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GOLDEN TOUCH

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NG TECK FONG,
FOUNDER OF TOMEI,
ON ADVERSITY,
PRECIOUS THINGS
AND HERITAGE

THE ART ISSUE

APPRECIATING ASSETS
MAKING THE MOST OF ART

TWENTY-FIVE
THE PEAK'S CHARITY ART
EXHIBITION & AUCTION

ART BASEL HONG KONG
5 MALAYSIAN STARS SHINE



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PRINCELY TREASURES

Committed to promoting European culture and history, whether horology or the decorative arts, Breguet has made it possible for the new display of 18th-century French decorative arts in the Louvre Museum in Paris to see the light of day, with the reopening last June of 33 dedicated galleries, previously closed for almost a decade.

TEXT Y-JEAN MUN-DELSALLE



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OPPOSITE PAGE
01 Napoleon Courtyard and Pyramid of the Louvre Museum.

02 The Gilbert and Rose Marie Chagoury gallery of the Louvre's Department of Decorative Arts.

Madame de Pompadour's boat-shaped lidded potpourri vase in Sèvres porcelain by Charles-Nicolas Dodin, 1760.



Queen Marie-Antoinette's roll-top desk in wood marquetry and gilded bronze by Jean-Henri Riesener, 1784.

It was the golden age of French decorative arts, a time when everyone who was anyone had one wish: making their way to the City of Light to seek their fortune. The French capital was the epicentre of creativity and savoir-faire in every sphere of art in the 18th century (which has been called 'a moment of grace in French art'), when all of the best artists and designers from around France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands flocked to Paris to work. By the middle of the century, when the French court had shifted permanently to Versailles, the royal manufactories and ateliers were based in the Louvre Museum. Today, the museum houses one of the most prized collections of French decorative arts, largely from the 18th century, that range from furniture, tapestries, woodwork and paintings to ceramics, clocks and silverware, most of which were originally commissioned for royal or princely residences. These priceless pieces testify to the blossoming

of ideas and inventiveness that characterised the Age of Enlightenment, and Breguet played a lead role in ensuring that the more than 2,000 treasures of French art are preserved for the enrichment of future generations through a complete revamp of the Louvre's Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI rooms, presenting, in 2,200 sq m of exhibition space, these masterpieces which were previously hidden away in storerooms.

Nayla Hayek, Chairwoman of the Swatch Group's Board of Directors, gave a moving speech to 300 VIP guests during a gala dinner held under the museum's glass pyramid to celebrate the galleries' relaunch recently. The daughter of the late Nicolas G Hayek, Founder of the Swatch Group, who, in 2009, had initiated the company's contribution towards the Louvre's EUR26million renovation of its 18th-century decorative art galleries (the museum's first major project entirely funded by private donors) but didn't live to see its completion, announced how proud her father would have been. Nicolas Hayek once said: "Preserving world cultural heritage is an investment for all of us, for our children and our grandchildren. It is our duty to do so, as much for the future as for the past. We are responsible for caring for and preserving the beauty of Europe." He believed that Breguet was an integral part of European cultural heritage, as he viewed watchmaking as a combination of science, technology and the decorative arts.

The links between Breguet and the Louvre are numerous: brand founder, Abraham-Louis Breguet, had exhibited his timepieces at the second Exhibition of Industrial Products held at the Louvre; Vivant Denon, the Louvre's first patron, acquired a Breguet minute repeater and a biscuit porcelain clock in 1810 and 1811, respectively; the museum owns a fine collection of Breguet creations, like the *No 1391* subscription pocket watch in a 57mm gold case with an engine-turned dial and the *No 2585* half-quarter repeating watch in a gold hunter case, a silver-plated back engraved with a map of nine Italian administrative regions, a thermometer and three off-centre dials for seconds, day of the week and date, which was sold to Prince Camille Borghèse; and, in 2009, the museum held the exhibition *Breguet at the Louvre: An Apogee of European Watchmaking*.

EXQUISITE HAND-CRAFTSMANSHIP

Furniture-making reached its peak during France's Ancien Régime. In the 18th century, for the first time in history, an exceptional desk and painting could be considered equals in terms of artistry and price. An extensive collaborative project between collector and artisan, each bespoke piece of furniture called for the skills of at least five master craftsmen – all members of a trade guild awarded the exclusive right to practise a *métier* in a given city and its surroundings, and enjoying royal protection – including a cabinetmaker, marquetry artist, bronze caster, silversmith, chaser, gilder, painter, clockmaker, locksmith and marble, leather or fabric worker.

Mikaël Kraemer, fifth-generation antiquarian of the prestigious Paris-based, family-run Kraemer Gallery, which houses the world's largest privately owned collection

of museum-quality 18th-century French furniture and *objets d'art*, says: "The pieces have often remained in good condition since the 18th century because of their original value. At that time, they were already very expensive. They were always kept in the main rooms of the house, never in the basement or attic, because they were protected by their value and considered to be patrimony, transmitted from one generation to another. It was the first time in history that furniture and the decorative arts were considered to be a major art and to be more important than painting and sculpture. This period was the exception in the history of art. Before the time of King Louis XIV, there was no creativity in furniture. It was plain wooden furniture that was only useful with no artwork – there were no carvings or ornamentation. But Louis XIV understood the prestige of the art world, so, through his high profile and power, he convinced the best artists from around Europe to come to Paris to work for him. Then, at the end of the 18th century, we had, more or less at the same time, the French and Industrial Revolutions, so no more of these handmade pieces were produced. Furniture in the 19th century after Louis XVI was industrially made and there was no more artistry; they were copies of works made in the 18th century. That made a real difference between 17th- and 18th-century art and those from the 19th and 20th centuries."

The master cabinetmakers of the time furnished the court, royal households, châteaux of the nobility and beautiful residences of rich financiers. Think King Louis XIV, Queen Marie-Antoinette, the Marquis de Marigny, Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barry, Madame de



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“PRESERVING WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE IS AN INVESTMENT FOR ALL OF US, FOR OUR CHILDREN AND OUR GRANDCHILDREN. IT IS OUR DUTY TO DO SO, AS MUCH FOR THE FUTURE AS FOR THE PAST. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CARING FOR AND PRESERVING THE BEAUTY OF EUROPE.”

Mailly and Lazare Duvaux – France's elite who competed with each other to have the most beautiful pieces of art. They were often in their 20s when they purchased them, as the life expectancy then was about 50 years old. It was also a time of relative peace, with no wars or crises, and this happiness was reflected in the furniture's artistic creativity.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE 18TH CENTURY

Under the supervision of the Louvre's successive directors of the Department of Decorative Arts and together with interior designer and French decorative arts connoisseur,

Jacques Garcia, who masterminded the exhibition design, a team of artisans helped the 18th-century galleries – composed of the chambers that once housed the Council of State and the entire first floor of the north wing of the Cour Carrée – regain their original splendour, thereby succeeding in safeguarding uncommon skills: cabinetmaking, bronze work, gilding, upholstery, parquet work and art restoration. The rooms adopt a chronological approach, taking visitors through a natural progression of the major stylistic periods, from the flamboyant Louis XIV aesthetic and the Regency style to the elaborate

03 Wardrobe in oak, softwood, ebony veneer, marquetry of tortoiseshell, brass, pewter and coloured horn, and gilded bronze by André-Charles Boulle, around 1700-1720.



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04 View of the Petit Trianon from the French garden.

05 Queen Marie-Antoinette converted Louis XV's private chambers into a cabinet equipped with movable mirrors, which would rise from the floor below to block the two windows to obtain a boudoir with a double mirror effect.

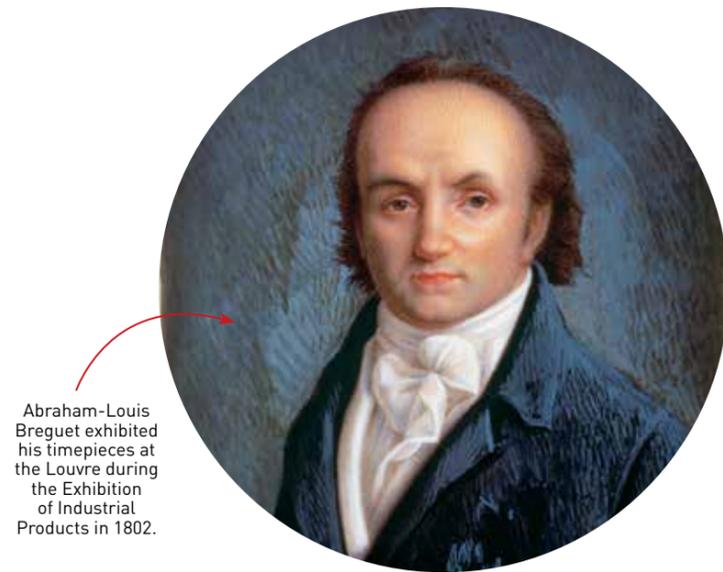
06 Louis XVI garden with dolphins vase with a blue background in Sèvres porcelain painted by Pierre Joseph Rosset l'Ainé and gilded by Jean-Pierre Boulanger, a gift of the Kraemer family.

but light-hearted Rococo art, followed by a return to the antique taste and neoclassicism with its pure, geometrical proportions, straight lines and refined colours.

Master works on display are by the greatest artisans of their day, whose workshops served not only the French court, but also its European counterparts, thus contributing to the spread of French culture: cabinetmakers Charles Cressent, Jean-Henri Riesener, Jean-Baptiste-Claude Séné and Bernard II van Risenburgh; silver- and goldsmiths Thomas Germain, Jacques Roëttiers and Robert-Joseph Auguste; and painters and decorators Charles Lebrun and Charles-Antoine Coypel. The Louvre's collection grew from donations from benefactors like Comte Isaac de Camondo, Baronne Salomon de Rothschild, Basile de Schlichting, René Grog and Marie-Louise Grog-Carven, J Paul Getty, the Duchess of Windsor and the Kraemer family. A top-quality, perfectly proportioned Louis XVI garden with dolphins vase with a blue background in Sèvres porcelain – made for the son of the king, painted by Pierre Joseph Rosset l'Ainé and gilded by Jean-Pierre Boulanger – was donated by Philippe, Olivier and Laurent Kraemer. Other smaller items include a gold

coffer made for Louis XIV by goldsmith Jacob Blanck, with a wooden body covered in blue silk satin, cast, chased and filigreed gold and gilt bronze, and Marie-Antoinette's travelling case in mahogany, containing 94 objects in silver, crystal, porcelain, steel, ivory and ebony.

What's significant about the galleries' new design are the period rooms – a rarity in French museums – which reconstitute a coherent decorative setting in terms of floors, panelling, doors, windows, cornices and ceilings, thus allowing visitors to view objects in historic context. The atmosphere of entire rooms in private residences have been reconstructed, brought back to life and put on display as prime examples of interior design by Parisian workshops under the reign of Louis XV, thus providing glimpses into the most fashionable palatial homes of the period. This museological concept makes the luxurious art of living instantly perceptible and easier to understand, and returns the creations of decorators and master artisans to their natural environment. Take, for example, the faithful reconstruction of the 1750 drawing room and private sitting room of the former Villemaré-Dangé townhouse at Place Vendôme. In a neoclassical space at the heart of



Abraham-Louis Breguet exhibited his timepieces at the Louvre during the Exhibition of Industrial Products in 1802.

BREGUET WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE, AS HE VIEWED WATCHMAKING AS A COMBINATION OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS.

— *Nicolas Hayek*

the new galleries, a cupola fresco depicting mythological subjects, painted in 1774 by Antoine-François Callet and Pierre-Hyacinthe Deleuze for Louis Joseph de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, was fully restored, reassembled and installed. There are also amazingly detailed carved, painted and gilded wood panelling originally created for aristocrat Le Bas de Montargis' residence, elegantly-painted panels once adorning the Comte d'Artois' Turkish-designed study in Versailles and a complete set of nine decorative paintings in the grotesque style depicting leisurely country pastimes by Jean-Baptiste Oudry.

A Louis XVI commode by Martin Carlin, with a red griotte marble top, ebony and rosewood veneers and chased gilt-bronze mounts, highlights imported Japanese lacquer screen panels featuring Asian landscapes, which is among the best examples in the world of the cultural exchanges between Asia and France at the time. André-Charles Boulle, the first cabinetmaker to use lavish gilt-bronze mounts to enhance the decoration of his furniture, created an armoire for the royal furniture depository in oak, softwood, ebony veneer, marquetry of tortoiseshell, brass, pewter and stained horn, and gilt-bronze mounts.

Other exceptional pieces include a set of six straight-backed armchairs and a sofa owned by the financier Pierre Crozat in carved, gilded walnut, red and fawn-coloured leather, and red-and-white silk braiding, and a roll-top desk by Jean-François Leleu in oak, tulipwood veneer, gilt bronze and marquetry of barberry wood, hollywood, maple burr and boxwood on brown-stained maple, decorated with Sèvres porcelain plaques.

PETIT TRIANON

Like many European royals, Marie-Antoinette was an ardent collector of Breguet timepieces. To set the stage for the reopening of the Louvre's 18th-century art galleries, Breguet organised a tour of the Petit Trianon palace (originally built in the 1760s by Louis XV for his official mistress, Madame de Pompadour, on the grounds of Versailles), Marie-Antoinette's private retreat from the stifling atmosphere of the Château de Versailles and its strict rituals and etiquette. Off-limits to Louis XVI, who needed special permission to enter (although he had a private apartment on the top floor, he never slept there), the masterpiece of Greek-style neoclassical architecture was her personal pleasure palace, a place she could call her own and on which she imposed her personality and impeccable taste for refinement and femininity.

The Queen's apartments included a living room for games and music, and she had a space that was once the previous King's private chambers transformed into a boudoir with sliding mirror panels that rose from the floor below to cover the windows. From her room, she could see the English garden, with its more 'natural' landscape scenes, and its marble Temple of Love dedicated to Cupid. The mezzanine housed bedrooms for her ladies-in-waiting and chambermaids, and a library, although she disliked reading. The palace's front façade, decorated with columns inspired by ancient temples, looked out onto the French formal garden, where she and her guests put on plays and operas in the Queen's Theatre, as she loved singing, playing the harp and composing songs.

Following the French Revolution, the home was looted, became a restaurant and dance hall, then was purchased by Napoleon I and restored by Empress Eugénie, before falling into disrepair over the centuries until the recreation of the legendary Breguet *No 160 Marie-Antoinette* watch, known as the most complicated timepiece in the world at the time, which was originally conceived by Abraham-Louis Breguet for the French Queen. The watch's rebirth was the brainchild of Nicolas Hayek, who also decided to spearhead the Petit Trianon's entire restoration – which cost over USD7million, mainly sponsored by Breguet – after acquiring the wood for the watch's presentation case from a centuries-old oak tree on the property, which had to be felled. In 2008, the replica of the Marie-Antoinette watch was unveiled and her favourite retreat was brought back to its former glory. And, today, at the Louvre, visitors need no longer be deprived of one of the world's finest collections of 18th-century French decorative furnishings and *objets d'art* – all thanks to Breguet. 🕒