

## ‘A Mechanical Bestiary’, With Time

By JAKE CIGAINERO SEPT. 5, 2016



From an exhibition this fall at Galerie J. Kugel in Paris: A clock depicting a bear and his Turkish handler, believed to have been made in Augsburg, Germany in 1580-1590.

PARIS — “Who is ticking?” Alexis Kugel playfully asked a group of ornate animal figures in his palatial antiques gallery at the historic Hôtel Colot.

The figures make up “[A Mechanical Bestiary](#),” an exhibition of 30 rare Renaissance-era automaton clocks that will be displayed at Galerie J. Kugel from Sept. 9 through Nov. 5. The gilded bronze zoo includes a pug with wagging tail and oscillating eyes, a chained monkey angrily beating a drum and an elephant with soldiers dancing on its back.

Some pieces came from the Kugel family collection, which Mr. Kugel recalls playing with as a child: “I probably broke one or two, forcing the needle so it would animate.” Others were found by Mr. Kugel and his brother Nicolas, both fifth-generation antiques dealers.

The technology for automaton clocks dates to Heron of Alexandria, the ancient Greek mathematician who wrote extensively about mechanics. Their popularity surged during the Renaissance, when many were made in Augsburg, Germany, the artistic center of Bavaria at the time.

“If you couldn’t afford a real elephant or lion for your menagerie, then you could compromise with one of these,” Mr. Kugel said.