

VINDICATION & VALUE

Mercedes Gleitze's famous Rolex Oyster heads to the auction block



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In early October 2025, Sotheby's auction house announced that on 9 November 2025, it would be auctioning off a particularly special Rolex wristwatch. This slim-banded, golden stunner was worn by British Channel swimmer Mercedes Gleitze during her world-famous redemption tour, the so-called Vindication Swim.

Gleitze launched that swim on 21 October 1927 to defend her integrity; she had successfully crossed the English Channel

Making indie film, 'Vindication Swim'

on 7 October 1927 in 15 hours, 15 minutes, becoming the 3rd woman ever and the 1st British woman to accomplish the feat.

But before the ink had fully dried on the breathless news reports of Gleitze's success, questions surfaced, mostly because another swimmer, Dorothy Cochrane Logan swimming as Mona McLelland, announced she'd swum the Channel three days later in an astonishingly fast 13 hours, 10 minutes. Logan's swim was quickly revealed to be an elaborate hoax, but sadly, her deception cast a pall over Gleitze's honest effort.

To show she was legitimate, Gleitze attempted another crossing on 21 October 1927. This so-called Vindication Swim ultimately did not conclude on the far shore, but the strength and endurance Gleitze displayed assuaged any doubts about the veracity of her previous swim.

Gleitze's intrepid story came alive in full colour on big screens across Britain last



Intrepid swimmer Mercedes Gleitze

year with the release of 'Vindication Swim', an artfully shot and authentically rendered feature film from Relsah Films.



A new blue plaque at her childhood home

Directed by Elliott Hasler, a young, award-winning writer and independent film director who hails from Gleitze's home town of Brighton, 'Vindication Swim' was released in the UK on International Women's Day, 8 March 2024, to a viewership that proved hungry to be reminded of a loveable but largely forgotten British heroine.

Hasler and the film's executive producer Simon Hasler (Elliott's father) say they had expected the independently-produced movie would have a modest, two-week run. But it was so well received, it ended up having an 18-week run and became the highest grossing indie film in Britain in 2024. That success enabled Relsah to bring the film to North America in fall 2025 with a series of screenings in open water hot spots ranging from New York and Toronto.

The timing, then, of Sotheby's auction is ideal, coinciding with the film's North American roll-out, which culminates on Gleitze's 125th birthday, 18 November 2025, when it becomes available on digital platforms across North America. The plucky film that could echoes Gleitze's pioneering rise to stardom, and Rolex's ascension to the pinnacle of timekeeping.

In a press release announcing the auction, Sotheby's Global Chairman of Watches, Sam Hines, described Gleitze's Oyster as "the watch that defined Rolex as we know it today," and noted that "the 1927 vindication marked a turning point for Rolex. From that moment forward, Rolex aligned itself with the pursuits of adventurers, athletes, and professionals operating in the most demanding environments on Earth."

Indeed, the Rolex Oyster, which Gleitze



Rolex called the Oyster "the watch that defied the Channel"



Gleitze became the first celebrity athlete endorser

wore around her neck on the swim, performed as boldly as she did. Afterward, a reporter noted that as she came out of the water, "hanging 'round her neck by a riband on this swim, Miss Gleitze carried a small gold watch which was found this evening to have kept good time throughout."

Gleitze became Rolex's first brand ambassador, writing to the company that "you will like to hear that the Rolex Oyster watch I carried on my Channel swim proved itself a reliable and accurate timekeeping companion even though it was subjected to complete immersion for 10h24 hours in sea water at a temp of not more than 58 (14.4°C) and often as low as 51 (10.6°C). This is to say nothing about the sustained buffeting it must have received. Not even the quick change to the high temp of the boat cabin when I was lifted from the water seemed to affect the even tenour of its movement. The newspaper man was astonished and I, of course, am delighted with it."

Rolex was thrilled with this collaboration, highlighting its technical achievement by leveraging Gleitze's beauty, athletic prowess, and popular appeal. In the process, they turned her into the first celebrity athlete

endorser – the company launched an entire ad campaign for "the watch that defied the Channel".

A quarter of a century ago – the last time the watch came into public view – it sold at auction for £17,037; in today's money that would be about £32,661. But the recent revitalisation of Gleitze's notoriety in Britain and abroad, thanks in part to the film and the recent installation of a blue plaque at her childhood home, has the esteemed auction house estimating the watch will sell for over £900,000 (1.3 million USD) at its Important Watches Live Sale on 9 November in Geneva.

The timing of all of these happenings is auspicious, says Director Elliott Hasler, who adds "it definitely has been a wild ride. We began filming in August 2019, and it's taken a long time to get to this point where we're actually bringing it to audiences. It's great to see the hard work that we put in – three years of splashing around in the English Channel trying to recreate the story and bring it to life." And to see Gleitze and her famous wristwatch back in the spotlight nearly 100 years later – well, it really was just a matter of time, wasn't it?