



Antique Silver Automaton Pocket Watch. Quarter Repeater. J. Barth. Switzerland, Ca. 1810-1820



3 900 EUR

Period : 19th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Sterling silver

Description

Watch the video on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/pjMubQ7g-aQ?si=ZQqFSxgzQzKheEzW>

This magnificent Swiss pocket watch, dated circa 1810-1820 and signed on the cuvette by J. Barth, is an exceptional example of the high-fantasy horology that flourished during the early nineteenth century. Housed in a finely crafted silver case decorated with guilloché engraving, it presents an elegant and understated exterior that contrasts beautifully with the artistic exuberance of the dial. Its fully functional quarter repeater adds an acoustic dimension that heightens the experience, creating a small ritual each time the slide is activated. The chime is coordinated with the animated scene on the front, bringing to life a unique and deeply captivating composition.

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The dial stands out for its intense blue enamel background that frames a central white chapter ring with classic Roman numerals. Surrounding it is a scene of African jacquemart automatons dressed in traditional attire and executed with remarkable detail. Each figure holds a small hammer and, when the repeater is activated, strikes the gilded bells positioned above the dial in perfect synchronization with the chime.

Watches with animated figures formed part of the taste for the exotic and theatrical that prevailed in elite horology during the French Empire period.

This suggests that the present example was likely a Swiss piece created for export to France. A lower gilt scene completes the composition with ornamental motifs that evoke lush flora and the imaginative aesthetic characteristic of the era.

Inside, the gilt cuvette engraved with the signature J. Barth protects a full-plate movement with a pierced balance and traditional Swiss finishing of excellent quality. The mechanism runs smoothly and shows signs of careful maintenance over the years. Both the timekeeping and the repeater function correctly, and the jacquemarts operate with the precision expected from pieces of this category. The dial is clean and free from visible cracks, the blue enamel is well preserved, and the case, despite the natural patina of age, retains its structural integrity in very good condition.

This watch is an extraordinary opportunity for anyone seeking a historical piece with strong visual and emotional impact. Its presence inspires immediate fascination. The automaton scene, remarkably well preserved, maintains the same charm that captivated watch lovers more than two centuries ago, while the repeater, precise and fully operational, adds a musical quality that surrounds each movement of the mechanism with an almost ceremonial aura.

It is ideal for inclusion in a collection of antique horology due to its rarity. It is also an excellent piece to gift to someone who appreciates singular watches, offering beauty, ingenuity and the feeling of holding a living fragment of watchmaking history. Its rarity and personality elevate it above most pieces of its time, making it an object capable of moving and leaving a lasting impression within any collection.

Dimensions: 57 mm.

History of J. Barth, Swiss Watchmaker

The figure known as J. Barth, identified today as Joseph Barth, corresponds to a Swiss watchmaker active from the early nineteenth century, with workshops first in Geneva and later in La Chaux-de-Fonds. His presence in specialised Swiss directories such as the *Indicateur de l'Horlogerie* allows for the partial reconstruction of the evolution of his manufacture, which later operated under the name "J. Barth & Fils".

Although surviving documentation is limited, modern studies and auction catalogues have helped contextualise his work and highlight his relevance within the technical watchmaking of the period.

The J. Barth signature became associated with high-complication watches, including quarter and minute repeaters, split-seconds chronographs, dead-beat seconds watches and examples featuring automatons, following the nineteenth-century Swiss tradition of animated scenes. Many of these pieces were destined for international markets, especially South America, Russia and the Ottoman Empire, where Barth collaborated with prestigious distributors such as Serkisoff & Co. and Andreas Huber, jeweller to the Bavarian court. The manufacture also adopted external technical innovations, integrating patented mechanisms and collaborating with other watchmakers to optimise repeater

performance and chronometric precision.

The relative scarcity of documentation has contributed to the aura of mystery surrounding the watchmaker, but the surviving signed pieces reveal a clear inclination towards technical excellence and refined aesthetics. Today, J. Barth watches represent an important fragment of nineteenth-century Swiss horological heritage and naturally belong in collections where history and mechanical craftsmanship are deeply appreciated.

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