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Written for the December 2018 Premiere Gun Auction-#75



I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that Alvin Alexander White, or A. A. White, is one of the finest and most well-known firearms engravers to have ever lived. I also think it's no exaggeration to say that the Colt Single Action Army revolver is one of the most well-known firearms of all time. That's why it's such a delight to put those two names together for four of the guns being offered in the 2018 December Premiere Auction.

Alvin White started on the path to engraving in the 1920s. Initially, he worked as a diecutter for the Balfour Company. He served in the Army Air Corps in the Pacific and North Africa during World War II. When White returned home, his friends began asking him to work on their guns. The quality of his work spoke for itself, and as word spread, it blossomed into a career for him. By 1947, he was a full-time engraver. White went to work for Colt in the 1950s and rose to the rank of Master Engraver. His work is considered to be some of the finest to come out of the Colt factory in the 20th century – and it's easy to see why.

His work is housed in a variety of notable institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum, the Autry Museum, and the NRA National Firearms Museum. White also designed the engraving that was used for a limited edition run of 250 guns for the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, one of which is also offered in this auction. Some important names in history have been presented with guns engraved by Alvin. They include Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan; FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover (whose White-engraved gun was auctioned by RIAC in December 2017 for \$46,000, as shown in video above); world leaders King Hussein of Jordan and Leonid Brezhnev; and entertainers Blake Edwards, Chuck Connors, and Hank Williams, Jr. Countless magazine covers have been dedicated to his work, including issues of *American Rifleman* and *Man at Arms*, just to name a couple. In addition to being an engraver, Alvin White was also an antiques restorer, painter, scrimshander, woodcarver, jewelry maker, and sculptor.

Precious Metal Inlays

The first revolver offered in this auction is a 2nd Generation Single Action Army made in 1957 and chambered in .45 Long Colt. The gun features 75% plus coverage, which consists of intricately executed English/American style floral scroll engraving incorporating vines and borders of gold inlay. Silver inlaid bands at the muzzle and breech are accompanied by a high relief gold eagle flying on the recoil shield. The cylinder flutes are also outlined with a beautiful inlaid band that is uninterrupted around the entire cylinder. White's signature is located under the right grip. Rounding out the offering is a finely figured locking hardwood case with a double lid, one solid and one glass.



Lot 491: Alvin White Signed, Master Engraved, and Precious Metal Inlaid Colt Second Generation Single Action Army Revolver with Case

The revolver retains 99% plus of its finish, with only the slightest of handling marks and a faint cylinder drag line. The frame and hammer have a French grey finish while the rest of the gun is blued. The grips are smooth overall and the gun is mechanically excellent. The custom case is in near new condition with a few scattered light handling marks and a minor crack in the lid.



FORD'S USA SAA



Lot 493: A.A. White Signed Master Engraved Colt Third Generation Single Action Army Revolver

The next revolver by White is a 3rd Generation example. Like the previous offering, it is also chambered in .45 Long Colt. This gun bears the serial number "USA*3" and was ordered by Kurtz Hardware Co. in Des Moines, Iowa. According to a letter by R. L. Wilson, it was intended to be embellished and sold to fund the production of two more embellished revolvers. Those two guns were then slated to be presented to President Gerald R. Ford in celebration of the Bicentennial in 1976. Colt decided to do a presentation of their own to the president, so Kurtz Hardware Co. elected not to follow through with the pair of guns as planned.



The question then was what to do with the guns, which were already made and ready to be finished. Eventually, all of the USA-serial numbered revolvers were sent to be masterfully engraved by the semi-retired Alvin. A. White, who was given carte blanche to embellish this revolver as though it were for himself. The result is an exquisite Single Action Army revolver, with an extremely rare 8-inch barrel, "in the white," just as it was shipped to White for engraving.

GOLDEN GOODNESS

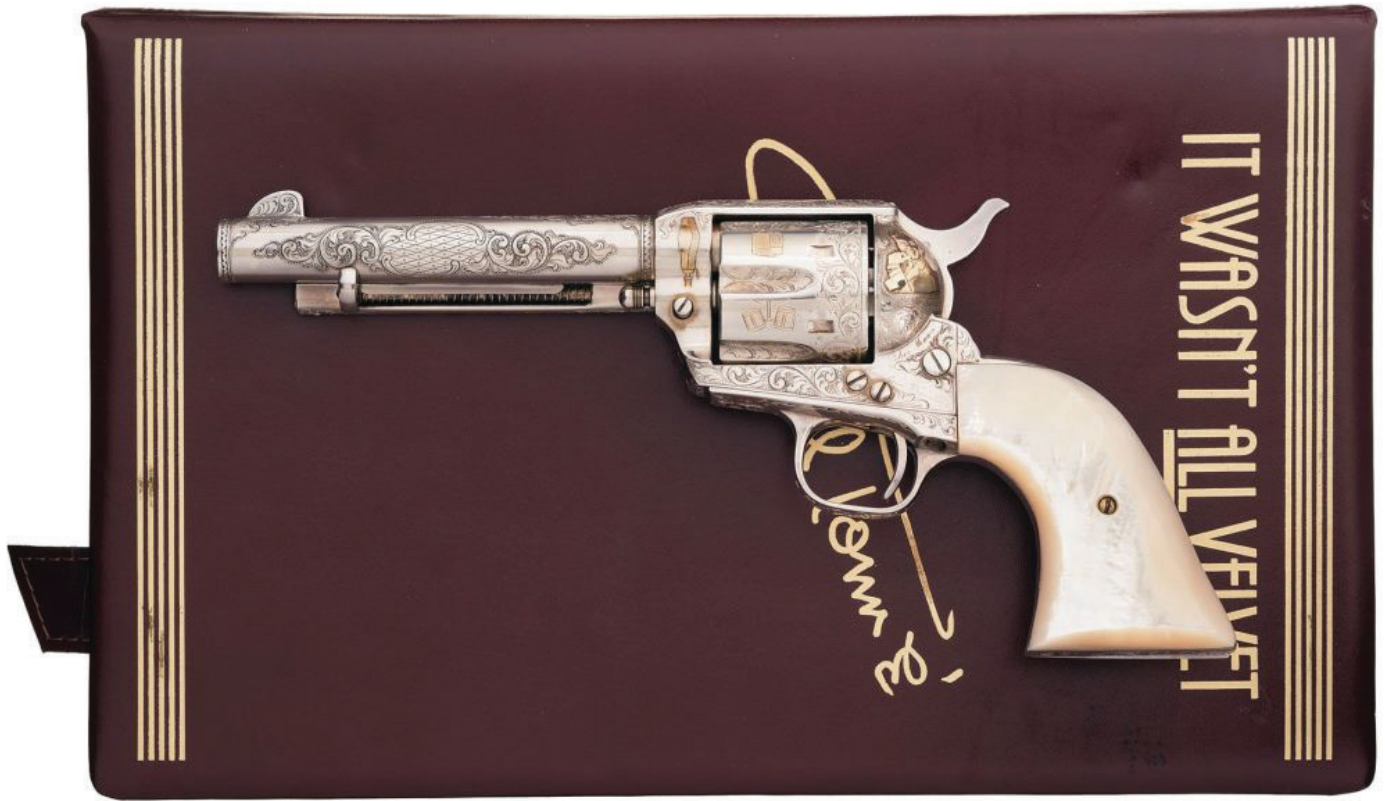


Manufactured in 1994, this 3rd Generation revolver was created just five years before Alvin's death in 1999. Since he was basically retired by this point, work from him during this time period is limited as he was then only doing special projects. This revolver is quite the visual show-stopper. Chambered for .44-40 cartridges, it has more than 25% coverage floral scroll with punch dot background, with the engraving filled with black/blue creating a stunning high contrast with the gold plating that covers the entire gun. Contrast is the name of the game with this gun, as evidenced by the nitre blue screw heads. The final contrast comes with the smooth, unadorned grip, which is hand numbered to the gun. White's initials "A.A.W." are located on the right of the front strap under the grip.



This work of art is mechanically excellent and in very fine condition overall. It retains 99% of the gold plating and vibrant nitre blue screw heads. There are some scattered light handling marks and a few minor dings and scratches on the grips, but it's still an amazing work of art.

MEL'S MASTERPIECE



Lot 2939: Scarce Cased Alvin White Signed Master Engraved United States Historical Society Mel Torme Commemorative Limited Edition Colt Third Generation Single Action Army Revolver

The final White-engraved SAA in this auction is a unique piece. Made in 1992 as a limited edition of 100 guns for the United States Historical Society, this 3rd Generation gun is marked "MT/9" on the butt, indicating it was the 9th revolver in the series. The "MT" stands for Mel Tormé, best known as a jazz singer and the musical composer of "The Christmas Song," which most of us know by the iconic lyric, "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire." Just month before his death in 1999, he was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. He was in good company; other recipients that year included Johnny Cash, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, and Smokey Robinson.

Alvin White's work on this gun includes beautiful scrollwork as well as some imagery related directly to Mel's life. Of course, there's Tormé's portrait on the recoil shield, but there's also a microphone on the front left side of the frame and a pair of drums between two of the cylinder flutes. Mel's signature is engraved on the backstrap.



White's initials "A.A.W." are on the right side of the grip frame. A letter from the USHA confirms the gun's configuration including the 5.5-inch barrel, .45 Long Colt chambering, "24-Karat gold highlights," and sterling silver finish. This rare commemorative is mechanically excellent and in excellent overall condition, with only light tarnish on the silver and minor handling and storage wear. The book-style case, which was designed to resemble Tormé's autobiography, is also in excellent shape with only light storage wear.

Alright, so there you have it: four Colt Single Action Army revolvers, each one unique in its own right, but bound together through the impeccable artistry from Master Engraver Alvin A. White. Whether you're in love with inlays, a fan of Presidential history, can't get enough gold, or love Christmas music, there's a White/Colt combo waiting just for you in the December Premiere Auction!

