



# Geneva Enamels

by Osvaldo Patrizzi

"Le Cœur"

A pair of watches by Piguet & Meylan, Geneva, circa 1820, enamel attributable to Jean Abraham Lissignol, case by Oltramare, made for the Chinese market. Left, sold by Antiquorum on November 13, 1999, lot 87, for SFr. 2,203,500 (US\$ 1,421,600); right, sold by Antiquorum in Vicenza on January 18, 1992, for SFr. 715,000. The Oltramare brothers were goldsmiths whose firm was founded on November 1815. The company was dissolved and the punchmarks destroyed on March 31, 1826.



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The success and development of painting on enamel in Geneva was largely due to the commercial expansion of horology.

In attempting to follow the mysterious alchemy of the art of enamel – and later the art of painting on enamel – from its origins up to the end of the 19th century, one is immediately and inevitably drawn

to one city. That city, which has made such a great contribution to the art, whose artists have so ably represented and almost personified that art, and to which I dedicate this last installment in the history of its evolution, is Geneva.

As you may have read in my previous articles on enamel, the first of which was devoted to its origins and its spread throughout Europe and China, the art was a highly appreciated decorative art from antiquity to the Middle Ages. The second article in the series concentrated on the evolution of enamel in Limoges and Blois, where artists such as the

Limousins, the Penicauds, the Reymonds, the Toutins, Morlière, and Gribelin, refined the technique to a state of perfection. The art became so characteristically identified with the locality where it was practiced that the various schools came to be called after the city where they grew up and developed: Limoges enamel or Blois enamel. The art was served by masters of unequalled artistic gifts and technical ability. They left works so superb that they have survived the test of time and of changing fashions, those implacable "judges" which over time distinguish works of art from the work of artisans.

Geneva owes its reputation as a major center for the art of enamel to three of its native artists, Jean Petitot, Jacques Bordier and Pierre Prieur, all of whom worked during the second half of the 17th century. The first two were apprentices of Pierre Bordier and Pierre Bouvier; the third was an apprentice "jeweler" of Jean Planchant. Highly skilled specialists in the technique of painting on enamel as perfected by Jean Toutin in the 1620s, their talents soon made them famous in all the major courts of Europe. Excellent miniaturists, they were appreciated for their unequalled mastery of their art, which can be admired in their portraits of members of the royal families and courtiers.

Another important factor was the religious persecution of Huguenots, many of whom fled to Geneva. They found the city to be a welcoming place where numerous artisans, horologists and goldsmiths had found refuge as well. These refugees contributed their experience, skill and knowledge to the further development of the art of enameling. Previously typically French, the technique soon became completely acclimated to the city of Calvin. The first artist who was to engender a veritable dynasty was a young man originally from Châtellerault in France.

**Pierre Huaud I**, (also Huault and Huaut) born in 1612, was the son of a goldsmith who fled to Geneva in 1630 at the age of 18. That same year he became apprenticed to Laurent Legaré, master goldsmith. In 1634 he became *compagnon*<sup>(1)</sup>, and master around 1637. On June 18, 1643, he married Françoise Mussard, with whom he had three sons: Pierre II, born in 1647, Jean-Pierre, born in 1655 and Ami, born in 1657. In 1661 he took as an apprentice Jean André, a painter who left works of great artistic importance. From 1659 to 1661, he had another apprentice, Isaac Gastineau, who left no trace in the history of the art. Pierre and his three sons became *bourgeois*<sup>(2)</sup> in 1671; Pierre died in 1680. No signed works by Pierre Huault I are known, but he specialized in the decoration of watch cases and seems to have been an artist

of great talent. Several watchcases are attributed to him, which can be dated by the characteristics of their movements. Works produced until about 1667-68 can be attributed to him, at which date the first of his three sons, Pierre II, became master.

Pierre Huaud I made noteworthy use of the *pointillé*<sup>(3)</sup> technique of painting on enamel, a technique that he used for the entirety of the subject depicted. Indeed, this may be considered the principal innovation that is attributable to him. This technique, featuring superimposed dots of contrasting colors, allowed for scenes of greater volume and depth. The pointillé technique was practiced by certain Blois and Paris artists, but it was used sparingly, only for faces, in order to enhance the delicacy of the features or to spotlight certain mannerist touches. This was a fine and subtle pointillé, nearly imperceptible, in which one could admire the purity and delicacy of line. The technique can be appreciated in many of the works of Robert Vauquer of Blois. However, the pointillé work of Pierre I was more vigorous, his colors brighter and more vivid, resulting in an effect of greater relief than had ever been seen before. Pierre I is credited with enamel watch cases in which the central scene is a portrait, framed by a medallion that is generally oval and surrounded by the garlands of intertwined flowers and scrolling typical of the mid 17th century.



*"Portrait of the Young Louis XIV"*

*P(aul) Vallette à Montpellier, circa 1660, enamel attributable to Pierre I Huaud. 22K gold and enamel single-hand, pre-balance spring pendant watch with painted on enamel case. Sold at Antiquorum on April, 2002, lot 598, for SFr. 220,000 (US\$ 147,000).*



*Abraham Cailliatte, Geneva, enamel  
 attributed to Pierre Huaud l'ainé, Geneva, circa 1670.  
 22K gold and enamel pre-balance spring watch.  
 Sold at Antiquorum on November 13, 1999, lot 5,  
 for SFr. 110,000 (US\$ 70,000).*



*"Bacchus and Ceres"  
 Attributed to Pierre Huaud l'ainé, Geneva, circa 1670.  
 Gold and painted on enamel pendant spice box.  
 Sold at Antiquorum on June 8, 2002, lot 412,  
 for HK\$ 143,000 (US\$ 18,000).*

The most talented of Pierre's sons seems to have been Pierre II. The many known works signed by him confirm his talent and skill.

**Pierre II**, born in Geneva on February 2, 1647, was apprenticed to his father. In 1678 he married Eva Delarue; the couple had four children. Taking his inspiration from the pointillé technique employed by his father, and being extremely gifted artistically, he painted many mythological and historical scenes such as the Judgment of Paris, the Abduction of Helen, Roman Charity, and Cleopatra. Considered the most talented of the brothers, he traveled to Berlin in 1685, and returned to Geneva in 1686. In 1691 he returned to Berlin, to the court of the Great Elector Frederic III as a painter of miniatures. He died there in 1698.

He signed his work in various fashions: P. Huaud l'ainé pinxit a Geneve; Petrus Mayor Natus Pinxit Geneva; Huaud l'aisne pinxit à Genève; P. Huaud P. à G.; P. Huault.

The signature is often enclosed in a cartouche on the band, under the VI; it is rarely found under the scene. The portraits are signed on the back, on the counter enamel.

**Jean-Pierre Huaud**, the second son of Pierre I, was apprenticed to his father like his brother before him. He married Adrienne de Tudert in November 1684. He and his brother Ami, with whom he was associated, went together to Brandenburg to practice the art of painting on enamel. This resulted from a specific request by the Great Elector of the Council of Geneva, who had to give them permission to leave. They returned to Geneva in 1700. Greatly influenced by the style of their father and their brother Pierre II, they were very skillful and highly regarded painters on enamel. Among the signatures of the brothers, either separately or together, can be found: Huaud le puisné fecit; Huaud le puisné peintre de son A.E. à Berlin; Frères Huaut; les deux frères Huaud les jeunes; Fratres Huaud pinxerunt.

**Ami Huaud** (also Amy) was born on August 9, 1657 and died on November 16, 1724. Like his brothers, he too studied with his father, and was associated with his brother Jean-Pierre from 1682 to 1688. In 1684, he married Antoniette Dutoit; this was a second marriage for him. Along with his brother, he was called to the court of the Brandenburg Elector in 1686, and returned to Geneva with his brother in 1700.



*Case enameled by les deux frères Huaud, les Jeunes, movement by J. B. Vrythoff, Hague, No. 152, circa 1686.  
Sold at Antiquorum on November 13, 1999, lot 7, for SFr. 79,000 (US\$ 51,000).*

*"The Bath of Bathsheba"  
Gold snuffbox with painted on enamel scene attributed to the Frères Huaud, circa 1700.*



*"Pietà"  
Gaudron à Paris, case painted on enamel by les Frères Huaud, circa 1690. Gilt brass single hand Louis XIV oignon watch with central winding.  
Sold at Antiquorum on June 2000, lot 365, for HK\$ 126,500 (US\$ 16,000).*

The Huauds created a true school of painting on enamel. Their work and reputation helped to popularize the art throughout the world. As was the case for Blois and Limoges, the characteristics of this type of painting on enamel led it to be named after its city of origin: *émail de Genève*.

After the Huauds, many of their students continued to paint with the technique taught by their masters. These were artists such as Jean V Mussard, Jean-Antoine, Jean André, Gabriel Fontaine, André Dottner, Germain Colladon. They, in turn, became masters and trained apprentices. The works produced by all these artists, admired throughout the world for their exceptional decorative qualities, were very effective in promoting the art of Geneva enamels. This tradition, firmly fixed in the memories of consumers, was able to withstand competition from the French and German artist. After a period of lesser popularity which lasted until the closing years of the 18th century, it came back into fashion with the vogue of the enameled snuffbox, embellished with a new type of machine chiseling of great precision and beauty, the *guilloché* technique.



The manufacturers, realizing that Genevese horology was becoming less saleable as a finished product, adapted to the situation and began offering semi-finished goods. Thus, movements were mass-produced, cased, and sent to their destinations, thereby avoiding the heavy customs duties imposed on finished goods. In this manner, many enamel-decorated cases were exported, having been sold separately from the movements.

Many of the lower-quality products were destined to emerging markets such as that of Italy, Austria, or Spain, where the growing middle classes, eager to prove their taste and discernment, demanded products which were accessible to them, even though they might be less exclusive. One realizes when looking at the few Genevese watches made during the second half of the 18th century that have survived, many are of mediocre quality. The majority are signed by Soret, Dechaudens, Bordier, Terroux, Moricand, and Veigneur, and feature portraits of noble ladies whose long profiles slightly resembling those of horses, painted on enamel and framed with paste stones simulating diamonds and rubies.

**“Roman Charity”**

*Gaudron A Paris, circa 1700, enamel attributed to Jean André I. Silver and painted on enamel single-hand oignon watch. Sold at Antiquorum on October 11, 2003, lot 101, for SFr. 8,000 (US\$ 6,100)*



**“Venus and Adonis”**

*Attributable to Jean V Mussard's workshop, No. 2870, circa 1730. Painted on enamel miniature. Sold at Antiquorum on June 14, 2003, lot 234, for SFr. 2,000 (US\$ 1,500)*



Enamel decoration was one of the main factors responsible for the popularity of horology in Geneva during the second half of the 18th century, a period of general decadence due to the asceticism imposed in France by the Revolution. In just a few years, even the field of horology lost much of its reputation which had remained stable for over a century, due to the existence of entrepreneurs who produced large quantities of low-cost, low-quality movements. Many retailers disappeared as well. In England, Germany and especially in France, the upper classes demanded ever-more precise and sophisticated instruments, inciting horologists to invent, create and produce works of exceptional quality, unrivaled by the Genevan horologists. Watchmakers such as Le Roy, Baillon, Lepaute, Lépine, Gaudron, Dutertre, Lenoir, Ellicott, Mudge, Graham and Hubert, produced works of great beauty whose technical innovations placed them on a technical level far beyond that of Geneva.



At the time, few watchmakers produced pieces of the highest quality. Among them one notes Jean and Michel Vieusseux, Jacques Patron, Blanc Père et Fils, Terreaux l'Ainé, Pierre Jacquet Droz and his son Henry-Louis Jaquet Droz, and Jean-Frédéric Leschot. Many others preferred to emigrate to Paris and London, cities more culturally active, where due to the almost insolent display of riches, luxury goods and watches of the highest quality were in great demand. However, others, such as Roman, Melly and Roux, settled in cities such as Constance. Such places were at the time fiscal paradises where more lenient legislation allowed the importation of Genevan goods. These were finished there and exported to Northeastern Europe, where the customs taxes remained reasonable. Painters on enamel such as Jean-Francois Favre, Jacques Thouron, and horologists such as Jean Romilly, Chevalier, and even Breguet, found the atmosphere in Paris and the



**"Rinaldo and the Wood Nymphs"**

**Ami Monnier, Geneva, enamel signed Jean-François Soiron, circa 1780.** An 18K varicolored gold and painted on enamel quarter-repeating watch. Sold at Antiquorum, on April 24, 2004, lot 127, for SFr. 27,500 (US\$ 21,000).

international clientele better suited to their production. Bellamy, Daniel de Saint Leu, Louis Recordon, Charles Dupont, and Josiah Emery, preferred London. There they were able to display the full measure of their horological talent, not to mention their commercial skill. In 1773, the above-cited Jaquet Droz, opened a comptoir in London in order to better sell their products. In Europe, toward the end of the century, important events were taking place. The Chinese and Indian markets were accessible via England, while political events were changing the political and social climate. Swiss horology, and particularly Genevese horology, discovered a market that was more receptive to lower-priced goods. Reduced competition, brought about by the economic and political difficulties that tormented Europe, boosted the demand for medium-quality watches that seemed impressive at first glance, but whose attractiveness was mainly for show.

The neoclassical fashion, with its purer lines for women, had a predilection for striking, yet delicate, necklaces that had a great decorative effect, like the "fantasy" watches then in vogue in Geneva. It addressed a clientele greatly reduced by the upheavals of the French Revolution, offering products which were better adapted to the social climate of the period.

Small masterpieces of the most unusual shapes and forms were produced, to be worn on the wrist or as pendants, whose romantic symbolism highlighted femininity, and which corresponded to a world in which women's fashions took on ever-greater importance.

During the next century, new horizons and new markets opened up in the world of international commerce. These offered new possibilities of renewal for the centuries-old Genevan horological tradition. The creation of a new product, the flat pocket watch for men, helped contribute to the renewal of Genevese horology, along with that of enamel. This type of watch was not only practical, it was elegant and prestigious as well.

Another article which had enormous importance for the evolution of painting on enamel in Geneva, particularly during the Neoclassical and Romantic periods, was the snuffbox. Enamel painters such as Jean Francois Soirin, Dufour and Lechet, Philippe-Samuel and David-Etienne Roux, Gabriel Constant Vaucher, Jean Abraham Lissignol, Jean Antoine Link, Jean Louis Richter, Aimè-Julien Troll, Adam, Dufaux, l'Evesque and the incomparable Jean-Francois-Victor Dupont found the means of fully expressing their art, while creating beautiful decorative objects.

*"Venus Binding the Wings of Cupid"*  
Piguet & Meylan, No. 6853,  
Geneva, enamel attributed  
to Lissignol, made for the  
Chinese market, circa 1820.

Sold at Antiquorum on  
April 12, 2003, lot 573,  
for SFr. 615,000  
(US\$ 440,000).



Horology, spurred on by the innovative ideas of Lépine and Breguet, became more and more practical. New forms were created, and new and fashionable designs were introduced to decorate them. The first automaton watches were made, the first musical watches, the first snuffboxes with singing birds. These fine and elegant pieces were embellished with splendid champlevé enamel scenes and set with pearls and precious stones.

The world discovered it had a great appetite for "breloques" (charms) and fine enamel decorative objects, brought to the greatest artisanal level by the previously mentioned artists, a level of perfection never before achieved in Geneva. In France and in England, timepieces in the form of small temples 30 cm. high were made of gold, enamel and pearls. Small watch movements of various shapes and forms were placed in precious gold and enamel spyglasses, fans, and nécessaires de voyage, to which were often added small musical movements with vibrating tuned teeth, playing sweet and delicate melodies.

This device had recently been invented by Favre-Salomon and further developed by Piguet and Capt. Occasionally these small marvels were fitted with highly complex singing bird mechanisms. These masterpieces were often decorated with mythological scenes, or scenes inspired by literary or historical subjects, taken from engravings and paintings by artists such as Eustache Le Sueur, (1616-1655), F. Joullain, Antoine Coypel (1661-1722), Simon Vouet (1590-1649), Jean Restout II, (1692-1768), William Hamilton R.A. (1751-1801), Angelica Kauffmann, (1741-1807), and Louise Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842). Other scenes feature the characteristic and typical landscapes of Lake Geneva, while still others showed Alpine scenes, all executed with great skill and precision.

As previously mentioned, the Chinese market was of great importance for Geneva during the first half of the 19th century. This was due to the efforts of a few great watchmakers whose most beautiful, elaborate



*"The Tambourine"*  
Piguet et Meylan à Genève,  
No. 6733, enamel attributed to  
Adam, made for the Chinese  
market, circa 1820. Sold  
at Antiquorum on April  
12, 2003, lot 574,  
for SFr. 715,000  
(US\$ 511,000).



and sophisticated works were exported to the Celestial Empire. These were men such as Melchior Monnin, Issac Daniel Piguet, Henry Capt, Samuel Meylan, Francois Rochat and his brothers, Jacob Frisard, and Abraham Bruguier. All of these artists were known to produce pieces in opposing pairs. These inestimable masterpieces, of the greatest refinement and richness, can today be admired in museums all over the world. The Chinese Imperial Court and the Mandarins were fascinated by these pieces, which were in great demand, and for which their makers were paid in gold.

As the years passed, the city of Fleurier took on ever-greater importance in the production of horological goods for the Chinese market, even though these goods tended to be of lesser quality. The most luxurious of them had cases decorated in Geneva, with scenes less elaborate than those produced only twenty years previously, and were ordered in great quantities. A new period of artistic "decadence" was beginning.

Very few firms still executed special orders. Among them were Vacheron & Constantin, a company which had developed remarkably and produced watches of excellent artistic and technical quality, Rossel and Bautte, J. Gallay, Blondel et Melly, J. L. Liudet, Lebet, Bichler and Hartmann. In addition, two Polish refugees, Norbert Patek and Francois Czapek, despite the difficulties encountered at the time, began a very promising career.

During the second half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, internal problems in China, such as the Boxer rebellion and restrictions imposed on commerce with Europe, led to a diminished demand for high quality and expensive pieces, and a great number of finished movements were imported from Fleurier. These movements were then mounted in silver or gilt copper cases in workshops located in Canton and Shanghai. At the same time, another market was beginning to show interest in Swiss horological products, and particularly those decorated with enamel.

V. Dupont. ft.



*"The Butterfly"*  
Ilbery, London, No. 6135, enamel  
signed V. Dupont *f(eci)t*, circa 1818.  
18K gold and enamel pearl-set center

seconds watch with a special escape-  
ment, made for the Chinese market. Sold  
at Antiquorum on March 31, 2001, lot  
418, for SFr. 330,000 (US\$ 191,000).



This was the Indian market, with  
its immensely rich Maharajas and  
Maharanis.

Of a completely different style, the watches made  
for India were more technically sophisticated, and  
the cases tended to be heavy, made of solid gold and  
decorated with rich *champlevé* enamel and precious  
stones and pearls.

The Maharajas, whose taste differed from that of the  
Chinese, wanted their watches, which were studded  
with sparkling jewels, to be suspended from the neck  
by a heavy chain that was also set with precious  
stones, as if they were military decorations. Brilliant  
and imposing, they requested that their portrait

miniature or that of the Maharani,  
be painted on enamel on the watch  
cover or *cuvette*.

The Genevese manufacturers, who in the past had  
had the monopoly of the enameling art, now had to  
face growing competition from firms in Le Locle and  
La Chaux-de-Fonds. This was true not just for the con-  
struction of complicated movements, but also for the  
decoration of the cases. Barbezat-Bôle of Le Locle  
made a specialty of cases decorated with enamel and  
precious stones; their work was particularly appre-  
ciated in the Orient. While certain Genevese work-  
shops, such as those of the Frères Ultramarre or  
Georges Reymond, had earned an international

# V. Dupont. ft.



*"King Arthur and Emmeline"*  
Ilbery, London, No. 7242, enamel  
signed V. Dupont. Pinx., circa 1820.  
18K gold and enamel center seconds

watch with a special escapement, made  
for the Chinese market.  
Sold at Antiquorum on March 31, 2001,  
lot 420, for SFr. 230,000 (US\$ 133,000).



reputation for horological pieces destined for China in the early 19th century, at the end of the century other firms devoted their efforts to pieces for the Indian market. These artists, who became famous for their creativity and goldsmith's skills, included Ferrero, Giron, Louis Vallot, and Guillardmod Jacot.

The magnificent and delicate portraits painted on enamel, of various royal figures in court costume, were often done by important miniature painters. Among those are John Graf, Juliette and Auguste Hebert, Pierre-Amédée Champod, Susanne Bourguignon, Henri Demole, and Louis Pautex. In addition, many other lesser-known artists devoted

their skills to the development and promotion throughout the world of this typically Genevese art; Genevese, indeed, for over a quarter of a millennium. The art of painting on enamel, when practiced by the best painters, is not just an industrial or decorative art, but truly proves itself to be one of the fine arts.

- (1) *Compagnon*: after four years of apprenticeship, a young man had to work for two years, after which he could take an exam to obtain the title of "master".
- (2) *Bourgeois*: administrative title given to foreigners residing in Geneva.
- (3) *Pointillé*: a painting technique in which the artist executes the scene or portions of it with a series of colored points of varying hue and intensity.