



# Artist Spotlight: NATASHA BESHENKOVSKY

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The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

The miniature art world is a vast sea, spanning the course of human civilization and reaching into the measureless depth of creative expression. Carved miniature sculptures were buried within Egyptian tombs some 4,000 years ago, yet here in the modern world the miniature scene is still alive and well. Virtually anything imaginable has been recreated in miniature form, using nearly every means of artistic materials, from glass to textile, painting to sculpture. Many miniatures are not reproductions of larger objects at all, but rather masterful *objets d'arts*, stand-alone works by their own right. Additionally, the techniques of miniature-making and scale reproduction have been used in fields as diverse as space exploration and theater design, allowing humans to examine their surroundings with more accuracy and understanding. Truly, for those who discover the love of miniatures, skimming the surface of this vibrant, culturally rich art form can quickly get one swept up in the tide. One miniature artist in particular, Natasha Beshenkovsky, has been riding the miniature tide for nearly 30 years, exemplifying the far-reaching appeal of miniatures through a wide range of media and inventive design concepts.



*Table with Hunt Scene*, Natasha Beshenkovsky. Located in *San Francisco Victorian*, Michael Lewis, 1979. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

While some miniature artists are true specialists, becoming experts at crafting one particular type of miniature, many more become what could be called adventurous dabblers, exploring

new and innovative techniques for reproducing the world at large. This latter type of miniaturist, if he or she is to become a success, requires a diverse background in history and art, as well as a discerning eye. Natasha Beshenkovsky



*New York Window*. Natasha Beshenkovsky, Acq. 2001. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

is one such artist, a woman who continues to impress her audience with her variety of groundbreaking miniature pieces, from furniture to figures. A graduate of the prestigious Moscow Art School and Moscow Film Institute, Beshenkovsky's background reveals a meandering path through the art world. In an interview with Martha Puff for *Dollhouse Miniatures*, Beshenkovsky states, "I am an artist first and a miniaturist second...I have been a professional artist all my life, working in many fields: animation, scenic design, book illustration, textile design, oil and watercolor painting. It so happens that smaller scale fits very well with my interests and abilities." It is a familiar story for many of the world's finest miniature artisans, who find that their range of talents can be adapted to the miniature setting with ease – whilst providing an outlet for unbridled creativity.

Natasha Beshenkovsky became interested in the



*Still Life with Hour Glass* (detail).  
Natasha Beshenkovsky, Acq. 2000.  
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

prospect of a miniature artisan career after attending an IGMA<sup>2</sup> show with a friend, recognizing how easily she could apply her years of artistic experience to this new discipline. She became a dealer at IGMA's show the

following year and the uniqueness and intricacy of her work merited a cover story for *Miniature Collector*. It was in April 1981, that journalist Lillian Wachtel introduced Beshenkovsky to miniature enthusiasts around the world in her article, "Eclectic Enamels from a Russian Émigré." Along with highlighting Natasha's gorgeous hand-painted furniture, Wachtel detailed Beshenkovsky's arduous arrival to the United States:

Natasha and her husband, a research librarian, are among those Russian Jews who, in recent years, have been permitted to emigrate from their native country – on two conditions: first, that they leave behind most of their possessions; and second, that they can never come back. That was three years ago. But it seems longer ago than that, psychologically speaking. By now, the 36-year old Natasha...is deeply absorbed in all she is now accomplishing as a painter (of both miniature antique furniture and full-size watercolor paintings) and seems to have put most of the anguish of the uprooting behind her. She wants to talk only about her art."<sup>3</sup>

With her story in Russia drawing to a close, Beshenkovsky's adventure in the U.S. was only just beginning.

Her perfectionism and distinctive style quickly earned a strong following that has gained momentum over the decades. Although the miniatures she produces are diverse, her style has remained her own, instantly recognizable. She remains an expert in hand-painted furniture, able to replicate an extensive gamut of period designs, from folk art to Art Deco, as well as creating whimsical, wooden sculpted figures that resemble origami in

their design. In the mid-1980s, she began to create what she calls "three-dimensional paintings," shadow-boxes that epitomize the French term *trompe l'oeil*, to fool the eye. Over the years, she has perfected this technique, producing what could best be explained as mini theatrical sets, with layers of backdrops, furniture and other props, as well as capricious characters who provide humorous, intimate, and fantastical storylines. Beshenkovsky describes her work best: "My work with three-dimensional paintings explores the way we relate to paintings, the magic space behind the frame. My pieces remind us of what the art of painting used to be when it was prized for skill, craftsmanship, and the ability to create illusion. The goal is to concentrate the attention of the viewer, to invite contemplation and to show the beauty."<sup>4</sup> Looking through her [online gallery](#) of recent projects is a feast for the eyes. It is no wonder that she has risen to international stardom, with works featured in museums and private collections across the globe.



*Red Icon*. Natasha Beshenkovsky, 1988. Located in *Colonial Mexican Dining Room*, Westcott, 1991.  
Photo by Emily Wolverton.



*Icon*. Natasha Beshenkovsky, 1987. Located on the first floor mantle in *Bishop's House*, Miller, 1984.  
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

Here at The Mini Time Machine Museum, we are proud to have numerous pieces by Natasha, lovely gems tucked into our collection that reveal the diversity of her talents. In our Enchanted Realm Gallery, take a peek into our *San Francisco Victorian* (Lewis, 1979), where you will find a delicately painted table in the Hound's Home Shop on the third floor- the scene depicts an English fox hunt, well-suited to a shop run by the canine persuasion.

Wander over to *Cauldron Coven* (Arnell, 1984-98), a peculiar mansion stuffed to the gills with curiosities, and you will find two more pieces of Natasha's painted furnishings. On the second floor, a painted wooden screen provides a witty backdrop for a game room, featuring hand-painted lady monkeys in bonnets playing cards. Downstairs, while Vincent and Catherine<sup>5</sup> exchange Halloween gifts, you will see a matching monkey fireboard protecting the fireplace – in this case a musician playing cello.

In our Exploring the World Gallery, seek out two pieces, our *Bishop's House* (Miller, 1984) and the *Colonial Mexican Dining Room* (Westcott, 1991). Each features icons by Beshenkovsky, religious triptychs that add powerful symbolism to the settings in which they are displayed. However, for a true Natasha treat, be sure to visit our *Still Life with Hour Glass* (2000) and *New York Window* (2001), charming examples of Beshenkovsky's three-dimensional painting style. Beautifully framed, these quiet scenes draw the viewer in, pulling the eye forward through the space, playing on shadow and light.

Natasha understands the power that miniatures have on the heart, the magic of seeing with fresh perspective: "We don't spend time looking closely at things. Smallness makes us attentive."<sup>6</sup> This method of focusing the viewer's attention through smallness of scale is not unlike the painter's use of the frame, narrowing the view to allow the deep breath of contemplation. The world frozen in time, every facet captured in detail – this is the Art of miniatures, the meditative quality of appreciating the vast sea through a single drop of water. We hope that with every visit to The Mini Time Machine Museum, you wade a little deeper.

Emily Wolverton  
The Mini Time Machine Museum

1. Puff, Martha. "The Mini Visual Artist." *Dollhouse Miniatures*. September/October 2012, Issue 29. P. 10.

2. International Guild of Miniature Artisans

3. Wachtel, Lillian. "Eclectic Enamels from a Russian Émigré." *Miniature Collector*. Number 24. April, 1981. P. 22 – 23.

4. <http://www.natashaminiatures.com/natasha/>

5. Characters from the popular American TV series, *Beauty and the Beast* (1987-1990).

6. Puff, Martha. "The Mini Visual Artist." *Dollhouse Miniatures*. September/October 2012, Issue 29. P. 12.