

SIHH 2018 – Métiers d'Art collection

Métiers d'Art *Les Aérostiers*: the fabulous conquest of the skies

- A combination of artistic crafts and horological techniques
- Engraving, pounced ornament and *plique-à-jour* enamel
- Manufacture Calibre 2460 G4/1
- Original display on dragging or jumping discs



Flying. A dream that dates back to the earliest days of humankind. After countless mythological, epic and sometimes incredible attempts, the dream at last came true in the late 18th century. The first “aerostatic experiments” successfully defied gravity. How many secrets of the much dreamed of and imagined kingdom of the skies would they reveal? Courage, genius as well as a touch of madness fired the early and intrepid balloonists known in French as *aérostiers*. Joyful crowds cheered these amazing hot-air balloons lifting off into the air. The Métiers d'Art *Les Aérostiers* collection by Vacheron Constantin pays tribute to this exhilarating chapter in history. On the scale of a watch dial, the master engravers of the Maison also accomplish an authentic feat: faithfully reproducing in miniature the historical depictions of five flights undertaken in France between 1783 and 1785. Splendid hand-engraved and micro-sculpted gold hot-air balloons hover against a translucent *plique-à-jour* enamel background, while time is displayed to the beat of Manufacture Calibre 2460 G4/1.

Vacheron Constantin is exploring new creative horizons in telling the marvellous story of skyborne adventurers. In addition to the delicate pounced ornament engraving technique, the dials are adorned with *plique-à-jour* enamel, a rare skill used for the first time by the Maison. This association is a natural continuation of the tradition of technical and artistic excellence cherished by Vacheron Constantin. The new Métiers d'Art *Les Aérostiers* collection combines these artistic feats with technical expertise by using the Vacheron Constantin Calibre 2460 G4/1 driving special displays: an original movement enabling seamless integration of the indications within the overall dial aesthetic.

Pounced ornament gold balloons

The master engravers in the Vacheron Constantin workshops took up a real challenge: adding volume to the original two-dimensional drawings, and interpreting their colours through finishing effects. Each hot-air balloon called for up to three weeks of craftsmanship in order to reproduce the entire range of subtle feature and ornamental details of the original works. The dials thus compose authentic miniature scenes graced with an extraordinary variety of motifs.

The pounced ornament technique consists in removing material so as to fashion relief effects. This irreversible operation calls for an impeccably deft touch. The master engraver first traces the volumes using a drypoint technique, before sculpting the precious mass and creates a particularly delicate rounded effect. This stage serves to carve out the curves of the balloon and the basket, as well as the lines of the ropes. The burins are repeatedly sharpened so as to achieve extreme precision. The level of finishing becomes ever more sophisticated, all the way through to the smallest details of the human figures, animals and the meticulous decoration of the balloons. The artisans each use their own methods and tools: small stones, brushes, papers and files. The light effects playing over the different gold textures naturally influence the visual appearance of the surface.

The colourful magic of *plique-à-jour* enamel

On the dials of the Métiers d'Art *Les Aérostiers* collection, a translucent background in sky blue, dark blue, turquoise, brown or burgundy, evoke a spirit of airy transparency. Vacheron Constantin is for the first time calling upon this skill mastered by very few enamellers. Its layout is reminiscent of *cloisonné* enamelling; while the absence of a base recalls a miniature stained-glass window. The balance between the various shades is extremely subtle, as is the polishing of the partitions between them.

The predominant shades of each creation are also picked up on the display discs as well as the matching strap. The inner bezel ring framing the enamel is engraved with a motif inspired by balloon ropes, also varying between 3N, 4N or 5N gold according to the models.

The aesthetic appeal of a highly technical calibre

Transparency effects provide fascinating glimpses of the gear trains and discs of Calibre 2460 G4/1 through the *plique-à-jour* enamel. This special self-winding calibre enables a singular hands-free staging of the indications. The disc-type display is cleverly revealed through apertures around the rim of the dial, between the curves of the *plique-à-jour* enamel partitions. The hours, minutes, day of the week and date are shown by means of four discs: respectively two of the dragging type and two of the jumping variety. The calibre decorated according to the highest watchmaking finishing standards is generously visible through the transparent caseback. The gold oscillating weight, specially engraved and domed for this new collection, evokes the rounded shape of a hot-air balloon.

Five flights... and as many stories engraved in gold

Science, magic and dreams: the *Métiers d'Art Les Aérostats* collection retraces the thrilling experience of five historical flights made in France, a pioneering nation in this domain. In the late 18th century, these extraordinary feats enchanted royal courts and dumbfounded crowds alike.

Métiers d'Art Les Aérostats - Versailles 1783 – An aerostat, designed by Étienne de Montgolfier, rises into the air for the very first time. This “aerostatic experiment” has a sheep, a rooster and a duck on board. Their survival will testify to the sufficiency of oxygen at a given altitude. Engraved in white gold, the basket and its floating ropes, having been slightly damaged by the landing, are perfectly visible beneath the opulent 5N gold balloon.

Métiers d'Art Les Aérostats - Paris 1783 – The first human being in turn rises heavenwards. Aboard another aerostat, also designed by Étienne de Montgolfier, are two “sky travellers”, micro-sculpted on the dial. Against a sky blue *plique-à-jour* enamel background, this splendid pink and white gold balloon is engraved with suns, the zodiac, *fleurs de lys*, garlands, insignia and an eagle with outstretched wings.

Métiers d'Art Les Aérostats - Paris 1784 – The balloonist Blanchard had imagined a system for guiding a balloon's trajectory. The ingenious system of wings built for this purpose can be clearly made out on the dial. While the landing took place far from the initial designated spot, the flight would inspire its developer and other balloonists in making more fruitful attempts.

Métiers d'Art Les Aérostats - Bordeaux 1784 – The whole of France takes part in the extraordinary conquest of the skies. This flight, made in Bordeaux with three voyagers in the basket, testifies to what had become a true phenomenon of the era. Reproduced in identical detail on the dial, the balloon features a splendid variety of fabrics and ornamentation, as well as a mythological scene.

Métiers d'Art Les Aérostats - Bagnols 1785 – Ten thousand people salute this flight with thunderous applause. The elegant white and yellow gold basket appears to be floating on *plique-à-jour* enamel in various shades of blue. The upper part of the balloon is coloured by electroplating. Seven years later, the balloon canvas would serve to make clothes for Republican volunteers.

The *Métiers d'Art Les Aérostats* collection represents as many journeys to the heart of the sky, testifying to a vibrant period buoyed up by a spirit of conquest. Brilliantly interpreted by the master artisans of Vacheron Constantin, the five flights each come in an exclusive limited numbered edition of five.

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TECHNICAL DATA

Métiers d'Art *Les Aérostiers*

References	7610U/000G-B210 - Métiers d'Art <i>Les Aérostiers</i> - Paris 1783 7610U/000G-B243 - Métiers d'Art <i>Les Aérostiers</i> - Paris 1784 7610U/000G-B244 - Métiers d'Art <i>Les Aérostiers</i> - Versailles 1783 7610U/000G-B245 - Métiers d'Art <i>Les Aérostiers</i> - Bagnols 1785 7610U/000G-B246 - Métiers d'Art <i>Les Aérostiers</i> - Bordeaux 1784 Hallmark of Geneva certified timepieces
Calibre	2460 G4/1 Developed and manufactured by Vacheron Constantin Mechanical, self-winding 31 mm (1¼") diameter, 6.05 mm thick Approximately 40 hours of power reserve 4 Hz (28,800 vibrations/hour) 237 components 27 jewels
Indications	Hours, minutes, day of the week and date in apertures on matching disc colour
Case	18K white gold 40 mm diameter, 12.74 mm thick Transparent sapphire crystal caseback Water-resistance tested at a pressure of 3 bar (approx.30 meters)
Dial	18K gold hand-engraved balloons Skies in <i>plique-à-jour</i> enamel
Strap	Blue/green/brown/dark blue/burgundy <i>Mississippiensis</i> alligator leather with alligator leather inner shell, hand-stitched, saddle-finish, large square scales
Clasp	18K white gold folding clasp Polished half Maltese cross-shaped

Limited series of 5 numbered watches per reference