

# Jean François Victor **Dupont: An Exce**

*Born August 6, 1785 - Died January 11, 1863*



*“King Arthur and Emmeline.”  
Ilbery, London, No. 7242, enamel signed  
V. Dupont. Pinx., made for the Chinese  
market circa 1820. 18K gold and  
enamel centre seconds watch.*



*Example of “Pointille”.*

*V. Dupont. Pinx.*



The Genevan tradition of painting on enamel has had more than its share of great names, artists who throughout the centuries contributed to the city’s reputation, making the characteristic « *émaux de Genève* », famous and sought-after the world over.

In all the fine and industrial arts, there have been figures whose artistic sensitivity, great skill, or simply their creativity, singles them out from all others. They left their mark in history, thanks to the beauty and the originality of their work.

In Genevan horology in particular, men such as Jean Rousseau, Jaquet Droz, Jean-Frédéric Leschot, Decombaz, and Piguet & Meylan left examples of their *savoir faire*, in the form of watches whose beauty and complexity made

# Exceptional Painter

## *"The Butterfly"*

Ilbery, London, No. 6135.

Enamel signed V. Dupont *f(eci)t*, made for the Chinese market circa 1818.

18K gold and enamel pearl-set centre seconds watch.



Example of "Pointille".



*V. Dupont. ft.*

them unique and inimitable.

Painting on enamel, along with engraving and embossing, has always been of great importance due to its decorative impact and the artistic cachet it gives to a watch, rendering it a work of art. The development of these arts, called « subsidiary » in Geneva, was tied to the city's economic situation. They grew out of the great success of the horological industry, at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, fueled in part by the tremendous demand for sophisti-

cated and therefore expensive watches and clocks, a huge demand particularly on the part of the Chinese Empire.

Jean-Francois-Victor Dupont was baptized in the temple of Saint-Gervais on August 6, 1785, the son of Jean Isaac Dupont and Susanne Sionnet, and was an artist who excelled in painting on enamel, on porcelain, and ivory. He was a contemporary of other great enamel painters, such as Jean Louis Richter, Jean Abraham Lissignol and Isaac Adam. Dupont was a gifted portraitist who

carefully honed his talents, developing a highly personal style. His work differs from that of most of his contemporaries, good but somewhat pedestrian painters, by the originality and romanticism of the scenes depicted, the vivacity of the colors, and a highly developed, almost excessive realism. He was inspired and often rendered these miniatures from such famous artists as Jean Pierre Saint Ours, Pierre Louis de la Rive, and Joseph Hornung, of the Genevan school.

Dupont's subjects were often determined by the demands of the market and the fashions of the day, which tended toward Symbolism and Neoclassicism, and were often drawn from Greek and Roman mythology. These fashionable scenes gradually became tinged by a new Romanticism that spread throughout Europe, influencing the tastes and customs of the time, beginning in the early years of the Restoration of the French Monarchy. This « Romantic » period lasted until the second industrial revolution.

The demand for exceptional works of art was pri-

marily due to the exacting taste of the Chinese clientele, who demanded that the smallest detail receive as much attention as the entire scene. This was a sophisticated and demanding customer, as punctilious as it was appreciative, who examined the painting on enamel watch cases with attentive and critical eyes. In them they sought the same skill and perfection that local artists brought to the splendid porcelain vases and plates of the C'hin period.

The style of Dupont is highly recognizable to an attentive eye; the figures tend to be grouped together, occupying most of the space in the foreground of the scene, leaving only the minor portions of the background to be rendered in perspective. The action takes place in the foreground, and the scene, whatever it may be, focuses on the figures. The painter's talent expresses itself in the proportions and gestures, thus imparting continuity and vitality to the figures' movements. His highly personal rendering of the scenes make them inimitable. There are other important characteristics of



*V. Dupont*

*Ilbery, London  
Enamel signed by V. Dupont Pinx  
made for the Chinese market circa 1820.  
18K gold and enamel pearl-set centre  
seconds watch.*



*Example of "Pointille".*

Dupont's paintings. One is his color palette; he made his enamels himself, which once the works had been placed in the oven and fired, created an astonishing variety and intensity of colors, an alchemy that the other enamel painters of the period could not imitate. His "signature" colors were red, blue, and a special shade of purple. Dupont was one of the few painters - along with Adam, another of the great Genevan artists - who used the lost traditional "pointillé" technique for his faces and hands, along with that of the one-bristle paintbrush.

Even though his work is so easily recognizable, much of Dupont's work is signed, and often dated. This may be due, in part, to the artist's pride in his work and his desire to reveal himself as the creator of the masterpiece; or it may have been a way of personalizing his work. Perhaps the signage was simply the gratifying satisfaction of proving himself an artist, not just an artisan. His works are signed: *Dupont fecit*, *v. Dupont*, *Vr Dupont*, *J.F. Dupont*, or *Dupont*. His works were primarily exhibited (under the

watch firm's name, such as Bautre of Geneva and Ilbery of London), from 1822 to 1843, at all the exhibitions in Geneva, in Paris in 1812 and 1855, and in Lyon in 1844.

He painted miniatures of famous figures such as King Henry IV of France and Navarre, Peter the Great of Russia, George V of England, and Napoleon Ier Bonaparte. The portrait he did of Napoleon Ier (signed *Vr Dupont 1825 à Genève*) was once in the Parisian collection of Maxime Hébert, and was sold at auction in Vienna on April 4, 1924.

Certain local personalities, such as the statesman Jean-Jacques Rigaud and the geologist and physicist Horace Benedict de Saussure, were painted as well; their portraits are preserved in the Musée d'Horlogerie et Emaillerie de Genève. Dupont painted miniature portraits of A.-P. de Candolle (after Hornung, 1839) and among his original compositions is a work entitled "Baigneuse", done in 1832.

In addition to his well-known work in enamel,



*"Ulisse's farewell"*  
 Ilbery, London N. 6094  
 Enamel signed by "J.F.V. Dupont Pinx"  
 made for the Chinese market circa 1815.  
 18K gold and enamel centre seconds watch.



Dupont also painted miniature portraits and scenes on ivory and porcelain. One of his most famous works on ivory is the “Woman in white silk dress with gold scarf” (J.F. Dupont fecit 1812).

Jean François Victor Dupont married Françoise Pauline Philippine Durand in Geneva, on March 18, 1817. They had a son, Justin, who also became a painter on enamel and taught art in Geneva. His workshop was registered in 1857, and is stated in the archives to be located at Rue du Rhone, #82. He died in Geneva in 1891

We owe to Jean-François-Victor Dupont some of the most sumptuously beautiful watches ever produced. However, his work is unfortunately extremely rare, and is all the more appreciated and sought-after.

**“The dove”**

Ilbery, London

Enamel signed by **V. Dupont**

made for the Chinese market circa 1820.

18K gold and enamel pearl-set centre

seconds watch.



Portrait of “**Unknown Gentleman**”  
signed by J.F.V. Dupont

« © Musée de l'horlogerie et de l'émaillerie,  
Ville de Genève »



Portrait of "Henry IV"  
signed by J.F.V. Dupont

« © Musée de l'horlogerie et de l'émaillerie,  
Ville de Genève »

Portrait of "Napoleon Bonaparte"  
signed by J.F.V. Dupont

« © Musée de l'horlogerie et de l'émaillerie,  
Ville de Genève »



Portrait of "George V of England"  
signed by J.F.V. Dupont

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