin from the *urushi* tree. Each layer is individually applied and burnished before the quail eggshell ornaments are added piece by piece to form Mademoiselle's favorite camellias.

And Chopard marries *urushi* and *maki-e lacquer* techniques in its ongoing series of LUC XP Urushi pieces created by artist Kiichiro Masumura, who is considered a living national treasure in Japan. For 2014's Year of the Horse, referencing the Chinese calendar's seventh sign, Masumura portrays a prancing horse among a field of lotus flowers on the dial, under which beats a mechanical automatic LUC Caliber 9 movement in a synergistic expression of art, horology and culture – a return to the sublime aesthetic past matched by modern mechanical wonder. ◀

## MIX MASTERS

Like their predecessors, modern watchmaking aficionados see no need to limit themselves to one decorative *métiers d'art* when many can be combined for heightened impact. **Van Cleef & Arpels** ([vancleefarpels.com](http://vancleefarpels.com)) makes storytelling through artful watches poetic in its latest series of Extraordinary Dials, depicting the signs of the zodiac in 12 limited editions divided into themes – earth, water, air and fire – designated by colour scheme, background pattern and appliques of sculpted mother-of-pearl leaves, waves, clouds or flames. Each piece tells a colourful story with engraving, enamelling and gem-setting.

Such *métiers*-intensive special editions have a long and illustrious legacy at **Vacheron Constantin** ([vacheron-constantin.com](http://vacheron-constantin.com)), the Geneva house established in 1755. To create this year's *Métiers d'Art Fabuleux Ornaments* collection, nearly a dozen master artisans sought to portray Ottoman architecture, Chinese embroidery, Indian manuscripts and French lacework using an array of decorative disciplines including *guilloché*, *Grand Feu* enamel, engraving, carved gemstones and gemstone *cloisonné* effects. The adornments surround exposed open-worked movements, merging the technical watchmaking art of skeletonisation with time-honoured ornamental methods.



FABULEUX  
ORNEMENTS



EXTRAORDINARY  
DIALS