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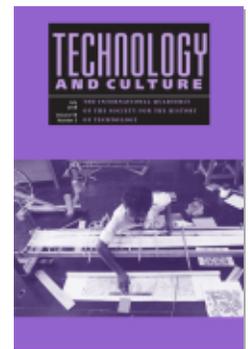
Display of Arms: A Roundtable Discussion about the Public  
Exhibition of Firearms and Their History

Jennifer Tucker, Glenn Adamson, Jonathan S. Ferguson, Josh Garrett-Davis,  
Erik Goldstein, Ashley Hlebinsky, David D. Miller, Susanne Slavick

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## Display of Arms

### A Roundtable Discussion about the Public Exhibition of Firearms and Their History

**JENNIFER TUCKER, with GLENN ADAMSON, JONATHAN S. FERGUSON, JOSH GARRETT-DAVIS, ERIK GOLDSTEIN, ASHLEY HLEBINSKY, DAVID D. MILLER, and SUSANNE SLAVICK**

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Jennifer Tucker (organizer and moderator) is associate professor in the History Department and Science in Society Program at Wesleyan University. She is the author of *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) and has published numerous articles and book chapters on the history of technology, science, law, photography, and culture. Glenn Adamson is a curator, writer, and historian who works at the intersection of craft and contemporary art. Currently senior scholar at the Yale Center for British Art, he has previously been director of the Museum of Arts and Design; head of research at the V&A; and curator at the Chipstone Foundation in Milwaukee. His book *Fewer Better Things: The Hidden Meaning of Objects* will be published by Bloomsbury in August 2018. Jonathan S. Ferguson is now keeper of firearms and artillery for the Royal Armouries Museum and is based at the National Firearms Centre in Leeds, UK. He specializes in the firearms of the early modern period to the present day, with particular focus on their use and effect. Josh Garrett-Davis is the Gamble assistant curator of western history, popular culture, and firearms at the Autry Museum of the American West. He is a Ph.D. candidate in U.S. history at Princeton University, writing a dissertation on Native American engagements with audio technology, and has written and edited multiple essays, reviews, and books on the American West and its cultures. Erik Goldstein is senior curator of mechanical arts and numismatics at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. He is a lifelong student of the numismatics, arms, military history, and material culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and has authored six books and dozens of articles on these specialties. Ashley Hlebinsky is the Robert W. Woodruff curator of the Cody Firearms Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Wyoming. Hlebinsky is also the president of The Gun Code, LLC, where she serves as a consultant for museums, expert witness in firearms-related civil and criminal cases, international lecturer, firearms writer, on-camera historian, and television producer. David D. Miller is the firearms curator in the Armed Forces History Division of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. He assists curators throughout the Smithsonian and beyond in their collecting and exhibition work. Susanne Slavick is an artist, curator, writer, and Andrew W. Mellon professor of art at Carnegie Mellon University. Her recent traveling curatorial projects include *Out of Rubble*, featuring international artists responding to the trauma and aftermath of war, and *Unloaded* and *Up in Arms*, both exploring historical and social issues surrounding

## Moderator's Introduction

Today, visits to museums and heritage sites are a principal way by which many people gain historical knowledge about firearms and engage firearms history. In this roundtable moderated by historian of technology Jennifer Tucker, museum and art exhibition curators reflect on the meanings, significance, and practices of gun history and heritage.

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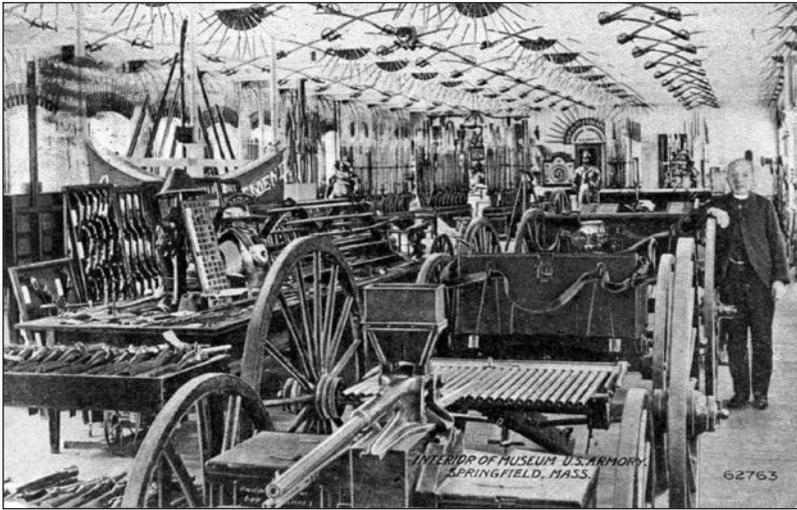
Firearms collections and exhibitions share affinities with other museums of technology. Yet firearms collections also raise unique and challenging questions. How are guns and their histories exhibited and narrated? Amid a contentious current national debate in the United States about the role of gun ownership and gun violence, defining history and heritage and their importance is a more difficult task. Do museums have special ethical responsibilities in “public history”? What part do museum visitors play in creating understandings of the past? What is the relationship between historians and the museums? What role, if any, does the public display of firearms collections serve in today’s gun debate?

The first deliberate display of firearms for the visiting public in the UK was the creation of the Grand Storehouse, built in London in 1688 on the site of the present Waterloo Barracks (later destroyed by fire in 1841). In the United States, firearms were first put on display in 1840 at the U.S. Patent Office Building in Washington, D.C., by the National Institute for the Promotion of Science (the precursor to the Smithsonian Institution). The institute (which began as a museum of American natural history) included firearms owned by famous Americans including former presidents and various explorers. The Patent Office also displayed thousands of patent models created by inventors, which included firearms. In the nineteenth century, companies such as Colt displayed their firearms at industrial fairs and expositions, the most famous of which may be London’s Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851. A firearm collection at Springfield Armory, in Massachusetts, was started officially just after the Civil War, as a wide variety of weapons came back from the battlefields. According to Alex Mackenzie, senior curator at the Armory, Col. James G. Benton established the museum about 1866 and opened it to the public in 1871. In addition to being an attraction for tourists, the firearms were used by engineers and workers at the armory as a technical reference library. Shown here in a turn-of-the-20th-century postcard, the museum is clearly crowded with displays (fig. 1).

The Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 included a large display of U.S. Army ordnance, firearms, and ammunition. The Army

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the impact of guns in American culture. For their support in making this forum available for public open-access, the contributors would like to thank the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life at Wesleyan University, the Aspen Institute, the Autry Museum of the American West, the Cody Firearms Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and the Smithsonian Institution.



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FIG. 1 "Interior of the U.S. Army Museum, Springfield, Mass.," photographic postcard c.1910. (Source: Image courtesy National Park Service, Springfield Armory National Historic Site.)

Ordnance Corps also had a small museum one block from the White House from the 1870s until 1903. In 1881 the Smithsonian opened the Arts & Industries Building and exhibited much of the same type of military equipment that was displayed at the Centennial Exposition. The period after World War I saw the beginning of great collections of early European and Asian firearms in American art museums. From the late 1950s, many firearms manufacturers, including Colt, Smith & Wesson, Winchester, Remington, and Brown, donated firearms and related archives collections to other museums (fig. 2).

Today, there are around thirty national, state, and publicly owned collections in the United States as well as hundreds more that are privately owned or in collections on military bases. The National Rifle Association (NRA), for example, runs three museums. The main NRA Firearms Museum is in Fairfax, Virginia, at the headquarters of the NRA organization, founded in 1935. The second is in Raton, New Mexico, with an emphasis on the history of the Southwest region and competition guns; and the third is a sporting arms museum in Springfield, Missouri, inside a Bass Pro Shop store. All told, about 350,000 visitors per year visit the three sites, supplemented by museum publications, magazine articles, cable TV (such as "NRA Gun Gurus"), and social media as well as traveling exhibitions and guest lectures.

Many of the world's major museums include firearms in their collections: the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, the Art Institute of Chicago, Victoria and Albert, and the Design Museum in London, for

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FIG. 2 Photographic postcard, c.1950–57, with photograph of the interior of the Colt Company Museum. Stamped on the back: “The Colt Museum, Colt’s Manufacturing Co., Hartford, No admission charge, Open Monday thru Friday 8 am to 4 pm.” Thanks to Dave Corrigan, curator of the Museum of Connecticut History, for bringing this to our attention. (Source: Connecticut State Library. Reprinted with permission.)

example, all have important arms collections that continue to add contemporary firearms. Firearms, too, are often embedded in military or social history exhibitions devoted to a particular historical period, such as at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.

Today, national, regional, and local museums often feature interactive displays or living history exhibits with character actors. Firearms displays sometimes are interpreted as part of the activities of heritage sites, reenactment societies, and virtual online museums. Yet despite their prevalence and significance, public collections of firearms have not themselves been the focus of extensive academic scholarship, especially relative to studies of other types of historical museum collections, reflecting, perhaps, a more general elision of firearms (or gun) studies in the academy. Private and public exhibitions of firearms raise many fundamental questions about how they resemble (or differ from) other technological exhibitions. Firearms are a particular kind of artifact that elicit strong positive and negative reactions among audiences. Given the diversity of different kinds of museums with varying collecting missions and agendas, what do we know, or think we

know, about firearms museums as sites of history and heritage? What can curators and others who are knowledgeable about technology and culture contribute to these debates? What resources exist for further study?

To get their perspectives on these and other questions, we go directly to the specialists who curate and exhibit firearms collections as well as artists engaged with public exhibitions and displays about firearms today. This roundtable discussion is, as far as we are aware, the first published conversation of its kind among curators and researchers of firearms collections and histories. Our conversation originated at a session held in conjunction with the “Firearms and the Common Law Tradition” conference of historians and lawyers, held at The Aspen Institute’s Washington, D.C., headquarters in September 2016. Among the invited participants for the workshop, which was chaired by Margaret Vining, curator of armed forces history at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, were curators representing varied collecting and research missions, from national collections of firearms (such as the Smithsonian Museum’s Firearms Collection) to nongovernmental repositories (such as the Cody Firearms Collection and the three National Rifle Association museums), museums of art and design, museums of western history and popular culture (such as the Autry Museum of the American West), and armories of military weaponry (such as the Royal Armouries in Leeds, UK). Among the subjects discussed were: collections policies and strategies, exhibitions, stories, security, conservation, ethical and legal considerations, and more. How do curators of exhibitions narrate the history of firearms? What is the role of firearms in telling stories about the past? What new stories can (or must) be told?

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As one workshop participant, Ashley Hlebinsky, put it: “Firearms aren’t this separatist thing. They have been integrated into society, they have informed industries; industries have informed firearms. During times of global war, other companies have pitched in to try to make arms, and during times of peace, firearms companies have made products that weren’t guns. How do curators relate the history of firearms to this global context?”

A central challenge faced by nearly all history and technology curators is one faced by many curators of technology museums: namely, how to display and provide historical context for technological artifacts (in this case, as one curator put it, “racks and racks of guns”) in a way that will appeal to both enthusiasts and the general public. What stories can be told with material artifacts that cannot be narrated without them? How do visitors imagine the past? What are the broader stories that exhibitions tell and retell?

Although a representative from the National Rifle Association Museums Group was part of the initial discussions, providing helpful information at the Aspen Institute about their research collections, the NRA declined to participate in the publication. The exchange includes two additional contributors who came into the roundtable later in the process: Susanne Slavick (professor of art, Carnegie Mellon) and Erik Goldstein (senior

curator of mechanical arts and numismatics, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia). The participating curators represent diverse perspectives in a thoughtful and scholarly discussion, providing a model of the kinds of conversations that museum exhibits and artifacts uniquely inspire.

This conversation represents the first roundtable discussion in *Technology and Culture* among curators of technology collections in museums, and hopefully it will spark more conversations. On one level, it invites us to think about how, if at all, the issues that curators of firearms collections raise are similar to, or different from, the kinds of issues that curators of other kinds of technological artifacts face. It is also our hope that our exchange will make a valuable contribution to the growing interdisciplinary field of “gun studies.”

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### I. Collection Description and Overview

**JENNIFER TUCKER (JT):** How did your collection begin, and how has it evolved? What kinds of objects are collected and displayed in your museum?

**ERIK GOLDSTEIN (EG):** The arms collection at Colonial Williamsburg has its roots in the need to furnish a pair of all-important buildings in the restored capitol city of Virginia: the Governor’s Palace and the Powder Magazine. The former, a reconstruction built in the 1930s on the original foundations, is known to have had an arms display decorating its walls, an exciting feature worth replicating. The Powder Magazine of 1715, little more than a fortified warehouse for the colony’s military materials, is known to have protected hundreds of flintlock muskets, making such firearms an essential part of that structure’s interpretation and furnishings. Since no reproductions were on the market from the mid-1930s through the early 1960s, original “Brown Bess” muskets were bought in huge quantities, largely out of England, to reflect what was used in colonial Virginia, and present in significant numbers in these structures.

Thus, it is not surprising that the vast bulk of the foundation’s firearms collection is composed of British martial flintlock muskets of the eighteenth century. After the 1950s, the collecting goals had broadened, and we began to acquire firearms, of whatever sort and origin, known to have been used in colonial America and the early Federal era. The same can also be said for other parts of Colonial Williamsburg’s holdings—if it existed and was used here during the abovementioned eras, we probably collect it, be it furniture, silver, fine art, or the everyday items used by everyday early Americans.

**JONATHAN FERGUSON (JF):** The [Royal Armouries] Museum’s collection grew out of the working arsenal stored at the Tower of London and

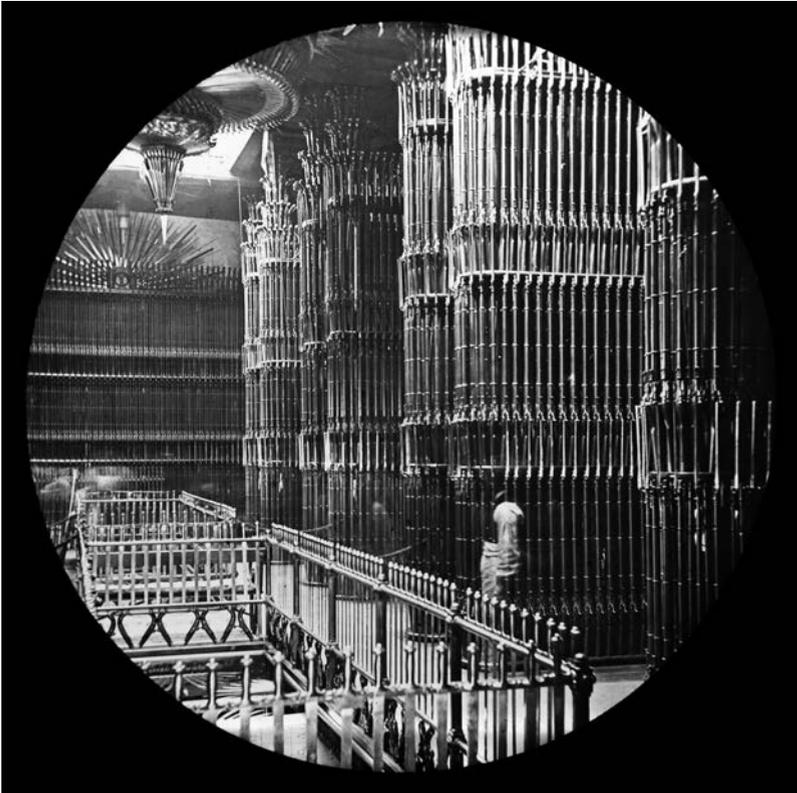


FIG. 3 Arsenal of Volunteer Arms at the Royal Armouries (White Tower), glass plate negative, c.1862–70. (Source: Author's collection.)

known for centuries as the “Tower Armouries” (fig. 3). Surviving examples from this core Tower collection date back to the early sixteenth century, including armor and guns owned by King Henry VIII himself, but primarily munitions-grade weapons and armor, some of which were assembled at the Tower itself. Additional objects were gifted and obtained in military endeavors, expanding the collection into one that, by the advent of the Gothic Revival, was of great interest to paying visitors, antiquarians, and the first scholars and collectors of what would come to be known as “arms and armour.” From this time onward further items were purchased privately and at auction with various informal collecting remits and policies in mind, creating one of the finest collections of its type. The latest major addition came in 2005 with the gifting by the UK Ministry of Defence of the former “Pattern Room” reference collection. This had begun as an offshoot of the Tower when a modern manufactory was established at Enfield in north London to take over production of military small arms. A museum collection of sorts amassed there and

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became particularly strong on firearms from ca. 1900 to the present. Re-combined with the Armouries collection, this created a world-standard subset collection of 26,003 individual firearms, not including bayonets, mounts, ammunition, and other accessories/ancillaries. The Armouries collection comprises more than 77,000 objects. Traditionally the displays have been didactic in nature, focusing on arms and armour as art history, military technology, and as symbols of power and/or wealth (whether of the ruling elite, their allies, or their defeated enemies). Very little by way of context was provided for the visitor other than the stories told by yeoman warders conducting guided tours. Ostensibly the displays have been aimed at the general public. However, the old Tower displays were problematic in terms of a lack of accessibility and variety in interpretation. With the establishment of the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds in 1996, efforts were made to create modern displays in line with contemporary museum standards. Today, however, these are showing their age, being object-rich and lacking in interactivity. The current galleries at the Tower are much more recent in date and more focused on modern tourist demographics, assuming no knowledge whatever of the subject.

**DAVID D. MILLER (DDM):** The National Museum of American History's firearms collection began with the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia. Spencer Fullerton Baird, the first curator of the Smithsonian's U.S. National Museum, was placed in charge of the federal exhibits at the exposition. When it closed, many of the exhibitors donated their collections to the Smithsonian, including several pieces of ordnance from the War Department. In 1881 the Smithsonian opened the new U.S. National Museum building to exhibit these collections. Shortly afterward the collections of the National Institute for the Promotion of Science, housed at the Patent Office Building, were transferred to the Smithsonian. The transfer included a dozen firearms once owned by historic American figures.

In the early twentieth century the War Department began transferring historic firearms, and the U.S. Patent Office transferred its extensive patent model collection to the Smithsonian. Over two hundred patent models were firearm inventions or improvements. Transfers from other government agencies and the generous donations of collectors continued to expand the collection. Today the National Museum of American History holds a significant firearms collection that is both technological—tracing the evolution of firearms from a fourteenth-century hand cannon to a modern M4 carbine—and historical—containing a number of historically significant models and biographical pieces. Our collecting focuses on new developments in firearms technology and on small arms used by the military and law enforcement agencies.

**JOSH GARRETT-DAVIS (JGD):** The firearms collection at the Autry Museum of the American West—about 1,300 guns in total—has largely grown out of a few major private collections. One was the collection of Colt Industries, which decided to divest itself of its historic firearms collection in the 1980s, at the same time Jackie and Gene Autry (with Joanne and Monte Hale) began planning the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum. Building on this, the museum has acquired other collections, including that of the Bianchi Frontier Museum, and substantial collections from a few major collectors including George A. Strichman, Greg and Petra Martin, George F. Gamble, and Dennis LeVett. The firearms collection is heavily weighted toward the various iterations of Samuel Colt's companies, plus more generally firearms developed and sold between the 1840s and about 1900, the period of American conquest and initial settlement of much of the West, including guns associated with historic people. In line with today's expanded western historiography, we could do better at collecting and interpreting the firearms that impacted the West for more than a century before and now more than a century after that celebrated window of time.

**ASHLEY HLEBINSKY (AH):** The Buffalo Bill Center of the West is an American Alliance of Museums–accredited institution that houses five museums and a research library under one seven-acre roof. [It] is located in Cody, Wyoming, approximately fifty miles from the east gate of Yellowstone National Park. As a result, the institution welcomes many visitors who are on their way to the park. The center as a whole gets about 200,000 visitors annually, with 85 percent arriving between May and September. This audience is often diverse and increasingly international. Founded in 1917, the center was originally a log cabin that has since grown to house the Buffalo Bill Museum, Cody Firearms Museum (CFM), Draper Natural History Museum, Plains Indian Museum, and the Whitney Western Art Museum. Archival material for every museum is found in the McCracken Research Library. The Center has over eight thousand firearms that are encyclopedic in nature and span the entirety of firearms history.

The Cody Firearms Museum has not always been a part of the center. In the 1960s the Olin Corporation, better known as Winchester Ammunition, housed and maintained thousands of historic firearms and tens of thousands of archival firearms records at their manufacturing facility in New Haven, Connecticut. In the 1970s a Winchester executive was looking to relocate the collection. Paperwork began for a permanent loan in November 1975. And on July 4, 1976, with western film star John Wayne present, the Winchester Arms Collection was dedicated to the center. By 1980, the Winchester Arms Museum opened in the basement of the Buffalo Bill Museum. In 1988 Winchester gifted the collection. The center then decided to develop an entire wing dedicated to the growing col-

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lection. It is important to note that, by 1988, the collection was more than just Winchester and included the collections of many manufacturers including Marlin, Remington, and Ruger. At the behest of former board of trustee member William B. Ruger, the museum was renamed the Cody Firearms Museum. It opened in its new space in 1991 and is now considered an encyclopedic collection of firearms ranging internationally and during the entirety of firearms history. Over twenty-five years later, the CFM staff recognizes that we have two major audiences—the enthusiast and the novice. Because of its connection to the other museums, the CFM gets many visitors with limited to no experience with firearms. Thus, the museum is undergoing a renovation that will better contextualize firearms within their diverse historic narratives.

**JT:** Susanne and Glenn, both of you are art scholars and curators (not firearms curators), yet the projects that you are working on also explore the history and material culture of firearms through public displays. How have your individual projects evolved, what objects are included in your shows, and what factors into your selections? Is there anything that you have learned, in the course of exhibiting to different audiences, that surprised you?

**SUSANNE SLAVICK (SS):** As an artist and curator, my work has primarily addressed violence and its consequences. Prior studio and exhibition projects like *R&R* (. . . &R) and *Out of Rubble* dealt with the aftermath of wars that have largely occurred abroad. With the *Unloaded* project, I wanted to turn my attention to violence on the home front, and the instrument of violence on that front is most often a gun. The artists I invited to participate in *Unloaded* present a number of perspectives on the image and impact of guns in contemporary culture, though none endorse them as a means to an end. Their works touch upon a host of issues surrounding access to and use of firearms across demographic categories. They examine and represent the role that guns continue to play in our national mythologies, our rates of suicide, homicide, and domestic violence, and the militarization of civilian life.

The artists in *Unloaded* visualize the power of the gun as icon and instrument, the damage it can do, and how weapons might be rejected, broken, or silenced. Some show the power that guns wield in both our daily realities and our personal fantasies. Others mourn and resist that power, doing everything they can to take it away, believing there are better ways to resolve conflicts, ensure safety, and keep the peace. I'm hoping that the works in *Unloaded* do what any good art can do: make us recognize who we are, why and how we behave, and how we might envision a different, less violent world.

I chose works that reveal what we fear and lose with guns, our easy access to them, the false comfort and sense of security that they seem to

promise, their mythologies of power and protection, how they shape our sense of identity and saturate our entertainment industry, how they allow us to enact and perpetuate our violent impulses while doing nothing to resolve the deep conflicts, both chronic and spontaneous, among individuals and within our society. Gun ownership and control is a divisive topic in this country. While I have a curatorial position, I want the show to lead its viewers to feel more and to think harder—beyond their current stances—and to ultimately regard the ubiquity of guns in our culture as a virulent and ongoing public health crisis.

The audiences for *Unloaded* consist primarily of those who frequent nonprofit art spaces and university galleries, yet because issues surrounding guns expand far beyond the art world, other civic groups from Pittsburgh were also involved.

GLENN ADAMSON (GA): I had the idea for *Loaded: The Gun in American Art* many years ago, on a visit to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. It's a museum with an important firearms collection as well as artworks connected to the topic. Samuel Colt founded his company in Hartford; he had a strong involvement in the arts and even is said to have been the first entrepreneur ever to engage in “product placement,” hiring the painter George Catlin to depict scenes of the wild West with Colt guns being used to good effect.

One of the works in the Wadsworth collection is William Hartnett's *The Faithful Colt* (1890), arguably the most extraordinary painting ever made of a gun (fig. 4). Isolated against a weathered green door, the New Model pistol, with its cracked ivory handle and rusted barrel, hangs above an illegible scrap of newspaper. The subject of the painting, a weapon once in constant use but now laid aside, would have immediately registered at the time as a symbol of the Union victory in the Civil War and the high price paid on both sides of the conflict. At the same time, the painting speaks to the era of frontier expansion—or rather, its end, and with it the decline in everyday use of firearms for most people. So among other things, *The Faithful Colt* captures the moment when guns shifted from practical tools to potent symbols of identity.

It struck me immediately, standing in front of this painting, that if presented in the right context, it might speak to contemporary audiences in an emotional way and also anchor a historical narrative that could inform our present-day debates about guns. I started to construct a narrative with the Hartnett painting as its “hinge,” or central moment—eventually working with Robin Jaffee Frank, who was then chief curator at the Wadsworth. The premise of the exhibition, which is still currently in development, is to present an overview of the pervasive presence of guns in American culture through the eyes of artists, from the revolutionary era to the present day.

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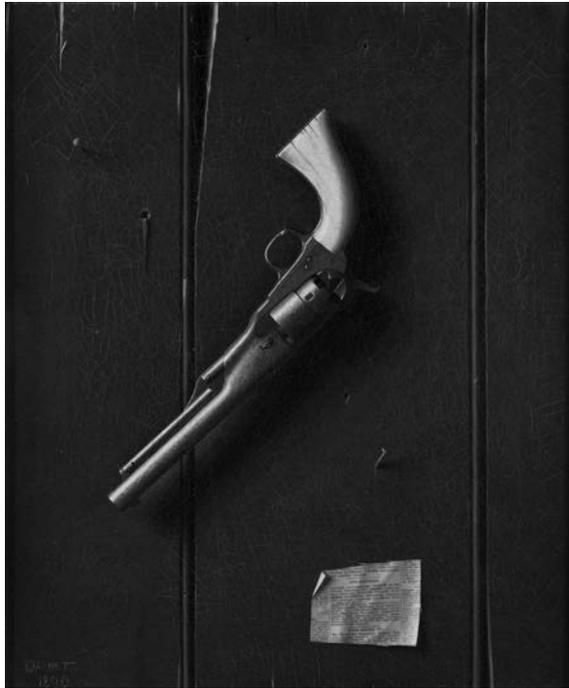


FIG. 4 William Hartnett, *The Faithful Colt*, 1890, oil on canvas. (Source: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut.)

Few topics are more controversial, obviously, because commentary about guns tends toward polarized extremes. Given this, we envision the show as neither progun nor antigun. Rather, the exhibition would offer a space of reflection in which museum visitors are invited to consider the predominant place that guns occupy in our country's past and present through the lens of art history. The national obsession with guns has, after all, inspired an extraordinary array of visual art, to say nothing of music, literature, and films (which will also be included in the show or affiliated programming). By engaging with this material, visitors will learn about the social and political history of firearms; but more importantly, they will be presented with a series of artistic ideas about guns and gun violence.

**JT:** Do firearms differ substantially from other types of material culture in either their relationship to their own historical context or their power for museum visitors? If so, how?

**EG:** While I don't think they necessarily differ from other types of composite antique objects, I do think they enjoy a special status with our guests. *Lock, Stock & Barrel*, the firearms exhibit currently in place at our museum, has been up since 1992, and is the longest-running exhibition ever installed by Colonial Williamsburg (though it will be replaced next

year). It is one of the favorites and always has a number of folks parked in front of the cases. Similarly, attractions found throughout the foundation, focusing in on firearms, are extremely popular and do “stand out.” These include the display at the Palace (230 muskets, 80 of which are originals), the Powder Magazine (hundreds of firearms), the Gunsmith Shop (where flintlocks of many sorts are made), Market Square (where Military Programs demonstrates the blank-firing of muskets, etc.), and the Firing Range (where we offer the chance to learn about safety and live-fire a flintlock longarm).

**DDM:** Firearms are no different than any other material culture in their relationship to their own historical context. The power of an artifact for museum visitors is in the eye of the beholder. Some museum visitors become engaged by firearms while others may be frightened, or disgusted, because of their perception of firearms. Some visitors find firearms to be very ordinary objects. A young boy, the grandson of a gunsmith, visited the firearms storage vault, and he was completely unimpressed. After all, Grandpa built guns. I took him to the sword room and showed him a privateer’s cutlass. He immediately became engaged and asked how old it was, was it used by pirates, what’s a “privateer,” and a dozen other questions.

**JGD:** Firearms clearly hold a charisma unlike many other types of material culture. Like every museum, ours is filled with artifacts and artworks, each of which holds its own power, but firearms as a class are particularly strong. In some visitors the guns induce awe and admiration; in some, fear or revulsion; in many, ambivalence. I suspect that a majority of our visitors have little everyday interaction with firearms, and for them the presence of an object that is constructed to fire seems to inspire attraction and/or revulsion. Can we harness these feelings in a display to inspire discussion or greater historical understanding? I hope so.

**AH:** Firearms are not substantially different than other material culture. The problem of power for museum visitors occurs because guns are mystified and anthropomorphized in our society. Visitors project presentism on firearms—and it can be difficult to break down those barriers with particular audiences. Rather than using beliefs and perceptions of firearms today to inform my knowledge of the past, I rather use the historical past to inform why we feel the way we do about guns in the present and where in history those feelings developed. People often focus on weapons of violence, as that is the most common discourse heard today, and struggle to disassociate those objects from a large percentage of firearms that have never been used for such purposes. It’s more the concept of place and the story associated with certain artifacts (not just guns) that hold power.

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**GA:** I think so, absolutely. If you are a gun owner or firearms rights advocate or, at the other end of the spectrum, someone who is simply horrified by these weapons and what they can do, then you will obviously bring those attitudes and experiences to any museum presentation of firearms. Some might argue that the museum should try to transcend such partiality—that we should present firearms in the museum only as historical artifacts, which reflect the time in which they were made and used. But I think that reflects a deep misunderstanding of what museums are and how they function. Our institutions are not just repositories of academic historical research (though they may be that as well), they are also public venues in which the present encounters the past. Expecting people to leave their opinions at the door is pointless anyway, but we shouldn't even want them to. Museums are actively engaged with present debates, hopefully informing people and getting them to check their presumptions against historical reality, but also meeting them more than halfway.

**SS:** I agree with Glenn here in that posing or assuming neutrality (for presenters or audiences) regarding cultural artifacts is difficult, if not impossible, and, for me at least, undesirable. The construction, proliferation, roles, and power of guns have changed over time. Exhibits should provoke and engage audiences to think about how those changes serve (or fail to serve) society. This kind of engagement is what keeps museums relevant and dynamic. I would think that connecting the past to the present is what successful museums should encourage. What guns do and mean today and what they did and meant in the past is worth thinking about.

**JF:** I am not aware of any academic research into this question, but my impression (shared by my colleagues and those visitors I have spoken with) is an overwhelming “yes.” Particularly in the UK, where weapons are heavily regulated and many types are outright prohibited, firearms of any kind may be fascinating, puzzling, or terrifying to many visitors. As highly personal, even intimate objects, often made by hand and always designed to be held, carried, cared for, and to both take and protect life, they imply a powerful connection to people of the past, even in the absence of appropriate museum interpretation. Some are made to display some attribute of an individual, others are marked with a name or personalizing mark. Even mass-produced military weapons divorced from their historical provenance bear visible wear and damage that speak to past violence. Firearms are about life and especially death, embodying powerful ideas like violence, power, prestige, resistance, liberty, oppression, war, terrorism, and others. They provoke a visceral and instant reaction from us (whether positive or negative) that other museum objects do not always provoke. But of course as a firearms specialist, I am biased!



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FIG. 5 Swivel barrel flintlock rifle, powder horn, and pouch, by an unknown maker, c.1800; photo by Hugh Talman. Object no: 43477. (Source: Reproduced with permission from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.)

## II. Firearms Museums as Resource and Field

JT: Is there an example of an object from your institution's collection that you think speaks to the country's current discussion of the Second Amendment?

DDM: [The object that I would choose is] a photo done several years ago to illustrate the Second Amendment. The museum wanted a historic firearm to avoid any negative publicity. It is a swivel barrel flintlock rifle by an unknown maker, c.1800 (fig. 5). In an era when firearms were muzzle loaded, it could be quickly fired twice before reloading. This could be invaluable while hunting as well as in militia service or self-defense.

AH: [The object that I've chosen is . . .] an American Assembled Flintlock Musket, "U.S." Surcharged (1777–81) (fig. 6). There were many muskets associated with the American Revolution and great variance among models. The two that are the most well known are the British Brown Bess and the French Charleville. Both types of firearms were used by colonists, but to fully rebel against the British government they had to literally beg, borrow, steal, and manufacture to arm themselves appropriately to put up a fight. Thus, committees of safety were formed in the various colonies to utilize an estimated three thousand gunsmiths spread among the colonies to manufacture muskets. The standard arm of



FIG. 6 American Assembled Flintlock Musket, "U.S." Surcharged (1777–81). (Source: Photograph courtesy of Cody Firearms Museum, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming.)

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French infantry during the Seven Years' War, the Model 1754 musket was replaced in 1763 by a new model. The older muskets in French arsenals in the 1770s were sold or given to the colonies and consequently saw second service, often remodeled during the American Revolution. There is a "US" surcharge struck into the barrel and lock plate of this musket, which was assembled from parts of earlier French muskets. It's a common misconception that single-shot muzzle-loading muskets were the only firearms available at the time of the Revolution. Rifling was invented around 1498, and multishot guns have been designed for about as long. However, in the rank-and-file style of warfare in the American Revolution, the musket was the standard infantry arm. This particular musket represents the Second Amendment not just because of its connection to the Revolution and subsequent Bill of Rights, but it showcases American ingenuity at making firearms from essentially spare parts even before the United States was fully born—ingenuity that American manufacturers have continued into the modern day.

GA: There are so many examples one could choose, but I'll just mention two. First, William Tylee Ranney's *On the Wing* (1850), which shows a man and a boy, probably a father and son, out hunting (fig. 7).

They look up to the sky, two generations with their attention directed in the same way, the boy (and a faithful hound) following the older man's lead. I can imagine this idyllic picture being used in an NRA brochure. The scene conforms to the gun lobby's narrative, in which firearms are part of a wholesome, family-oriented culture, one in which hunting figures prominently. Of course, like most nineteenth-century genre paintings, it is an idealized picture—death is present, but only in the conventionalized form of "still life" (an apt phrase in this case), the game piled at their feet. The slice of life that it depicts is genuine enough, though, and it speaks to a deep current in American culture, in which firearms play a central role in rites of passage, particularly among males.

A second image, from almost exactly a century later, is William Klein's iconic photograph *Gun 1, New York* (1954). We again have two protagonists, and though they seem to be of the same generation, the younger boy again looks up to his elder. But here the lesson that seems



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FIG. 7 William Tylee Ranney, *On the Wing*, oil on canvas, 1850. (Source: Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art.)

to be imparted is rather disturbing. What is most unsettling about the picture is not the unbridled rage on the older boy's face, or even the fact that he aims his pistol right at the camera and hence at anyone looking at the picture (a compositional idea, incidentally, that seems to have been pioneered in the silent film *The Great Train Robbery* in 1903). The most upsetting thing about the picture is that the boy is only feigning the idea of violence, yet the result is actually frightening. What Klein captures is the moment when such imaginary play tips over into the impression of real rage. So, conversely, I can imagine this picture being used in an anti-gun brochure; it implies that the minute you put a gun in someone's hand, bad things might happen.

I realize this may sound a little utopian, but I wish that our conversations about guns were anchored in artworks like these instead of in the law. Our national conversation about gun rights has been predominated by quibbling over the ultimately undecidable wording of an ancient bit of language. It's like trying to regulate the auto industry on the basis of a law written about horse-drawn carriages, and I honestly can't see the debate over the Second Amendment itself ever being resolved. Intuitions about it are just too opposed. The Ranney painting and the Klein photograph are also from the past, but because they have cultural depth and psychological complexity, they present much more useful material for reflection. They capture countervailing instincts—both of which are entirely legitimate—about what happens when you introduce guns into families. They

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FIG. 8 3D printed “Liberator” pistol in ABS thermoplastic polymer, Britain, 2013. Designed by Defense Distributed in the United States, produced for the Royal Armouries Museum by Warwick University, UK. (Source: © Royal Armouries.)

can be tools of instruction, which help inculcate a sense of responsibility. They can also be the instruments of sudden tragedy. Firearms bind people together and also divide us. Wouldn't it be great if every antigun person could sit down with a progun person, with both *On the Wing* and *Gun 1* in front of them, and talk about the two pictures, deeply and honestly? *Loaded* is an attempt to create that kind of situation.

**JF:** I have chosen our example of the 3D-printed single-shot Defense Distributed “Liberator” pistol (fig. 8). This was made for the museum by a UK university following that institution's involvement in government testing of the viability of this design as a criminal weapon.

For me this is the ultimate expression of Second Amendment rights, history, and so-called gun culture. It requires minimal skill to make and quite deliberately represents an ability to obtain firearms regardless of any attempt to restrict their ownership. Its very name symbolizes resistance to a perceived authoritarian government, in that the original FP-45 Liberator was designed to be dropped into occupied Europe to provide some sort of weapon to resistance fighters. More importantly, it was a psychological weapon first and foremost, giving a boost to disempowered fighters on the ground and giving cause for concern to Nazi forces, who sought to disarm the local population to pacify resistance and enforce conformity to a new set of laws and ideals. Like the original, the DD Liberator is practically useless but symbolically very powerful. In a U.S. federal context it is wholly legal to produce and possess, yet it constitutes a direct provocation to and defiance of the authorities; an invitation to “come and take it” (to use a phrase used in pro-Second Amendment literature and merchandise). It is also a portent of things to come, a first step toward more effective weapons produced in part or in whole by



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**FIG. 9** Springfield Model 1873 “Trapdoor” Carbine, .45 caliber, c.1873–77, taken from the Battle of Little Bighorn by Little Moon (Lakota), who carved his moon symbol in the stock. Gift of Mr. William Irontail, Southwest Museum of the American Indian Collection, Autry Museum. Pictured with a war club attributed to Crazy Horse (Lakota), Fort Robinson, 1876. (Source: George Riley Kemp Memorial Collection, Southwest Museum of the American Indian Collection, Autry Museum.)

means of “additive manufacture.” In this way it embodies all the risks and rights associated with the Second Amendment.

**JGD:** I would choose a Springfield Model 1873 carbine, reportedly taken by Little Moon, a Lakota fighter, from one of George A. Custer’s soldiers after the Greasy Grass/Little Bighorn battle in 1876 (fig. 9). Little Moon decorated and repaired this coup of an object. What does this have to do with the Second Amendment? Nothing, really. But that is the point. It shows the essential irrelevance of constitutional law in the face of a massive military engaged to protect a gold discovery on land constitutionally guaranteed to the Oceti Sakowin/Great Sioux Nation by treaty. In thinking about American firearms history, there is so much beyond the Second Amendment that we need to consider. At the time the Bill of Rights was “framed,” the American West was not part of the new nation. Like many western historians, I try not to assume the West was destined to become part of the United States. It wasn’t predetermined how big that small nation’s territory would become. Regarding the Second Amendment, if anything, the American conquest of the West shows how quickly a kind of citizen-militia became irrelevant in the face of a massive, industrialized federal military presence in the nineteenth century. Whatever an individual’s theoretical rights to and abilities with a firearm, the U.S. military could eventually quash any local resistance to eastern rule, whether by Latter-Day Saints or Lakotas.

**SS:** One photograph in *Unloaded* that evokes Second Amendment issues might be Nina Berman’s “Come and Take It” Rally, *The Alamo, San Antonio, Texas, USA*. In October 2013 she documented hundreds of gun owners who assembled at the Alamo and marched to a Confederate war memorial, vowing to carry their weapons openly despite a local ordinance prohibiting firearms in public parks and other locations. Berman

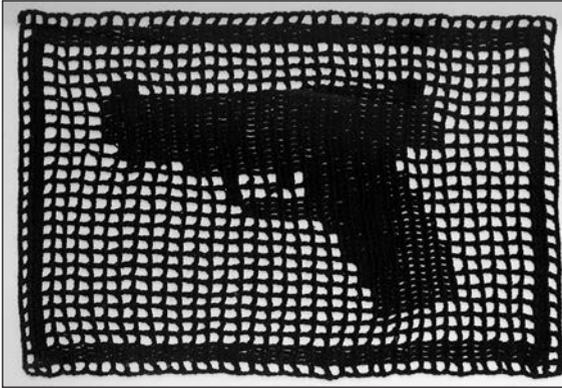
detected a “subtext of white supremacy” among the participants through their attire, placards, and behavior. Compared to her earlier work in the 1990s on NRA activists and militia members, Berman regarded this group as a whole new generation of gun owners who wear “their weapons like Madison Avenue socialites wear their Hermès bags.”

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I usually begin my tours of *Unloaded* with Lauren Adams’s *Granny Smith & Wesson* as it alludes to America’s intimacy with guns. That intimacy largely stems from the culture’s glorification and protection of individualism and personal liberties. The fierce individualism that stoked the survival of colonists and settlers and drove development of the “frontier” made guns common household objects, ostensibly protected by the Second Amendment passed in 1791.

Adams’s *Granny Smith & Wesson* is a diminutive footstool upholstered with fabric that imitates French toile and American colonial motifs. The cloth is hand-painted with a pattern of Smith & Wesson handguns. In transforming this object of domestic comfort, the artist suggests the violence within our ethos of manifest destiny, a violence that lies at the foundation of our history. It speaks to a culture in which guns have become as pervasive and as “comforting” as grandmothers (Granny Smith). Our violence is laid figuratively at our feet.

I have often ended the *Unloaded* tour with Stephanie Syjuco’s *Standard Issue Smith & Wesson* (2006). This is a print of a pattern for filet crochet that would transform a hard weapon into something soft and pliable (fig. 10). In an ironic gesture at becoming an “arms dealer,” her former antifactory blog allowed people to freely download patterns to crochet themselves. The Smith & Wesson image is again appropriate as it was Smith & Wesson that stepped forward in 2000 under the Clinton administration, committing to fundamentally change the way guns were made, distributed, and sold. It agreed to accept stricter regulations and a “code of conduct,” hoping to distinguish its brand as a company that cared about safety. Financial reassurance through a governmental “preferred buying program” was meant to help offset loss of revenue from an anticipated boycott. That loss became real when the NRA, retailers, and consumers boycotted Smith & Wesson for its stance. Its sales declined nearly 40 percent but rebounded under the Bush administration, which failed to enforce the terms of the gun safety deal and aided the company with major new federal contracts. Openly repudiating its gun safety pledge, Smith & Wesson introduced a new line of high-capacity pistols. In 2006 it shifted beyond handguns, producing and profiting considerably from its first M&P15 semiautomatic assault rifle. Designed for war and law enforcement, such guns have now militarized the civilian sector. I do not think the legislators who passed the Second Amendment could foresee such prevalent and powerful lethal capacity in the hands of civilians.



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FIG. 10 Stephanie Syjuco, *Standard Issue Smith & Wesson*, 2006, filet crochet. (Source: Private collection. Reprinted with permission.)

### III. Museum Display Practices

JT: Is there anything that you would like to see developed or changed in how firearms are exhibited in museums?

JF: I personally enjoy object-rich displays and would like to see greater use of firearms in UK museums in general, the antigun culture in the UK notwithstanding. After all, we seek to make no value judgment on the use of arms, or at least to present opposing views where possible. Gun violence is a fact of history and of contemporary life, and we must not attempt to hide it, even if we abhor it (or even firearms themselves). However, there is a need for enhanced and multilayered interpretation that allows as many visitors as possible to be engaged, interested, excited, and even horrified (where appropriate) by our subject. There should be a focus on the violent perpetrator as well as the object used to inflict violence. In terms of interpretive methods, I think augmented- and virtual-reality technologies have a great deal to offer in terms of providing this missing context (especially in the UK where dioramas and realistic figures are no longer fashionable in museums). A single firearm could, from the subjective point of view of the observer with the necessary graphics overlaid on the screen(s) or display glass in front of them, have multiple different actors/perpetrators depicted as holding or even firing it. For example, the (in)famous AK rifle could appear in the hands of terrorists, police, farmers, poachers, etc. to emphasize its ubiquity, cultural importance, and other aspects. I believe the new Mary Rose (the publicly-displayed wreck of King Henry VIII's flagship) installation does something similar.

AH: Currently, many firearms museums are reminiscent of an art museum formula. Firearms are displayed with minimal interpretation and in elab-

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orate fans that while beautiful can make it difficult for someone to study the object. Another issue with quantitative displays is the inability to connect the firearms to larger narratives. Curators have often assumed a high level of visitor understanding when designing firearms museums and exhibits. While appealing to gun enthusiasts, it can make it difficult to reach a wider audience. Fortunately, technology is at a point that firearms museums can still display quantity—which appeals to enthusiasts—but also add interpretation to help a firearms novice navigate the complex and diverse world of firearms throughout all of history.

**GA:** Prior to working on *Loaded*, I had not been particularly focused on firearms displays in museums. And I would not profess much expertise even now. From the brief survey I've undertaken, though, I have to say that the field seems fairly conservative in terms of curatorial methodology. Displays of guns tend to echo displays of silver or ceramics in old-model decorative art museums and galleries—many objects, organized by static and objective categories like date, type, geography, and manufacturer. This mode of presentation works really well for a collector or other enthusiast but very poorly for the general visitor, who is likely to glaze over quickly when presented with such profusion, even if the objects themselves are carefully chosen and mounted. One obvious answer—though I realize that collections curators are often pained to consider it—is to put out only 10 percent as many objects and do ten times as much with each one. A single Smith & Wesson pistol contextualized by related artifacts and other interpretive information is likely to be much more informative and engaging for the average visitor than a wall case full of them. If the imperatives of the institution are such that en masse displays are necessary, it's of course possible to mix the two strategies—allowing the majority of the objects to function as a backdrop and highlight individual objects of particular interest. In the case of guns, which are such controversial objects, in-depth focus also allows for multiple narratives to coexist in the space.

Artists offer some compelling models for this kind of contextualization—take, for example, Titus Kaphar's *Fight for Remembrance I* from 2013 (fig. 11). In this image, an African American Civil War soldier is depicted holding a “real” (appropriated) nineteenth-century revolver. White-wash distributed over the image field suggests the erasure of such figures from much mainstream military history, and also the complicatedness of black America's relationship to guns. The physical presence of firearms is never in doubt, but how they should be seen certainly is. I really admire the multivalence of an image like this; it's not exactly “pro” or “contra” anything but instead gives you something to meditate upon. It would be great if institutional curating of firearms could feel more like this.



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FIG. 11 Titus Kaphar, *Fight for Remembrance I*, 2013, oil on canvas. (Source: © Titus Kaphar. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.)

JGD: Our museum mixes what one might describe as the “art” and “history” styles of curation—with “art” emphasizing rare, exquisite, and exceptional objects; and “history” emphasizing those that were common, representative, or tied to a significant event. We have done well by our rare firearms as works of decorative art and examples of different technologies, and showing examples of firearms popularly thought to have “won the West”: the Kentucky rifle, the Colt Single Action Army revolver, and the Winchester Model 1873 rifle. In the future, I would like to explore the relationship of these technologies with others in the West’s industrial revolution (railroads, telegraphs, barbed wire, photography). We should also explore the role of firearms in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century West, for instance in the vast changes World War II wrought in the region (including military firearms) in the political battles beginning in the 1960s and ’70s, in inner cities, and in the cultural and ecological role of hunting. Our 2014–15 exhibition *Empire and Liberty: The Civil War and the West* achieved perhaps our best success to date in embedding historic firearms amid a wide variety of other objects in a broad narrative where guns played such an important role. On another point, I believe we need to try to make clear to visitors that history is a conversation between the past and the present, and we should not shy away from the present controversies associated with firearms. Our museum has tried on a few occasions to provide a civil forum in a

sometimes uncivil gun-rights debate, and some staff were disappointed when advocates on both sides forgot the mandate to think historically and simply repeated their talking points. I am not under any illusions that productive conversations will be easy to generate. But we have an institutional responsibility to address both violence and firearms (not always the same topic) in the American West. And to keep trying.

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**DDM:** Personally, I like exhibits that have a theme or provide some context. It does not need to be too elaborate, just following the evolution of a particular manufacturer, the development of a famous model, or changes in military weapons over time. I soon become bored after looking at several racks of one type of firearm and its numerous variants.

**SS:** I rarely frequent collections of tools or accoutrements of aggression (or defense), whether they focus on medieval armor or modern firearms, no matter how beautifully they are crafted. It is difficult for me to get past the violence they anticipate or inflict and for which they are designed. If they were less explicitly reified and contextualized in a more complex and multivoiced way, I might be drawn more frequently to such collections. In general, I tend to resent the preponderance of memorials and museums devoted to warfare and strife as they far outnumber those dedicated to peace, pacifism, or nonviolent conflict resolution.

**JT:** Erik, Colonial Williamsburg is the only “living history” museum in our discussion. From what you’ve seen, what do visitors learn or take away from historical reenactment that they wouldn’t from just seeing a firearm exhibited in a display case?

**EG:** While I can’t speak for other institutions, I’m pretty happy with the way we deal with firearms at Colonial Williamsburg. While firearms are most often found behind glass in the vast majority of museum settings, they can be found in every corner of Virginia’s former capital city. Not just relegated to display cases and left to be, all aspects of the firearm, from its creation to its many uses, are dealt with here on a daily basis. Here’s a quick, site-by-site look at how we present, exhibit, and treat firearms at Colonial Williamsburg.

### ***Gunsmith Shop***

Carried on at the Ayscough House, where working replicas of flintlock arms are actually made, this shop is one of the few places in the world where one can see a rifle barrel being hand-forged in the traditional eighteenth-century manner. The diverse array of guns made here are primarily American and British, and include swivel-breech double-barreled rifles, high-end cased pistols, a wall gun, Indian trade muskets, and Virginia rifles. Our highly skilled gunsmiths ply their trade with all the tools available to their colonial-era counterparts, from hand tools to rifling and boring machines.

### ***Geddy Foundry***

The Geddy family practiced gunsmithing in Williamsburg at least as early as 1737, and the archaeological record of their home and work site is rich in eighteenth-century gun parts. These relics, many of which date from the Revolutionary War period, tell us that firearms were being made by this family dynasty of tradesmen as well as being repaired by them too. Today, the Geddy Foundry casts gun furniture and sword hilts using period-correct materials and methods, as a direct reflection of the work being done there during the eighteenth century.

### ***Governor's Palace***

Begun by Governor Alexander Spotswood at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there had been display of military firearms adorning the palace walls since the 1710s. Not just a static display, these were the actual working weapons used for the defense of the colony. Today, the reconstructed Governor's Palace has 230 "Brown Bess" muskets and eighteen pistols hanging on its walls, all in appropriate fashion, as per an inventory of June 1775. Of that 230, eighty are originals dating from the 1750–1780 period and include a dozen Long Land Pattern muskets marked to the famed Twenty-third Regiment, Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

### ***Powder Magazine & Military Programs***

Completed in 1715, this octagonal brick building in the center of town began its life as a warehouse for the firearms and military materials owned by the colony. After being used for a number of other purposes in its later life, the Powder Magazine was filled with muskets once again in the 1940s. Today it houses a collection of more than a hundred original eighteenth-century muskets, carbines, and pistols, in addition to many dozens of reproductions used for onsite drill and blank-firing demonstrations by Colonial Williamsburg's Magazine & Military Programs interpreters.

### ***Public Armory***

Early in the Revolution, Williamsburg blacksmith James Anderson stepped up to the plate and developed his small shop into the Public Armory. This industrial complex, built at the expense of the state, was created to both repair Virginia's arms and manufacture a host of stores and munitions. Today the trades of tinsmithing, blacksmithing, and leatherwork are practiced at the site and are focused on making and repairing warlike supplies of many sorts.

### ***Musket Range***

For those who have always wanted to fire a reproduction flintlock smoothbore at a target, Colonial Williamsburg has opened a live-fire musket range. Geared toward the novice, the experience includes in-depth safety instruction and everything needed to fire a Brown Bess musket and a fowling piece (fig. 12).

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FIG. 12 Master gunsmith Richard Sullivan, test-firing a very fine rifle of his own make. (Source: Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

#### *DeWitt Wallace Collections & Conservation Building*

This purpose-built structure is the nerve center of Colonial Williamsburg's collection of antique objects, spanning from the tiniest coin to the largest eighteenth-century building in the historic area. Though closed to the public, this secure facility is where the study collection of firearms is kept, awaiting investigation by any interested parties, who need only to make an appointment with the curator. Also found here is the Objects Lab, where all antique arms preservation and conservation needs are tended to. Curatorial and registrarial offices, in addition to a state-of-the-art photo studio, are located here too.

#### *Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg*

The finest and most important long arms and pistols owned by the foundation are to be found on exhibit here. Though the current firearms exhibit, *Lock, Stock & Barrel*, is celebrating its twenty-fifth successful year, it is slated to be replaced in April 2019 by *Arming Virginia, Weapons for the Revolution*. This new exhibit will explore the firearms and edged weapons of the late colonial wars and the American Revolution through a Virginia-centric point of view. Arms will be exhibited alongside archaeologically recovered relics and will be tied to the history of the unique manufacturing ventures commenced in Virginia. These operations, like Hunter's Rappahannock Forge and the Public Armoury, helped launch the American industrial revolution and the establishment of the earliest arsenals of the United States.

**JT:** Is it possible to tell stories or give historical accounts of firearms in American museums that are not possible or as easy to narrate in books? If so, is there an example you can describe?

**JF:** I believe so. Much can be done in books or electronic media, but there is tangibility to the real object that these media cannot reproduce. In some ways it is more about the emotional connection to the object and to the people, places, and events that it represents. However, there is a practical, intellectual side to this as well. For example, in a history of technology context, it is far easier to understand how a machine like a firearm is made, how it works, and what effect it has on a target, if one can see examples of the real thing, including examples stripped to their component parts. Even better, if one can handle, operate, or in rare cases even fire real guns in a seminar, at an event, or as part of handling a connection. Objects displayed with appropriate interpretive techniques are more accessible than print media and reach a wider audience, including some who would not think to search out information on weapons but might nonetheless pay a visit to a heritage site.

**AH:** In terms of pure functionality, historical accounts of firearms in American society are limiting for readers to fully understand how guns function and operate. Individuals can read about the way a flintlock should fire, but it can be difficult to digest that process unless they are able to see it in person. Firearms, like other technological artifacts, are better when tactile. There's a lot of misinformation about the way they operate and fire, and museums have the opportunity, more so than a narrative, to let visitors understand the true mechanics of the gun—whether through videos or even the safe handling of reproductions in docent spotlights. Additionally, to those unfamiliar with firearms, there can be a certain aura of fear around guns that are the product of what they have seen, read, and heard. Museums put these artifacts into perspective and allow people to start to break down those barriers so they can better understand their functions and roles throughout history.

**GA:** Curators should be very honest with themselves about what exhibitions are good for and what their limitations are. The big advantages that museums have (in comparison to books or online content) are two: the gallery space, and the immediacy of the artifacts. Both permit a degree of theatricality, an aesthetic staging, which is impossible to generate at second hand. The disadvantages of course are numerous. There is less space to communicate ideas and information; information sorting is inflexible (as compared to a searchable website, for example); and the costs of production are relatively high, which often in turn result in dependencies on funders, which can create a powerful chilling effect on curatorial independence.

There is also another difference that is worth remembering: a book's author can usually count on the fact that people who read their work will be interested in the topic. A curator cannot make that assumption. Many people—including school groups and other children—are either brought

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to the space by someone else or encounter it by happenstance. This means that we can't make assumptions about prior knowledge. But on the plus side, there is also a great opportunity to reach new people. This seems to me a crucial function of museums. Currently, Americans are increasingly falling into narrow channels of information consumption. Whether through their social media feed or by tuning into a certain radio or TV channel, we are reinforcing our own assumptions instead of exposing ourselves to other views. Museums are public platforms, and the relatively untargeted nature of their visitorship means that they have a chance to change minds, even change lives. It is also interesting to me that public trust in museums has remained consistently high, according to polls, even as trust in other institutions like the government, the media, and the field of law has plummeted to record lows. As a sector, we have both a responsibility and an obligation to live up to that trust. Museums will abuse it, and ultimately lose it, if we engage in undue partisanship or excessive deference to funders' interests.

What all this leads to is that firearms curators have an obligation to consider the nonspecialist visitor and to present narratives in a visual, possibly even dramatic way. Ideally, a gallery should communicate clearly even to visitors who don't read a single word. In practice, this means that intricate explanations of business history, fine technical points, and even stylistic issues may be hard to get across. Stories anchored in objects are much easier—particularly if they are “relics” connected to significant people or historical incidents. It doesn't take much curatorial ingenuity to make an engaging display of Elvis Presley's guns. For the display firearms that lack that kind of specific history, large-scale issues (the frontier, mass production, urban violence) can certainly be effectively addressed, but there will always be a need for imagination and confidence. Exhibition design, the setting, and mood are just as important to consider as the artifacts themselves.

**SS:** The historical narratives I mentioned in relation to Lauren F. Adams's and Stephanie Syjuco's works might be absorbed differently through visual rather than textual narratives alone. One of my favorite writers is Annie Proulx. Her book *Accordion Crimes* traces the ownership of a simple green accordion. There was one bold social experiment in 2015 that adopted a similar strategy with guns that I think of as brilliant performance art. States United to Prevent Gun Violence is a nonprofit organization that opened the GWH Gun Shop for two days in a New York art gallery transformed for the occasion. The one hundred authentic-looking prop guns in stock were each tagged with a history. One was purportedly from Adam Lanza's mother's collection, used in the Sandy Hook massacre. Another was used by a five-year-old who shot his baby brother. A hidden camera documented the encounters, with both the proprietor and the customers handling the guns “for sale.” Some of the

customers changed their minds about purchasing or owning guns after hearing or reading their histories. The group's subsequent video and website has a convincing home page for first-time buyers, so their mission continues online: <http://gunswithhistory.com>. I can't help but think that telling stories in this manner might have great impact, especially in a nation where reading books is on the decline.

Several interactive works by Whitney Bandel also convey stories. In order to activate *Shoot 'em Up!*, the user must pick up one of the two pistol-shaped controllers, aim the barrel at their mouths, and speak words associated with firearms (such as "bang") into it. This triggers a microphone sensor that registers the volume as a shot, which then triggers a video effect that visualizes the action. In vocalizing the aggression instead of mindlessly pressing a button or pulling a trigger, viewers are meant to become more cognizant of and responsible for their actions. In Bandel's *In Your Hands*, users raise the gun to their ears to hear personal accounts of gun violence, connecting to the trauma of others through their own simulated actions. These are just two examples of how stories related to guns might be told within museum contexts.

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**JGD:** Many of our most charismatic firearms (particularly to nonspecialists) are those ornately crafted and engraved arms, often presentation pieces that were never meant to be fired. This suggests that one set of stories museums can tell particularly well is about the historic symbolism of guns. What does it mean to present somebody with an astounding piece that will never be fired—but still technically has the potential to fire? How does this compare to a commemorative medal, garment, painting, or other gift? The relationship of firearms to cultural ideas of manhood (and, less commonly, womanhood and childhood) seems like it might be explored through objects better than in a book, given a museum visitor's corporeal experience in the firearm's aura.

**JT:** Guns are involved in tens of thousands of violent incidents in the United States each year, including homicides, suicides, incidents involving police officers and suspects, and accidental deaths and injuries, and a majority of firearms researchers and suicide experts agree that a gun in the home increases the risk of suicide and domestic violence. Yet, at least as far as I'm aware, there is no museum devoted specifically to the historical interpretation of gun violence. What thoughts do each of you have about the depiction of gun violence as part of firearms museums?

**EG:** As a museum focused on the arts and history of the American colonial period, I don't expect that an exhibition will ever be mounted dealing specifically with violence or the grievous wounds suffered in battle. That being said, I'm sure some of our military programs folks do answer questions about the nature of combat wounds received during the Revolutionary War, etc., but I think that'd be about the limit of it.

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AH: The depiction of violence in general in museums is one that is constantly debated. Curators and designers walk the fine line between glamorization and sterilization of certain parts of history. In terms of firearms used for violence as part of a firearms museum, the best method is to integrate it into a particular storyline when relevant. It's important to note that while violence and war are a part of firearms history, it is only one part. For example, a large portion of the Cody Firearms Museum is dedicated to target shooting and firearms for sport.

SS: [I] am curious if the museums provide historical information on how Native American peoples and their weaponry fared against such guns and how guns created a disproportionate advantage. How full a picture is provided about these guns that “won” or “stole” the West? Regarding “we try to put a face and a story with a gun”—historically, not all users and targets of guns are honorable or justified. I am curious if [other] museums put a face and story with the victims of countless guns that have been ill-used—accidentally or intentionally—whether on momentous occasions (like presidential assassinations) or in everyday American life (in which 68 percent of murders and 51 percent of suicides involve guns).

While museums with gun collections debate as to how or whether to depict gun violence, I would like to point out contemporary art exhibits that reverse the equation. Instead of depicting gun violence, some artists literally or figuratively “do violence” to guns—creatively transforming guns acquired through community “buy-back” programs. In 1996 New Orleans gallery director Jonathan Ferrara and artist Brian Borrello organized the first *Guns in the Hands of Artists* exhibition, inviting artists to transform guns removed from the city's streets into works of art. Ferrara restaged a new version of the show at his New Orleans gallery in 2014. It traveled in 2015 to the Aspen Ideas Festival and the Aspen Action Forum, Washington University in St. Louis, and Miami Project in Florida. *Guns in the Hands of Artists* (GITHOA) is now a foundation that promotes community-based activist art as a means of opening a dialogue around guns, gun ideology, and gun violence in contemporary American society. Rhode Island artist Boris Bally also organized a traveling exhibit involving contemporary metal artists who transform disabled guns in the tradition of turning swords into plowshares. The first letters of “Innovative Merger of Art & Guns to Inspire New Expressions” formed the first word of the project's title: Imagine Peace Now. The resulting exhibit premiered in 2017 at East Carolina University and proceeded to the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston. It continues to tour through 2018. Such exhibits visualize narratives and facilitate dialogue concerning gun violence in ways that museums with gun collections might consider.

**AH:** In response to Slavick's concern regarding the interpretation of firearms and the American West in the Cody Firearms Museum, it is the mission of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West to interpret the actual history of the West—not its romanticized mythology. That is not to say the mythology isn't acknowledged, but it's certainly not interpreted as fact. Down the hallway from the CFM is our Plains Indian Museum, which interprets both the historical and contemporary cultures of Plains Indians. The Cody Firearms Museum also has an extensive Native American firearms collection. Because we are part of a larger institution, many of our historical conversations are approached in a multidisciplinary fashion.

In reference to the concern regarding displays on how guns “Won the West,” we constantly work to dispel the assumption that we have a display entitled that. If anything, we have a display on guns used in the West. The staff refers to the phrase “Gun That Won the West” in the manner that is historically accurate: as a Winchester marketing slogan from the post-World War I period. We discuss the various ways firearms were used in the West, and the rest of the world, both in good and bad circumstances. While the current Cody Firearms Museum very much follows a traditional firearms display, the renovated museum will do a better job at discussing these contextual histories through multiple avenues. In terms of whether or not the museum should discuss firearms used by criminals, I have personally consulted for organizations such as the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement (the Mob Museum), and I focus much of my research on the perception of firearms in culture as a result of guns used in crime and violent circumstances. However, we do not apply that narrative to one of our objects where there is none. But if we had a firearm used in a crime, such as John Wilkes Booth's Deringer pistol that was used to assassinate President Lincoln, then yes we would display it with its history. At the Cody Firearms Museum, it is our mission to interpret the entirety of firearms history, examining the whole picture good, bad, or indifferent.

**JF:** I co-presented on this subject at a 2015 conference at the University of Hull. Essentially my impression (and that of my colleague) is that gun violence per se is rarely depicted in museums. Firearms (especially post-1870) are rarely displayed at all, and those that appear with minimal context. The act of shooting and especially the act of shooting people is rarely addressed, even where death and killing are interpreted. The firearm, where present at all, appears isolated from the act and from the violent perpetrator. Attempts to place firearms in context are met with resistance from museum professionals, exemplified well in the course of preparation for our own First World War exhibition in 2014. An existing diorama display of a British machine gunner firing his gun was re-

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FIG. 13 A block of ballistic gelatin tissue is struck by a load of buckshot from a World War I-vintage Remington Model 1897 "trench gun." This still from some high-speed camera footage shows the maximum extent of the extreme "cavitation" caused by nine .32 caliber lead balls striking close together. (Source: Courtesy of the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds, UK.)

moved, and designer suggestions to place machine-guns on open display aimed at the visitor (with motion-activated gunfire sounds) were rejected. The boldest suggestion was to place an interactive sniper rifle on a mezzanine floor overlooking an entrance staircase, such that a visitor looking through the "scope" would realize that they had themselves been in the crosshairs just a few minutes prior. Curators referred this suggestion to a senior colleague, who responded "Absolutely, definitely, NO!" Nonetheless, extensive use of high-speed filming was made and incorporated into interactive displays. Ballistic gelatin and soap were used to represent the human body and convey the destructive power of various firearms (fig. 13).

As another example, my colleague Lisa Traynor's experimental research into period silk body armour was also incorporated. The result, along with some interpretation panels, was a kind of crime scene re-creation of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand; academic research framed as a historical "what if" for visitors to the exhibition. A period example of the FN M1910 pistol was placed in a brass "hand" mount to imply the assassin's grasp on the pistol, and a modern replica of the Zeglen silk armour set up opposite it, showing the bullet hole in the fabric. A screen displaying high-speed footage of one of the tests was incorporated into the case holding the pistol (fig. 14).

The same was done in the case of our Waterloo exhibition, with the addition of genuine antique cavalry swords filmed cutting recently killed



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**FIG. 14** An original FN Model 1910 pistol (.380 ACP) is fired at a replicated fabric body armour produced to a Casimir Zeglen patent of the late nineteenth century. As well as being able to fire certain collection objects, the Royal Armouries has use of an instrumented test range for the purposes of research and demonstration. (Source: Courtesy of the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds.)

pig carcasses, to the same end. This pseudoscientific approach seems more acceptable to museum leadership. Historical and oral testimony is also “safe” for museum displays and has featured in these recent exhibitions in the form of selected objects exhibiting obvious battle damage and curated sound recordings describing violent acts. Human remains have yet to be used at the Armouries for this purpose, despite staff involvement in the interpretation of wounds found on the skeleton of King Richard III. There are sensitivities surrounding the display of human remains (highlighting cuts, thrusts, and other skeletal injuries), but it has been done very effectively at other UK museums and remains one of the best ways (in my view) to contextualize and personalize the subject of arms and armor. Finally, we attempt to draw out any personal connections with known individuals, as this makes it that much easier to relate.

**DDM:** As noted earlier, most of the firearms at [the National Museum of American History] are exhibited in the context of military history. Outside the context of military engagements, we do not usually address gun violence in exhibitions. Most museums do not actively collect firearms used in crimes. I don’t know that museum visitors would expect to find the topic of gun violence outside of an art exhibition or crime museum.

One of our curators traveled to Orlando to collect artifacts in the aftermath of the Pulse nightclub shooting. Her collecting focused on public demonstrations and makeshift memorials. No firearms material was collected; that type of material is likely still being held in evidence. Recently, as part of a History Film Forum program, the museum screened the film *Tower*, a documentary about the mass shooting from the University of Texas clock tower in 1966. It is the only depiction of gun violence in the museum I can recall.

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SS: In the presentation of cultural objects of any kind, museums often provide contextual information and imagery regarding the use of that object. We might, for example, be shown how a prehistoric stone hand ax might have been used to butcher animals, dig for tubers or water, chop wood or remove tree bark, or throw at prey. While there are many museum illustrations of weapons used in warfare (usually portrayed as defense or justified aggression), we rarely see images of their abuse or criminal use in civilian life. As the social and economic impact of their abuse and misuse is significant, depiction of gun violence *and its consequences* within firearms museums would offer a fuller, fairer, and more engaging picture. Two works come to mind that allude to gun violence without guns or gore. Adrian Piper's image *Imagine (Trayvon Martin)* 2013 shows the adolescent literally fading away behind a red gunsight. Its text, "Imagine what it was like to be me," is a tough and sad request. We imagine the violence that occurred, though no weapon or blood is visible. Another elegiac work, *Massacre of the Innocents* (2015) by Andrew Ellis Johnson, was made in response to the 2014 police shooting of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland. The video shows multiple target practice sheets in succession, but from their reverse sides. We are behind the targets and imagine the bullets coming at us, not fired away from us, as in typical first-shooter positions so popular in films and gaming. Objects of innocence (toys from different phases of childhood) revolve around the bull's-eyes, caught in the crossfire. The work is a stark pronouncement: it is our own safety that is compromised and threatened by guns and those who wield them.

JGD: One of the most graphic depictions of violence in our galleries is one of those still unchanged from the original design of the museum, from 1988. A case on "law and order" includes an enlarged photo of four members of the Dalton Gang after they were killed following an attempted robbery in 1892. Poignantly, in the photo, a boy peeks through a fence to see the lifeless bodies. The same case included an actual noose supposedly used to hang an outlaw, Thomas "Black Jack" Ketchum, in New Mexico Territory in 1901. Emmett Dalton's revolver sits in this case as well, but to my eye, it is less disturbing than the photo and the noose. More recent curation has chosen less viscerally affecting displays, possi-

bly reflecting an unease or at least an imagined unease that visitors will have with depictions of violence. In fact, my colleagues and I recently removed the noose, which was never labeled but just hung there for dramatic effect. While I am uncomfortable with eliminating depictions of historical violence, I was more uncomfortable with a noose as essentially a prop, particularly as slipknots continue to be displayed as threats, including one left in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2017. Without the resources to fully reinterpret the history and romance of “law and order,” the most practical course was to remove the noose. I would like, eventually, to bring this conversation into the open and to invite visitors to think about—and share their reflections on—the ways guns (and gallows) were and are “just tools” and, at the same time, tools that have an inextricable relationship with violence. What would an interactive collection of visitor comments around the “law and order” case look like? Would it help us reflect on the relationship (positive or negative) between firearms and violence?

On the other hand, I would emphasize that we should not isolate gun violence as an exceptional type of violence. The flip side of the “gun that won the West” myth (the West was in fact “won” by a massive military, the extension of an industrial and economic revolution, and a burgeoning population, among other factors) is a parallel myth that guns are a supreme force of violence in history and in the present. I think about that noose. I also think of Woody Guthrie’s insight, in his paean to the outlaw Pretty Boy Floyd, that some men “will rob you with a six-gun / And some with a fountain pen.” Yes, we need to, for example, do more to introduce visitors to historic massacres of American Indian civilians like those at Sand Creek (1864) and Wounded Knee (1890). But we must also acknowledge the greater numbers of Native people who died from starvation and preventable diseases once their lands were appropriated and livelihoods destroyed with pens in the same period. It is easy to blame guns because their violence is quick and direct, but violence has always occurred on many registers, and with many tools.

**GA:** As is perhaps implied by my comments so far, I think every exhibition of guns should acknowledge violence, at least to some extent. Even people who claim to love firearms primarily for their aesthetic and technical qualities—who are deeply informed about the carved ornament on a Kentucky rifle’s stock or the mechanical innovations involved in a repeater—surely would have to admit that if these things weren’t also weapons, they probably wouldn’t be all that interested. (It’s a rare gun enthusiast who is also interested in carved stair banisters, say, or old machine tools.) So violence is always the elephant in the room, whether it is addressed or not. There is of course the question of *how* you represent gun violence. Just putting a picture of a dead child next to a display case

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full of Glocks is probably not the answer. Again, art provides some powerful opportunities here. The way that a photographer like Weegee or an artist like Andy Warhol represents gun violence has a dimension to it that is beyond mere factuality. Just recently at the National Gallery of Art, I saw an extraordinary, little-known set of prints by Warhol that concerned the Kennedy assassination. Alongside a portrait of the president, done in the artist's typical silkscreen style, was a transcript of a TV channel's internal memorandums, recording the station's step-by-step realization of what was happening. Though very neutral in tone—it's just a list of footage clips, each so many seconds long—it conveyed the confusion and distress of the event so powerfully. It brought you right to that horrible moment, and what it felt like to people all around the country who were watching with dawning horror. Good curating on this issue could incorporate such artworks but should also learn from them. You can show violence indirectly in ways that are enlightening, which provide multiple complex perspectives on the fact. It doesn't need to be an outright confrontation.

SS: I was surprised at how [the show *Unloaded*] seemed to unleash people's personal stories concerning gun violence. Gallery visitors who are complete strangers tell me about fleeing scenes of domestic violence in which guns terrorized them. I found myself spontaneously embracing a mother I had never met before who brought a photograph of her dead son, shot to death in a grocery store parking lot. Another visitor who works as a weapons manufacturer told me he was grateful to see "the other side." I was touched by his humility and sincerity.

Those who visit art galleries are generally open-minded as they are seeking new experiences and visions. So far, the audiences at the non-profit venues hosting *Unloaded* have seemed sympathetic to the ideas that the artwork probes. Many of the galleries are at universities that foster critical thinking. Student bodies vary with each university, though, and at one college gallery, students felt uncomfortable and challenged by the show's very presence on campus. Many of its students came from rural homes and perceived the urban environment they were studying in as dangerous. Despite university regulations prohibiting guns on university property, many admitted to carrying concealed weapons while attending classes. I wondered if their discomfort with the show equals the discomfort and anxiety some of us feel knowing that we are surrounded by such lethal instruments all the time. The personalities or intentions of their owners and what might trigger the use of their concealed weapons are unbeknownst to us—and a cause for concern, to put it mildly.

JF: In previous years the Armouries has actively sought to help minimize criminal violence by initiating the "No to Knives" campaign and redisplaying part of our "Self-Defence" gallery to show the negative impact of

gun and knife crime. This was even reflected in our vision statement of 2008: “To apply the principles behind the Royal Armouries’ heritage, the protection of our nation, to help make Britain a safer place today.” We have since moved to a more neutral stance and have removed part of the aforementioned overtly antiweapons display and issued a new mission statement that does not include any public safety remit. I would hope that a new proposal for an even-handed exhibition tackling gun violence would be received by open minds, but I would anticipate it being a difficult proposal to “sell” given this recent history and the potential for negative press, should such an exhibition be seen to take anything other than an antigun, antiviolence position.

**DDM:** Presuming it’s not an art exhibition, how would your museum’s governing body react to a proposed exhibition on gun violence?

**SS:** As the curator of an exhibition on gun violence and other issues surrounding guns in our culture, I am appreciative of the gallery directors who have joined the *Unloaded* tour. They have often had to advocate for the show with administrators anxious about inviting controversy. I have admired their courage and tenacity in recognizing that the difficulty and sensitivity of gun violence issues are not reasons to avoid presenting them. And, thankfully, everyone has been entirely civil so far during the *Unloaded* tour.

**AH:** This is a difficult question. As stated by many previously in this panel, curators struggle with interpreting violence in general. In our institution, which focuses on western history, our governing body would be open to discussing violence in general on the frontier. This would most likely be open to a multidisciplinary approach to understand the way the West actually came to be.

**JGD:** As I mentioned above, I believe isolating “gun violence” as a category distorts the history of violence more broadly, but I would very much like to see our museum explore historical and contemporary violence more deeply. We have begun to do so with older historical violence, addressing such subjects as slavery in the West or the genocide of Native Californians during and after the gold rush. Moving into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries invites more controversy: while the Autry has included displays on “Old West” violence for decades, our recent exhibition about the photojournalism of the *La Raza* political newspaper has generated more friction due to some relatively nongraphic photos of victims of violence, and the association with political militancy. (Overall, though, responses to the show were positive, and it was a rousing success for the museum.) Imagine the responses to an exhibition that explored the violence associated with Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, 1980s gangs, Cliven Bundy’s sagebrush rebellion, or recent mass shootings. If such displays included weapons actually used in conflicts or

crimes, we would have more politics to negotiate, although that might also generate interest. In spite of possible controversy, I am confident that our staff leadership and board of trustees would support a well-conceived exhibition proposal on any of these topics. One of our institutional guiding lights is the study of “convergence” of different peoples and forces in the American West. It is not uncommon for convergence to produce violence—therefore, these topics could clearly serve our mission.

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**AH:** How can we break down the stigma some visitors have when they encounter firearms in museums?

**GA:** I think that the stigma around guns is entirely justified. They do kill people! If we pretend otherwise—or leave the fact decorously tacit—then we are betraying the public interest. Indeed, curatorially speaking, the stigma around firearms constitutes a tremendous opportunity. This is one of the animating ideas behind our *Loaded* exhibition. As the title implies, we want to acknowledge what a difficult and contested topic this is and address it directly. When you are making a museum show, you always look for ways to bring energy and interest to the proceedings, and then channel that into productive and enlightening moments for the visitor. If some people have dread of these weapons—let’s say their lives have been irrevocably altered by gun violence, and even looking at [a gun] makes their stomach lurch—then that’s something you have to respect. You try to work with people’s perspectives, not talk them out of whatever they may be feeling.

**JF:** In my experience, time makes things “safe.” That is, visibly antique firearms such as muzzleloaders are perceived very differently from even “Old West”-era weapons, and especially “modern” arms like the AK and AR. Thus one approach would be to minimize or marginalize the more modern firearms, but I do not personally approve of this. It is censorship of a sort and simply avoids the issue rather than addressing it. Interestingly, many visitors assume that firearms encountered in a museum environment are deactivated or otherwise “safe,” when in fact that is not always the case. Certainly in our own museum we do not even remove firing pins, much less deactivate. Anecdotally, I also get the sense that for younger generations raised on movies and video games, the stigma has been lessened. As far as data go, I am not aware of any complaints from the general public over our display of firearms, whereas we have received several complaints from progun visitors about one of our displays that arguably reinforces the existing stigma. Overall, I feel as though museums are somewhat “immune” from the firearms stigma and should feel free to display the objects alongside the established facts. This leaves the thorny issue of interpretation, which can be actively progun, overtly anti-gun, or (my preferred approaches) either consciously neutral in tone or presenting both sides of the argument, leaving the visitor to come to their

own conclusions. There is no correct “one-size-fits-all” approach, as museums vary in collection scope, remit, audience, physical and political geography, etc.

**SS:** Such a stigma is natural—derived from our shared knowledge of the damage firearms can inflict. It is not unnatural to recoil at the lethal nature of guns. We might respond to guillotines in the same way. Artistic transformation or representation of guns is an excellent way to complicate and deepen understanding of weapons, their uses, and consequences. Like any other cultural object, guns are not neutral but loaded with associations, memories, and expectations. Artists can speak to and sometimes alter those associations, memories, and expectations. For example, Mel Chin’s *Home Y Sew* converts a Glock 9mm handgun into “a strappable, self-contained, action-activated, fully functional, self-inoculating, self-medicating, emergency gunshot trauma treatment kit.” He disarms the aura of “gun” through “covert, surgical implantation of life-saving potential.” Another small sculpture by Renee Stout, *Baby’s First Gun*, marks a grim milestone in childhood development (fig. 15). It forces us to consider the impact of guns in children’s lives. The number of children murdered in the USA accounts for nearly 75 percent of all children murdered in the developed world. Youth between the ages of five and fourteen in the United States are seventeen times more likely to be murdered by firearms than their counterparts in other industrialized nations. What pieces like these reveal may not reduce the stigma of guns, but they may increase our understanding of why we are so justifiably wary of them.

**JGD:** There is only so much a museum tour can do to change a visitor’s thinking; but especially for visitors who have no personal experience with firearms, positive or negative, the museum can be a safe context in which to experience and think about guns. We need more visitor-experience research to back this up, but my hunch is that the more we can show firearms in a variety of contexts, the more chances visitors will have to think of firearms in a different light. If a news feed full of present-day gun violence is the only backdrop somebody sees for firearms, perhaps presentations on agriculture, hunting, political liberation, or decorative art could help complicate this with context. All that being said, a stigma around firearms may not be an inherently bad thing we need to “break down”—there are good reasons some people are uncomfortable with firearms’ various roles in our society today—and museums are excellent places to view and think about objects that make us uncomfortable.

**AH:** Reducing stigma for some visitors will be dependent on the mission, audience, and location of the collections. However, it is important when planning an exhibit or gallery to consider visitor expectation, so that the curator can appropriately get her message across in the installation.

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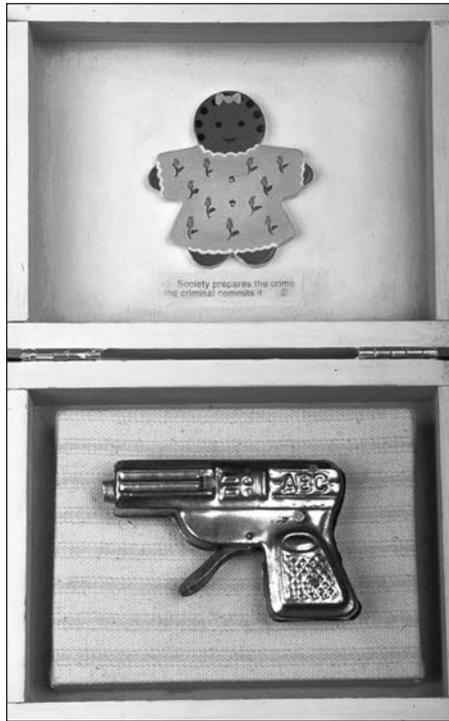


FIG. 15 Renee Stout, *Baby's First Gun*, 1998, mixed media, 2.5 x 6 x 4.75 inches closed, 1.75 x 6 x 9.75 inches open. (Source: Courtesy of the Belger Art Center, Kansas City, Missouri.)

Often, visitor expectation is not necessarily in line with the narrative that is being showcased. In addition to visitor expectation, there can be a multitude of ways to provide correct information to visitors. In the plan for the new museum, we have multiple hands-on galleries and interactives within galleries that will help contextualize firearms for the visitors. Additionally, it will showcase firearms basics and mechanics and allow them to visually and manually manipulate actions of guns to see how they work. The museum will also feature a science center that will “mythbust” common misconceptions about how guns operate. By combining a series of hands-on information opportunities and contextualizing firearms into larger narratives, when relevant, it can help broaden a visitor’s understanding of firearms throughout history rather than the minimal information they hear and see through various media.

JT: What, if any, legal issues do curators of firearms face? Have there been any changes recently/historically in such legal issues? Are there ethical issues?

**AH:** Many people, including museum professionals who are affected, assume that American museums have amnesty from firearms laws. However, in America that exemption is only applied to state and federal organizations. As a result, nongovernment museums encounter several difficulties in preserving specific types of firearms. Two key areas for concern in the museum are as follows: first, in 1934 the National Firearms Act highly regulated fully automatic firearms, short-barreled rifles and shotguns, and suppressors, requiring them to be registered with the government. Today there is no way to register an unregistered NFA item, and it is illegal for a nongovernment museum to collect or be in possession of one. The second key concern is the 1986 Hughes Amendment, which prevents civilians (and, as a result, museums) from collecting post-1986 machine guns. These two issues may not seem like a big deal, but there are many artifacts as a result that have to be destroyed because of these regulations, when they could be safely preserved and displayed in a museum.

**DDM:** Most museums and firearms curators face many legal issues. I am fortunate because our firearms collection is owned by a federal entity and stored and exhibited in a federally owned facility. I can easily collect and exhibit firearms covered by the National Firearms Act of 1934 (NFA). The NFA regulates the ownership of certain types of firearms, primarily machine guns and short-barreled, or “sawed-off,” shotguns and rifles, as well as a few other types. Nonfederal museums have a difficult time complying with NFA regulations and may also be subject to state and local laws concerning the ownership and display of firearms. Consequently, some museums with firearms collections either cannot or will not collect certain firearms, and sometimes historically significant pieces are destroyed and lost to history.

**JF:** Under English and Scots legal systems, museums are exempted from or provided for in terms of firearms legislation to a much greater extent than in the United States. The Museum Firearms Licence “. . . authorises the persons responsible for the management of the museum, and their servants, to possess, purchase or acquire, for the purposes of the museum: (a) firearms and ammunition which are, or are to be, normally exhibited or kept on its premises, without holding a firearm certificate or shotgun certificate; and (b) prohibited weapons and ammunition which are, or are to be, normally exhibited or kept as aforesaid, without the authority of the Secretary of State under section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968 (as amended). This is conditional on the approval of the local chief of police as to safe and secure storage.” This largely circumvents the issues that U.S. colleagues encounter vis-à-vis “title 2” firearms (section 5 in the UK).

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SS: A few recent incidents around the country may highlight legal and ethical issues around guns in art museums or museums with gun collections. In 2014 Washington State passed Initiative 594 that required a background check on nearly all guns in the state, with some exceptions for temporary transfers and transfers between family members. The Lynden Pioneer Museum released a statement claiming it would have “to return some unique World War II–era firearms to their owners” because “we would be in violation of the law if we had loaned firearms that had not undergone the background check procedure.” In fact, the law was not retroactive. Conservative media promoted the museum’s false reading of the bill in order to attack the new law. Museums must act responsibly in how they interpret and publicize the consequences of any gun safety legislation. (Source: <https://www.mediamatters.org/blog/2014/11/20/right-wing-media-falsely-claim-that-museums-nee/201648>.)

Guns on display may be problematic for art museums, especially if affiliated with universities. In 2016 University of Houston officials banned Alton DuLaney’s “ARTGun” from an exhibit at the Blaffer Art Museum. The piece contained a revolver with a miniature “ART” flag protruding from its barrel. Despite the fact that the revolver was unloaded, it was considered threatening and, at the time, guns were not permitted on campus. The irony is that, three months after the incident, Texas state law permitted campus carry. Students with concealed handgun licenses can now bring their weapons into public university buildings, classrooms, and dorms.

Despite the value of their collections, American art museums do not typically use armed guards. In 2008 the Broad Contemporary Art Museum at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) began using private security who wore holstered guns. *LA Times* art critic Christopher Knight reported that no armed guards patrolled any of LACMA’s other four buildings, despite the masterpieces they house. This practice raises the same questions surrounding the arming of staff in primary and secondary schools: are such guns on the premises more likely to protect against thieves or shooters or more likely to commit the violence they are meant to prevent?

JF: What [do others think] about the use of (deactivated) firearms as handling objects?

DDM: We are primarily an American history museum. I do not think visitors expect to come here and handle firearms. Some docents have carts with reproduction artifacts that visitors may handle to learn about the material culture of the past, but they do not include firearms. As a public trust entity, I do not think the museum wants any negative publicity from visitors handling any type of firearms.

**JGD:** Yes, I believe that, particularly with historic firearms, handling a replica or real firearm gives a much better appreciation for the weight, process of use, and ingenious technologies of firearms. Much like allowing visitors to taste historic styles of food or put on a buffalo coat, holding a historic firearm can help impart the foreignness of the past. Viewing any object through glass, while necessary, is obviously much more superficial.

**SS:** Again, I may be an outlier among this group, but I recoil at anything that normalizes guns or that fosters our national love affair with them. I'm not sure that their being deactivated would discourage the way that so many fetishize them.

**AH:** First, I'd like to note that I do not support the deactivation of firearms that are accessioned artifacts. However, at the Cody Firearms Museum we do have a series of deactivated reproduction firearms that we use in educational programming. The ways that firearms operate can be hard to learn from a label, and so the firearms help people understand not only how they work but derive information, like how the weight of the gun would have affected accuracy and the functionality of said gun in various situations. In our museum, we also use the firearms to teach visitors about firearms safety. For many visitors, it is their first time interacting with firearms, and so, while the guns are deactivated, we teach them to treat them with the same level of respect they would a functional firearm.

**JF:** I should clarify that by "handling objects" I am referring to pseudo-sacred objects not part of the core museum collection. Given the issues in the UK, namely surrounding the "possession" of firearms subject to licensing (not applicable to pre-1939 muzzleloaders), deactivated weapons are the only option for the majority of museums. I should note that, with the appropriate security and collections care measures in place, we do run closed sessions for adult learners that include supervised handling of live firearms (although these are core collection objects). Therefore if the legal environment allows for it, I would encourage handling of substantially intact weapons where appropriate, and deactivated examples where it is not (i.e., in the galleries). In legal jurisdictions where nondeactivated weapons are permitted in public galleries, it may nonetheless be prudent for museums to follow "gun show" procedures of rendering weapons immediately safe from inadvertent discharge (e.g., by removing firing pins).

**JT:** To round out the picture of guns and their functions in society and culture, what additional histories of firearms would be desirable to have? What, in your opinion, do you think the role of artifacts could be in telling those histories or stories?

**SS:** What artifacts might tell the story of the *impact* of guns? Do we ever see the riddled windshields or bloodied garments on display? Do we see ma-

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terial evidence of the medical, legal, and human consequences of gun violence? It would be a challenge to avoid sensationalizing such items or catering to morbid interests, but such artifacts sensitively contextualized might tell a fuller story about weapons. There are also artworks that are not documentary which could tell other kinds of stories about guns. After hearing of two bullets fired by opposite sides in the American Civil War and found fused together on a battlefield, the Propeller Group, a Vietnamese artist collective, imagined applying that improbable occurrence to the guns that came out of the Cold War. The video and sculpture *AK-47 vs. M16* is the result—presenting two models that represent cultural and state rivalries. Shot at 20,000 frames per second, the video captures the two bullets colliding in extreme slow motion. An accompanying sculpture consists of a gel block encasing the bullet fragments that splintered rather than fused. The artists are children of the Vietnam War. Their work revels in the contradiction of deliberately trying to re-create a rare and chance event, and its transformation into a poetic and gorgeous gesture—all while suggesting the absurdity of violence as a way to resolve differences.

**JGD:** The 2016 Aspen Institute forum included a few discussions I found fascinating and would like to learn more about. One was about the power of wielding a gun, waving it around, or simply open-carrying it without ever firing: Is there a way to quantify this power in different historical contexts? Another was about the enduring lives of different firearms technologies long after they are “obsolete.” What is the role of black-powder or muzzle-loading firearms decades, or generations, after newer technologies become available? Firearms are quite durable and can remain functional for hundreds of years, so focusing on the sustained *use* rather than the *inception* of different models may (as with any technology) tell a different story. Artifacts seem like an essential way to tell this story, as we might analyze the generations of repairs and adaptations made to a given artifact “in the field,” so to speak. Finally, I would like to read and to tell in the museum more environmental histories connected with firearms. In the West, the fur trade is an obvious place to start. But the mining and trade of saltpeter, the more recent de facto wildlife refuges on bombing ranges and military lands, and recreational hunting’s connection with the environmental movement are other topics I would like to see explored. The question remains whether these are actually “histories of firearms” or histories of markets, geopolitics, or cultures that happened to include firearms. In the museum context, they are all stories that can be told with firearms as anchoring artifacts. In connection with several of these topics, I was impressed by a recent visit to the Museum of the Fur Trade in Chadron, Nebraska. Though many of its exhibits were designed decades ago, the museum was ahead of its time in approaching early American history from a continental perspective

(rather than clinging to the Atlantic seaboard), in showing the complex interactions of various indigenous nations and global empires in exploiting natural resources, and in integrating a stellar firearms collection with associated artifacts such as gunpowder, traps, clothing, and (at the consumption end) fur products and beaver felt hats.

**AH:** Because of today's narratives on firearms, people often cannot separate a firearm from violence. Many incorrectly assume that all firearms were made and used for strictly violent purposes. While I do not think it is appropriate to ignore firearms used in criminal circumstances in history, it is equally inappropriate to ignore when that is not the case.

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This past summer, the Cody Firearms Museum hosted a full-scale symposium dedicated to firearms historians and museum professionals to discuss the unique opportunities and limitations of having firearms in museums in the twenty-first century. Present were professionals who represented a spectrum of political beliefs and perspectives on firearms, united by the need to preserve firearms as artifacts despite a growing desire in our field to reduce the number of firearms on display. During this two-day symposium, one overarching theme emerged that addressed a growing dissonance between what the public wants to see in a museum and what academia wants to showcase. Across institutions ranging from the Smithsonian to the Met, it was discovered that arms and armor tend to be the most popular exhibitions in the eyes of the public however remain the least respected academically. At "Arsenals of History: Firearms and Museums in the Twenty-first Century," we hosted a Facebook Live session on remaining neutral with firearms hosted by NPR's *TTBOOK (To the Best of Our Knowledge)* founder Anne Strainchamps. We examined whether or not remaining neutral is possible or even preferable. One thing I highlighted is that when some people look at any firearm, they assume the object is automatically and inherently violent. For example, a visitor can look at an Olympic target rifle and project the same amount of baggage as they would a gun used in a murder. The power of objects, however, lies in their story and surrounds their usages. Those two firearms should not be interpreted or understood in the same way, so we as educators must find a way to manage visitor expectations with the message we want to convey.

This past summer, a visitor asked me, "How many people have been shot and/or killed by the firearms in your collection?" It was a question many people would assume would be a relatively high number, but at my institution, the answer was with over eight thousand firearms, it was an extremely small percentage. When we polled ten separate institutions from the NRA Museum to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the answer was about the same—most collections of firearms were not used for that purpose. While establishing provenance can oftentimes be a tricky matter for museum curators, we have been able to pinpoint the history for

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many of our artifacts. For example, in the Cody Firearms Museum, a large portion of the collection surrounds sporting arms. These firearms include Schuetzen rifles, sporting arms made by many manufacturers, Olympic target firearms, and many more that were made for the specific purpose to be used for sport. Early Kentucky rifles were a type of firearm that were multi-purpose, but many firearms designed for sport in the late nineteenth century and beyond are made specifically for that role and function. The major outlier in many gun collections are military firearms. However, even in our collection many have never seen battle because they were prototypes and T&E [testing and evaluation] firearms. Our older military firearms often cannot be traced to their exact usage. Another large portion of our collection consists of embellished and presentation arms dating back to Catherine the Great and continuing up through presidential presentation. In early presentation firearms, like with Catherine the Great, those firearms were a symbol of peace and unity. For example, from the Smithsonian collection, we have on loan a miquelet lock musket that an ambassador from North Africa gave to President Thomas Jefferson during their trip to the White House to symbolize the end of conflict with the Tunisians after the Tripolitan Wars. These are just some of the examples of firearms used for purposes other than often perceived intent. These variety of usages are so great that it could be the topic of its own roundtable, but it is often the least discussed.

**JF:** Do [others of you] feel that it is important to collect (not just borrow for display) popular culture artifacts such as props, film posters, video games, etc.?

**DDM:** Yes, it is important to collect objects from popular culture. Our museum has a Division of Arts and Culture which does just that (and yet another division that collects video games). They are already in the business of collecting film props, posters, and sporting equipment. Sometimes they ask for advice on which weapons best represent a popular movie or television program when there is an opportunity to collect them. Should they collect a working firearm from a film, TV program, or competitive shooter, it would be stored in the firearms vault with the rest of the firearms collection.

**JGD:** Yes, we collect a wide variety of artifacts to contextualize firearms—or is it the firearms that contextualize the other artifacts?

**AH:** Firearms displays often look like something you would find in an art museum. They are object-centric exhibits that often provide little context. I believe that we should use supplemental artifacts to show photographs or video of the guns in use. Video games can also be an important tool that would relate to today's visitor. Video games as well as virtual-reality shooting experiences can give the visitor their own experience firing a gun from history.

**JF:** The question relates to remit; should we expand our typically restrictive remits to include supporting material, ephemera, etc.? I ask because my experience/perception is that museums will borrow such objects specifically for a display and return them when the display ends. Or they will acquire them as “disposable” rather than core collection items. I ask this question precisely because my own museum is seeking to acquire such items as part of our “Collecting Cultures” project to acquire and display movie prop objects. We do not wish to lose these items at the end of the project and so are planning to acquire them as core collection items. We do in fact collect flat art representations of arms and armor, so this is an extension of that practice. We may one day go beyond this and collect objects that reflect the subject: copies of video games, children’s toys, gadgets, etc. Again, we already collect select replica firearms as comparative examples (for the future but also to facilitate law enforcement enquiries).

**JGD:** What have [the rest of you] found are the merits of displaying primarily guns together with a few other supporting artifacts (in a “gun gallery” or “firearms museum”) versus integrating them with other artworks and artifacts of their times and places?

**EG:** Absolutely! Supporting objects, especially those relating to the historical use of a particular firearm, can add much to the contextualization of the piece, thereby enhancing its educational potential. For instance, to understand the eighteenth-century musket in context, it will often need to be shown with its companion pieces like the bayonet, sling, and cartridge box. One can also take things further afield by delving into the world of the soldier; what did he eat, and with what utensils? What did he wear? Luckily, we have large and varied collections to draw from at Colonial Williamsburg. This has had the pleasant consequence of allowing for a very diverse assemblage of objects to be brought together to tell a particular story, regardless of the seemingly homogeneous theme of the exhibit.

**DDM:** Currently all the firearms on display in the museum are grouped with other artifacts to provide context and help tell a story. They are usually firearms used by a famous person or associated with a significant historic event. In the past we had a gallery that traced the development of U.S. military firearms from colonial times to the present that featured very few supporting artifacts. It was a popular gallery that served some members of our audience who did not come to the museum to see the First Ladies’ gowns.

**JF:** The merits are in creating a focused story of the design and development of firearms, for displays rooted in the history of technology. Where this falls down particularly hard is with any nonspecialist audience, particularly in interpreting the use and effect of the weapons themselves.

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Contemporary museum practice dictates a lower level of “intellectual access” to collections that tends to rule out dense displays of singular object types (in this case, firearms). This is supported anecdotally by what I call the “glazing over” effect; visitors lacking the preexisting knowledge to make sense of what they are seeing may pay attention to a handful of objects but will then walk past the rest. That being said, interactive media afford us opportunities to fill in the interpretive “blanks” without resorting to large external loans or sacrificing the number of objects on display. The concept of “open display” (i.e., glassed-in storage that visitors can walk through or around) allows a high density of objects to be seen by the visiting public and even to be interpreted using mobile devices and/or interactive stations that can contain lots of text, images, statistics, etc. This frees up the more intellectually accessible thematic and chronological displays that modern museum visitors expect.

**JT:** The British historian Raphael Samuel once said that “If history was thought of as an activity rather than a profession, then the number of its practitioners would be legion” (Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 17). We haven’t really talked about gun shows (events where promoters rent large public venues and rent tables for displays, numbering around 5,000 annually in the United States) as a site of historical interpretation, yet gun shows function as unofficial sources of historical knowledge about guns. Do any of you have thoughts you could share about any aspect of the contemporary American gun show as a site for history or memory? What do you see as their major pros and cons as historical displays?

**AH:** There are many different types of gun shows in the country, so it’s hard to give a blanket answer, but I will respond to the quote regarding history as an activity rather than a profession. Firearms, like art, are highly sought after by collectors, many of whom are interested in the technological changes of a specific type of firearm in history. Unlike art, however, there are few academic classes geared to the study of firearms. As a result, there has been a dearth in traditional academic study of firearms as objects in history. This lack of study has caused the Cody Firearms Museum to engage professors and museum professionals to create an association of firearms historians and museum professionals to encourage a pathway to the academic study of firearms in 2018.

**JGD:** Nonacademic or “antiquarian” historians of firearms have done some incredible research, which appears in magazines, online, or in other venues. As with much technical or specialized history, this work sometimes strays toward missing the forest for the trees. (This can be true whether the subject is firearms, antique porcelain, or impressionist painting.) Of course, academic historians can be equally guilty of this or of zooming out too much and not giving enough specific “trees” for nonspecialist audiences to connect with. Finding the balance between details and the bigger

picture, and being willing to challenge broadly accepted interpretations, are hallmarks of good history scholarship—whether academic or more popular, the challenges are the same.

**DDM:** History exhibits at gun shows generally address a particular model or maker of firearms. They are usually very accurate, but they often do not provide much historical context. I would say maybe half of gun show attendees have a real interest in history, and the other half are more interested in a particular model or brand of firearm. What I find interesting is many of the gunsmiths I meet have a deep interest in and knowledge of history. I think one of the best places for historical narratives about firearms in use today is television. Several cable channels run programs about firearms. Some of these programs do a good job of addressing both the technical aspects of firearms as well as a historical perspective on their use.

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**JF:** All these are valid in their own right, especially where museums lack the resources/presence to fulfill the role. Exhibits at shows and otherwise put on by “learned” societies are valuable contributions, as is some of the popular literature and material to be found online. Another important contribution is that made by reenactors and others who might display/interpret firearms at historic sites and elsewhere. The problem with content created outside of academic rigor is always with peer-review and referencing, which is typically entirely lacking. This permits or even encourages the propagation of subjective opinion, “folk” narratives, factual errors, and further compounded errors introduced through constant repetition. Whereas there is an academic body of work within the fields of arms and armor, war history, history of technology, etc., the material looking specifically at firearms for their own sake is invariably produced by amateurs. This is not to say that these contributions are wholly bad or incorrect, however; indeed they fill an important gap between the layperson and the academic specialist.

**JGD:** I notice we haven’t addressed gender in our conversation here, but in my experience firearms are overwhelmingly a “guy thing”—most interesting to male collectors and docents, historically associated with men, and so on. (Of course there are numerous exceptions.) Is this something you address or think we should address in exhibitions or writings?

**AH:** Surprisingly, while perceived as a male dominated “thing,” women have always been a part of firearms history. They dressed as men on the battlefield, and women as civilians played an integral role during wars. They were hunters, homesteaders, and firearms owners out in the American West. And in the late nineteenth century, during the golden age of firearms manufacture in America, they were marketed to as consumers in an increasingly consumer-driven world. Women were celebrities in the shooting world. In 1949 the National Rifle Association appointed its

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first female board member, competitive shooter Alice Bull. They have also had board presidents that have been female. In the 1960s, during the second wave of feminism, some female activists armed themselves to both equalize and protect. And since the late 1980s, women have become an increasingly larger population in the shooting world. This is just a brief overview for the large places in history that women fill in the firearms world. In terms of exhibitions, I do not believe in doing a separate exhibition for women and guns because they have always been integral to firearms history. Rather, I would suggest that we can do a better job integrating these narratives, when relevant, throughout various galleries.

**DDM:** This museum [the Smithsonian Museum of American History] does not address gender in relation to firearms. I may have been a bit flippant earlier, but I meet many women who are the exceptions, and they want to discuss firearms, not gender studies. I do not see a need to address it in exhibitions or writings. A man or a woman is either interested in firearms or not. I have seen some interesting books and articles about the use of women in firearms marketing.

**JF:** In terms of civilian ownership and use, this seems to be changing, in the United States at any rate. This is probably reflected worldwide in terms of women in the military/law enforcement world. I suspect there is also something of a “forgotten history” of women and firearms; just because the “stakeholders” have traditionally been male does not mean that guns have not been important to women and vice versa. I would personally love to see a publication and/or exhibition along these lines. So far the Armouries has not addressed this, however.

**SS:** Today guns certainly know no gender; however, their association with machismo persists. There is gender balance in all my curatorial projects, and *Unloaded* is no exception. Many of its artists subvert associations between gender and guns—through imagery, text, material, or process. James Duesing’s animated hot dog twirls a gun as a substitute penis. The equation of guns, derring-do, and manhood permeates the entertainment and gun industries alike. A telling ad for the Bushmaster AR-15, one of the three guns used by Adam Lanza in the Sandy Hook elementary school massacre, directly appealed to men’s machismo with its catch line: “consider your man card reissued.”

A woman is murdered with a gun roughly every five hours in the United States—just one indication of the impact of guns on women. Works like my own *Romantic Resistance* resist this assault on women with a decidedly feminine string of pearls, cohering despite its perforation with actual bullet holes. Renee Stout turns the tables on the victimization of women, also mixing romance and resistance, in her monoprint *The Conversation*, which confesses a desire to put on perfume and make guns. Gun manufacturers have played to perceived fears and desires of

women, with ads proclaiming: *Can you afford to be Unarmed?*, *Momma didn't raise a victim*, and *Forget diamonds, a Glock is a girl's best friend*. Guns now come in hot pink, Tiffany blue, white pearl, and goddess purple, as if fashion accessories. *Destiny Fulfilled*, a photographic self-portrait by Casey Li Brander who sports a Destiny's Child T-shirt that seamlessly blends girl groups with guns while standing in a well-stocked gun shop, points to the demographic shift of gun ownership—26 percent of American women now own guns.

Artists disable guns, figuratively or literally, through stereotypically gendered processes like sewing or welding. Fabric replaces metal in Natalie Baxter's *Warm Gun* series. Her guns become soft, sealed appendages that can do no harm, with their apertures sewn shut. In Mel Chin's *Cross for the Unforgiven*, eight AK-47s are welded together. If fired, they would mutually destruct, a metaphor for the machismo of maintaining empire.

JT: Our conversation began with the intention to stimulate conversation, not only about firearms collections but about the history and heritage of technology. As we've been discussing, the study of visual and material culture is integral to a broader understanding of gun technology in culture. Museum collections of firearms are educational in multidimensional ways; they also can (and, as we have seen, already in many cases do) take a role in contentious issues such as those we have been examining.

Some questions we might leave with, and continue to think about, are: How can historical studies of technology and culture, and museum studies of firearms, advance and inform general understandings of the entanglements of guns and society? What is the museum's responsibility to historians, and of the historian to the museum? What new historical narratives about the role of firearms in culture can, and should, be told?

We hope our discussion in these pages will encourage researchers to study new angles on this topic and inspire contributions that will yield a richer historical understanding both of the changing role of gun technologies in American life and of the public role of museums. I've certainly learned from each of you, and would like to thank you for participating in the roundtable.