

Miniature Arms

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Miniature Arms
Collectors/Makers
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Miniature Switchblades



A Rincon Rigby

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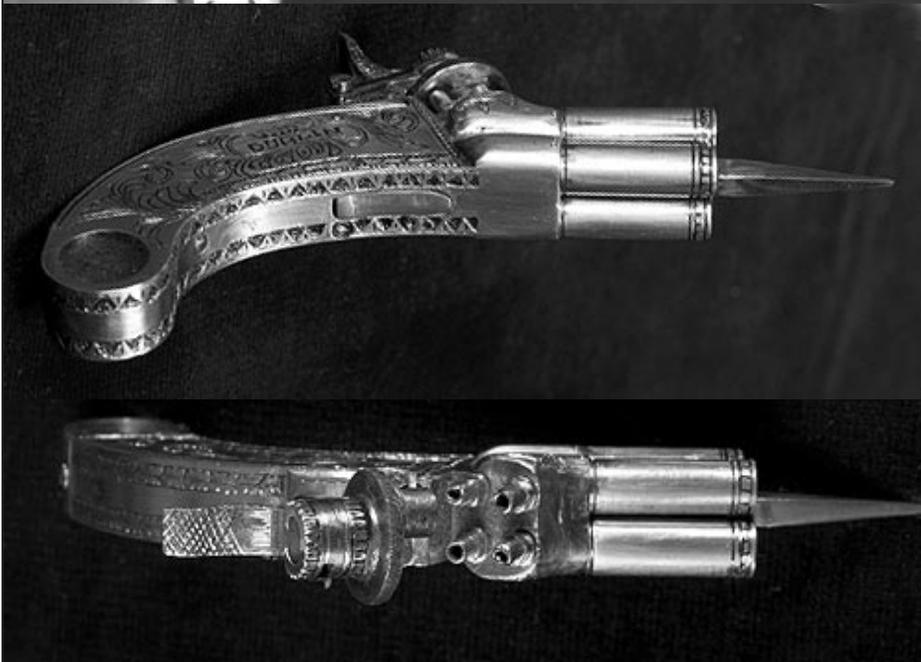
Arms Through the Ages

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Auction Highlights



Miniature Weapons Engraving



*A*ntonio Rincón, miniature gun maker, describes a fascinating stage in the manufacture of a “ best “ Rincón miniature gun. When friends visit his small workshop in Bogotá, Colombia, they never fail to marvel at the number and variety of craft skills required to build the miniatures that are justly considered to be amongst the best in the world.

Lock, stock and barrel, every element to the weapon is made and finished out to impeccable standards of mechanical function.

Engraving is one of the most intriguing of the skills and plays a vital part in the miniature guns appeal to its owner, indeed, more time may be spent on discussing the subject and execution of the guns engraving than on the practical and functional features of its mechanics.

The engraving of steel is no easy matter and is infinitely more time consuming than work on soft metals such as silver gold or pewter. As a consequence, the training of an engraver requires patience and determination. The fundamental requirement is mastery of the graver, the tool that actually cuts. The engraver works with light or rather the lack of it. Light

angled across a perfectly polished surface reflects with a bright and white “effect. A V-shaped cut across this surface will reflect the light at a different angle, and cast its own shadow in the cut. The reduced intensity of the reflected light appears to the eye as a dark line; this is the effect with which the engraver works. His palette, therefore, consists of numerous types of cut and the regulation of their intensity.

By finely cutting a series of closely spaced parallel lines it is possible to reduce the reflected light so as to create a truly dark area. Additional stippling and matting will intensify the effect. Starting with these deceptively simple technics, untold variations of patterns have evolved to adorn miniature guns, yet all of them rely on this interplay of light and dark.

The basic techniques of simple line cutting may suffice for the finer detailing required to depict the mythological creatures fabu- l o u s animals which frequently find themselves embel-

lishing a miniature gun, but elaborate detail and other effects may call on an expanded range of engraving techniques.

Chiselling, carving and modelling all require metal to be removed to leave the uncut surface in relief. A very bold effect can be achieved by cutting out and creating a relatively shallow relief, but leaving crisp, steep edges to the basic outline. Deeper chiselling and carving can create truly three-dimensional effects. The introduction of different colors to the process calls for the technique of inlay.

Gold is a traditional addition, and its choice may be determined by simple practicality to highlight “RINCON”, for example, and make the word stand out against the hardening colors. To secure the gold, an appropriate amount of the parent metal is excised in a shallow U-shape rather than the V-shaped of a simple line. The bottom of the U is squared up, then slightly undercut so that the trench is wider at the base than at the top. 24 carat gold wire

is then punched downwards, and swagged into the undercut. Any excess material is removed and the gold is polished flush to the surface.

Accuracy of preparation is crucial to this technique since the contrast in colors will reveal the merest wobble. Herein lies the true skill of the craftsman. Larger inlays require the use of sheet gold which is pre-shaped to the form of the inlay, but again swagged in to an undercut edge. With a raised inlay the thickness of the gold is increased, and the surfaced is modeled after it is secured. A mixture of golds, red, green, white and yellow or silver and ever copper, gives the engraver scope for infinite variety and subtlety in a finished design.

Most of us are only able to admire this type of work in museums and collection but in fact, far from these skills being associated with bygone days.

The previous text was extracted from a new book on miniature guns in which Antonio Rincon describes technics of engraving used to adorn the Rigby pistol shown in this article.

This gun will be exhibited in the **NRA annual show**, Phoenix, Arizona May 15-19-2009.

