

AHS London Lecture Thursday 16 March 2017

Julia Clarke

Casing watches and automata.

The goldsmiths and enamellers of Geneva 1780–1830

Although much has been written about the Geneva *Fabrique*, the local name for a tightly-knit community of merchants, watchmakers, goldsmiths and attendant trades, most authors have concentrated on the watchmakers. Out of the 5,000 men and women employed by the *Fabrique* in 1789, watchmakers formed the largest group at some 1,200 practitioners but, added together, the 660 casemakers, 354 *bijoutiers*, jewellers and goldsmiths, and 300 enamellers and enamel painters can be considered equally important. These were the artists and artisans responsible for the outward presentation of the watch and automaton movements that the Geneva merchants sold to a worldwide clientele.

By the middle of the 18th century, Geneva had gained a reputation for ‘cheap and cheerful’ watches and *bijouterie* but by the end of the century was producing splendid and innovative pieces for the Near and Far Eastern markets including musical, singing bird and automaton boxes, clocks and watches. The inscribed names of the retailers or *mécaniciens*, such as Jaquet-Droz & Leschot or Henri Maillardet are familiar but not the names of those who made and ornamented the cases.

Julia Clarke worked at Sotheby’s as a specialist in gold boxes and objects of vertu for over forty years and is now a consultant. She has long been interested in the history of Geneva gold workers and enamellers.

TICKETS

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A jewelled gold and enamel *serinette* scent flask, the movement Jaquet-Droz & Leschot, the case probably Philippe Gervais, Geneva, 1785/7, sold to James Cox, London, 1787.



A pearl, gold and enamel automaton mouse, attributed to Henri Maillardet, circa 1805.

Both photos courtesy of Sotheby’s.