

ANGULAR MOMENTUM & MANU PROPRIA

the capital difference

Paul O'Neil

The outskirts of Switzerland's capital city of Bern are an unlikely place to find one of the country's unsung heroes of the métiers d'art, but it is here, on one half of the fourth floor of the iconic Stufenbau building, a former nitrocellulose (gun cotton) factory in Ittigen, that Martin Pauli works painstakingly and in splendid isolation.

Wandering through an open door, one feels a million miles away from the high-security, industrial manufactures of Geneva and the Vallée de Joux. In a workshop that resembles a working museum, with antique machines dotted around seemingly randomly, the atmosphere is so relaxed that even the cat from a neighbouring workshop is free to come and go as it pleases. A quick tour reveals machines for making cases, a station for micro-painting, another for Japanese lacquer, one for enamelling and still another, brimming with tools, for engraving. It is here that Martin Pauli designs, produces and even photographs his bespoke pieces.

▽ A unique piece with a verre églomisé miniature painting from the **TIGER** collection by Martin Pauli.



But Angular Momentum started out very differently. The brand was born of an idea to revolutionise the traditional system of displaying time on a watch by replacing the fixed dial and moving hands with a rotating dial and a single fixed hand (hence the name *Angular Momentum*, which refers to the torque required to set the disc in motion). Already a success in itself, this technology has since allowed Martin Pauli to perfect a truly unique form of miniature painting. In the absence of moving hands, the entire dial can be filled with the miniature painting. Yet it is not the dial at all that Pauli paints but the inside of the sapphire crystal.

This means, of course, that the painting has to be done in reverse. To assist the process, Pauli applies a sticker to the front of the crystal that allows him to follow the contours of the drawing under the microscope. He then proceeds to apply finely calibrated natural colour pigments to a thin layer of aqua regia, dispersing them either with a pin or a brush with a single bristle. After firing to remove excess liquid, three protective layers of Japanese Urushi lacquer are applied on the painting as a protective layer. A small aperture in the finished painting on the crystal allows the time to be read off the rotating disc.

Whether it has a dial with a miniature painting, Japanese lacquer, or even glow-in-the-dark enamel, a bespoke watch by Martin Pauli comes with a movement from his impressive "new old stock" collection, which comprises around a thousand movements – enough to keep him going for a number of years – stored in an antique cupboard in the corridor of his workshop. He is keen to stress the quality of these vintage movements: "They can run for 15 to 20 years before they need servicing," he says. "Just imagine, service used to be free of charge at Zenith but today it's big business."





A bespoke timepiece by Martin Pauli costs around 50,000 Swiss francs. This is a huge sum but it stands up well to the offerings of Pauli's few mainstream "competitors" (the word hardly seems appropriate in such a niche), where the painting alone can cost 70,000 francs and the finished watch retails for several hundred thousand francs. The absence of a retail margin undoubtedly helps to keep prices down, but it also has its drawbacks. "The biggest problem I have is that if you offer bespoke timepieces then you have to have direct contact with the customer," he explains. "Otherwise you have to have retailers who know all the available options."

For a man working entirely on his own, Martin Pauli offers an astonishing range of samples that show off the numerous rare skills he masters. But he also offers a range of more classically themed, more affordable timepieces that help him "pay the rent" and maintain his independence. The resurgence of the *metiers d'art* can only help him further with this. "I think it's a good marketing tool," he concludes, "because you have the opportunity to prove that the product is hand made. I'm sure I'm benefitting from its resurgence." ■

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GRAND FEU ENAMEL AND GRISAILLE PAINTING

MANUFACTURA 1528, ANGELS COLLECTION,
by Julien Coudray 1518

In the delicate "grisaille" technique, the enameller works into the enamel fine gold or silver patterns, using either a hand chisel or punch. The 13-part dial is made from enamelled solid 18-carat Pd125 white gold, with traditional *grand feu* black and white enamelled domed cartouches. The centre of the dial is made from enamelled solid 18-carat gold featuring *grand feu* enamel miniature, using the "grisaille" technique. The three-coloured hands (blue, grey and yellow) are hand-engraved and designed to represent an arrow once together. The colours are obtained without either chemical treatment or lacquer.



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