



BUTCHER SHOP

Ron & April Gill, Acq. 2006
Location: Exploring the World

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Tucson, Arizona

Another terrifically hot Tucson summer is coming to a close, and restless residents already whisper eagerly of the gorgeous Fall weather on the horizon. We are all keen for a change and fresh perspective in our Sonoran desert home. Perhaps it is with this enthused viewpoint that we turn our gaze to the museum's collection, seeing the diversity of our miniatures with new eyes. With so much detail to saturate the visitor, the change of seasons is a perfect time to take note of the forest, rather than the trees. Standing back from the exquisite miniature rooms, filled with their tapestries, feasts, shelves of books and fine furnishings, we see the beauty and ingenuity of the structures that contain them. Some of these, such as our *Greene & Greene* (1989), based on the famed Pasadena Gamble House, or Madelyn Cook's *Yu Yuan* (ca. 1980s), a replica of the 400 year old Dragon Pavilion in Shanghai, are arguably more impressive for their fine-scale architecture than for their luscious interiors.

We have many miniature scenes in our collection which go even further to stretch the imagination by drawing upon unique and innovative containers. Visitors delight in our *Hares & Bears: Scene in a Walnut* (Acq. 2000), in which artist Debra Lowe painstakingly created four miniature hares and another four tiny bears, arranged on impossibly small shelves within the shell of a walnut. Similar in scope is Anna Derksin's *Dutch Scene Decorated Egg* (Acq. 1990), which comfortably fits both husband and wife slumbering peacefully in their alcove bed – all nestled within a



Butcher Shop (upper compartment). Ron & April Gill, Acq. 2006.
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

hollowed chicken egg. The artists of these pieces push the limits of both scale and fragility, impressing upon the viewer the patience required to complete such delicate work. Other unique containers add to the subject matter in more literal ways, such as Pat Arnell's *Crow's Nest Bird House Shop* (1997), a 1:12 scale shop featuring a vast assortment of bird houses – and the shop itself is, of course, a full-scale bird house. The choice to use an actual bird house breaks “the fourth wall,” a phrase often used by theatrical and literary circles to describe the removal of the imagined boundary between the characters and the audience. In this case, Arnell addresses her audience directly by choosing the bird house as her container; it is an object of our own world, not that of the miniature inhabitants, and its success as a container directly relies upon the relationship between subject matter and viewer.

One of our finest examples of this type of miniature “repurposing” is Ron and April Gill's *Butcher Shop*

(Acq. 2006), located in our Exploring the World Gallery. This two-story miniature scene depicts a butcher shop store-front below and walk-in meat storage above. The building itself is nothing other than a vintage, double-compartment, dry heat dental sterilizer. The sleek shine of the metal lends itself to the feel of the trade, mirroring the shine of the butcher's knives and mimicking the sense of constant cleanliness that is required of such work. To transform their real-world object into a 1:12 scale building the Gills, who are world-renowned IGMA artisans and Cube recipients, completely refurbished the interior of the sterilizer with their own custom details. Upstairs, the walls are aged red brick, and the exposed fluorescent lighting shines ominously on the suspended legs of beef and pork, dangling from their hooks; downstairs, the stucco walls and hardwood floor are more inviting for customers, with the gleaming glass deli case taking center stage. An elevator joins the two floors, providing quick access for the butcher should he need to replenish his display. The Gills took full advantage of their unique container's structure, hiding much of the electrical wiring in the drawer between the two compartments. The sterilizer's exterior, however, remains virtually untouched, with the latches, glass and knobs intact – a playful reminder to the viewer that there is more to this world than meets the eye.



Butcher Shop. Ron & April Gill, Acq. 2006.
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

The butcher shop's interior décor was done in collaboration with Eileen Godfrey, whose shrewd attention to detail gave the furnishings a cohesive time period and palette. One of the finest additions to the shop is surely the butcher himself, a stout figure with evident personality, created by IGMA artisan Nancy Quinby – one half of the powerhouse duo that comprises the miniature resource Nantasy Fantasy Creations. The right human figure can elevate a miniature scene in ways that mere tables and chairs cannot and, in such a sterile environment, the viewer can take comfort in the oafish charisma of this butcher – we can almost hear him muttering to himself as he examines his stock.

Butcher Shop was purchased at a miniature trade show by our museum founder Pat Arnell, who not surprisingly admitted to having no real interest in butcher shops nor antique sterilization tools. Rather, like most of us, it is the uniqueness of the whole that sets it apart. "It was just so neat, very unusual," remarked Pat. "I was already familiar



Butcher Shop (lower compartment).
Ron & April Gill, Acq. 2006. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

with their work, but the container itself was the selling feature.” The Arnells came to join forces with the Gills on many projects over the years, appreciating their clever humor and elements of surprise.

Miniatures as an art form force us to see the world anew, to appreciate the everyday things that we have come to take for granted. Miniaturists themselves are experts at seeing full-scale objects for their miniature potential. Wherever you may live, we at The Mini Time Machine Museum hope that this Fall brings you some fresh perspective. Who knows what you might notice, if you take some time to look?

Emily Wolverton
The Mini Time Machine Museum



Hares & Bears: Scene in a Walnut.
Debra Lowe, Acq. 2000. Photo by Balfour Walker.