



THE PAINTED MINIATURE BRONZE WORKS OF ROBERT OLSZEWSKI

Issue No. 56

Thursday, February 12, 2015 The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

February always ushers in a sentimental air, and visitors may find their gaze lingering on the softer details of our collection. Wandering the galleries with an appreciation for an artist's hints of tenderness leads to countless joyful surprises: the capricious sweetness of children's bedrooms, the feminine warmth of delicately stitched gowns, or the fragile petals of flowers lighter than a blade of grass. These singular elements contribute to the overall atmosphere of a finished piece and enhance the visitor's understanding of the artist's intentions. In this sense, even the smallest details of a work can become critically influential, no matter how subtle they might appear. The painted miniature bronzes of Robert Olszewski have been subtly shaping our visitor's experience like a silent army, a multitude of diminutive works tucked into all corners of our collection. More than 60 of Olszewski's works can be found in our galleries, housed in just under 20 roomboxes and dollhouses.

The great quantity of his work can be traced to our Museum Founder, Pat Arnell. A collector at heart, it is no surprise that Pat has created a miniature world of fellow enthusiasts – her love affair with Olszewski's small-scale pieces has produced small homes run by his would-be collectors. His statuary adorn bookshelves and fireplace mantles, bedside tables, desks, and credenzas. Once you have learned to recognize his work, you can readily spot them.



Farmer with Doves. Goebel Miniatures, 1989. Scaled reproduction from Olszewski's Historical series. Located in *Alderley Manor* (Pam Throop, 1985). Exploring the World Gallery. Photograph by Emily Wolverton.

Appearing to be 1:12 porcelain figures, each bronze sculpture is the result of a labor-intensive process that can take hundreds of hours. In her article, "The



Oriental Lovers. Olszewski Studios, 1996. Scaled reproduction from Olszewski's Oriental series. Limited Edition of 750. Exploring the World Gallery. Photograph by Emily Wolverton.

Miniature Art of Robert Olszewski," Diane Caron Velasquez elaborates on his technique, which utilizes what is commonly called the Lost Wax Process.¹ Olszewski begins by carving his sculpture in wax, creating a piece that is just slightly larger than his hoped for end result to account for shrinkage: this first step alone can take from 60 – 400 hours, depending on the detail of the scene. "The wax original is then encased in plaster, the mold heated to melt the wax, and a master cast in sterling silver."² The silver can be refined if needed before going to the next step, when latex molds are created using the silver master, only to begin the process once more: "wax is cast in the latex molds, plaster molds made around the wax, and the final brass sculpture cast after the wax is melted away."³ In this way — by continuing to make wax molds from the silver master — each finished sculpture is effectively an original produced from its own wax. One of

the most worrisome challenges is how easily the wax can be damaged when removing it from the latex, causing occasional but significant losses during the process. However, Olszewski's process allows him to generate runs of several hundred near-identical reproductions. Then, once the bronze sculpture has been produced, it is ready for the next step in his process. "When the figurines are ready for painting, he and his colorist mix all the colors and paint 120 artist's proof pieces, refining the shades and layering steps with each piece. This production series may take another 100 hours before his staff of experienced painters takes over."⁴ During his time working for Goebel Miniatures,[♦] Olszewski had a team of 65 painters and five sculptors, all working diligently to match his strict standards.

We have one work by Robert Olszewski which stands alone, apart from any larger piece: *Oriental Lovers* (1996). Located in our Exploring the World Gallery, the piece is right at home amidst our Eastern collection, surrounded by works depicting Thailand, China, and Japan. *Oriental Lovers* is based on an 18th century German porcelain work, reproduced in 1:12 scale. Olszewski Studios produced a brochure in March of 1996, detailing the story behind the piece, which perfectly illustrates both Mr. Olszewski's sentimental side as well as his desire for perfection.⁵ "I first came upon 'Oriental Lovers' in 1977, and after studying its complexity knew I needed to set it aside for a later date," writes the artist. He describes it as being "an early example of the European fascination with the Orient," and details the challenges of creating a miniature version – including "[setting] aside our best detail painter to exclusively work on the gold, a task that took 15 weeks to complete." The numerous openings in the trellis provided the greatest challenge, since "each opening has to release perfectly from the mold while retaining the fine details of the trellis curls and flowers." But the magic of the process was to capture the tenderness of the couple and the blossoming romance of the moment, which Olszewski pondered with sincere appreciation:

"Notice the man and how he leans toward the lady, politely, and with restraint. Also notice the young lady's upright posture, definitely a lady, and that each is focusing on the book, not looking at one another. These clues lead me to think it is very early in the relationship and also that perhaps the book might be a gift. After living with these musings, I decided to add a subtle hint for those that might never read this text, and carved a heart shape in the trellis just above their heads..."

It is no wonder that collector's from all over the world find such joy in acquiring Olszewski's works, when there is such heartfelt attention paid to the spirit of each



Pat Arnell featured pieces from Olszewski's DeGrazia series in her *Southwest House Casita Bonita* (1992). The image on the right features (left to right): *My First Horse* (1985); *Pima Drummer Boy* (1986); and *White Dove* (1985). A size comparison with a dime is shown in the image on the left. This series was produced for Goebel Miniatures. Photographs by Emily Wolverton.



Special release figures from Olszewski's Storybook line, *Wizard of Oz*. Limited editions for Goebel Miniatures. The image on the right features (from left to right): *Scarecrow* (1985); *The Cowardly Lion* (1986); *The Tinman* (1985). A size comparison with a dime is shown in the image on the left. These pieces are located in *Cheshire Regency* (George & Sally Hoffman, 1981). Photographs by Emily Wolverton.



Pieces from Olszewski's Wildlife series produced for Goebel Miniatures. These pieces are featured in *Cheshire Regency* (George & Sally Hoffman, 1981). From left to right: *American Goldfinch* (1985); *Hooded Oriole* (1989); *Western Bluebird* (1982); *Chipping Sparrow* (1980); *Spring Robin* (1988). Photograph by Emily Wolverton.

handcrafted original.

There are too many charming pieces to list here, but there are many with rich personal stories behind them. Located in *Angus' Apartment* (Ron and April Gill, 2008) is Robert Olszewski's singularly special piece, *Portrait of the Artist* (1991). We find he has miniaturized himself, sitting next to the Cowardly Lion and a Munchkin from the Land of Oz. Standing beside him is his young son David, who wears a red clown nose, and is gazing at the dove in his father's hand. This work was made as special treat for his collectors and could only be purchased through exclusive opportunities. In our Enchanted Realm Gallery, our *San Francisco Victorian* (Michael Lewis, 1979), includes another somewhat autobiographical piece, *The Little Tinker* (1994). In this portrait, he has recreated himself as a young man with a goatee and moustache, garbed in fairytale attire. He is made to a fantastical scale, dwarfed by the strawberry plant which gives him shade; an

enormous bumble bee can be seen enjoying a flower blossom above the Tinker's head. The *San Francisco Victorian* has a few other Olszewski pieces, including two from a very special retrospective work, *Lady With An Urn* (1995). Olszewski's very first attempt at creating a painted miniature bronze was *Lady With An Urn*, made in 1977 (only 15 of these were ever made, making it the most rare of all of his works).⁶ The 1995 re-release shows remarkable new details, as a testament to 20 years of honing his skill with the wax process. The 1995 limited edition release was offered in four different dress colors (brown, pink, green, and blue). Pat Arnell placed *Lady With An Urn Brown Dress* and *Lady With An Urn Blue Dress* in the *San Francisco Victorian*, located as objects of art for sale in "Hound's Home Shop." Visitors can also spot *Lady With An Urn Green Dress* in our *Bishop's House* (Reg Miller, 1984), located in our Exploring the World Gallery.

Robert Olszewski's expansive career has included commissioned pieces and licensed works for a range of quality manufacturers, including Goebel, The Walt Disney Company, and the Franklin Mint. He currently operates out of his own private company, Olszewski Studios. Keep a look out for his miniature sculptures on your next visit, but watch out – they say that collecting is contagious!

Emily Wolverton
The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

1 Velasquez, Diane Caron. "The Miniature Art of Robert Olszewski." *Miniature Collector*. Volume 17, No. 5. November/December 1994. Number 86. P 30 – 35.

2 Ibid. p 32

3 Ibid. p 32

4 Ibid. p 32

◆ In 1979, Robert Olszewski was a co-founder of Goebel Miniature Studios, a subsidiary of Goebel. He worked for Goebel Miniatures from 1979 – 1994. Goebel Miniatures is no longer in existence.

5 *Oriental Lovers Brochure*, March 1996.

www.olszewskistudios.com/OrientalLovers.php.

Olszewski Studios Official Website. Webmaster Ray Olszewski. Web Design by Moe Technologies, 2006.

6 Olszewski Studios, *Lady With An Urn*.

www.olszewskistudios.com/ladywithanurn1.php.

Olszewski Studios Official Website. Webmaster Ray Olszewski. Web Design by Moe Technologies, 2006.



Chinese Water Dragon (1987). Produced for Goebel Miniatures for Olszewski's Oriental series. Located in *Alderley Manor* (Pam Throop, 1985). Photographs by Emily Wolverton.



Meissen Parrot (1987). Produced for Goebel Miniatures. The parrot is a scaled reproduction from Olszewski's Historical line. The image on the right shows the parrot in its setting in *Alderley Manor* (Pam Throop, 1985). The *Meissen Parrot* can also be seen in *Cheshire Regency*. Photographs by Emily Wolverton.



The Grand Entrance (1994). This piece was Olszewski's first release from his new venture, Olszewski Studios, after leaving Goebel Miniatures. The limited release features a couple in mid-1770s court attire and carries significant personal symbolism: the man carries sculptor's tools and the woman carries paintbrushes, in honor of his recent marriage to his colorist, Eva Costello. As well as being hand signed, Olszewski wrote their names, Bob and Eva, on the bottom. The image on the bottom shows *The Grand Entrance* in its setting in *French Chateau* (Eric Landsdown, acquired 1993). Photographs by Emily Wolverton.