



18th Century Violin Maker's Shop

W. Foster Tracy, Number Two of Six, 1979
A Little Magic Theater Gallery

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Tucson, Arizona

W. Foster Tracy, known as Tracy to his friends, was a well-known American miniaturist who specialized in making miniature instruments, primarily string instruments. This piece is titled *18th Century Violin Maker's Shop*, and it is registered as number 2 of 6 identical works which he constructed in 1979. The subject of this piece is a literal, one-inch scale reproduction of what a violin maker's studio might look like in the 18th century, and it is made all the more compelling because the scene itself is encased within an actual full-scale violin. To achieve this, the majority of the front face of the violin has been removed, leaving the hollow interior as the space in which to re-create the studio. Due to the narrow depth of the full-scale violin, what is shown here is merely a slice of the workshop, only representing one wall of what would be a larger space, extending past the boundaries of the violin vessel. The piece is resting on a four inch piece of grey marble, into which Tracy carved his name, the title of the piece, and the abbreviation for South Montrose, Pennsylvania, where he lived and worked.

A violin's body is pear-shaped, comprised of three main areas: the rounded upper bout, the rounded lower bout, and the inward-curving waist in between the two. The full-scale violin is 23.5" long, with approximately 14" of that length being the neck. In the one-inch scale, Tracy's violins are just under two inches in length, authentically made to the point that each of his miniature violins could actually be played with a miniature bow. The voice of the violin would be quite different however, due to the small size of the violin body.

At first glance, visitors are overcome with admiration for the minute and authentically reproduced details, the rich warm colors of the raw and varnished wood, and the immediate understanding of the work's scale, thanks to the full-scale object being directly present. When looking into this violin shop, to the left there is a narrow wooden work table with a square wooden stool tucked beneath. To the right and to the left,



18th Century Violin Maker's Shop by W. Foster Tracy, Number Two of Six, 1979.
A Little Magic Theater Gallery. Photo by Balfour Walker.

climbing upwards along the interior waist of the larger violin vessel, there are miniature shelf ledges on which rest glass jars and various tools of the trade. The interior back of the violin vessel has been carefully carved with shallow vertical lines from top to bottom to imitate the appearance of wooden planks, with the tiniest of dots to appear as nails in the boards. This illusion creates the back wall of the workshop, and along this wall, in the lower bout, there are even more hanging tools, including palette knives, multiple types of hand-saws, calipers, wrenches, pencil sketches no larger than a postage stamp, violin parts in progress, and a row of hanging bows. In the upper bout, sloping downward at an angle from left to right, there is a wooden rack along which six miniature completed violins are hanging. In an actual violin-makers studio, you would find many of these racks, with row

after row of completed violins suspended. There is also a miniature cello in this workshop, its neck leaning against the work table, adding to the scale comparison.

Tracy electrified this piece, building a hidden light fixture into the upper bout, which sheds light vertically downward into the body of the violin vessel. There is a narrow rectangular piece of stained glass in between the lights and the studio's interior. The glass is primarily painted canary yellow, with two small areas of grass green and one small area of apple red; this color was not chosen for visual design reasons but rather to add just a touch of color to the studio's lighting, imitating the shafts of colored light that come through a window as the light passes through the green leaves of a tree, or the red light of early morning dawn. This soft lighting effect creates a peaceful and serene mood for the studio. In the 18th century, a violin-maker – known as a luthier – would have required excellent natural light to do his work; there is only one small candle and one small oil lamp in Tracy's miniature studio, both sitting on the work table.

You should know that Tracy was the founder and first president of IGMA, the International Guild of Miniature Artisans, an organization that still thrives today. His strict adherence to accuracy of scale and authenticity in detail are readily present in this piece. There are curled pieces of wood shavings and sawdust covering the floor. The glass jars on the shelves contain real pigments, varnishes, paint thinner, and glue. Tracy used bird's-eye maple and spruce wood for the violin bodies, ebony wood for the fingerboards, and pernambuco – a type of Brazilian wood – for the bows, all of which are the actual woods used when creating fine-quality full-scale violins. Although impossible to see, he even signed the interior of each violin, in the same manner as they are signed in the full-scale.

The other displays in our small Magic Theater gallery compliment Tracy's work, as each are examples of equal excellence in small-scale reproduction, including the exquisitely carved one-inch scale Waterford crystal goblets of Jim Irish, and the vibrant, delicate bird and wildlife sculptures of Mary McGrath. What could be a better resting place for one of Tracy's masterpieces... Jim Irish and Mary McGrath are both IGMA artisans in the Guild that Tracy founded.

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