



## The Interview

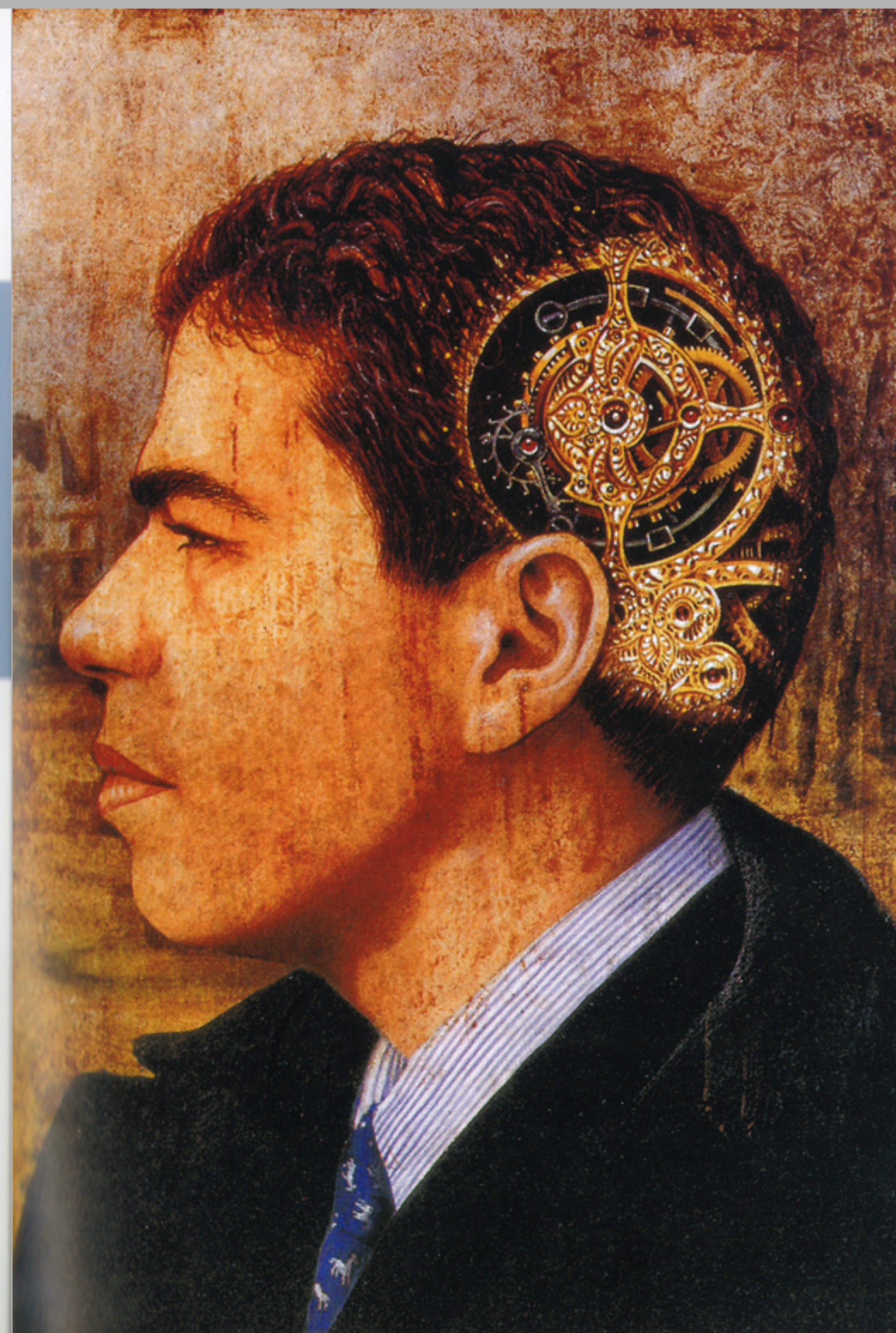
Over the past sixteen years, Laurent Picciotto has watched hundreds of collectors of complicated watches in action at his Parisian shop.

Below, an interview with a man who knows exactly what makes his clients' wheels spin.

– **What makes a collector?**

– His collection. In other words, the act of assembling several pieces due to their beauty, their rarity, their functions, their history, and/or their price. I have a client who owns fifteen hundred watches. In his case, the theme of the collection is the number of watches he owns. Another client has only ten watches, but they are the ten most expensive watches in the world. I knew a man who collected watches and oil cans—he had eight thousand! When I asked what the relationship between these two collections was, he answered that each time he bought a timepiece or an oil can, he was retracing a history, the history of horology through watches, or the history of the automobile and aviation through oil cans.

*Tic-Tac Man, portrait of Laurent Picciotto by Anton Molnar, 1994, 25.5 x 21.2 inches, private collection.*





Some collectors only buy watches with black dials and Arabic numerals on white metal, no matter the brand. Others are monomaniacs obsessed with a single number, like eight, for example, and will only purchase limited-edition pieces numbered eight. A collection can also be devoted to the quest for a specific model by a single brand (such as the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak or the Rolex Daytona). Or a collector can simply get to the point where he's just filling in the blanks: he no longer really considers the watch he's buying, he's just interested in the object that will fill in the gaps in his collection—all the Breguet tourbillons, all of Patek Philippe's minute repeaters, etc. This type of collector is rare. In general, these people also tend to hoard cameras, cuff links, and cars. Their collections are like stamp albums in which not a single stamp can be missing!

**– It's pathological . . .**

– Yes! But the side effects are only financial. The essential characteristic of any watch collector is that he has to have a lot of money, despite the fact that none of the collectors I've met started their collections by buying \$100,000 watches. Dependency comes later, as collectors acquire more pieces and their eye becomes educated. At that stage, they enter some kind of Grail quest. The watch they want to acquire is always the one they don't yet have. Frustration is the driving force of most great collectors. When a man finds himself face-to-face with a watch he has been dreaming of night and day for several months, the only reasoning he knows is: "This piece is worth \$850,000. I can't really afford to buy it, but can I really resolve myself

to living without it?" In 90 percent of cases, the answer is no, and he buys the watch.

**– Does the act of collecting objects related to time accentuate this dependency?**

– Certainly. The watch accumulator is different from the painting accumulator, for he collects the measurement of passing time. Some have the feeling they can master the flow of time by acquiring highly complex watches. Others need to fragment time by changing watches several times a day. I knew an American collector who owned more than a thousand watches; he changed watches seven times a day. Each part of his day was defined by the particular model he chose to wear: there was the shower watch, the breakfast watch, the office watch . . . And he changed all the watches from day to day. He told me he spent 25 percent of his time managing his holdings in time-measurement devices. The approach of the hour of one's death is also an integral factor of a watch collection. When some collectors get old, they sell their collections and stop wearing a watch.

**– You never mention any female collectors . . .**

– Because as far as I know, there aren't any. Collecting watches is typically a male activity. For men, a watch is a rite of passage. When a boy is given his first watch, he is given a "man's" accessory, an object that will help him enter the adult world. He is proud to show it off at school. A collector buying himself a new model will always glow with that same initial look of pride. I've always said that I sell expensive toys...