



## Autry National Center

### Take a Closer Look: Decorated Weapons at the Autry

#### Our first “special” exhibit of arms and armor.

Decorated arms and armor have always been a part of the West. In fact, decorating one’s weapon is a very old tradition shared by many different cultures all over the world. *Pistols: Dazzling Firearms*, the Autry’s first “special” exhibition of arms, examines the different motifs, or decorations, people have used and what we can learn from looking at these decorations. These motifs are usually pictures or shapes considered very important or special to the owner. For example, a pistol made for a President might have a picture of the White House or an eagle, our national bird.

As each of these cultures decorated their weapons differently, and for different reasons, it would be very difficult to discuss them all in one show. *Pistols Dazzling Firearms* discusses those decorated by Americans since about 1836 to the present day.

#### In the Gallery

##### Gallery Detective

In the exhibit *Pistols: Dazzling Firearms*, there are themes or subjects that remain popular and continue over the centuries. Can you find them?

- 1) The Nautical Theme. Try to find motifs (pictures) that tell you the artist was interested in the ocean.
- 2) American Presidents. Look for images of different firearms that tell you the artist is thinking of our Presidents.
- 3) Cowboys. Can you find motifs that tell you about the artist’s interest in cowboys? What sort of motifs did he use?

##### Motif Hunt: (find the answers in our gallery)

What have you learned about the motifs shown in the exhibit? The answers to these questions are found in our exhibit.

Where does the eagle and snake motif come from?



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What kind of people paid to have a gun decorated?

What kind of metals can be used in decorating a weapon?

What makes each of the Presidents' revolvers unique to him?

### **Be a Museum Scout**

A scout is a person who searches to discover and gather information about people, places, and things. Next time you visit the Autry National Center, see how good a scout you are and find arms and armor or images of them in our galleries. Once you start looking, you will find many different kinds of armaments in the museum as well as images of them in paintings, sculptures, and other kinds of art in many different galleries throughout the Museum.

### **Did you know?**

The Autry National Center in Los Angeles has two museums - the Museum of the American West in Griffith Park and the Southwest Museum of the American Indian in Mount Washington. Using their collections of art, artifacts, and stories, these museums help us better understand the West, those who lived here before us, and ultimately ourselves. Arms (another word for weapons) and armor, sometimes called armaments, are one part of the Autry's collection. People use arms and armor to hunt, fight, protect themselves, and in the case of decorated arms, to show off a little bit.

### **What kinds of exhibits are there?**

There are different kinds of exhibits. Most museums, including the Autry, have "permanent" or core exhibits that highlight the museum's mission and collection. Another kind is a "special" or temporary exhibit. This kind of exhibit is only open for a limited time, anywhere from a few weeks to almost a year. Special exhibits generally showcase an artist, style, genre, collection or story in depth. Sometimes "special" exhibits move to different museums and are called a "traveling" exhibit. Lastly, there are "on-line" or "web" exhibits. This type of exhibit allows many people from all over the world to enjoy the exhibit and learn more about a subject very easily.



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### Who works on an exhibit?

Many different departments work together on an exhibit.

**Curator:** Researches and collects information that tells visitors like you more about arms and armor. Curators also identify and propose the purchase or donation of objects, so that the museum's collection will continue to grow. When a department installs its galleries or holds a special exhibition, curators are responsible for selecting the objects to be shown, supervising their display, and writing the labels and panels you read.

**Exhibit Designer:** Determines how the objects will look best in the gallery. The exhibit designer chooses the right color paint, the gallery design that make each exhibition unique, and the cases that protect the objects and also show them in the best light.

**Conservator:** Makes sure that the objects in the collection are well cared for, stored properly, and, if needed, fixed and cleaned. Going on exhibit can put stress on an object, and conservators must decide if an object is okay to be exhibited.

**Registrar:** Is responsible for each object that comes into the museum. They must inspect each object, write a description and condition report, give the object a unique number, and find the proper storage location for the object. When it is time for an exhibition, the registrar locates each object.

**Educator:** Develops the activities, lessons, and resources that relate to each exhibit at the museum. Educators create guides for use in the exhibition, lesson plans teachers can use in their classrooms, tours for school kids and adults, and general programs that complement the exhibition.