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Small Wonders

Maja Tarateta, ABN Contributing Editor

At the [American Folk gallery](#) in Asheville, N.C., gallery director Betsy-Rose Weiss and owner Deane Giordano heard over and over again that their customers were running out of space and couldn't keep collecting. So, four years ago, they asked the artists they represented to consider doing what they do, only smaller. "The artists loved the idea," Weiss says. It was then that the gallery's annual Small Works show was born, and it has been held each year around February ever since.



Liz Sullivan's "Barn in the Moonlight" is an acrylic on masonite. The framed size is 15 x 13 inches, and it retails for \$450.

Customers have loved it, too. "One feels protective of something so small," Weiss explains. "They get up close to the work, and there's an intimacy. Sometimes, there's a little place in people's hearts and homes that just needs a sparkle."

Big Shows for Small Art

Small is big even in Fairfield, Iowa, an artist community of 10,000 residents and 300 visual artists, three dance companies and 100 musicians, according to Stacey Hurlin, director of [ArtLife Society](#), which has hosted an annual small works exhibit for five years. The goal of the nonprofit organization is to help artists and educate the public on recognizing, understanding and purchasing original artwork, Hurlin explains.

In its first year, the ArtLife Society show hosted 55 pieces by 18 invited artists, and five works were sold. Last year, the show displayed 318 pieces by 108 artists. By the end of the show, 44 percent of the works were sold, according to Hurlin. Works in the show must be original, and the framed size can be no larger than 14 x 16 inches. The two-month exhibit attracts approximately 4,000 visitors. "My mission," Hurlin says, "is to get people in the door and to walk out a very different person. That's the thrill for me."

The mission is not a difficult one when it comes to small works. "You become the piece," Hurlin continues. "With small works, it's almost like a little place in their minds opens, and they're swallowing pieces, literally, in their totality. You have the opportunity to become changed, transformed by the piece in front of you. You become what you see."

Landscapes are the most popular subject matter for small works in the Iowa show; abstracts are least popular. But whatever the subject, there is popularity all around. "Small works are easy for artists to ship, easy for people to purchase and easier to add to a collection," Hurlin explains. "It's easier for the person who is not an art collector to begin investing in original art."

The [Miniature Art Society of Florida](#) started a show of small works in 1975 to "promote the resurgence of interest in miniature art," according to Herb Weed, administrative consultant for the nonprofit organization. It received 1,500 submissions from national and international artists for its show earlier this year, and it only had space for 900 works. "[A jury selection process ensures] that the quality of the show is very good," Weed says. "Collectors love it."



"Oh Really!" by Irene Sheri is offered in Collectors Editions' Museum Miniatures Collection.

At the Florida show, watercolor is the most popular medium, followed by oils. Landscape is the most popular subject, and birds and animals also sell well. Images must be no larger than 25 square inches and 64 square inches overall (including the frame) to qualify for the show. "There are no national

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**The Museum Miniatures Collection
from Collectors Editions**

standards as to what's miniature," Weed says. "But I think our size requirements are typical as to what has become accepted in the miniature community."

The appeal, according to Weed, is a practical one. "Small paintings are very good for small areas," he says. "But the primary appeal is what one of our artists calls the 'wow' factor. It's the uniqueness that attracts, and the prices tend to be more affordable. The average in our show is \$300 to \$400, but one sold for more than \$8,000. And, it's not uncommon to see prices of \$2,500 to \$3,500."

Artists Embrace Small

Some painters of small works have joined a movement called "A Painting A Day," in which they sell their works online through blogs, Ebay and other Web sites. Painter Micah Condon posts his work and the work of others on his site, www.dailypainters.com, which he launched in September 2006. "Historically, there have always been artists who did daily work," Condon explains. "But the online movement was started by Duane Keiser. He got very popular, and other artists caught on from there."

Keiser launched his daily blog (www.duanekeiser.blogspot.com) in 2004 and originally sold paintings for \$100 each. As the popularity and competition for the work increased, he switched to Ebay where his paintings sell for \$250 to \$400 each and sometimes more. In the process, he inspired other artists to do the same.

"[Miniature art] is growing in popularity for artists and buyers," Condon says. "The biggest attraction for me is the challenge to work on something every day. It keeps you fresh and trying new things. For buyers, it's affordable. There's the intimacy of a smaller piece. I see it continuing strong in the foreseeable future."

Artist Donna Festa also creates primarily small works, usually 8 x 10 inches at most. "I used to do an exercise on small paper to prepare for oil," she says. "I'd give myself 15 minutes to do a painting. It loosened me up and let me be more spontaneous. It just grew from there."

Or got smaller, as the case may be. "The size suited my work in feel and concept," Festa says. "My opinion of the world today is that it's always shouting at me. My work is intentionally quiet and small. Someone looking at it has to have one-on-one contact with it. It's the opposite of my concept of the world."

Small is also big in sculpture. At San Francisco's Sculpturesite Gallery, owner Brigitte Micmacker devotes 10 percent of her inventory to hand-held sculptures, and it's no small task when they have to be properly displayed in a case with appropriate lighting. She is also planning a miniature sculpture show for December when people looking for unique gift ideas will hopefully be delighted to buy an original piece of art at an affordable price.

Her customers are attracted to small sculptures either because they are serious collectors who have run out of space, or they are new to collecting and are looking for an affordable way to start. Still, others are simply attracted to the scale.

Micmacker sites "the tactile essence of these objects" as one of the primary attractions for her customers. "All sculpture is somewhat tactile, but if you can hold a sculpture in your hands, it gives you an additional feeling of owning it; as opposed to a monumental sculpture, there's more of an equal relationship," she says. "A small object gives a sense of strong ownership."

California-based publisher Collectors Editions was so intrigued by the idea of small that it created a miniature collection of the works by six of its artists. The Museum Miniatures Collection, launched early this year, features the work of Andrew, Brian Davis, Michael and Inessa Garmash, Tim Rogerson, Sabzi and Irene Sheri in unique miniature limited editions. Designed primarily for the new collector, the Museum Miniatures Collection has proven popular with even the most discriminating art connoisseurs. Priced between \$350 and \$395, the collection has become a viable option for galleries wanting to entice new collectors, and it offers something new and fresh to their seasoned patrons.

"It seems that art continues to get bigger as the capability to produce large-format prints is perfected; however, we continue to be impressed by the charm of a beautiful small image captured within the border of a perfect frame," says Michael Young, president and CEO of Collectors Editions. "We think it is important to offer galleries and their collectors some variety when it comes to the size of the artwork. For instance, we sell a Sabzi limited-edition print titled 'Summer Nights' that is sized at 44 x 66 inches, and we sell his Museum Miniature titled 'Tropic Night'



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“Evening Skate,” 12 x 9 inches, by Don Demers is part of the SmallWorks Fine Art Editions collection available through Greenwich Workshop.

sized at 8 x 10 inches, and we seem to have as many buyers for each size.”

Such was the thought of [Greenwich Workshop](#) when it launched its collection of SmallWorks Fine Art Editions. The company has offered miniature works in the past, but not at the caliber of the SmallWorks initiative. The original images are no larger than 144 square inches, which is slightly larger than the traditional miniature show format.

The company launched the concept with a SmallWorks North America show in November. The juried exhibition and sale awarded five artists from a \$20,000 show purse. The top 40 artists from the event will be published in the company’s SmallWorks Fine Art Editions Catalogue this spring.



“Two Pears,” a 5-x-5-inch oil on paper by Elizabeth Fraser, is one of many miniature pieces created daily and posted on [www.dailypainters.com](#).

Historically Small [Skinner Inc.](#), an auction house based in Bolton, Mass., auctioned a collection of miniature art—primarily portraits and jewelry—in February. The highest selling portrait miniature by Moses B. Russell brought in \$10,000, according to Martha Hamilton, a specialist in American furniture, decorative art and native paintings for the company. However, most works in the collection of antiques, she says, sold in the \$2,500 to \$4,000 range.

“Portrait miniatures were originally created with very small brushes and magnification,” Hamilton says, “[but their popularity] faded out when the daguerreotype came in 1839. It’s a very specialized field. They are

beautiful likenesses of the period, and they cost a lot less money. It’s hard to get similar quality for a comparable price. I expect that [the market for miniatures] will continue to do well as people recognize they can still buy these portrait miniatures, and they’re still affordable.” **ABN**

SOURCES:

- ArtLife Society, 641-472-8135, [www.artlifesociety.org](#)
- American Folk Gallery, 828-281-2134, [www.amerifolk.com](#)
- Collectors Editions, 800-736-0001, [www.collectorseditions.com](#)
- Daily Painters, 303-828-4701, [www.dailypainters.com](#)
- Donna Festa, 610-345-1682
- Miniature Art Society of Florida, 727-525-8251, [www.miniature-art.com](#)
- Sculpturesite Gallery, 415-495-6400, [www.sculpturesite.com](#)
- Skinner Inc., 978-779-6241, [www.skinnerinc.com](#)
- Karen Snoots, 302-947-1808, [www.natureartists.com/karin_snoots.asp](#)
- Studio Fine Art, 888-403-2089, [www.studiofineart.com](#)
- Greenwich Workshop, 800-243-4246, [www.greenwichworkshop.com](#)

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