

The MB&F M.A.D.Gallery presents 25 rare vintage surveying instruments collected by Italian architect Bruno Gritti

The MB&F M.A.D.Gallery is delighted to showcase 25 rare and beautiful 19th century surveying instruments thanks to Italian connoisseur and collector Bruno Gritti.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, surveyors were important people, responsible for tracing the lines needed to map cities, dig canals, build roads and lay down railway lines in a rapidly industrialising world.

Their most precious possessions were their surveying instruments like theodolites, tacheometers and levels. These instruments weren't just highly accurate measuring tools, they were artfully crafted too: Gleaming brass, bronze or steel, sometimes complemented by the rich brown hue of wooden tripods or carrying cases.

Mr Gritti has dedicated the last 50 years of his life to meticulously researching and collecting these historical treasures, ambassadors to the age of exploration and empire-building. And luckily for us, he has chosen the M.A.D.Gallery to fulfil his wish of passing the baton onto kindred spirits with a fascination for history and an appreciation of fine mechanical craftsmanship.

Mr Gritti says of his carefully curated collection: *"For me, the tools that feature in my collection are not just an expression of precision mechanics and applied optics, but they are also objets d'art representing a specific period of history."*

Instruments that shaped the world

Ever wondered how Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain, got its name? Well, it's not so called after a famous explorer but thanks to the British surveyor George Everest, who played a crucial role in preparing the first land survey map of the Indian sub-continent in the 1830s.

Indeed, the 18th and 19th centuries were the golden age of surveying, an era when previously unmapped parts of the world including the Americas and far-flung European colonies became new frontiers for trade, commerce and settlement.

To harness the resources of these regions, it was essential to know the lay of the land and so geodesic surveying and topographic mapping became tremendously important. Governments quickly understood the critical role that surveyors played in establishing control over territory and resources.

The task of charting these vast lands was formidable. Land surveyors often had to cover difficult terrain and spend months in the field measuring mountains, rivers, coasts and other topographic features with their trusty surveying instruments.

Until the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the latter half of the 19th century, these instruments were built by craftsmen who often doubled as self-taught inventors. Pieces were frequently finished with fine carvings and details that varied depending on who had commissioned them. Even within small series of 10 to 20 pieces, individual instruments could be considered as unique pieces because of the different finishing touches that they received.

The best surveying instruments were some of the most advanced scientific apparatus of their day, highly sought-after and extremely valuable not only for their hitherto unparalleled levels of precision, but also for the level of craftsmanship and sublime aesthetics that they exuded.

The Bruno Gritti collection

An architect, Bruno Gritti was so fascinated by antique surveying instruments that he began collecting them from the 1960s onwards. He gradually built up his collection through visits to antique fairs like the Mercante in Fiera in Parma.

For more information, please contact:

Juliette Duru, MB&F SA, Rue Verdaine 11, CH-1204 Genève, Switzerland

Email: jd@mbandf.com Tel: +41 22 508 10 36

“The moment when you discover a new tool is indescribable,” says the Italian. “Only a collector can understand the inner satisfaction that you feel at this early stage. It goes far beyond mere physical possession.”

Rarity and aesthetics were the two criteria Mr Gritti used to select pieces. Over the best part of 50 years, his collection grew not just in quality and quantity but also in value, as these instruments became coveted collectors' pieces.

Tacheometers, theodolites and levels

The Gritti collection features some of the most coveted instruments of the period: Levels, theodolites and tacheometers.

The Y or Wye level was used for determining elevations and composed of a spirit level mounted in parallel to a removable telescope on Y-shaped supports. Theodolites were used to measure both horizontal and vertical angles with high precision and comprised a telescope attached to a graduated vertical circle, two horizontal circular plates and two spirit levels, while the tacheometer is a kind of theodolite that also allows the measurement of distances.

These instruments are still being employed today in their modern guise, featuring laser sensors and electronic gadgetry.

Distinguished names

Featured in the Gritti collection are instruments crafted by well-known 19th century makers like Troughton & Simms of London that created instruments for the Greenwich and Melbourne Observatories. Another eminent British instrument maker in the collection is Thomas Jones, considered important enough to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 1835.

Besides European manufacturers, the collection also boasts pieces from American firms like Young & Sons of Philadelphia as well as Keuffel & Esser of New York. Both European and American firms featured in the collection supplied instruments to the venerable U.S. Coastal Survey, which was set up in 1807 to survey the shoreline of the United States.

About Bruno Gritti

Bruno Gritti is a native of Bergamo, Italy where he continues to live. Now 75 years old, Bruno still works as an architect and currently specialises in the design and construction of health and social services centres. Besides his passion for surveying instruments, Mr Gritti is also a seasoned watch collector.

For more information, please contact:

Juliette Duru, MB&F SA, Rue Verdaine 11, CH-1204 Genève, Switzerland

Email: jd@mbandf.com Tel: +41 22 508 10 36