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Brun's Museum Worthy Gun Art

by T. Logan Metesh



The World's Fair has long been the place where numerous landmark inventors and artists have shown off their creations, bringing fame and honor to themselves and their countries. Iconic creations such as the Ferris wheel, the Eiffel Tower, and even the ice cream cone were all stars at a World's Fair. Another great example is when Sam Colt highlighted his Model 1851 revolver at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. It was at the Great Exhibition that the concept of what we know as the World's Fair today was born, but the exposition in 1851 has roots that go much deeper in France in the 18th century.

Originally begun in 1798 and known as the *Exposition Nationale* or *Exposition des Produits de l'Industrie Française* (Exhibition of Products of French Industry), the event was designed to showcase the very best of French society and ingenuity. When the last one was held in June and July 1849, it featured 5,494 exhibitors.

One such exhibitor was J.C.A. Brun, a Parisian-based gunsmith active between 1849 and 1872. Brun had a remarkable talent, and his collaborative efforts with other arms-related craftsmen produced some exceptional, high art firearms for the attendees to enjoy. His creations are just as remarkable and popular today as they were 150 years ago, with examples being admired in museums across the United States.

One of the guns made by Brun and his associates for the 1849 event is known as "The Devil's Shotgun." Now part of the Petersen Collection at the NRA National Firearms Museum, this 16 gauge shotgun is ebony-stocked and elaborately embellished with numerous multi-color gold inlaid renderings of demons and other bizarre creatures, along with their human victims. Of equally ornate Rococo construction are the case and its accessories, including an elegantly curved horn powder flask and a ramrod made of baleen.

The [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) owns and displays an additional collaborative piece of Brun's. It's another elaborate shotgun, but this time it's a pinfire instead of percussion. It was displayed at the Exposition Universelle of 1867 and is now a part of the museum's Arms & Armor collection, where it resides in a gallery that also contains arms once owned by Emperor Charles V and King Louis XIII of France.

Another one of the Brun creations from 1849 was a cased pair of .50-caliber percussion pistols with a much more friendly theme than the one found on The Devil's Shotgun. The barrels have elaborate etching along the whole of the visible surfaces, and Brun's name is accented by gold on the letters and inlaid gold lines above and below. The mid-sections of the barrels have butterflies flanking a young fairy on gun "A" and an adult fairy on gun "B." The top flats have scrollwork in the breech section, and the balance of the designs are primarily floral blooms.

The pistols are housed in an exceptional fitted case, complete with a cleaning rod, mallet, engraved ball mold, nipple wrench, engraved ladle, two containers for patches and caps, a ramrod, and two lidded compartments.

The fact that examples of Brun's work are on display in museums of the highest regard for both firearms and art is high praise, for sure. Pieces with this level of craftsmanship and historic provenance are not often available to the public, so any opportunity to obtain one is decidedly rare.

