

# Miniatures

Small Wonders

# History of Miniatures

**Miniature art** includes paintings, engravings and sculptures that are very small; it has a long history that dates back to prehistory. The [portrait miniature](#) is the most common form in recent centuries, and from ancient times, [engraved gems](#), often used as [impression seals](#), and [cylinder seals](#) in various materials were very important. For example most surviving examples of figurative art from the [Indus Valley civilization](#) and in [Minoan art](#) are very small seals. [Gothic boxwood miniatures](#) are very small carvings in wood, used for [rosary](#) beads and the like.

Western paintings in [illuminated manuscripts](#) are known as [miniatures](#), even if not very small - this sense of the word in fact has a different derivation, from a Latin word for a reddish [pigment](#). Miniature art has been made for over 2500 years and is prized by collectors. Museums around the world have collections of miniature paintings, drawings, original prints and etchings, and sculpture. [[citation needed](#)]

Miniature art societies, such as the World Federation of Miniaturists (WFM) and [Royal Miniature Society](#), provide applicable of the maximum size covered by the term. <sup>[1]</sup> An often-used definition is that a piece of miniature art can be held in the palm of the hand, or that it covers less than 25 square inches or 100 cm<sup>2</sup>. Some exhibits require the subjects to be depicted in 1/6 actual size, and in all paintings the spirit of miniaturisation should be maintained.

# Ancient Egyptian Miniatures (Shabtis)

The earliest known miniatures were created over five thousand years ago to be placed in Egyptian tombs. The ancient Egyptians believed these miniatures would be brought to life to join the deceased in the afterlife. They are among the most abundant artifacts of ancient Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

The ancients' desire to immortalize these objects gives us a glimpse of what they really cared about. Dioramas often include valued family members, servants, and depictions of common affairs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z17t-VvO2JU&t=13s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBZWUimlQc&t=33s>





# Ancient Chinese Miniatures

An archaeological team from the Datong Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology has unearthed a trove of well-preserved figures that provide a glimpse at life in the region 1,500 years ago.

The figurines, found in the tomb of upper-class individuals who lived during from the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534CE), depict a variety of dancers, domestic workers and labourers, providing a historically important glimpse into daily life of the period. The archaeological team stated that this discovery constitutes a watershed moment in the study of funerary culture. The female musicians depicted in this terracotta group will also provide a coveted link between ethnic costuming and national culture.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ftji2xGK3zU&t=54s> (long)









# Chinese Dough Figurines

Written records on Chinese dough figurines date to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), and some two thousand years later this art form is still popular. Skilled artists can shape intricate sculptures in minutes using their hands, scissors, small knives, and pointed sticks. Using dough made from flour or glutinous rice, they create animals, geometric patterns, and human figures drawn from history, folktales, novels, and operas. Artisans begin by blending different types of dough to create vibrant colors. They then pinch, twist, cut, carve, and mold the dough to create different shapes and to add decorative patterns. In this video from the 2014 Smithsonian Folklife Festival program [\*China: Tradition and the Art of Living\*](#), artist Zhao Baolin (張寶琳) from Beijing explains his introduction to [making dough figurines](#) and their significance in the cultural heritage of China today.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZKeFQXQEdc&t=48s>





# Miniature Painting

A **miniature** (from the [Latin](#) verb *miniare*, "to colour with [minium](#)", a [red lead](#)<sup>[1]</sup>) is a small illustration used to decorate an [ancient](#) or [medieval illuminated manuscript](#); the simple illustrations of the early [codices](#) having been miniated or delineated with that [pigment](#). The generally small scale of such medieval pictures has led to [etymological](#) confusion with minuteness and to its application to small paintings, especially [portrait miniatures](#),<sup>[2]</sup> which did however grow from the same tradition and at least initially used similar techniques.

Apart from the Western, [Byzantine](#) and [Armenian](#)<sup>[3]</sup> traditions, there is another group of Asian traditions, which is generally more illustrative in nature, and from origins in manuscript book decoration also developed into single-sheet small paintings to be kept in albums, which are also called miniatures, as the Western equivalents in [watercolor](#) and other media are not. These include [Arabic miniatures](#), and their [Persian](#), [Mughal](#), [Ottoman](#) and other [Indian offshoots](#).

# Medieval Manuscripts (western)

Illuminated manuscripts are books from early medieval times through the Renaissance. Considered major works of art, they were written and decorated by hand with gold, silver, lapis, and other precious materials. Explore several exemplars, including the finest German illuminated manuscript of the 12th century, the *Stammheim Missal*, as well as other religious and secular works. Created by Getty Museum.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/medieval-world/beginners-guide-to-medieval-europe/manuscripts/v/manuscripts>



ICIPIUNT. VIJ. PSI.  
PENITENTIALES AN  
Ne reminiscaris psalmus



OMINENENIN

furore tuo arguas me  
neque irata tua corripiat









**D**ad laudes  
tus in ad  
utorum  
meum in  
tende: Do  
mine ad adiuuandū  
me festina. **G**loria.  
**Q**uādo sūpta p̄  
ominus regna  
uit decorem induit  
est indutus est dñs  
fortitudinē et p̄ma  
uit se. **Q**uoniam firma  
uit orbem terre qui

# Shahnameh

Sultan Muhammad (attributed), The Court of Kayumars (Safavid: Tabriz, Iran), c. 1524–1525, from the Shah Tahmasp Shahnameh, c. 1524–35, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 45 x 30 cm (Aga Khan Museum, Toronto)

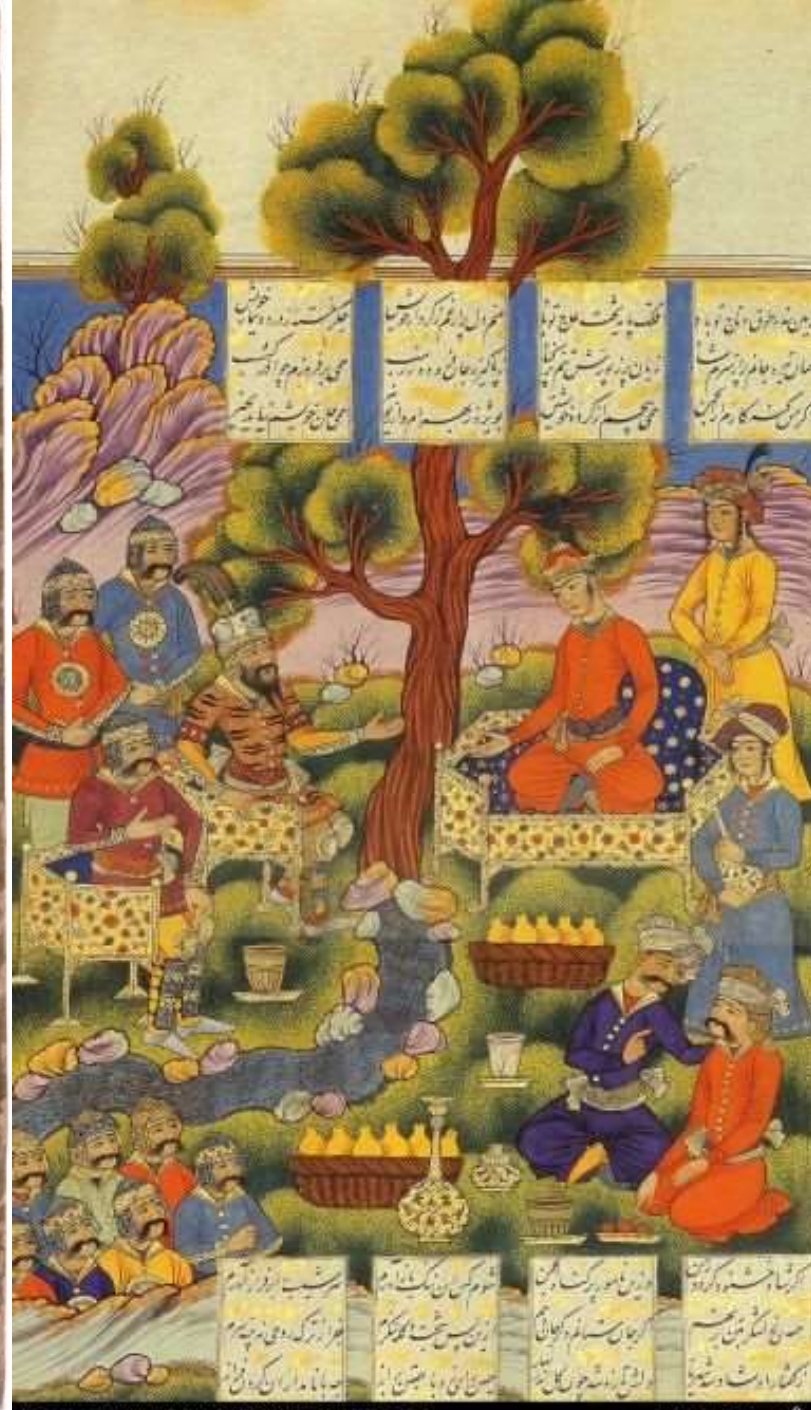
[Paradise in miniature, The Court of Kayumars – YouTube](#)

[Paradise in miniature, The Court of Kayumars — part 2 \(youtube.com\)](#)



پادشاه جهان در آن روز  
بهر پیشانی خود گزید  
که در میان آن روز  
بهر پیشانی خود گزید  
که در میان آن روز  
بهر پیشانی خود گزید

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که در میان آن روز  
بهر پیشانی خود گزید



Miniatura persiana, una página de "Shahnameh" del "Ferdowsi" del gran poeta persi. "Ferdowsi".  
Probablemente compuesta de una edición. Fue por 1000. Repro: Dariusz Domini en Infobase en la granza ritual del siglo XIX (L. 1898-90).  
Fundación Cultural Chelak  
www.chelak.com





# Shahzia Sikander

**Shahzia Sikander** (born 1969, [Lahore, Pakistan](#)) is a Pakistani-American [visual artist](#). Sikander works across a variety of mediums, including drawing, painting, printmaking, animation, installation, performance and video. Sikander currently lives and works in New York City.

- [The Artist Project: Shahzia Sikander \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Shahzia Sikander: "The Last Post" | Art21 "Extended Play" \(youtube.com\)](#) (animation)
- [Persian Miniature Art - a Story of Master and Student – YouTube](#) (Other contemporary artists)









# Portrait Miniatures

A **portrait miniature** is a miniature [portrait](#) painting, usually executed in [gouache](#), [watercolor](#), or [enamel](#). Portrait miniatures developed out of the techniques of the miniatures in [illuminated manuscripts](#), and were popular among 16th-century elites, mainly in England and France, and spread across the rest of Europe from the middle of the 18th century, remaining highly popular until the development of [daguerreotypes](#) and [photography](#) in the mid-19th century.<sup>[1]</sup> They were usually intimate gifts given within the family, or by hopeful males in courtship, but some rulers, such as [James I of England](#), gave large numbers as diplomatic or political gifts.<sup>[2]</sup> They were especially likely to be painted when a family member was going to be absent for significant periods, whether a husband or son going to war or emigrating, or a daughter getting married.

[Discover the Intimate World of Portrait Miniatures \(youtube.com\)](#)

[How was it made? Portrait Miniatures | V&A \(youtube.com\)](#) (how they were made)

[Conservation: portrait miniatures – YouTube](#) (conservation)

# Nicholas Hilliard

**Nicholas Hilliard** (born 1547, [Exeter](#), Devon, Eng.—died Jan. 7, 1619, London) was the first great native-born English painter of the [Renaissance](#). His lyrical portraits raised the art of [painting miniature portraiture](#) (called limning in Elizabethan England) to its highest point of development and did much to formulate the concept of portraiture there during the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

[Nicolas Hilliard, Portrait Miniature | Object of the week | Sam Fogg \(youtube.com\)](#)





# Rosalba Carriera

Rosalba Carriera (12 January 1673 – 15 April 1757) was a Venetian [Rococo](#) painter. In her younger years, she specialized in portrait miniatures. It is for this that she was able to establish a career in portraiture. Carriera would later become known for her pastel work, a medium appealing to Rococo styles for its soft edges and flattering surfaces. She is remembered as one of the most successful women artists of any era.

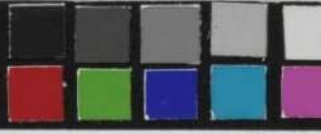
Born in Venice with two sisters, Rosalba Carriera was a prominent and greatly admired portrait artist of the Italian [Rococo](#). Her family was from the lower-middle-class in Venice, and as a child, she began her artistic career by making lace-patterns for her mother, who was engaged in that trade. However, when interests in lace waned and the industry began to falter, Carriera had to find a new means of providing for herself and her family.

[ROSALBA CARRIERA - Life, Works & Painting Style | Great Artists simply Explained in 3 minutes! \(youtube.com\)](#)



↑ V&A

5cm









# Dan Ohlmann

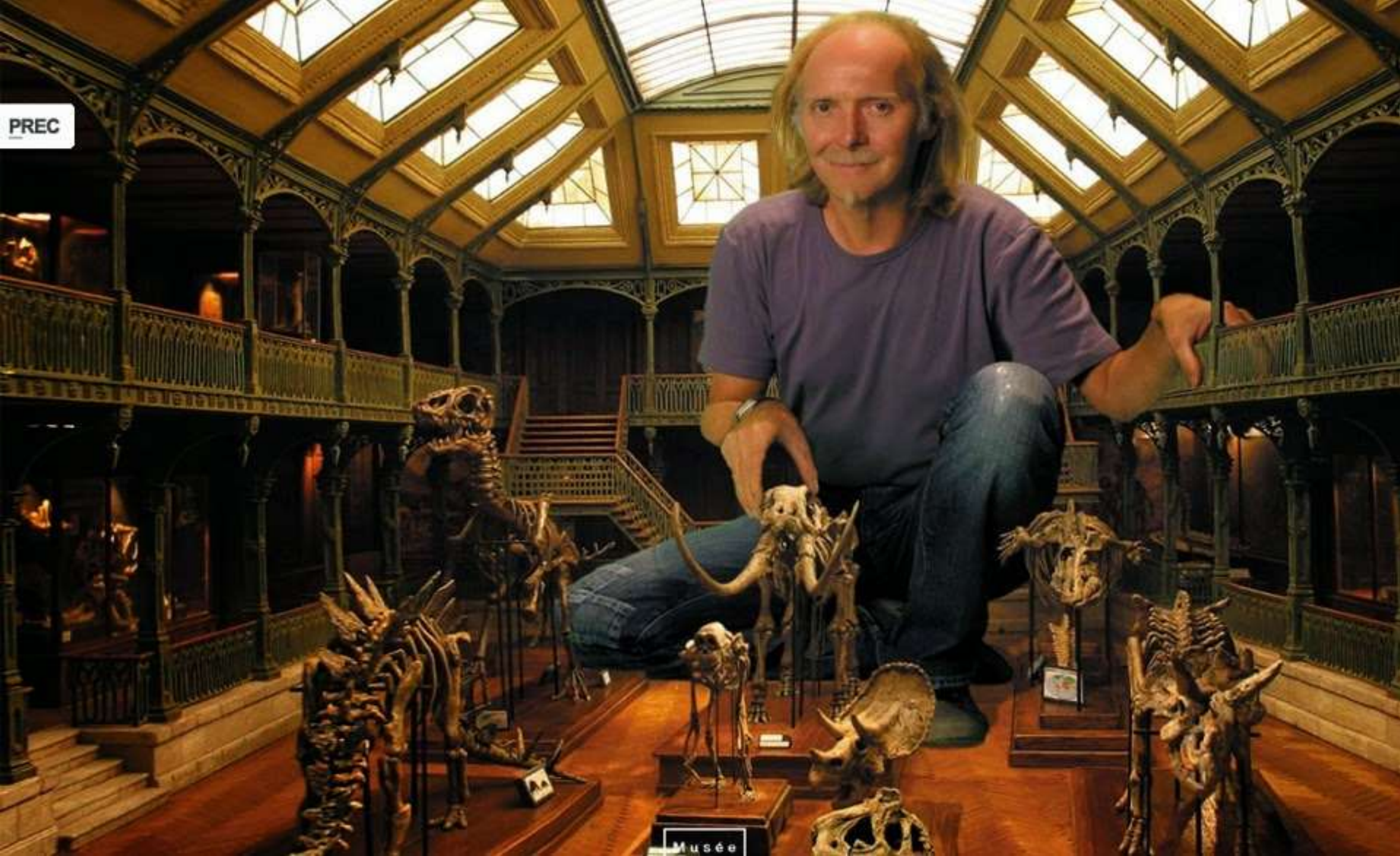
If you ever find yourself in Lyon, France, you'll want to make time for a visit to the [Musée Miniature et Cinéma](#), one of the city's most peculiar museums. It is most notably for featuring Dan Ohlmann's impeccably detailed 1/10th and 1/12th scale models of architectural interiors.

His models are so realistic, in fact, that the only way their illusions can be broken is by the addition of the artist's body, whether that's a hand adding or removing a piece of furniture, his head poking through to revel in the model's completion, or even his whole body, as he was able to achieve in his rendition of a natural history museum.

- [Meet The Master Of Miniature Worlds - YouTube](#)



PREC



Musée



# Joshua Smith

Joshua Smith is an Adelaide-based Australian miniature artist, known for his miniature structures and scale model buildings. Here he lends his perspective on his craft, and on creative perspective itself. Josh's website: [iknowjoshuasmith.com](http://iknowjoshuasmith.com) Josh's Instagram: [instagram.com/joshua\\_smith\\_street\\_artist](https://www.instagram.com/joshua_smith_street_artist) Josh's Facebook page: [fb.com/JoshuaSmithStencilArtist](https://www.facebook.com/JoshuaSmithStencilArtist)

- [Joshua Smith - Miniature Artist | MAKERS WHO INSPIRE \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)









# Marina Totina

Marina Totino is a **multidisciplinary artist based out of Montreal, Canada**. She specializes in photography, filmmaking and building miniatures.

- [How The Miniatures In Your Favourite Movies & TV Shows Are Made \(In Montreal\) \(youtube.com\)](#)







# Nix + Gerber

Nix + Gerber, the duo of Lori Nix and Kathleen Gerber, are miniature diorama artists who have collaborated for 14 years. They specialize in creating post-mankind settings, where buildings are crumbling and "nature takes back some of the spaces." In this wonderful and fun artist profile short documentary by filmmaking duo The Drawing Room, we meet these two compelling artists with a keen eye for the details that makes their art come to life. → Subscribe:

<http://bit.ly/NatGeoSubscribe> → Get More Short Film Showcase:  
<http://bit.ly/ShortFilmShowcase>

- [See an Apocalyptic World Envisioned in Miniature | Short Film Showcase \(youtube.com\)](#)
- <https://vimeo.com/165461598>











# Kath Holden

Kath Holden is a minority in her craft. She transforms the world around her into immaculately rendered miniatures—a departure from the enduring trend of creating Victorian dollhouses or other period-inspired miniatures.

“I like to represent now—the era I live in,” Holden says in Ellen Evans’s short documentary *Life in Miniature*. “If we don’t do miniatures of what we do now, how will it be represented in the future?”

Holden runs Delph Miniatures with her mother and business partner, Margaret Shaw, who specializes in food-related miniatures. Together, the two create tiny replicas of everything under the sun, from condoms to wheelchairs to blow-dryers. They find meaning in their work representing the quotidian, even though Holden takes issue with the predominant attitude of fellow makers. “It can be a bitchy world in the miniatures world,” she says.

[The World in Miniature Sculptures \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



Fresh Fish!  
**FRYING  
TONIGHT!**

HOLDEN



LIFE *in*  
MINATURE

# Leandro Gomez Quintero

Leandro Gómez Quintero (b. 1976, Baracoa, Cuba) uses paper, cardboard and found objects to create models of American cars and Jeeps, all of which are used as methods of transportation in his hometown. They are individually hand painted and detailed to mimic the original vehicle. His sculpture represents Willys Jeeps from 1942–1955, as well as Dodge Power Wagons, GMCs, and Fords from the era. These sculptures are representations of what his community sees on a daily basis and Leandro hopes to preserve and offer knowledge through his art, as well as reflect the history of transportation and everyday life in Cuba. Quintero says, “They bring humor and call attention to the fact that we are an isolated community within a country that has been isolated for many years. By showing the people a part of their everyday lives in a lighthearted way, they come to appreciate and can smile at some of the difficulties that we encounter in just trying to live our lives and getting from one place to another.”

<https://www.craftinamerica.org/artist/leandro-gomez-quintero>









# Alexander Girard

Alexander Girard (1907–1993) was a highly influential and prolific interior and textile designer in the 20th century. He designed interiors for restaurants, homes, offices, and aircraft. He created textiles, typography, and tableware. His work extended to exhibitions, toys, and an entire city street in Columbus, Indiana. Folk and pop art were inspirations for his bold, colorful and whimsical artwork. Girard was a defining figure in the history of the Museum of International Folk Art. He donated more than 100,000 objects from his and his wife Susan's folk art collection. In 1981 this became the museum's permanent exhibition, 'Multiple Visions: A Common Bond.'

<https://girardstudio.com><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DqDt-Tjami>





# Mark Murphy

Mark Murphy is a miniaturist. He studied at Ohio State University, with an emphasis on sculpture. He finished his studies at the Philadelphia College of Art with a BFA in woodworking and furniture design. Shortly after that he moved to San Francisco where he started making scale furniture models. It was at that time he met the miniature house builder Pam Throop and started making pieces for her period American and English houses. Mark also does collaborative work with several other miniature artists including Mary O'Brien, Patricia Hartman, Patricia Richards, Lee-Ann Wessel and Annelle Ferguson. A Fellow of the International Guild of Miniature Artisans, Mark has been teaching miniature furniture construction since 2000. He shows his work at miniature shows (The Guild show in Hartford CT, The Good Sam show in San Jose, CA and the Chicago International Miniatures Show). His work is in private miniature collections and miniature museum collections including the Gateway Center in Maysville, KY and the Toy and Miniature Museum in Kansas City, MO.

- <https://www.craftinamerica.org/artist/mark-murphy>





# Max Hooper

Overgrown with Fruity Cheerios or plastic plants fit for a fish tank, the miniature dioramas that emerge from [Max Hooper Schneider](#)'s Los Angeles studio marry ecology and technology into an unsettling, post-human future. The artist ([previously](#)) constructs vast environments within small vitrines that position dolls, Tiffany lamps, and liquor bottles as relics of the past and fixtures of a new world.

Schneider's practice revolves around the idea of the [trans-habitat](#), what he describes as "a relentless onslaught in which bodies...are continuously created, transformed, destroyed, and recreated." His works imply this cyclical process as otherworldly organisms consume what were once everyday objects, and humans appear displaced from their role as primary actors.

Many sculptures veer toward the grotesque like "Pond Scum Phalanx," which features a mass of vibrant fishing lures entwined with grimy clumps of slime. Other pieces like "Cereal Cave" and "UNDERTOW MOON" nod to the potential cause of destruction, as neon light cloaks the ecosystems making them appear almost radioactive.









# Yukihiro Akama

In Huddersfield, England, a half hour's drive down the road from [Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#), artist [Yukihiro Akama](#) fashions a whimsical, miniature world from within a furniture maker's workshop. In his forthcoming solo exhibition at YSP—his largest to date—the artist presents 55 intricately carved wooden houses in *Basho no Kankaku—A Sense of Place* 場所の感覚.

Akama, who pursued a career in architecture while living in Japan, often relied on digital tools and felt disconnected from traditional methods of building and working with his hands. After he moved to the U.K. in 2011, he began to carve small houses that reminded him of vernacular styles, like [stilt houses](#), that he would see on his travels around Asia. Inspiration also comes from Japanese temples and shrines, particularly elements from 4,000-year-old ruins dating to the [Jōmon](#) era.

Starting with a hand-drawn sketch, Akama allows intuition and the characteristics of each piece of wood guide the final design. Rough hunks of timber transform into elegant, low shapes or tall, spindly structures, with sizes ranging from a little bigger than a fifty cent piece—about 1.5 inches—to more than 40 inches tall. Sometimes the artist adds a cantilevered effect, occasionally sticking on pebbles and clay to add organic textures to the surfaces, then finishing with a dash of a blow torch before polishing.





# Assignment Suggestions...

- Make an artwork that fits in the palm of your hand
- Make a diorama
- Do a series of small paintings (could be a larger painting cut up into smaller artworks)
- If you have miniature items, arrange them in a tableau and photograph it