PHILLIPS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
BACS & RUSSO

PRESS RELEASE

PHILLIPS TO OFFER CARTIER PORTICO MYSTERY CLOCK NO. 4 AT THE GENEVA WATCH AUCTION: XXIV

Created in 1924, Portico Mystery Clock No. 4 is one of only six made by Cartier between 1923 and 1925, and the only example with a hexagonal dial

One of the two largest and most elaborate Portico clocks, alongside No. 3, which Phillips sold at The Geneva Watch Auction: XXI in 2025 for CHF 3,932,000

Returning to auction for the first time in 30 years, No. 4 was formerly owned by Alain Cartier and reputedly once belonged to the Maharajah of Nawanagar



GENEVA – 27 OCTOBER 2026 – Phillips in Association with Bacs & Russo will offer Cartier Portico Mystery Clock No. 4, one of only six examples of the series created between 1923 and 1925, during The Geneva Watch Auction: XXIV on 7 & 8 November at Hotel President, Geneva.

Made in 1924, No. 4 is the only Portico known with a hexagonal dial. Alongside No. 3, sold by Phillips in Geneva in May 2025, it is one of the two largest and most elaborate examples of the series. Returning to auction for the first time since 1996, No. 4 will be offered as Lot 220 with an estimate of CHF 1,800,000–3,200,000.

Phillips has had the privilege of offering some of the most magnificent Cartier Mystery Clocks over recent auction seasons. Standing 38.5 cm high and weighing 10.6 kg, Portico No. 4 takes the form of a temple gate, its six-sided carved rock-crystal dial suspended between two square rock-crystal columns.

The structure incorporates yellow gold, platinum, enamel, onyx, jade, mother-of-pearl, seed pearls, and diamonds. At the center, the hands – pavé-set with rose-cut diamonds – form a dragon. The manually wound movement, made by the European Watch & Clock Company, is concealed in the arch above the suspended dial.

Formerly the property of Alain Cartier – grandson of Louis Cartier and a fifth-generation member of the Cartier family – No. 4 was last offered publicly at *The Magical Art of Cartier* in Geneva on 19 November 1996. Reputedly, the clock had once belonged to the Maharajah of Nawanagar, ruler of the princely state in western India. It is accompanied by a Cartier Certificate of Authenticity dated 2002.

The Portico Mystery Clocks

Cartier introduced its first Mystery Clock, the Model A, in 1912, working with clockmaker Maurice Coüet. Its apparently floating hands are attached to transparent discs driven around their circumference by a movement concealed from view, a principle with precedents in the illusion clocks created by French clockmaker and magician Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin during the 19th century.

Between 1923 and 1925, Cartier and Coüet gave the concept a new architectural direction with the six Portico Mystery Clocks. Their rock-crystal dials were suspended like gongs within freestanding structures recalling Asian temple gates, an architectural form that gave the series its name. Unlike Cartier's earlier Mystery Clocks, the movement was housed in the structure above the dial rather than in the base.

The Portico clocks date from a period when Asian art and objects were an important source of ideas and materials for Cartier. Louis Cartier had sent salesman Jules Glaenzer to the Far East, and the latter returned with curiosities, gemstones, and other objects. Throughout the 1920s, Cartier drew on Asian art in its decorative creations, from vanity cases incorporating carved jade and enamel to clocks featuring Chinese lacquer, mother-of-pearl, and antique jade panels.

Among the exceptional Cartier clocks recently offered by Phillips was Portico Mystery Clock No. 3, also made in 1924 and sold at The Geneva Watch Auction: XXI in May 2025. With its rose-quartz columns and 12-sided carved rock-crystal dial, No. 3 had remained in private hands for more than three decades before its return to auction. No. 3 had also been exhibited at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris and later at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

In 1991, Cartier brought all six Portico Mystery Clocks together for an exhibition at the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH), the only known occasion on which the complete series has been displayed together.

What Sets No. 4 Apart

Nos. 3 and 4 occupy a particular position among the six Porticos. They are the two largest and most elaborate examples and the only two with square rather than round columns. No. 4, however, differs from every other member of the series in one fundamental respect: its suspended rock-crystal dial has six sides, while the other five Porticos have 12-sided dials.

Eric Nussbaum (1940–2003), the first director of the Cartier Collection, was particularly enthusiastic about No. 4. At the time of its 1996 auction, he described it as “the largest, most expressive, and most Art Deco of the family of six… Because it is hexagonal, the outline of the face is much more detailed than the others in the family.”

Indeed, the larger individual facets of the hexagonal dial provide greater space for decoration. Its bezel combines onyx and jade with diamond-set Roman numerals and an inner row of seed pearls, while the hands, set with rose-cut diamonds, take the form of a dragon. Two jade trees rise from the bases of the rock-crystal columns, which carry black enamel decoration. Above, a flat arch featuring a rock-crystal and enamel screen with jade decoration supports the suspended dial.

Aurel Bacs, Senior Consultant, Phillips Watches, says: “In every collecting field, there is the good, the better, and the best. Sometimes, the best is so far above everything else that the word ‘best’ struggles to do justice: Portico No. 4 is in a league of its own. When it comes to its mind-blowing aesthetics, artistry, craftsmanship, elegance, and majestic proportions, words simply fall short.”

Bacs continues: “The return of this masterpiece to auction after 30 years is a momentous occasion for collectors of the very best, and its significance should not be underestimated by the community. It is an incredible honor for Phillips to offer this treasure at The Geneva Watch Auction: XXIV.”

The Geneva Watch Auction: XXIV will take place on 7 & 8 November 2026 at the Hotel President in Geneva. The Cartier Portico Mystery Clock No. 4 will be on view during the preview in Geneva, 4–7 November.

AUCTION DETAILS
The Geneva Watch Auction: XXIV
Preview: 4–7 November 2026
Auction: 7 & 8 November 2026
Location: Hotel President, Quai Wilson 47, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland

ABOUT PHILLIPS IN ASSOCIATION WITH BACS & RUSSO
The team of specialists at Phillips Watches is dedicated to an uncompromised approach to quality, transparency, and client service. Phillips in Association with Bacs & Russo holds the world record for the most successful watch auction, with its DECADE ONE (2015–2025) sale having realized US$83 million in 2025. The annual total for watch auctions in 2025 exceeded $290 million, marking the first time any auction house's Watches department has surpassed US$200 million in annual sales for five consecutive years.

Record-breaking prices include:

1. Paul Newman’s Rolex “Paul Newman” Daytona reference 6239 (CHF 17,709,894 / US$17,752,500) – New York Auction: Winning Icons – 26 October 2017 – Highest result ever achieved for any vintage wristwatch at auction.

2. Patek Philippe reference 1518 in stainless steel (CHF 14,190,000 / US$17,631,075) – Watches: Decade One (2015–2025) – 8 November 2025 – Highest result ever achieved for a vintage Patek Philippe wristwatch at auction..

ABOUT PHILLIPS
Phillips: where the world’s curious and bold connect with the art, design, and luxury that inspires them. As a leading global platform for buying and selling 20th and 21st century works, Phillips offers dedicated expertise in the areas of Modern and Contemporary Art, Design, Photographs, Editions, Watches, and Jewels. Auctions and exhibitions are primarily held in New York, London, Geneva, and Hong Kong, with representative offices based throughout Europe, the United States, and Asia. Phillips offers a regular selection of live and online auctions, along with items available for immediate purchase. Phillips also offers a range of services and advice on all aspects of collecting, including private sales and assistance with appraisals, valuations, and financial planning. Visit phillips.com for further information.

**Estimates do not include buyer’s premium; prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer’s premium.*

PRESS CONTACTS:
HONG KONG – Ingrid Hsu, Head of PR and Corporate Communications, Asia ingridhsu@phillips.com
GENEVA – Marine Lemonnier-Brennan, Consultant marine.lemonnier@289consulting.com
Aude Campanelli, Consultant aude.campanelli@289consulting.com
NEW YORK – Jaime Israni, Head of PR and Corporate Communications, Americas jisrani@phillips.com
Paul Lerner, Consultant plerner@optimistconsulting.com
LONDON – Katie Carder, Head of Press and Corporate Communications, Europe kcarder@phillips.com
Anna Passmore, Senior Press Officer apassmore@phillips.com

PHILLIPS NEW YORK – 432 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022
PHILLIPS LONDON – 30 Berkeley Square, London, W1J 6EX
PHILLIPS HONG KONG – G/F, WKCDA Tower, West Kowloon Cultural District, No. 8 Austin Road, West Kowloon
PHILLIPS GENEVA – Rue de la Confédération, 7 Geneva 1204

FOLLOW US ON:

WeChat