

Decorative Arms: Treasures from the Robert M. Lee Collection

Spanning five hundred years of creative production, this exhibition features European and American arms and armor drawn from the distinguished personal collection of Robert M. Lee (1927-2016), a renowned collector who called Nevada home for nearly thirty years. Lee went to great lengths to acquire the finest antique arms for his collection, while at the same time supporting and championing some of the most talented artisans and engravers working today. “Tastefully ornamented arms,” Lee believed, were “the epitome of art.” Lee’s patronage of modern engravers is widely believed to have led to a renaissance in the field of fine arms engraving.

The artistry of embellishing and engraving firearms is a challenging artistic endeavor, with a rich history that reaches back to the Medieval and Renaissance eras. This exhibition offers an opportunity to view European antique arms alongside the work of highly skilled 20th century engravers from England, Italy, Belgium, Austria, and the United States. While all the arms in this exhibition are functional, most have never even been fired or used. Instead, they were often designed and manufactured for ceremonial, display, and exhibition purposes. As such, they collectively represent some of the finest examples of decorative arts produced during the past five hundred years.

Wheel-lock Rifle, 1627

Made by HGH,
Nuremberg, Germany

Steel, fruitwood, bone, and gilding

This rifle was made to a very high standard and is superbly decorated. There is reason to believe that it was made by a young craftsman who apprenticed in Nuremberg (present day southern Germany) with the hopes of being accepted as a master craftsman. Nuremberg was a major gun-making center in the 17th century where young craftsmen would train under a master until they were allowed to set up their own workshops. There is an inscription on the gun (inlaid in bone) that translates to: "With luck and God's will may this be my masterpiece." It is also stamped with the Nuremberg control mark.

The elaborate decoration of this gun includes references to hunting, classical Greek and Roman legends, and fantastical Germanic myths.

Breech-loading Wheel-lock Rifle, 1625

Barrel-maker, marked NM

Stock-maker, marked VH

Steel, fruitwood, mother-of-pearl, and bone

Although the precise origins of this rifle remain a mystery, based on its style and decoration it is thought to have been made somewhere in what is now southern Germany or Austria, perhaps Saxony, which was a well-known gun-making center in the 17th century. Many artisans working in a guild would have contributed to the creation of this object, including a stock-maker, wheel-maker, barrel-maker, lock-maker, and engravers.

In this case, the wooden stock is carved entirely from walnut and is decorated with inlaid animal horn and mother-of-pearl. There are additional engraved mother-of-pearl decorations including flowers, tendrils, serpents, dragons, and a prancing horse.

The term “wheel-lock” refers to the round steel mechanism that spins in order to ignite a spark and fire a charge in the firearm’s barrel. Wheel-lock mechanisms were complex to design and build, making wheel-lock arms costly to own. It is also an early example of a “breech-loading” rifle, which means it was faster and easier to fire than weapons that were created before it. The owner of this rifle would have likely exhibited it to show how progressive and enlightened a collector they were.

Wheel-lock Puffer Pistol,

circa 1590

Engraver unknown

Barrel-maker, Peter Danner

Lock-maker, Georg Seidler

Stock-maker, Master of the Castles

Steel, gilt brass, ebony, mother-of-pearl,
horn, and bone

Puffer pistols were common throughout northwest Europe in the second half of the 16th century. The term “puffer” is a German word used to describe the large spherical *pommel* that was meant to be grabbed when drawing the gun from its holster. In this case, the six-paneled pommel is made from ebony wood with gilt copper, horn, and mother-of-pearl detailing.

This pistol can be traced to the hand of a craftsman whose actual name is unknown, but who has been nicknamed by historians, “The Master of the Castles,” because he so frequently depicted castle imagery on his guns. The lock and the barrel on this gun were made by Peter Danner, and the stock was carved by Georg Seidler. All three of these men worked out of Nuremberg—one of the largest gun-making centers of the time.

The main story engraved on this pistol is of Germanic origin. On the left side of the gun, a king is seated in bed with two arrows. As the story goes, the king instructed his three sons to shoot an arrow at him upon his deathbed. Whoever shot closest to his heart would succeed him as king. The two elder sons shot their arrows, but the youngest could not bring himself to do it.

Having proven his greater love for his father, the youngest son was crowned king.

Wheel-lock Pistol, circa 1605

Engraver and maker unknown
French (Alsace-Lorraine)

Steel, walnut, mother-of-pearl, and bone

This pistol was likely made for the French market and can be traced to the first decade of the 17th century. It is profusely decorated with mother-of-pearl and stag horn. Among the decorations are images of birds, dragons, dogs, bears, classical figures, and floral motifs.

Three-Barreled Hand-Revolving Flintlock Pistol, 1783

Manufactured by Boulanger,
St. Etienne, France

Steel, walnut, silver, gold; case made from leather and felt

This three-barreled revolver is the only gun known to have been made by the gunmaker named Boulanger, who otherwise spent his entire career working in the *arsenale* (or weapons department) of the French government. Decorated with trophies, laurel wreaths, and sprays of oak, this elaborate gun was likely made to commemorate a military achievement. It is unknown, however, whether the gun was ever presented since the *cartouches* (areas on the gun where the name of a recipient would have been engraved) were all left blank. The pistol is accompanied by an unusually shaped green leather-bound wooden case lined with velvet.

Multi-Bladed Display Knife, 1839

Manufactured by Joseph Rodgers & Sons, Sheffield, England

Steel, brass, ormolu (gilt brass), gilt silver, mother-of-pearl, turquoise, and gold

The firm of Joseph Rodgers & Sons developed a family cutlery business in Britain that can be traced back to 1724. This knife was likely designed as a “show” or “exhibition” piece that was displayed on a counter in the Joseph Rodgers’ showroom in Sheffield, England. An elaborate knife of this type not only demonstrated the maker’s skills, but also advertised the company’s wares.

The “quadrangular” form of this knife allowed for more blades than a conventional two-sided knife—eighty blades in all. The four sides are separated by carved mother-of-pearl and set with two small turquoise studs and gold plaques.

Exhibition Pistols, 1854

Designed and manufactured by
Gastinne-Renette, Paris, France

Steel, ebony, and silver

These magnificent pistols are in near original condition and have probably never been fired. They were made by the distinguished Parisian gunmaker Louis-Julien Gastinne-Renette, whose firm developed a fine reputation in the second half of the 19th century for “exhibition” quality pistols. It is very possible that these pistols were made especially for display at the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1855. Gastinne-Renette worked as a gunmaker for Emperor Napoleon III during this same period.

These pistols are deeply chiseled in a French style known as *rocaille*, which is noted for its exuberant decoration, abundance of curves, undulations, and natural elements. The ornamental case is lined with blue velvet and the lid is gilt-stamped with the maker’s name. The case comes with a complete set of accessories, including cleaning rods, a mallet, screwdriver and wrench, bullet mold, a powder measure, and powder flask.

These pistols were previously owned by the celebrated collector, sportsman, author, and champion shot Walter Winans (1852-1920).

“Prince Ferdinand Philippe, Duc d’Orléans,” Four-Shot Super-posed Carbine, Powder Flask, Ball Molds, and Chest for Garniture of Arms, 1836-1839

Engraved by P. A. Lapret
Manufactured by Henri LePage,
Paris, France

Steel, gold, and walnut; chest made from oak,
steel, and felt

The Paris firm of LePage made this gun, powder flask, and case for the Prince Royal of France. Ferdinand-Louis-Philippe-Charles-Henri-Rosalin, Duc d’Orléans (1810-1842), was a noted patron of the arts, and succeeded to the titles of Prince Royal and Duc d’Orléans after his father, Louis-Philippe (1773-1850) became king in 1830. The gun, powder flask, and case bear the monogram FPO (for Ferdinand Philippe Orléans).

The items here are extensively decorated with the classical Greek and Roman tales of the hunting goddess Diana/Artemis, the lovers Venus and Adonis, and Perseus and Andromeda.

A Latin inscription on the gun translates to: “Hunting reconciles two contradictory things—pleasure and health.”

**Composite full suit of armor
for a youth,** various dates
(circa 1500, 1520-30, 19th century)

Maker unknown, in the
Maximillian style

Steel

Composite full suit of armor,
various dates (circa 1520-30, 19th century)

Maker unknown, in the
Maximillian style

Steel

Both of these suits of armor—one for an adult and one for a youth—are complete, although they are composed from parts dating to different periods. Nevertheless, each is considered a complete Maximillian suit. Maximilian is a modern term applied to the style of 16th-century German plate armor associated with Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519), who was the Holy Roman Emperor from 1508 until his death.

These armors are made from steel and decorated with many flutings. The flutings may have helped to deflect spearpoints and blades from entering the armor. The fluted design also resembles pleated clothing that was fashionable in Europe at the time.

Centuries of Tradition

From the 1500s to before the Industrial Revolution, the production of arms in Europe could be traced to a few key regions where arms were made for nobility and other wealthy patrons. These centers of production, such as Nuremburg, Germany; Brescia, Italy; Greenwich, England; and Toledo, Spain were home to guilds of craftspeople, whose unique specialized skills had been passed down from generation to generation. The manufacture of a single firearm, for example, was the product of numerous artisans: including stock makers, lock makers, barrel makers, gold- and silversmiths, and engravers. Their skills seamlessly converged to result in the successful production of a high-quality weapon. Industrialization, which brought the introduction of machine and assembly line fabrication, led to great changes in the field of gun making, and many European countries established weapons arsenals to serve their military needs. Although demand for custom-made arms declined around this time, a resurgence took place in the mid-twentieth century. Robert M. Lee's patronage of modern engravers is widely believed to have led to a renaissance in the field of fine arms engraving.

Flintlock Fowling Piece,

circa 1640-50

Built and engraved with metalwork decorated by Caspar Spät, Royal Munich Court Workshop, Germany
Stock likely decorated by Elias Becker, Munich

Steel, fruitwood, and gold

This German flintlock gun with a very long, elegant, tapering barrel is not signed. However, due to its distinctive chiseled ornamentation and metal work, it has been attributed to Caspar Spät. Spät was one of the last members of the celebrated Munich school of arms decorators.

This firearm was once in the historic museum collection of the Counts and Princes of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen at Sigmaringen Castle in Germany. A note from 1922 in that museum's records mentions that the gun came from nearby Strasbourg where it had been left behind by a Russian general during the Napoleonic Wars of 1803-1815. The note goes on to explain that the Munich-made gun may have initially been looted from the Munich Zeughaus (a government artillery arsenal) by Napoleon's troops in the early 1800s.

Monte Mandarino

A gunmaker for more than 45 years, Monte Mandarino has devoted his life to studying, building, and designing decorative arms. He is credited with helping to lead a revival in custom sporting arms in America. Interested in antique firearms since he was a child, Mandarino first studied gunsmithing at Lassen Community College in Susanville, California. He then worked as an apprentice with a Kentucky rifle maker in North Carolina in the mid-1970s. In 1981, Mandarino moved to the Flathead Valley in Montana where he still lives and works. Mandarino specializes in historic replicas, with a particular interest in late Renaissance, and early Baroque firearms from France, an era known as the Louis XIV period of the mid-to-late 1600s.

Robert M. Lee commissioned Mandarino to create three of the arms on view in this exhibition. Committed to only the finest quality and authenticity, Lee sponsored Mandarino's travel to Europe on many occasions to study historic arms. His support of Mandarino spanned over a decade and had a significant influence on Mandarino's personal gunmaking philosophy:

"I feel a very real and tangible link with all the gunmakers, carvers, engravers, cabinetmakers, and craftsmen that have gone before," Mandarino says. "When I handle or examine a piece of work, I feel that I am being spoken to from the past in a vocabulary that only those of us who do this work really understand. It makes me feel that I am part of a continuum that has existed since man first began using tools. For that I am truly grateful."

Flintlock Fowling Piece, 1999

Made by Monte Mandarino, Kalispell,
Montana, USA

Steel, walnut, and gold

Flintlock Fowling Piece, 1989

Made by Monte Mandarino, Kalispell,
Montana, USA

Steel, walnut, and gold

Flintlock Pistols, 1993

Made by Monte Mandarino, Kalispell,
Montana, USA

Steel, walnut, and gold

Josef "Joe" Fugger

Born in 1903 in Austria, Josef "Joe" Fugger began engraving under the tutelage of his father and received further training in Ferlach, Austria. He immigrated to the United States in 1924, where he studied under another famous Austrian-born engraver, Rudolf Kornbrath, who lived in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1927, Fugger took the position as head engraver with the famous gunmaker Griffin & Howe of New York City. There, his work adorned the most elaborately embellished rifles and shotguns the firm produced.

For Robert M. Lee, Fugger was the engraver of choice. His superb workmanship is seen on the Purdey and Holland & Holland double rifles on view. These two iconic rifles were pivotal commissions for Lee, and also represent the beginning of a broader renaissance in firearm engraving that took place after WWII. Lee is often credited as being instrumental to leading this artistic resurgence. Fugger retired from engraving in 1960, but is credited with inspiring many engravers throughout the United States.

1

Bolt Action Rifle, 1954

Engraved by Josef "Joe" Fugger, New York, USA
Manufactured by Griffin & Howe,
New York City
Steel, walnut, ebony, and gold

2

Pistol-Grip Cap, 1950s

Engraved by Josef "Joe" Fugger, New York, USA
Steel and gold

3

Royal Model Double Rifle, 1959

Engraved by Josef "Joe" Fugger, New York, USA
Manufactured by Holland & Holland,
London, England
Steel, walnut, and gold

4

Double Rifle, 1958

Engraved by Josef "Joe" Fugger, New York, USA
Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons,
London, England
Steel, walnut, and gold

Ken C. Hunt

In the long-established field of English firearms engraving, the name Ken Hunt arguably stands out as the best known. Widely celebrated and deeply admired, Hunt now works independently, taking commissions from eager patrons worldwide. His engravings adorn firearms and knives from many different makers, and his superb craftsmanship is seen on the very best American, English, and European arms. Hunt is sought after for his excellent gold-inlaid work, which regularly depicts game birds and animals. In this display case, a comparison can be made between the wide range of styles and approaches Hunt takes with each project.

1

“The Hunting World Shotgun,” Double Shotgun, not dated

Engraved by Ken C. Hunt, London, England

Manufactured by Pedro Arrizabalaga,
Eibar, Spain

Steel, walnut, and gold

2

Over and Under Shotgun, 1991

Engraved by Ken C. Hunt, London, England

Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons, London

Steel and walnut

3

Double Shotgun, 2003 – 2004

Engraved by Ken C. Hunt, London, England

Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons, London

Steel, walnut, gold, and silver

4

Over and Under Shotgun, 2002

Engraved by Ken C. Hunt, London, England

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

5

Double Shotgun, 2002

Engraved by Ken C. Hunt, London, England

Manufactured by John Rigby & Co.,
London, England

Steel, walnut, and gold

Phil Coggan

Born in Wales, Phil Coggan ranks high among his British engraving contemporaries, and is recognized as one of the greatest engravers in the world. He has credited Ken Hunt and Alan Brown as his inspirations. Like them, Coggan works independently, executing spectacular designs in several engraving styles for gunmakers worldwide. He is universally admired for his superb designs of animals in steel or gold, and is often noted for his fine relief, multi-color, gold-inlaid scrollwork. Robert M. Lee commissioned many guns from Coggan. Those on view here exemplify his finest work.

1

Double Rifle, 2002-03

Engraved by Phil Coggan, England

Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons,
London, England

Steel, walnut, and gold

2

Over and Under Shotgun, 2002 – 2004

Engraved by Phil Coggan, England

Steel, walnut, and gold

3

Pair of Over and Under Shotguns, 1998

Engraved by Phil Coggan, England

Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons,
London, England

Steel, walnut, and gold

The Brown Brothers

Paul and Alan Brown, often referred to as the Brown Brothers, are two of England's greatest relief engravers, with a reputation for producing some of the most intriguing and unusual works executed in steel. Their initial interest in firearms and engraving started while they were both in their youth, growing up in the British countryside. Their earliest carving experience came from working with wood. After being exposed to the fine art of etching and engraving, they began engraving in steel themselves. They are essentially self-taught and have become renowned for their deep-relief carved surfaces and gold inlay work. Collectors regularly commission the brothers to make unique works, including those on view here that were commissioned by Robert M. Lee.

1

Over and Under Shotgun, 1994

Engraved by The Brown Brothers, Paul and Alan Brown, England

Manufactured by Peter V. Nelson, London, England

Steel and walnut

2

Double Shotgun, circa 2013

Engraved by The Brown Brothers, Paul and Alan Brown, London, England

Manufactured by Hartmann & Weiss, Hamburg, Germany

Steel, walnut, and gold

3

“The Mountain Gorilla,” Double Rifle, 1985

Engraved by The Brown Brothers, Paul and Alan Brown, England

Manufactured by Westley Richards, Birmingham, England

Steel, walnut, ebony, silver, and gold

4

Falling Block Rifle, 1988

Engraved by The Brown Brothers, Paul and Alan Brown, London, England

Manufactured by Hartmann & Weiss, Hamburg, Germany

Steel, walnut, and gold

The Saurian

This unique rifle set known as “The Saurian 4-Bore” was designed by Malcom Lyell, Geoffrey Brooks, and Russel Wilkin of Holland & Holland, and engraved by Paul and Alan Brown to commemorate and celebrate prehistoric creatures. The term “saurian” is often used interchangeably with the word dinosaur. This rifle, along with this selection of fossils and other stones, is typically housed in a large custom-built cabinet. The fossils in the collection are from periods between 395 million years and 65 million years old and were collected from all over the world.

“The Saurian,” Royal Model Double Shotgun, 1980 – 1985

Engraved by The Brown Brothers, Paul and Alan
Brown, London, England

Manufactured by Holland & Holland,
London, England

Steel and walnut

1

Dipterus species

Devonian period (419-359 million years ago), Orkney, Scotland

A primitive bony fish.

2

Dactyloceras species

Jurassic period (201-145 million years ago), Germany

An ammonite, or extinct cephalopod mollusk, with tentacles protruding from a coiled shell.

3

Flexicalymene species

Devonian period (419-359 million years ago), Erfoud, Morocco

A trilobite or hard-shelled organism that lived in water, belonging to a group of organisms that includes modern crustaceans and insects.

4

Ichthyosaur species

Jurassic (201-145 million years ago), Dorset, United Kingdom

Fossilized droppings of the great marine reptile known as ichthyosaur.

5

Trigonia duedalea

Cretaceous period (145-66 million years ago), Belgium

A triangular marine shaped bi-valve mollusk with two hinged shells, similar to mussels and oysters.

6

Phytosaur teeth

Triassic period (252-201 million years ago), Colorado, USA

Phytosaurs were heavily armored semi-aquatic reptiles similar to modern crocodiles.

7

Geisonoceras species

Devonian period (416-359 million years ago), Erfoud, Morocco

A mollusk similar to an ammonite that inhabited shells of diverse shape.

Royal Model Double Rifle, 2001

Engraved by The Brown Brothers,
Paul and Alan Brown, London,
England

Manufactured by Holland & Holland,
London, England

Steel, walnut, and gold

This rifle of unusually large .700 caliber was built by Holland & Holland, London, England, as one of a set of seven double rifles commissioned by Robert M. Lee. Each is crafted with high relief engraving depicting animals found in different places around the world. The different size of each rifle in this unique custom order offered a rare and challenging opportunity for the Brown Brothers to depict animals deeply carved onto “steel canvases” of diminishing size. Begun in 1995, this set took approximately seven years to complete.

Colt Firearms Masterpieces

Samuel Colt's initial venture into gunmaking began in 1836 at age twenty-one when he started the Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company in Paterson, New Jersey. Although this business did not continue past 1842, Colt re-established his business in 1847 with the name Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing.

Throughout the eras of the Gold Rush and American Civil War, the Colt revolver developed its own mystique. To own a Colt in the 19th century was to own a firearm of distinction. The four modern Colt firearms on view here are based on classic designs from the 1860s and 70s but were made in the 20th century to the specifications of Robert M. Lee. Nevertheless, the innovative style of engraving they exhibit owes its lineage to Colt's historical past.

**“Salute to the Cowboys,”
Pair of Single Action
Army Revolvers, 1990 – 1993**

Engraved by Frank E. Hendricks, Jr.,
San Antonio, Texas, USA
Manufactured by Colt, Hartford,
Connecticut

Steel, ivory, and gold

These highly decorated Colt revolvers were engraved by Frank E. Hendricks, Jr. of San Antonio, Texas. The engravings show mythic cowboy scenes of the “Old West.” Using four colors of gold, the highly detailed, sculptural images on these guns tell stories of cowboy life—from galloping, lassoing, and resting on horseback, to reclining at the saloon.

“PEACEMAKER,” Single Action Army Revolver, 1985

Engraved by Leonard Francolini, New Mexico, USA

Manufactured by Colt, Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Designed by Tiffany & Co., New York City, USA

Designers Paul Epifanio, Larry Wojick, and Ubaldo Vitali

Steel, silver, gold; case made from leather, and felt

After a hiatus of more than sixty years, Tiffany & Co. began designing firearms again in 1982 on an extremely exclusive basis. George A. Strichman, former Chairman of the Board of Colt Industries, commissioned this revolver for a Christie’s Benefit Auction for the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in 1985. On the front of the frame is an inlaid logo of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The revolver features ornamentation based on nautical motifs. Among the decorations are silver-inlaid dolphins and shells, a scroll that suggests stormy seas and high waves, as well as a “rampant sea horse”—a variation on the company’s famous “Rampant Colt” logo. The silver grips are enhanced with gold work, and inscribed with the name: “*Peacemaker*.” An image of Strichman’s yacht—which shares the name *Peacemaker*—appears on each grip panel. The buttcap features an anchor motif, along with George A. Strichman’s monogram.

“The American Eagle,” Model 1860 Army Revolver, 1993 – 1994

Engraved by Andrew Bourbon,
Massachusetts, USA

Manufactured by Colt, Hartford,
Connecticut

Designed by Tiffany & Co., New York
City, USA

Designer April Flory

Steel, brass, mother-of-pearl, gold, and silver

Created by Tiffany & Co. with an “American Eagle” theme, this revolver was originally designed for the U.S. Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia. On the frame and cylinder, an eagle clutches arrows and an olive branch. Pearl grips are decorated with a silver band and a \$5 dollar “Half Eagle” gold piece. The revolver is built without visible frame screws: they are covered with gold and silver decorations, and to access the mechanism the grip straps must be removed.

Model 1854 Revolver, circa 1862

Engraver unknown

Manufactured under license by Pryse and Redman, Birmingham, England

Retailed by E. M. Reilly & Co., 502, New Oxford Street, London, England

Steel, ivory and gold-plate; case made from oak and baize

As the technology of firearms evolved in the mid-19th century, demand increased in Britain and the United States for revolvers that would fire more rapidly. This led to competition between gunmakers. Robert Adams and Frederick Beaumont joined together as shareholders in the London Armoury Company to produce several thousand rapid-fire revolvers before their partnership ceased in 1867. This revolver was made in Birmingham, England, by the partnership of Charles Pryse and Richard Redman, but retailed by the London-based gunmaker Edward M. Reilly, whose firm was likely hired to add the decorative finishes. It is uncertain whether it was decorated in Birmingham to Reilly's specifications or came to London to be decorated there. Either way, its lavish ornament suggests it was probably considered top of the line for E.M. Reilly & Co.

“Paris Exposition Universelle,” Pin-Fire Revolver, 1878

Manufactured by Mathes Freres,
Paris, France

Steel, ivory, gold; case made from ebony,
leather, and bone

The term pin-fire refers to the small pin in the metallic cartridge that would ignite the primer when struck. Pin-fire revolvers like this one were especially popular in the mid-19th century in Europe.

This revolver was made by a firm owned by the Mathes brothers that operated in Paris in the 1870s. At the time, the company was acknowledged as makers of highly decorated *arms de luxe*, hunting, and fencing weapons.

Italy: A Tradition of Excellence vinyl text

Considered the birthplace of Renaissance art, Italy has always been a rich center of artistic and cultural production. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Italy is also home to some of the world's most talented decorative arms engravers. Robert M. Lee commissioned numerous modern pieces from many of these established Italian artisans.

Tucked away in a picturesque valley in the Italian Alps is Val Trompia, the Italian and European capital of firearm production and decoration. The small village of Gardone, with 10,000 residents, is home to the Pietro Beretta Company. Founded in 1526, the Beretta Company is the oldest active manufacturer of firearms components in the world. The region is also home to numerous iron-producing mines, which made the region an obvious early location for the production of arms. Today, the Val Trompia region produces 70% of Europe's and 40% of the world's sport and hunting small arms.

This historically rich area has given rise to a community of over 140 smaller manufacturers, artisans, and engravers whose livelihoods are steeped in the legacies of arms production. While some of these makers produce as few as ten rifles per year, the quality of their craftsmanship, rooted in the traditions of their Italian ancestry, is highly respected worldwide.

Top to bottom:

Over and Under Shotgun, circa 1991

Engraved by Claudio Tomasoni, Italy
Manufactured by Ivo Fabbri, Brescia, Italy

Steel and walnut

Over and Under Shotgun, 1997

Engraved by Manrico Torcoli, Italy
Manufactured by Ivo Fabbri, Brescia, Italy

Steel, walnut, and gold

Over and Under Shotgun, 2008

Engraved by Davide M. Terzi, Italy
Engraving, carving, and inlay contributions
by Richard Roy, Bryson Gwinnell, and
Ron Buck
Manufactured by Galazan, New
Britain, Connecticut

Steel, walnut, gold, and enamel

Over and Under Shotgun, 2005

Engraved by Mario Terzi, Italy

Manufactured by Pietro Beretta,
Gardone,
Val Trompe, Italy

Steel, walnut, gold, and enamel

Italian Engravers

1

Over and Under Shotgun, 2001

Engraved by Giacomo Fausti/Creative Art and
Firmo Fracassi, Italy

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel and walnut

2

Double Shotgun, 2008

Engraved by Armando Piardi/Creative Art, Italy
Detailing by Ron Buck

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

3

Fox Model Double Shotgun, circa 2008

Engraved by Claudio Cremini, Italy

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

4

Fox Model Double Shotgun, 1999

Engraved by Giovanni Steduto/Creative Art, Italy
Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

5

Double Shotgun, 2010 – 2011

Engraved by Valerio Peli/Creative Art, Italy

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, gold, and enamel

Firmo Fracassi and Francesca Fracassi

Firmo Fracassi was born in 1939 and grew up in Tavernole, a small village near Brescia, Italy. The area is well-known for gunsmiths and the exceptional firearms they export around the world. Fracassi is best known for the *bulino* style of engraving. This method of engraving involves using a thin, steel-tipped tool known as a burin to create furrows of various depths, angles, and shapes that result in what have been called miniature works of art.

Fracassi's daughter Francesca began art school at the age of 15 and quickly realized she wanted to follow in her father's footsteps. By the age of 17, she began training under his tutelage and is now considered a master engraver herself. Robert M. Lee appreciated Fracassis' precision and attention to detail. On average, the father-daughter duo might spend up to 2,000 hours to engrave a single shotgun.

1

“The Michelangelo Gun,”

Double Shotgun, circa 1970s

Engraved by Firmo Fracassi, Italy

Manufactured by Abbiatico & Salvinelli,

Armi FAMARS, Gardone, Italy

Steel, walnut, and gold

2

Over and Under Shotgun, circa 2001

Engraved by Firmo Fracassi, Italy

Manufactured by Pietro Beretta, Gardone,

Val Trompe, Italy

Steel and walnut

3

Over and Under Shotgun, 2007 – 2008

Engraved by Francesca Fracassi, Italy

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,

Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

4

“The Day,”

Over and Under Shotgun, 2007 – 2012

Engraved by Firmo Fracassi and Francesca Fracassi, Italy

Stock inlays by Ron Buck

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,

Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

5

“The Night,”

Over and Under Shotgun, 2007 – 2012

Engraved by Firmo Fracassi and Francesca Fracassi, Italy

Stock inlays by Ron Buck

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,

Connecticut

Steel, walnut, silver, and gold

Giancarlo and Stefano Pedretti & Gianfranco Pedersoli

The art of engraving is often a family affair. That is certainly the case in the Pedretti Family from Gardone, Val Trompia, in Brescia, Italy. Giancarlo Pedretti and his son Stefano Pedretti are both engravers of note who are keeping the engraving tradition alive. Giancarlo, who passed away in 2016, learned engraving from an early age and worked for many years at Beretta. Stefano's son has also studied under him and is now a master engraver himself.

Gianfranco Pedersoli, from Ponte Zanano in northern Italy, began drawing at the age of fourteen. He then abandoned his academic studies to apprentice with master engraver Giulio Timpini. He also became employed by the Beretta engraving department, but eventually began working independently. Pedersoli now works exclusively on commission, engraving arms for clients. Each design he creates is unique and never replicated.

Top to bottom:

Over and Under Shotgun,
2004 – 2005

Engraved by Gianfranco Pedersoli, Italy
Manufactured by Pietro Beretta, Gardone,
Val Trompe, Italy

Steel, walnut, and gold

Over and Under Shotgun, 1996

Engraved by Giancarlo and Stefano
Pedretti, Italy
Manufactured by Boss & Co., London

Steel, walnut, and gold

Over and Under Shotgun,
2003 – 2004

Engraved by Gianfranco Pedersoli,
Italy
Manufactured by Galazan,
New Britain, Connecticut

Steel and walnut

“The Diana Set,” Four Hammer Double Shotguns, 1998-2003

Engraved by Francesco Medici, Italy
Manufactured by Pietro Beretta,
Gardone, Val Trompe, Italy
Cabinet built by Giuseppe Rivadossi,
Nave, Brescia, Italy

Steel, walnut, and gold

Founded in the 16th century, the Pietro Beretta Company, based in Brescia, Italy, is the oldest active manufacturer of firearm components in the world. This cabinet and its contents—commonly referred to as the Diana Set —was conceived and created by the Beretta Company. The four Hammer Shotguns, for which the cabinet was designed, were engraved by Francesco Medici (born 1924). Medici has been referred to as the “father” of Italian high art gun engraving. The Italian walnut cabinet was hand-crafted by Giuseppe Rivadossi.

The image of the Roman goddess Diana, traditionally associated with the hunt, nature, and wild animals, is inlaid in gold on each gun. Each gun is further embellished with game birds and deeply engraved, elegant scrolls.

These arms feature an unusual style of lock with externally mounted hammers that were common during the 19th century. The exterior hammer style is rarely used on modern firearms, which typically have concealed locks. However, a nostalgia for external hammers continues into the 20th century.

Robert M. Lee considered this hand-built cabinet and set of arms to be exemplary of the highest Italian handcraft, and a centerpiece of his personal collection.

**“King Carl XV of Sweden,”
Model 1867 Navy Pistols,
1867 – 1868**

Manufactured in Belgium for E.
Remington & Sons, Ilion, New York

Steel, ivory, gold and platinum

These pistols were presented by the Remington Arms Co. to King Carl XV of Sweden and Norway (1826-1872) who reigned from 1860-1872. It was common for a company like Remington to present gifts such as these as a way of promoting their products. Remington also presented similar pistols to King Alfonso XII of Spain (1857-1885).

Winchester: Guns of the West

Winchester is perhaps America's most recognized firearms manufacturer, with the company's origins dating back to the 1850s. Popularly referred to as the guns that "Won the West," Winchester's lever-action repeating rifles are synonymous with the American West. They appeared regularly in Western movies and are almost always associated with the myth of the American cowboy.

The three Winchester rifles—Model 1873, Model 1876, and Model 1895—are some of the company's most famous designs. Each of these rifles is custom engraved with motifs celebrating Western themes.

Top to bottom:

“The Battle of Little Bighorn,”

Model 1873 Rifle, 1883, embellished 2000s

Engraved by Ron Smith, Texas, USA

Manufactured by Winchester, New Haven,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, gold, silver, and bone

Model 1876 Rifle, 1880, embellished 1993

Engraved by Ken C. Hunt, England

Manufactured by Winchester, New Haven,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

Model 95 Rifle, 1923, embellished 2002

Engraved by Joe Rundell, Michigan,

Manufactured by Winchester, New Haven,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

Spanish Left-Hand (Main-Gauche) Dagger, 1873

Damascened in the manner of the
Zuloagas Royal Armory, Toledo

Steel and gold

This type of hand-held dagger, also known as a “parrying dagger,” would have been used during a sword fight alongside a long-bladed sword. With the introduction of lighter and smaller swords, this style fell from favor. During the 19th century, a resurgence of interest in antique arms throughout Europe provided opportunities for skilled metalworkers to recreate historical arms of all types.

This dagger offers an exceptional example of the damascene process. Damascening is the art of inlaying different metals into one another to produce intricate patterns that resemble rich tapestry designs of damask silk. This piece is decorated in the style of Eusebio Zuloaga, who along with his son Placido, contributed to a resurgence of damascening art in 19th-century Eibar, Spain. The coat of arms of the King of Spain appears at the base of the blade near the handle.

Hunting Trousse, early 19th century

German

Steel, stag antler, leather, brass and gilding

Beginning in the 16th century, the hunting *trousse* was considered important equipment for a hunter in German lands. The largest knife (called a *waidpraxe*) could be used for chopping, while the three smaller knives (called by-knives) were useful for smaller projects. The grip, or handle, on the *waidpraxe* is made from stag horn and inlaid with a hunting scene. The handle of each by-knife is decorated with scenes of hunting dogs.

The entire set was carried in a leather-bound sheath mounted with gilt brass fittings. This set was intended for a left-handed person.

Miniature Armor, second half of 19th century

Maker unknown, in the German Gothic
style of the late 15th century

Steel

This miniature steel armor is a scale replica of a late 15th century southern German Gothic-style armor. These types of model armored figures were popular towards the end of the 19th century but were not exclusively owned by wealthy collectors. This miniature was probably owned by a private collector who was interested the Gothic Revival.

Wheel-lock Pistol and Sword,

circa 1560

Chiseling attributed to “Meister Franz,” believed to be a craftsman named Franz Lehman
Manufactured by Meister Franz,
Torgau, Saxony

Steel and gold

In the second half of the 15th century, firearms began to gradually replace bows, crossbows, and swords on battlefields in Europe. They also began to be carried more frequently by civilians for self-defense. Early guns, however, could be unreliable, so sometimes they were combined with older, more trusted weapons such as swords. Only a few sword-pistol combinations were made during this era. Over time, objects like these became valued more as curiosities than functional weapons.

This highly decorated sword-pistol is chiseled with Biblical stories from the book of Exodus. The hilt shows the Jewish Exodus from Egypt and subsequent journey to the Promised Land, while the sides of each grip show people worshiping the Golden Calf.

Breast-Plate, about 1560

Maker unknown, South German,
probably Landshut

Steel

This steel breast-plate probably came from a 16th century suit of armor used in the field. It is decorated with spiraling and serpentine scrolls, and the primary etching depicts a knight kneeling in prayer before Christ who is crucified on the Cross. The image indicates that whoever wore this armor fought in service to Christianity.

Paul Lantuch

1

Double Shotgun, 2008

Engraved by Paul Lantuch, Connecticut

Stock carved by Ron Buck

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

2

Over and Under Rifle, 2008

Engraved by Paul Lantuch, Connecticut

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, gold, and silver

3

Model 1851 Navy Revolver, not dated

Engraved by Paul Lantuch, Connecticut

Manufactured by Colt, Hartford, Connecticut

Re-creation of the revolver given by Samuel
Colt to Tsar Nicolai I of Russia

Steel, walnut, and gold

4

Super Blackhawk Revolver, circa 1980

Engraved by Paul Lantuch, Connecticut

Manufactured by Sturm, Ruger & Co.,
Southport, Connecticut

Formerly in the collection of William B.

Ruger, co-founder of Sturm, Ruger & Co.

Southport, Connecticut

Steel, ivory, turquoise, and gold

English Engravers

1

“Nizam of Hyderabad,”

Double Rifle, circa 1885

Engraver unknown

Manufactured by James

Purdey & Sons, London

Steel, walnut, and gold

2

“Nawabzada Colonel Khan”

Double Rifle, circa 1910

Engraver unknown

Manufactured by Holland & Holland, London

Steel, walnut, gold, enamel, ivory, diamonds,
rubies, and sapphires

3

“The Hummingbird,”

Double Shotgun, 1998 – 2000

Engraved by Rashid El Hadi, England

Manufactured by Westley Richards,
Birmingham, England

Steel, walnut, gold, and platinum

4

Double Rifle, 1920

Engraving likely by Harry Tomlinson

Manufactured by W. W. Greener,
Birmingham and London, England

Steel and walnut

5

Double Rifle, 1988 – 1990

Engraved by Rashid el Hadi, England

Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons, London

Steel and walnut

Austrian Engravers

1

Büchse (Single-Shot Rifle), not dated

Engraver unknown

Manufactured by Herbert Scheiring,
Ferlach, Austria

Steel, walnut, and gold

2

Büchse (Single-Shot Rifle), 1996 – 1999

Engraved by Helmut Kelih

Manufactured by Peter Hofer, Hofer-Jagdwaffen,
Ferlach, Austria

Steel, walnut, and gold

3

Doppelbüchse (Double Rifle), 2005

Engraved by Franz Mack, Austria

Manufactured by Johann Fanzoj,
Ferlach, Austria

Steel, walnut, and gold

4

Doppelbüchse (Double Rifle), 1999

Engraved by Peter Schaschl, Austria

Manufactured by Wilfried Glanznig,
Ferlach, Austria

Steel and walnut

American Engravers

1

Single-Shot Rifle, 1994

Engraved by Sam Welch, Utah

Made by Billingsley & Brownell, Wyoming

Steel, walnut and gold

2

Double Shotgun, 2003 – 2004

Engraved by Richard Roy, USA

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,

Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

3

Model 21 Double Rifle, 2000s

Engraved by Dan Cortini and Bryson Gwinell, USA

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,

Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

4

Over and Under Shotgun, 2005

Engraved by Leonard Francolini, New Mexico

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,

Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

Belgian Engravers

1

Over and Under Shotgun, 2011

Engraved by Thierry Duguet, Belgium and USA
Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

2

Model 21 Double Rifle, circa 2008

Engraved by Frédérique Lépinos, Belgium
and Italy

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, gold and silver

3

Model 21 Double Rifle, circa 2008

Engraved by Thierry Duguet, Belgium and USA
Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

4

“The Quail Gun,” Over and Under Shotgun, 2005 – 2009

Engraved by Alain Lovenberg, Tohogne, Belgium
Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons, London

Steel, walnut, and gold

5

Pair of Over and Under Shotguns, 2000

Engraved by Philippe Grifnée, Belgium
Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons,
London, England

Steel, walnut, and gold

Precious Metals: From Functional to Fine Art **vinyl text**

Like most decorative arts—from furniture to picture frames—arms adorned with opulent materials such as silver and gold are primarily designed to impress. The presence of precious metals indicates the highest level of sophistication and luxury a collector can attain. Whether clad in silver or inlaid with gold, the firearms on view in this exhibition suggest that, in the talented hands of artists and engravers, functional objects can be transformed into original works of fine art.

Inlays are the most popular way of incorporating gold, silver, platinum, copper, and iron into the design of decorative arms. Gold is probably the most common because it is malleable and easy to manipulate. Inlays can be both flush or raised depending on the design. Oftentimes, different colors of gold or different metals are combined to give an impression of depth or to make plants and animals appear more lifelike.

Pair of Rock Crystal Pistols, 1992 – 1993

Manufactured by Asprey, London,
England

Rock crystal, gold, enamel, diamonds;
case made from burl walnut veneer and satin

These elaborate rock crystal model pistols were designed in the form of French or Belgian target pistols of the mid-19th century. They were made in 1992-93 by Asprey, one of London's most celebrated producers of jewelry and other luxury goods. Charles Asprey founded the company in 1851 with a vision to produce "articles of exclusive design and high quality."

Often filled with liquids intended for drinking, transparent firearms made from glass were first introduced in the early 1600s and remain surprisingly common. While these pistols have partially-working "locks," they were only intended for display. This set represents the pinnacle of production for transparent firearms.

Celebrating the Millennium

The ten rifles on display here were all commissioned by Robert M. Lee to commemorate the arrival of the year 2000. Each gunmaker was specifically asked to build and design a “Millennium Gun” and to approach the project from their own unique perspective. Together they offer a glimpse into the studios of some of the world’s finest living engravers at a significant moment in history.

Left to right:

1

**“The Millennium Guns,”
Double Shotgun, (one from a pair), 1999**
Engraved by Phil Coggan, England
Manufactured by Peter V. Nelson,
London, England
Steel, walnut, gold, and platinum

2

**“The Boss Millennium Gun – Year 2000,”
Double Shotgun, 1999**
Engraved by Manrico Torcoli, Italy
Manufactured by Boss & Co., London, England
Steel and walnut

3

“The Millennium Gun,” Double Shotgun, 1999
Engraved by Ken C. Hunt, London, England
Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons, London
Steel, walnut, gold, and silver

4

**“The Millennium,”
Over and Under Shotgun, 1999**
Engraved by Gianfranco Pedersoli and Manrico
Torcoli, Italy
Manufactured by Ivo Fabbri, Brescia, Italy
Steel and walnut

5

**“The Millennium—Celtic Rifle,”
Over and Under Rifle, 2002**
Engraved by Alain Lovenberg, Tohogne, Belgium
Manufactured by Hartmann & Weiss, Hamburg,
Germany
Steel, walnut, and gold

6

“The Millennium,”

Over and Under Shotgun, 2000

Engraved by Firmo Fracassi and Giacomo Fausti,
Italy

Manufactured by Galazan, New Britain,
Connecticut

Steel, walnut, and gold

7

“The Millennium Gun,”

Over and Under Shotgun, 1999

Engraved by The Brown Brothers,
Paul and Alan Brown, England

Manufactured by Peter V. Nelson,
London, England

Steel, walnut, gold, and platinum

8

“Millennium 2000,”

Vierling (Four-Barrel Rifle), 1999

Engraved by Peter Schaschl, Austria

Manufactured by Wilhelm Glanznig,
Ferlach, Austria

Steel and walnut

9

“The Millennium Gun,”

Royal Model Double Rifle, 1999

Engraved by The Brown Brothers, Paul and Alan
Brown, England

Manufactured by Holland & Holland, London

Steel, walnut, and gold

10

“The Millennium Gun,” Double Rifle, 1999

Engraved by Phil Coggan, England

Manufactured by James Purdey & Sons, London,
England

Steel, walnut, and gold

About the Collector: Robert M. Lee vinyl text

Robert M. Lee (1927-2016) was born and raised in rural Woodmere, Long Island, New York, where he was taught a love of nature and the outdoors by his parents from a young age. By the time he was seven years old, he was determined to be a cowboy, a dream eventually overtaken by his desire to become a hunter, sportsman, and explorer. Inspired by stories and articles he read in *Outdoor Life* and other sporting magazines, Lee procured his first Winchester .22 caliber bolt action rifle by selling magazine subscriptions. Beginning at age eight, his mother accompanied him for weekly instruction at the local rifle range. She took advantage of the opportunity and learned to shoot alongside her son. As a teenager Lee invented (and patented) various arms components, a testament to his vast knowledge of this craft which he leveraged into a lifetime of collecting at the highest level.

Following his studies at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania and service in the United States Army from 1946-1947 Lee became a successful businessman, but his longing for outdoor adventure endured. During a 1955 excursion to Africa, Lee made a decision that would change the course of his life: he decided to establish a business as a safari outfitter. While living in Angola in the 1960s, he operated Lee Expeditions, Ltd., a guide service that brought foreign hunters to south-central Africa for the first time. In 1965, after returning to New York, Lee founded Hunting World, Inc., a luxury goods brand known for designing and manufacturing fine luggage, clothing, watches, leather goods, and accessories. Over the next three decades, Lee advocated for sustainable conservation practices of wild animals around the world, helping to establish the Taxkorgan Nature Reserve in China.

Given his lifetime interest in hunting and outdoor life, Lee began collecting arms and armor in earnest in the 1950 and amassed one of the finest arms collections in the world. This passion, coupled with his philanthropic interests, inspired Lee to help support the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the Robert M. Lee Gallery of American Arms & Armor is named in his honor.

**“Presented to Robert M. Lee
from His Friends,” Model 1847
Walker Revolver, 1980s,
embellished 2013**

Engraved by Richard Roy, USA
Manufactured by Colt, Hartford,
Connecticut

Steel, snakewood, and gold;
case is hardwood veneer

This revolver was presented to Robert M. Lee by his friends at a dinner in New York City. Engraved by Richard Roy, it is embellished with gold-inlaid elephants, which was Lee's personal logo. The unique grips are made from Snakewood, a type of wood native to the coastal regions of South America that is recognizable for its characteristic snakeskin patterns.

Born in Quebec, Canada, Roy began engraving in 1967 and now lives and works in the United States.

Model 1855 Root Revolver, 1861

Manufactured by Colt, Hartford,
Connecticut

Steel and walnut; case made from mahogany

This Colt pistol was a family heirloom passed down to Robert M. Lee through his maternal grandfather's side of the family. The story of the Colt harks back to Lee's childhood in Woodmere, Long Island, New York:

My mother's grandfather lived in Hartford, Connecticut and on rare occasions visited our home. On one of those visits, when I was perhaps seven or eight, he presented my mother with a beautiful Colt 1855 Sidehammer revolver. My great grandfather allowed me to hold this precious piece!

When I was about twelve, my mother gave me "access" to the precious Colt...It soon became my prized possession. The family heirloom proved an important factor in inspiring a keen interest in hunting, firearms, and the out-of-doors."



Robert M. Lee, his mother, and his horse Nicky.

The Face of Engraving

Behind every object in this exhibition is a talented engraver who likely spent thousands of hours embellishing these decorative arms. Their backgrounds and experiences are as diverse as the objects on view. Many of them grew up in families where the tradition of engraving was passed down from generation to generation. While many of them work on contract with large gunmakers such as James Purdey & Sons., Holland & Holland, and Westley Richards. Others work freelance, taking commissions solely from private clients. Modern engraving is very much alive around the world, and many experts credit Robert M. Lee's patronage for helping to lead to a renaissance in the field.