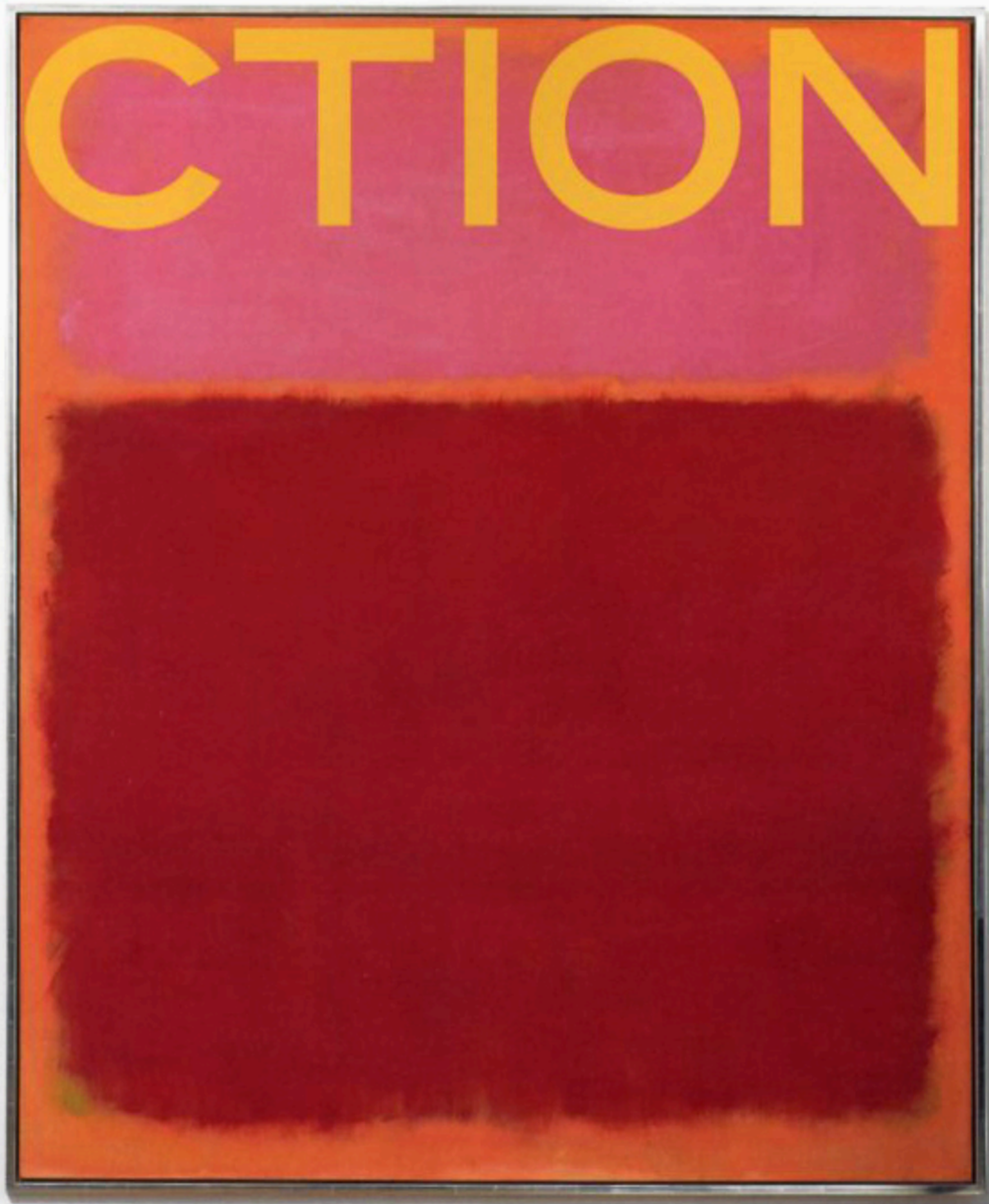


ONE-STOP SHOPPING: HONG KONG | LUXE WATCHES | LEE UFAN'S STROKE OF GENIUS

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SPRING SALES
SEASON OF REVELATION

100 HIGHEST-GROSSING BRIC ARTISTS

DAVID ZWIRNER BUILDS
WILL HE SURPASS LARRY GAGOSIAN?



SMALL WONDERS

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technical, conceptual, and even heretical by traditional watchmaking standards: If firms like Patek Philippe reach for a Platonic ideal, a growing number of niche brands are seeing how far they can run from it. "There's been this trend toward independent watchmaking" during the past 10 years, says Greg Simonian, president of Westtime, the leading timepiece boutique in Los Angeles. "People are looking for something new." Master watchmakers have left the large firms and founded lines to test their wildest horological fantasies. The resulting pieces are prized for their creators' idiosyncratic vision and for their labor-intensive finishes, as well as their rarity. Their production is small—necessarily so, says Simonian, because "oftentimes the owner of the company is the guy behind the bench, too."

When it comes to auctions of modern timepieces, says Charles Tearle, of Antiquorum, "there are certain limited editions that everyone wants." The newer brands by and large perform unpredictably on the block, a fact Tearle attributes to their highly individualized appeal. "Most of the people who buy these watches don't tend to sell them," he explains, but when a hotly pursued model does come on the market, collectors are "often willing to pay really aggressive amounts."

Connoisseurs of niche watchmakers generally play for keeps. "There is definitely a fanaticism," says Simonian. "Most of the time, these brands only make four or five models, so it's easy to own all of them." Following are four brands sure to prompt the envious question: Who are you wearing? —SARAH P. HANSON



MB&F

Maximilian Büsser, a veteran of Jaeger-LeCoultre and Harry Winston, in 2005 conceived a namesake line of "horological machines," miniature kinetic sculptures that are positively baroque in their futurism. Each year, with an invitational group of creative conspirators (the &F stands for "and Friends"), he produces a single model line. The editions range in price from \$74,000 for the HM2 in red gold and titanium to \$208,000 for the HM1 titanium tourbillon, and in size from 125 to as few as 10. "The one that we can't keep in stock is the HM4," says Simonian. "There's a piece of sapphire on the watch that takes 180 hours to machine."



RICHARD MILLE

Hallmarks of Mille's designs include styling and technology taken from Formula One racing, such as alloys, ceramics, carbon

nanofiber, and a reinforced baseplate inspired by F1 chassis construction. Notable for its exposed innards and ergonomic case designs, the line has recently moved into more-decorative models, such as the gem-laden RM 026, which retails from \$485,000 in titanium to \$510,000 in white gold at Mille's first American store, opened in February on Beverly Hills' Rodeo Drive. Around 2,600 pieces are produced a year, with some editions as small as 15. Prices start at \$40,000 and go up to \$755,000.



Clockwise from top: The HM4 Thunderbolt, by MB&F, \$188,000; the Planetarium watch by Christiaan van der Klaauw contains a tiny rotating solar system, €36,500 (\$51,500); Richard Mille's new 038 Tourbillon Bubba Watson, named for the American golfer, \$525,000 in a limited edition of 38. Opposite: The Urwerk UR-110 in titanium.