



The smallest artwork you will see this year

The Miniature offers “a God’s-eye perspective”

By A.T. Bossenger



Lee-Ann Chellis Wessel, Group with Egg Tempera painting, 3 1/16"x2 1/2", Earthenware plate, 1 1/4" d., and Vase, 1"

A photographer who builds small worlds only to destroy them in the photographic process.

A furniture-maker who shrank the scale of his designs when unable to find adequate studio space upon moving to San Francisco.

An industrial designer-turned-toy inventor exploring the details of the Mid Century Modern era by reducing iconic designs to a 1/12 scale.

A knitter who challenged herself to create smaller and more intricate works that would eventually land on notable television programs and film.

The artists featured in The Miniature, an exhibit at Indiana University's Grunwald Gallery, are from various backgrounds, but what they share is a fascination with scope. The exhibit aims to show what it takes to make a piece that requires a microscope to see. Talk about detail.

The exhibit was co-curated by Grunwald Gallery director Betsy Stirratt and miniature knitter and Bloomington resident Althea Crome. Showcasing the work of 10 artists, including Crome, aims to represent the gap between miniature design and the contemporary art world.

“We decided to select people that really illustrated the range of miniatures being made today,” says Stirratt. “It was important that we select work that bridged the two worlds and also created a fun and fascinating experience for visitors to the show.”

Tiny sets, clothing and paintings are definitely a niche market, but that doesn't keep it from thriving and expanding. Crome's work alone, tiny knitted pieces inspired by art history and other sources, has been displayed in venues as notable and varied as The Martha Stewart Show, Ripley's Believe It or Not and in Henry Selick's film adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*.

Viewing this miniature art through a microscope only touches the tip of the iceberg in terms of the work that goes into each piece.

“Doing the research for a miniature project can be about the same as researching a Master's thesis,” says William Robertson, whose work on display at Grunwald includes a working 1/12th scale replica of the Louis XV Microscope. “For this project I read hundreds of pages on the creation of instruments, the marketing to the court, the artist style and what influenced it along with every other detail from the period.”

The artists who primarily re-create historical works spend days looking over old blueprints or analyzing full-time prototypes to determine how to translate the details on a small scale. Even the ones who bring to life objects of their own imagination spend time researching what scale and materials will serve the piece best.

Once the books are closed, actually creating these tiny works of art is its own ordeal. Often it means venturing into unknown territory, as many designs have never been attempted on such a small scale, if at all. Artists are often tasked with building their own tools or acquiring objects as peculiar as actual puppy teeth. Detail is religion, and these folks do not cut a single corner when it comes to presenting a piece as authentic as possible.

For some of the artists, such as photographer/diorama creator Matthew Albanese, the work doesn't even end when the creation is complete. “The miniatures themselves are a completely different experience in person from what they are through the lens,” he says. “Half the time, I destroy them if I haven't already during the photographic process.”

It's a lot of work but its worth it for sculptor/photographer Joe Fig. “Working in miniature scale gives the viewer a God's-eye perspective,” says Fig.

“We hope people are inspired by the show” adds Stirratt. “And that it makes them ask the question ‘how did they do it?’ and ‘can I do it too?’”

The Miniature

*Where: IU's Grunwald Gallery When: August 28 - October 3, opening reception 6-8 p.m. on August 28
indiana.edu/~grunwald/*

Artist demonstrations:

Artists William Robertson and Althea Crome will give demonstrations on Friday, September 11 at noon.