



DE BETHUNE

L'ART HORLOGER AU XXI^E SIÈCLE

**Keynote by Denis Flageollet – at the press conference
“(Im)Perfect World” at Maison d’Ailleurs - Yverdon, 13 November 2019**

I will spare you reading from the press kit you have in your hands. Instead, I will try to share with you, through our respective professions, callings, my personal vision of the ‘Perfect’ and the ‘Imperfect.’

Watches – “Time Pieces” – present a perfect platform for dreams and the idea one can conjure of a utopia. The origin of some of our watches aims to connect various worlds of technical and artistic know-how. When I designed the DW5, my desire was to leave plenty of room for the various possibilities of dealing with its external structure. I am pleased to be able to present to you, as a preview, the Armillia, one of the unique timepieces resulting from this desire.

On one hand, I admire the extraordinary drawing talent which François Schuiten translates into a universe that allows us to escape from this world. On the other, I have a friend, Michèle Rothen, whom I consider to be the greatest metal engraver in the world. For 35 years now I have been asking her for the impossible; she has never failed.

That's all it took to make me want to build a bridge between these two art forms. As craftsmen, it's not about “more.” It's better.” We always seek to push our limits. I will speak to you as a craftsman because, beyond the exceptional creativity of the works on display (works that challenge us to question ourselves in a clinical way about our human condition), there is the work of the craftsman – craftsperson –, the work done by his or her hands.

We are on a daily quest for the perfect gesture, the perfect way of crafting something, which obviously does not exist. Very fortunately for us, however, these small imperfections that arise from an imperfect or not quite perfect gesture are what, in the end, make up the uniqueness of a handcrafted piece of work.

That boundary between perfection and relative imperfection is what we need to reach in order to bring out our emotion through the material we work with. A material that fascinates us and often resists us. Although works that amaze us are not perfect in every detail, they conjure a sensation far beyond comprehension.

This is how I feel when I see the work of François Schuiten or Michèle Rothen. Or any object created with extraordinary know-how, regardless of the field or discipline. I feel this when I stand before such works because they are human, the result of having done one's best, of having made it with heart, with passion, but also with slight imperfections. All this makes them human, and reassuringly so because they do not come out of machines and industries that format everything they produce.

They are perfect in their imperfection. And it is because of these imperfections that their creator loses something fundamental: he or she can no longer be moved by their own work. Somehow, the creator leaves a part of him or herself behind in the work.

Ask Michèle or François and they will tell you that at the end of their work they only see the defects. In my case, they haunt me, and I must wait for them to fade from memory before I can look at my work with more objectivity. This continuously forces us to question ourselves, pushing us to keep doing better next time. What drives us is all these phases and stages of concentration, failure, determination, doubt and success.



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The strength great artists have is what enables them to build on this experience and to keep crafting a better result. That's what I admire in their works. And when, like the works of François, they also question us, challenge us, and send us a message of hope but also of warning on the razor-fine border between utopia and dystopia, there is only one thing for me to do, and that is to try to capture it in a watch.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank François, who allowed me to work on Dream Watch 5 Armillia, and Michèle, who allowed me to take on this new challenge. Try to imagine, while you look at the piece and at the drawing, all the hours and hours (there are hundreds) that went into the slightest strokes of the pen, the slightest strokes of the chisel. By François, to transport us to other worlds with his strokes of genius. By Michèle, to miniaturize this universe and suspend it forever in solid gold.

At De Bethune, we spent weeks to manufacture each component with the greatest care, to finish it in the greatest watchmaking tradition and to assemble it into an object that indicates the hours and minutes through a window, and accurately displays the phases of our unique satellite, the moon, in the form of a sphere. This watch, which points towards our future, encapsulates an invisible know-how that goes back several centuries and involves 10 craft disciplines.

I would like to conclude with a wish: May we long have the chance to keep our crafts alive, and continue to awaken a sense of wonder. Far from industrialization and growth for its own sake. Far from the "always more" that every day seems to drag us closer to the brink of disaster.