

*An  
Unusual Exhibition  
At The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art*

by Winthrop Edey

(GENERAL)

The exhibition "Clock and Watch Design" at the Metropolitan Museum, in New York, created by Mr. John Ittmann, is something entirely new in my experience. Mr. Ittmann's approach to horology was through the Print Department of the Museum; I believe he is the first to approach it in this manner, and so it was to be expected that the exhibition would be highly interesting. It covers clock and watch design from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. The designs, both original drawings and published prints, are drawn with but a few exceptions from the Museum's own collection, so naturally the emphasis is decorative rather than scientific. There are as well several clocks and watches selected for their close relation to some of the designs in the exhibition, and one clock dial and movement that relates to a scientific plate in a book from the Museum's library; this is the only departure from the pure decorative emphasis.

The Museum's collection of horological prints is large; Mr. Ittmann has selected only those that in his eyes

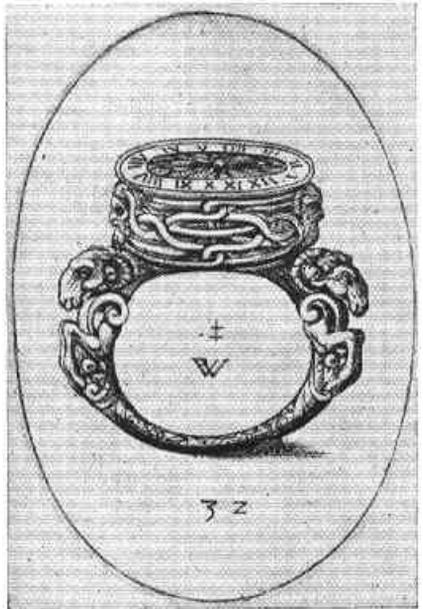


Fig. 1 Design for a ringwatch — Pierre Woeiriol — French School, about 1531-1589 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 1926)

(Editor's Note: Mr. John Ittmann, the creator of the Exhibition described in this article, has contributed to the BULLETIN in his own right. He is a young historian of Art, and is located at Lawrence, Kansas, where he is Registrar of the local museum. He presently specializes in horological research.)

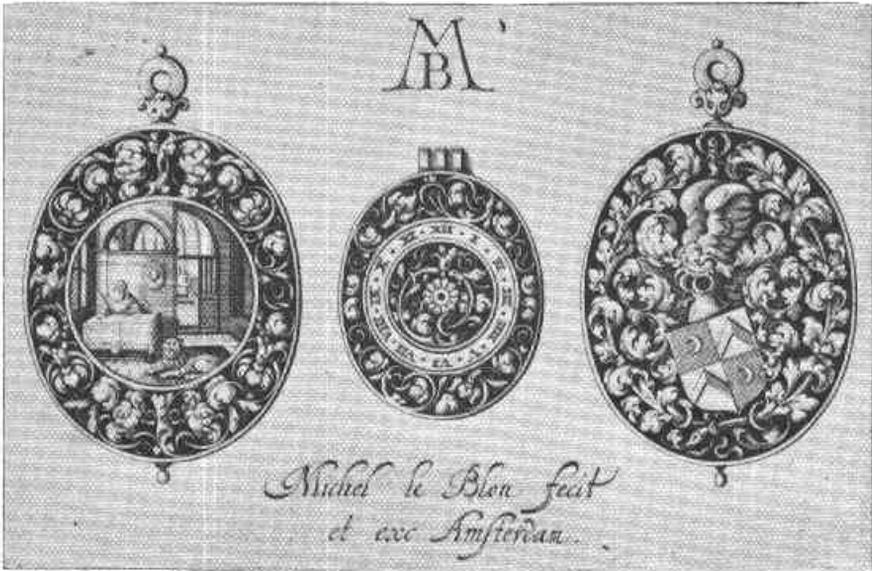


Fig. 2 Design book for watchmakers — Michael Leblon — Amsterdam, 1587-1660 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 1934)



Fig. 3 Niello ornament for a watch case — Antoine Jacquard Poitiers — flourished circa 1619 - 1650 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 1924)

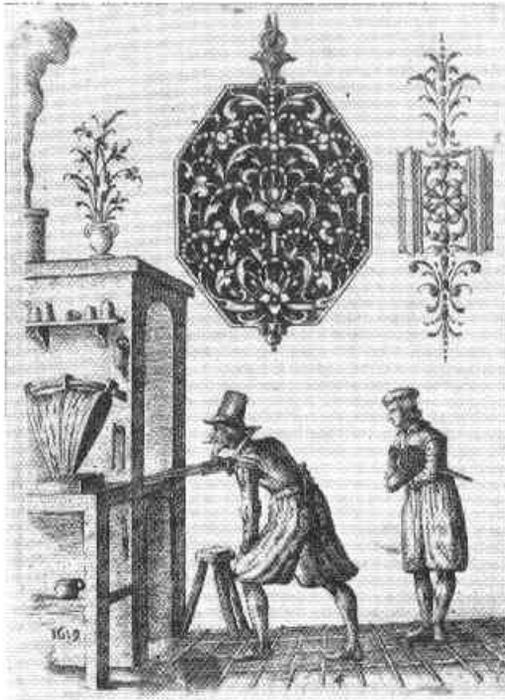


Fig. 4 Niello designs for watch cases — French School — about 1618-1640 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 1923)

have sufficient appeal to warrant inclusion. He has included lighter notes for casual visitors as well as a considerable selection of seventeenth century watch designs for the more serious student; this, along with his desire to give as consistent a chronological spread as possible has resulted in his including a number of nineteenth century clock designs whose appeal is mainly curious or humorous rather than aesthetic.

The chronological distribution is even but the geographical spread is not. France emerges much more strongly than any other school. This results from the selection offered by the Museum's print collection. I have very little knowledge of published designs for watches other than what I have learned from studying this collection, but I will be so bold as to suggest that the French designers were better than their colleagues in Italy, Germany, or England; and this

would explain more of their work having reached published form.

The exhibition begins with a series of allegorical and illustrative Renaissance engravings that depict such clocks as an artist would have had access to at that time; Durer's "Melancholia" is included because of its bewitching beauty even though *time* in it is symbolized by the hour glass rather than the clock.

Then comes a rich series of designs for watch cases, dials, and cocks, most of them French, first half of the seventeenth century. Outstanding among these are a sixteenth century French design for a ring watch by Pierre Wociriot (the earliest ring watch I have heard of), here brought before the public for the first time; a Dutch watch, scarcely larger, set into a pendant; a beetle of great beauty, by the celebrated Jean Tontin, with a design on its back that is almost Beardsley; and a large strap-

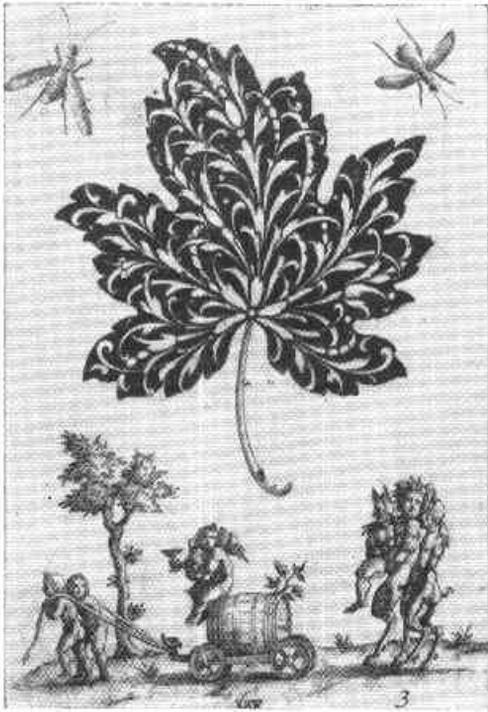
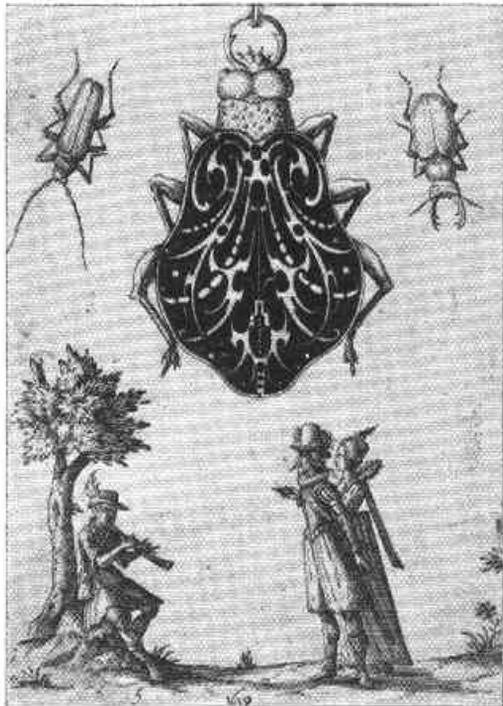


Fig. 5 (left and below) Niello designs for watch cases — French School — about 1618-1640 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 1923)



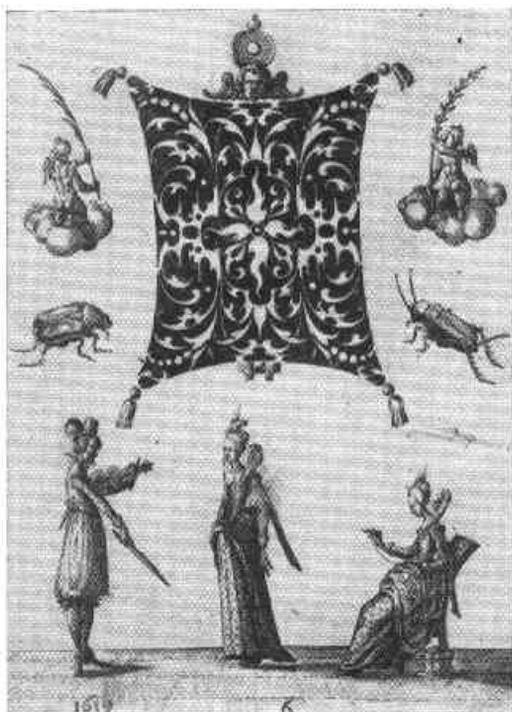
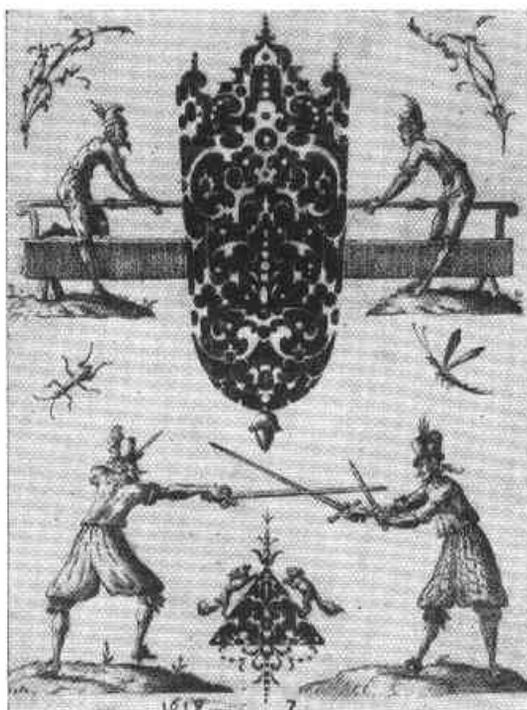


Fig. 6 (right and below) Niello designs for watch cases — French School — about 1618-1640 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 1923)



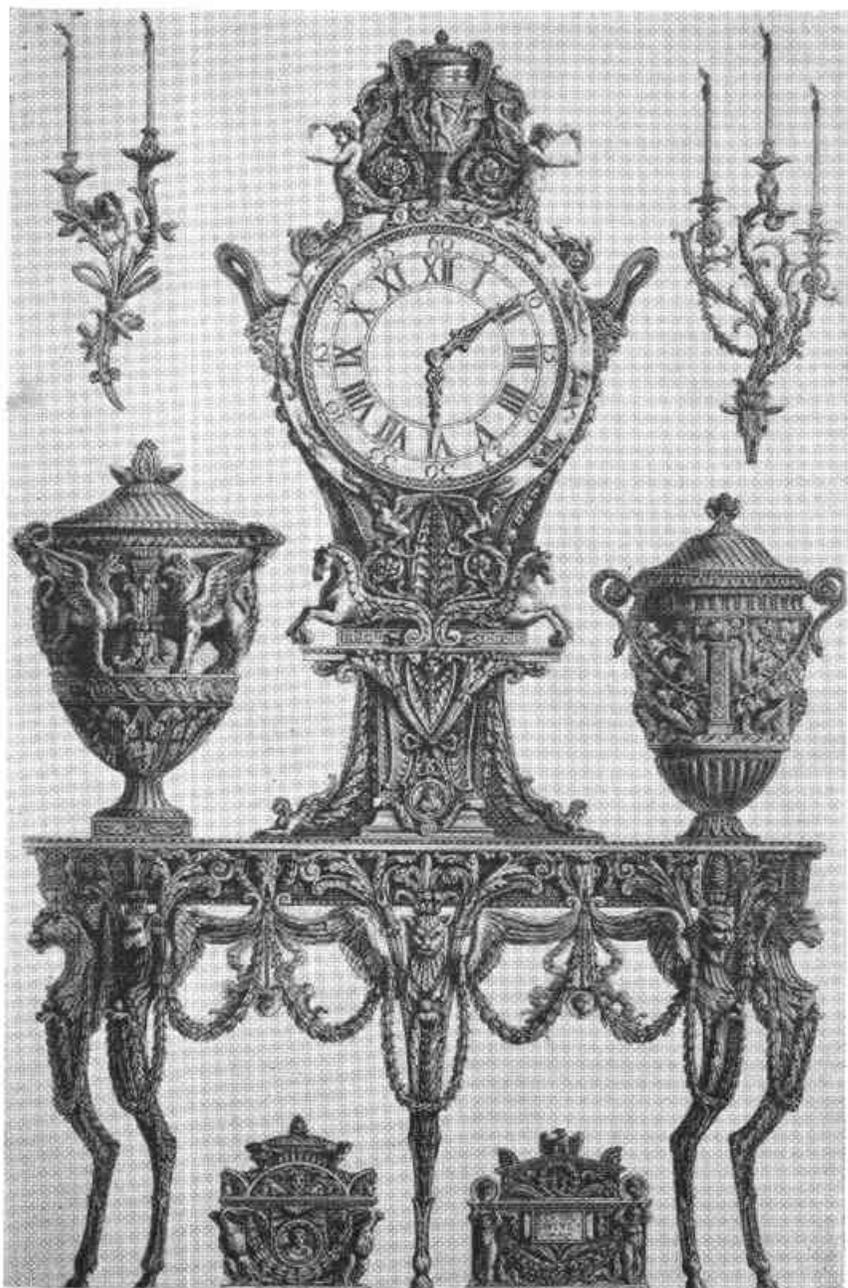


Fig. 7 Design from "Diverse Maniere d'Adornare i Cammini," by Giovanni Battista Piranesi—  
Rome, 1769 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1941)

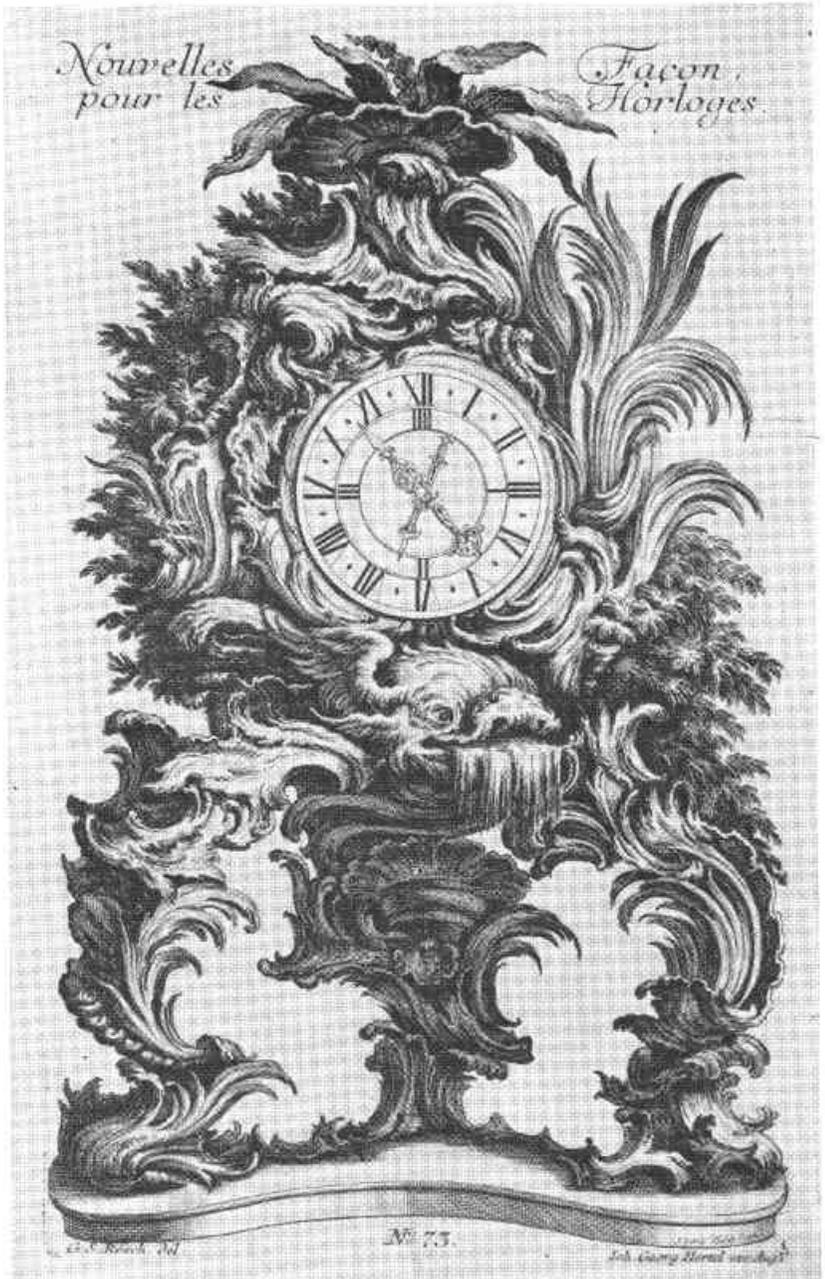


Fig. 8 Design for a clock case — Georg Sigmund Rosch, Augsburg — circa 1730-1766 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whittelsey Fund, 1949)

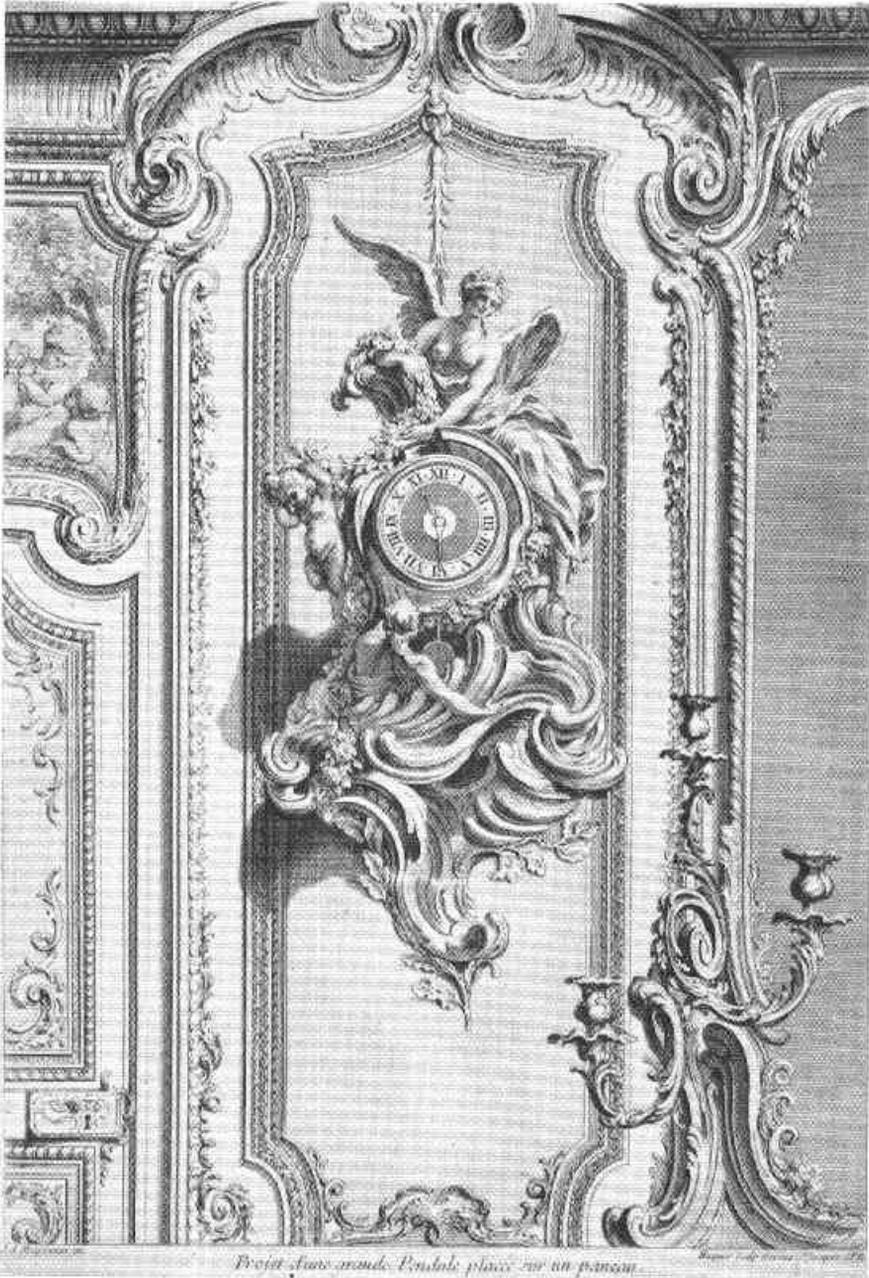


Fig. 9 Design for a Cartel clock — Juste Aurele Meissonnier — circa 1693-1750 — French School — Plate from his Oeuvre, Paris, n.d. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1918)

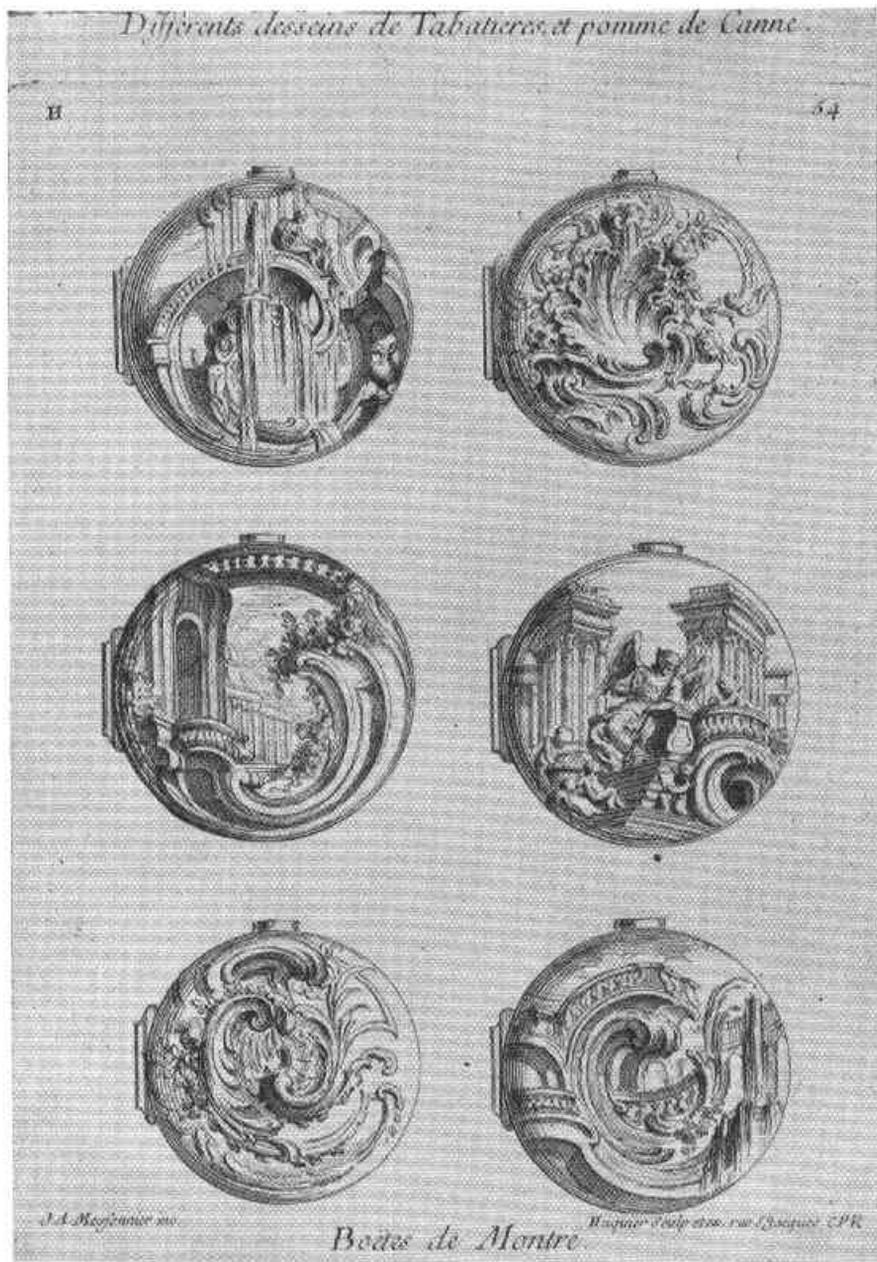


Fig. 10 Designs for watch cases — Juste Aurele Meissonnier — circa 1693-1750 — French School — Plate from his *Oeuvre*, Paris, n.d. [Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1918]

work design of the utmost delicacy by Jacques Hurtu, which if executed would have enclosed a highly important movement. In Mr. Ittmann's opinion these strapwork designs, of which they are many, were meant for execution in niello; I would remind the reader that many silver or gilt

watches of a similar character survive with the design in very low relief and the background matted. Along with these designs there is a selection of four important watches from the Morgan collection, one of them in an extraordinary cross-shaped enamel case of about 1650; they do not match

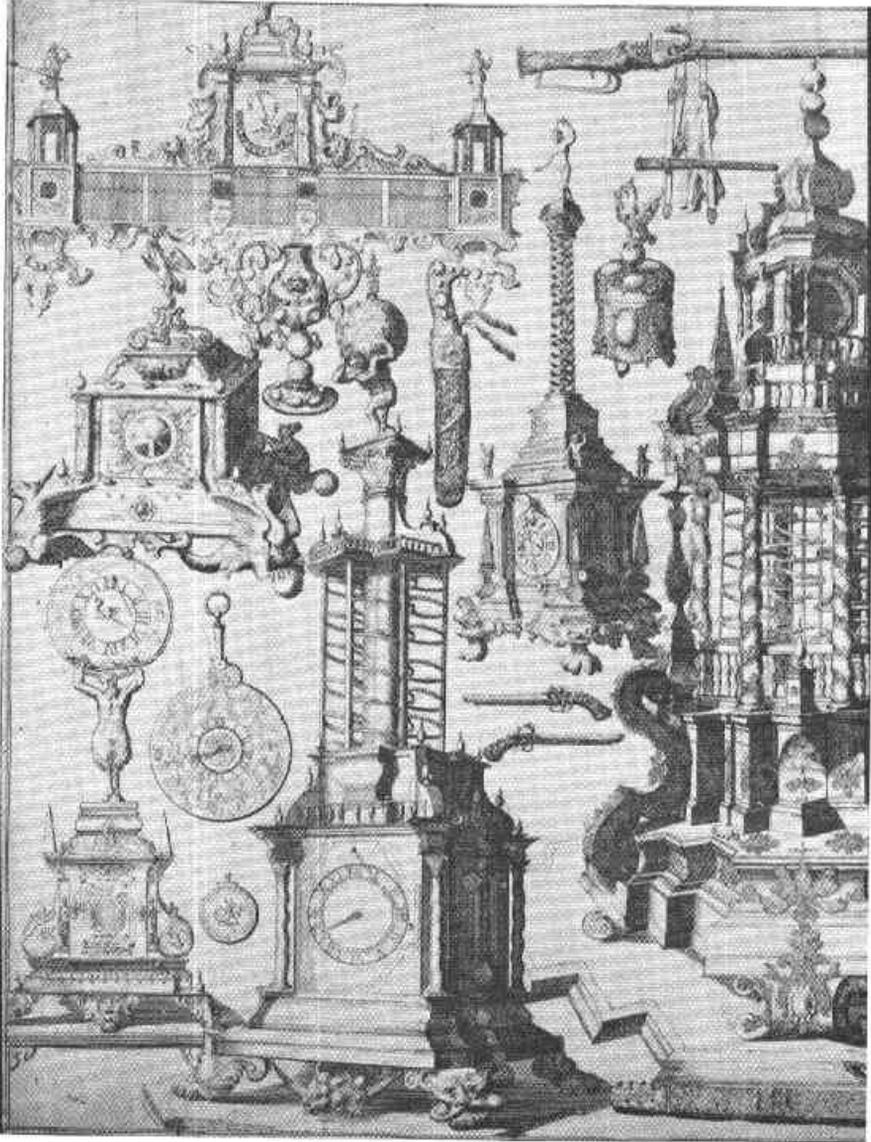


Fig. 11 Detail sketches of complicated clocks — Attributed to Romeyn De Hooghe, Amsterdam, Paris, Haarlem, 1645-1708 — Possibly an inventory of a royal collection (Metropolitan Museum of Art, loaned by Winthrop Kellogg Edey)

any of the designs exactly but they show what such watches as the designers had in mind would have looked like.

The exhibition continues in much the same manner, the prints around the walls divided into sections of clocks and sections of watches, chronologically arranged. There is a section of clock prints of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of all na-

tionalities, then one of watches, which includes in a case below, two books and three watches of the early eighteenth century. The next section is devoted to the origins of the rococo; these designs are French, Italian, and German. Outstanding is the celebrated large Meissonnier design for a cartel clock. I have often wondered whether a clock was ever made from this design; I hope very much that

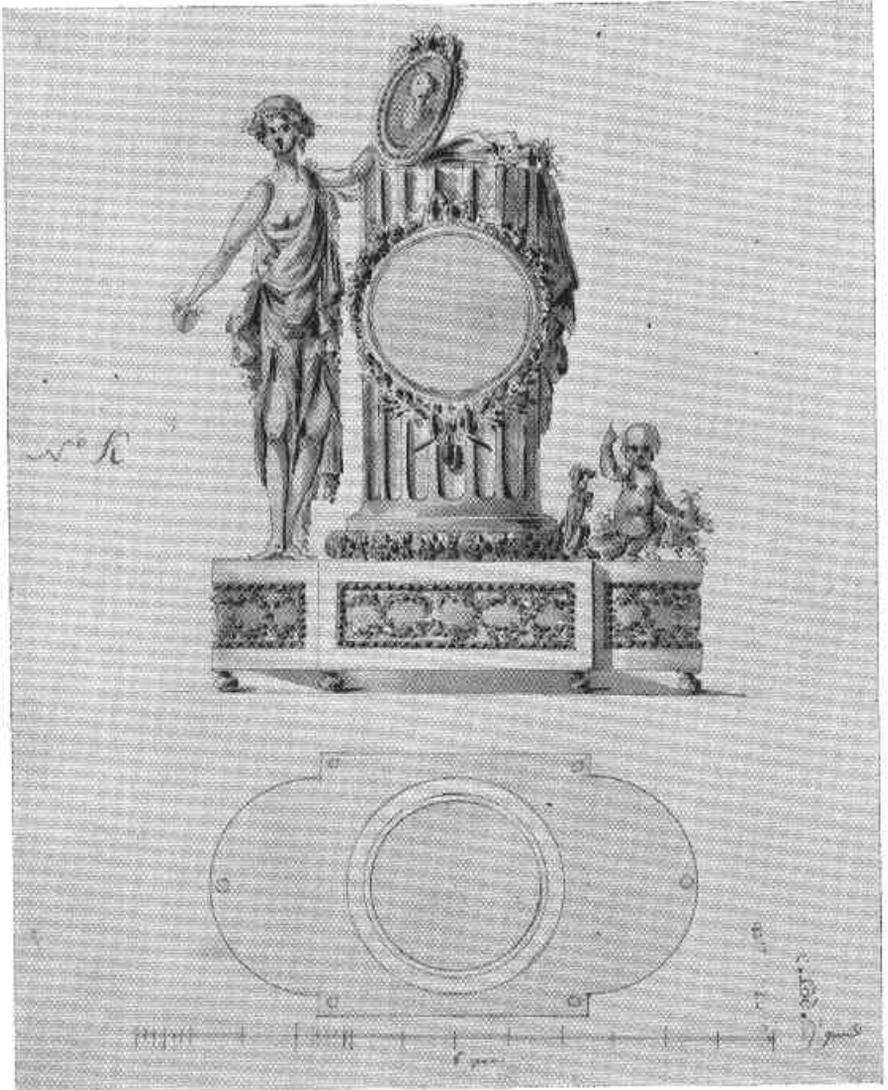


Fig. 12 The Design — watercolor executed for Albert, Duke of Sachsen-Teschen — French, 1770-1785 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Raphael Esmerian, 1960)

one was. The next section displays some English and French designs, mostly watches, of the eighteenth century; and finally we have a series of seventeen large prints and drawings, all of them French, from late in the eighteenth century and the nineteenth; these cover nearly half

the total wall space of the exhibition, and I must admit that since the periods they cover — Louis XVI and Romantic — are not to my taste, I wish Mr. Ittmann had included more earlier designs and fewer of these. An amusing note is provided by a design for a clock featuring a white



Fig. 12a The Clock as sketched in Fig. 12 — Marble and gilt bronze — Charles Dutertre a Paris, circa 1775

porcelain lady seated in a bathtub of the same material richly mounted in gilt bronze; she is holding up a ring to a small yapping gilt bronze poodle, which is perched on the top of the bathtub. The clock made from this design is exhibited in a neigh-

boring case. It is extraordinary that these two objects should have been brought together again, for the clock is not from the Museum's collection and was discovered by a fortunate chance.

Not the least interesting aspect of



Fig. 13 Trade card — English School — mid-18th century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whittelsey Fund, 1962)

the exhibition is the series of display cases containing books and clocks. Near the entrance is the celebrated Metzger-type clock by Chasparus Bohemus, dated 1568, from the Morgan collection, and with it is the tiny engraving by Beham, "The Triumph of Women," which was used to design the frieze around the base of the clock. This is a juxtaposition of the greatest interest and may even be the only one of this type known to us from the sixteenth century.

The books on display are nearly all of them great ones by famous masters — Berain, Oppenord, Boulle, Chippendale, and Adam, among others, and, of course, Thiout, well-known to horologists, in a case with a dial and movement made by Charost using the designs published in Thiout as a guide. In another case is an example of the only known clock-case model by Boulle for which he published the design.

The fact that this is the first exhibition of this kind illustrates the lack of serious interest in case-design on the part of collectors and horological historians up to now. We should be grateful to Mr. Ittmann for giving us this splendid and important exhibition, with taste, scholarship and discrimination. We should do our best to cultivate a greater interest in the artistic aspects of horology, so that the same may be done again, and so that more and more clocks and watches may be united to their original designs.

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#### GEORGE OVES CLOCK

A.E.J., Pennsylvania, asks the age of two tallcase clocks, one marked "George Oves, Lebanon" and the other "John Wilkes."

George Oves worked as a clockmaker in Lebanon, Pa., but the only record we have of him is his marriage to Elizabeth Buehler in Lebanon in 1805, so he must have been working about that time.

The John Wilkes clock is too indefinite to attribute without a place name. We have no record of John Wilkes as an American clockmaker, but a man by that name worked in London in 1723. (J.W.G.)

#### SHAGREEN

Outer cases for early watches were quite common and many kinds of material were used. Tortoise shell, metal and leather were popular but shagreen was especially liked. True shagreen is a very tough type of leather made chiefly at Astrachan from the strong skin of the rump of an ass or horse. To prepare it for use, a peculiar roughness was produced by treading into the skin hard round seeds which were shaken out when the skin was dried. It was then stained green with copper filings and sal ammoniac. Then the grains or warts were rubbed down to a level with the surface. The skin of a shark was substituted for the tougher skin and when properly treated made suitable cases and were also known as shagreen if dyed green. However the true shagreen took on a higher polish and was more durable and thus many of these cases have lasted for 200 years. (J.W.G.)

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#### WATCH OUT!

One night, homeward bound on the train, I was amazed to see Frank Jones, a friend, ignore the request of his seat-mate, a personable young man, for the time of day. The young man repeated the request several times and was studiously ignored by Frank. Rebuffed, the young man took another seat. I took Frank to task for his rudeness, and this is what he told me:

"The next and last stop is Upton, where we live, so the guy must be going there. If I had told him the time, we'd have started a conversation. Since he was a personable looking fellow, and there is nothing to do in Upton, I'd have wound up inviting him to dinner at the house; he'd have accepted, and naturally he'd meet my daughter, Alice. They would get to talking and he would ask her for a date. She would accept the date, then they would start going together, and the first thing you know they would fall in love, and damn it, I don't want my daughter to marry a man who can't afford a watch!"

(Submitted by J. G. Jefferson)