

SON OF A GUN

by Keith Strandberg



Throughout the history of the watch industry, limited editions and bespoke timepieces have been the realm of the über-rich, the Henry Graves of the world who have the disposable income to commission the timepieces of their dreams. Yvan Arpa, founder and managing director of Artya Luxury Art Pieces, is out to change it.

The Concept

Arpa is a bit of a mad scientist, a creative force in the watch industry that sees inspiration and turns it into a watch – sometimes in mere days.

“The DNA of the Artya brand is creativity,” Arpa explains. “I am inspired by the world around me, by everything I see, hear, touch and experience. I can have some watches with spiders for gothic people, I can have hearts for romantics, I can have bullets for gun lovers and more. I love the challenge of creating new products. With other brands, you have to respect the DNA, established over decades or centuries, so you are handcuffed making the same watches over and over. Our DNA is creativity, so we can do anything.”

“You either love Artya or you hate it,” Arpa admits. “It is very strong and very emotional, which is how watches should be. Watches shouldn’t be dull and lifeless, they should inspire you.”

Arpa decided to focus on unique pieces that were in reach of the average watch lover, and he does this by attention to detail, special case treatments, original artwork on the dials and much more.

“We have more than 650 watch brands in Switzerland and most of them try to go in the traditional direction, focusing on the history of watchmaking and so



on,” Arpa says. “Doing a new brand, I knew that I needed a different concept. I started out hundreds of years behind the established brands. I myself have a passion for shoes and if you want a unique pair of shoes, you have to pay thousands of dollars. In watches, it’s the same, the unique watches are so expensive and I knew this wasn’t right.”

“Instead of going to industrialization, I decided to start manufacturing watches by hand,” he continues. “My idea is to have an industrialized case, one that can be made in big quantities to bring the price down, but every watch I would rework in a very artistic way. That’s how I came up with the idea of having every case struck by lightning, which changes the look of the case in a unique way every time. At the beginning, I ruined one case out of three. Now, we have figured it out and we can do different colors.”

For the straps, Arpa was looking for a material that no one else was using, and he found it in toad skin. In mythology, a toad can withstand lightning, so what better material for his straps? In addition, toad skin straps are very tough and really good looking. In addition, every Artya dial is hand made and

every movement is hand finished, so they are all different because, unlike machines, people add their own special touches. “In the process, we have developed more than 17 new techniques, with new pigments, techniques used in art, not watchmaking,” Arpa details. “Artya timepieces are really hand crafted watches. Every single piece is completely unique and cannot be done the same way again, but I make sure they are affordable. I want to make the price below 2,000 chf for a unique watch, bringing bespoke watches to the masses.”

Arpa knows what it’s like to have something unique and how special it really is. “People should be bored wearing the same shoes, suits and watches as everyone else,” he declares. “We are all unique, so people should have the courage to wear unique things.”

Like any dedicated artist, Arpa never stops working on the next watch. “I am working on some new out-of-the-box watch ideas for 2012,” Arpa says. “We will have two new collections, with weird

and different complications than the world has been used to.”

We can’t wait to see what’s next.



Above some of the original pieces created by Artya: Son of a Gun; Butterfly; liquid dial; Oh my Dog; Tesla Squelette. Below Yvan Arpa with Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley from the KISS rock band.



How to Buy Artya

Artya has retailers around the world, but it is also possible to buy Artya directly from the Artya website, www.artya.com.

“We sell directly from the website,” Arpa says. “We have great retailers around the world, but all our watches are unique pieces, so there is no competition between our website and our retailers. If someone falls in love with a piece, they have a lot of different options to buy it.”

“In addition, people can call us up and get a unique piece made just for them,” he continues. “The ‘Son of a Gun’ happened like this, where a gun lover from the United States called to see if we could put bullets in the watch. we figured out how to do it and he loves the watch.”

Artya is a family affair, as Arpa’s wife Dominique creates all the dials. “We have come up with some really cool liquid dials, some great tropical butterfly dials that were very colorful, and spiders, paintings, special pigments and more,” Arpa details. “It is really cool to work with my wife like this and I am really having fun.”