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Jaeger-LeCoultre & the Pre-Raphaelite

Frederique Leighton, 1st Baron Leighton of Stretton, was a distinguished Victorian painter and sculptor of the Pre-Raphaelite school, who plumbed the depths of Classical antiquity and became the president of the Royal Academy. Jaeger-LeCoultre, as you very well know, is a celebrated Swiss watch manufacture that was founded in 1833 and can lay claim to over 1000 calibres.

Why these two should be caught up in the same paragraph became apparent earlier this year when the Le Sentier maestros exhibited a unique display of enamelling commissioned by a British art collector and watch enthusiast. The Gentleman in question is the proud owner of Pavonia, an exquisite portrait of the Italian model Nanna Risi, painted by Leighton in 1858. His carte blanche challenge was for Jaeger-LeCoultre to reproduce Pavonia, in all her serene Latin glory, on the swivel case of his own Reverso.

After a dedicated 120 hours the result is simply astonishing. The enamellers have managed to capture many of the subtlest detail, from the creases of the soft white fabric of her top, to the lazy coquettish smile that plays at the corner of her mouth. A truly fine piece of bespoke tailoring and one that can be seen at next year's SIHH, where both the watch and the original painting will be on display.



Big Cat

Coming across a carefully thought out and beautifully executed dial helps remind us of the manifold skills involved in watchmaking. All too often attention falls predominantly on the intricacies of the movement, and while this is of course crucial it remains only part of the process.

The Visionary Lion by Speake-Marin is a perfect example of this coming together of various crafts-people and artisans. The English watchmaker had employed the services of one Yamazaki Mushi who, over a period three months, built up single layers of individual colour, using a technique derived from the traditional Japanese lacquer sprinkling process of Makie. Applied in this gradual and painstaking manner the finished result is a rich, sumptuous and luminous design.

With no indigenous species, big cats, particularly lions and tigers, have been a source of intrigue and inspiration for Japanese artists for centuries. Seduced by the ideas of power and stealth - rather than drawing from first-hand observation - these animals often took on magnificently stylised forms. Speake-Marin's Visionary Lion fits with tradition, particularly with the 'Yin' inspired autumnal red and gold and the swirling clouds of the lion's windswept mane.

