

JEWELRY

Breguet shares its royal affiliations in Marie Antoinette retrospective

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Portrait of Marie Antoinette by Vigé Le Brun; courtesy of Breguet

By STAFF REPORTS

Swiss watchmaker Breguet is bringing its Marie Antoinette-commissioned timepieces to horologists in Tokyo for a new exhibition.

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Breguet has partnered with the Chateau de Versailles to support a museum retrospective honoring Marie Antoinette, a lover of decadence, at Tokyo's Mori Arts Center Gallery. The exhibition opens in October, and tells of the intimate relationship the Swatch Group-owned watchmaker had with the last queen of France.

Fit for royalty

In 1762, Abraham-Louis Breguet left his home in Switzerland for Paris and soon found himself in aristocratic circles, including the court of Queen Marie Antoinette.

The first Breguet timepiece ordered by Marie Antoinette came in 1782, a few years after Mr. Breguet established his workshop on Paris' Quai de l'Horloge. The order helped to cement Breguet timepieces and the watchmaker's reputation within the court and high society.



Abraham-Louis Breguet, founder of Breguet

Marie Antoinette even wore her "simple Breguet watch" while held captive in the Temple Prison during the French Revolution. Prior to her death, Marie Antoinette commissioned a watch from Mr. Breguet that would remain the most complicated timepiece produced for nearly a century after its completion.

Although Marie Antoinette was killed 34 years before its completion, 44 years after it was ordered and 4 years after Mr. Breguet's death, the watch is iconic within the watchmaking industry.

The watch has been stolen, relocated and subsequently reproduced to protect it since its creation more than two centuries ago. Breguet watchmakers set to reproduce the timepiece had only archives to go off of to recreate the intricate movements held within.

During the preparations to rebuild the watch, it was discovered that Marie Antoinette's favorite tree at Versailles was sick with disease and set to be chopped down. Versailles subsequently donated a piece of the oak tree to Breguet, which was used to create a keepsake box for the reproduction of Marie Antoinette's wristwatch.



Breguet's Marie Antoinette watch

The reproduction completed in 2008, among other artifacts, will be on display at the "Marie Antoinette: A Queen in Versailles" exhibition. The artifacts will be on view at the Mori Arts Center Gallery through Feb. 26, 2017.

In another brand retrospective, Breguet partnered with the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco to present horologists in the Bay Area the opportunity to learn more about the brand's innovative works.

The 2015 exhibit, titled "Breguet: Art and Innovation in Watchmaking" was held at the California Palace at the Legion of Honor Museum. On display is the Swatch-owned watchmaker's largest collection of antique timepieces ever shown to consumers in the Americas.

Pieces culminated to underscore Breguet's timepieces as "miracles of mechanical engineering and objects of rare beauty celebrated in the courts of Europe by the world's most preeminent personalities," including Marie Antoinette ([see story](#)).

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