




MB&F HM4 'THUNDERBOLT'

SKY'S THE LIMIT

The master of suspense, Maximilian Büsser, knows everyone loves a mystery. And with the unveiling of the 'engine' of the upcoming HM4 'Thunderbolt', he's got enthusiasts across the globe clapping their hands — and scratching their heads. BY JACK FORSTER



Ladies and gentlemen, children of all ages, the circus is back in town — and ringmaster Maximilian Büsser is once again teasing us with the carefully titrated doses of information and speculation that make every launch of his now-famous “Horological Machines” one of the most eagerly anticipated events in horology.

The philosophy of Maximilian Büsser & Friends is well known — it’s not just to create watches that are cosmetically different, nor do they express a desire for novelty for its own sake. Instead, they are conceived as expressions of the *feeling* of time — explorations of how the structure and function of timepieces can reflect the zeitgeist of bygone eras, and how that structure and function express, and even help form, the way we experience time today. As such, MB&F’s creations are related to the little practiced but historically fascinating genre of watchmaking known as “form watches”, or watches with an unusual and often symbolically important shape. The creation of form watches is almost as old as watchmaking itself, and though the earliest portable timepieces had rather uniform designs (most often, a “tambour”, or drum shape), very soon, the relationship between the experience of time, and the machinery which embodied its passage, led watchmakers to create watches that directly expressed a particular point of view.

Naturally, one of the most significant preoccupations of watchmakers (and clockmakers) during watchmaking’s formative era was the relationship between time, spirituality, and mortality, and many form watches were “memento mori” — a

Latin phrase loosely translated as “remember you will die” — which reflected the inevitability of death as a reminder to regard the experiences of this world as transitory. One of the most famous of these was the watch owned by Mary, Queen of Scots, which was in the shape of a skull; many were made in the shape of crucifixes as well.

Not all form watches were memento mori — many took on fanciful forms such as flowers, birds and insects, but as the mid-

be more than just a stage show in which effects are achieved by necessary but banal behind-the-scenes machinery. Instead, it’s the inner workings of MB&F’s timepieces that are the most essential manifestation of the vision behind each watch. The outer form, therefore, is not an illustration of that vision, but a necessary consequence.

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19th century came and went, fanciful watchmaking gave way to more sober and instrumental timepieces that reflected the rise of the culture of science and industry characteristic of the age. Decoration and form did not so much vanish as become abstractions, and though the form watch has never completely vanished from the horological landscape, the genre was for decades relegated largely to the realm of jewelry when it was practiced at all.

The rarest of form watches have always been those in which the outer shape of the watch is matched by the shape of the movement, and it’s in this extremely small class of “rarae aves” that one finds the watches of Maximilian Büsser & Friends. The most fundamental guiding principle of MB&F is that each Horological Machine will

science fiction and flight. While each Horological Machine thus far has been a doorway into a certain world of time, the HM4 is perhaps the most extreme expression yet from MB&F of the seamless connection between form and not function, but feeling that Maximilian Büsser’s timepieces are intended to embody.

Now, the sixty-five-thousand-dollar question is, “What the hell does it look like?” We can only tell you that queries to MB&F will be met with the gleeful “no comment” of a great storyteller, who knows when he’s got listeners wondering what happens next. The mystery, of course, lies in the relationship between the shape of the movement and the final, completed timepiece. All we can say is, when you do finally see it, the connection will hit you like, well, a thunderbolt. ★