



# PETER ACQUISTO

## Miniature Masterpieces in Silver

Issue No. 36

Thursday, April 11, 2013

The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

The galleries of The Mini Time Machine Museum are filled with stunning dollhouses and roomboxes. To walk through our galleries is akin to *Gulliver's Travels*, giving each visitor a sense of omnipotent satisfaction as he peers into the strange and wonderful worlds of Lilliputian lives. Stomping about as would-be giants, our understanding of size quickly becomes relative, as each single house dissolves into a dazzling microcosm: the small house is filled with smaller rooms, these rooms are filled with delicate furniture, the diminutive desk is filled with tiny books, and there, beside the books, are the most miniscule of pencils. Our gaze goes ever deeper, from the garden to the flower to the perfectly curled petal. Appreciating the works here becomes a detailed study, an orchestration of miniature notes. It is on this plane that the attentive viewer is rewarded – many of the most beautiful miniature objects in our collection can be missed by a careless gaze. So many gems are quietly sparkling, patiently waiting for that gasp of appreciation. The miniature silver masterpieces of Peter Acquisto are precisely the sort of treasure that a patient eye will find, humbly sitting atop a tiny bookshelf or adorning the dining room table. Though each of his pieces is *objet d'art* worthy of a spotlight, instead they find themselves tucked into the scenery, so marvelous in their realism that they blend effortlessly into their surroundings. If his works were out of proportion or shoddily made, we would take notice immediately, just as the eye notices the smudge on an otherwise spotless rug. Acquisto's silver is camouflaged in perfection.



Candlestick by Peter Acquisto. Based on a French original by Messonnier c. 1728. This example can be found in *French Chateau* (Eric Lansdown, 1993). Photo by Emily Wolverton.

One certainly doesn't need to be a miniaturist to appreciate Peter Acquisto: the fine silver pieces which he creates are testaments to patience, dexterity and expertise. Unquestionably, the capacity to design works of art in silver is a skill to be admired on any scale, but to produce them in

*miniature* reaches awe inspiring heights. He has been a silversmith for more than 30 years, polishing his skills and receiving international recognition including a following of devoted collectors. He became an IGMA\* Fellow in 1984, was selected for the NAME\* Academy of Honor in 1988, and received the Mel Prescott Award in 2000. He is a very busy man, continually producing new and exciting works. It should also be noted what a tremendously likeable fellow he is, with a ready smile and unassuming disposition. On his occasional visits to our museum he never fails to leave an affable impression.



Cruet Set by Peter Acquisto. The cruet is considered Acquisto's most challenging piece due to its many separate, delicate components. The casting process requires very special spruing. This example can be seen in *Bishop's House* (Reg Miller, 1984). Photo by Emily Wolverton.

Although miniature silver welcomed a revival in popularity thanks to artisans like Eugene Kupjack, the art form is hardly new. Marguerite Winter noted in her article "Silver in Miniature," that there are examples surviving today that date from the 1680s, a period described as the golden era of England's silversmithing.<sup>1</sup> "Some early miniature silver served as salesman's samples of full-sized plates. Child size rattles, toys, spoons and cups were also produced. Many silver miniatures, however, were obviously intended to be enjoyed as today's miniatures are, as tiny reproductions of the accoutrements of life."<sup>2</sup> Many examples of "salesman samples" can be found in our museum's History Gallery: our *18<sup>th</sup> Century Nuremberg Kitchen* (1742), is filled with miniature German pots and pans of a similar origin, as are the numerous baby cabinets from the early to mid 1800s.



William II Monteith Bowl by Obadiah Fisher. The goblets to the right and left of the bowl were made by Peter Acquisito. *Great Hall* (Peter Westcott, 1983). Photo by Emily Wolverton.

Acquisito got his start in miniatures in the 1980s, thanks to his sister, Jeanette Barnes, who convinced him to use his jewelry-making skills to make miniature silver objects. In her article, “Peter Acquisito: Perfectionist in the Silversmith Trade,” Anne Day Smith writes how, at first, Acquisito was not particularly interested.<sup>3</sup> That attitude quickly changed, however. “His trial run produced three simple objects: a coffee pot, a plate, and a goblet

that were an instant success. Acquisito Silver Company<sup>♦</sup> has been in business ever since.”<sup>4</sup> His subject matter has evolved into ever-more challenging pieces, as he carefully selects and researches classic antique silver styles and forms.

Acquisito uses the technique of casting to create his silverworks. It is time-consuming process with more than a dozen stages. Winter describes the casting process in detail:

*[Casting] begins with an original, carved from a special wax or fabricated out of metal. If the original is wax, it is encased in casting plaster and studded with tubes called sprues. When the mold is heated, the wax drains through the sprues and liquid metal replaces the wax in the mold. From the resulting metal prototype many latex molds are made and filled with new wax. If the original is made of metal, the first plaster mold will be unnecessary...Acquisito makes his original out of [metal] to shorten the casting process by one step, thus keeping crisp details one generation closer to the finished product.*<sup>5</sup>

Creating the prototype is the first and most important step, one which can take several months to complete. As Acquisito himself points out, “The master should be as crisp as possible...No piece will be any better than that original.”<sup>6</sup> To produce an accurate prototype, he makes sketches from photographs, using his calipers to measure right down to the thousandths. “It’s easy to figure, thanks to the decimal system. Usually I’m within a close tolerance of 2/1000ths of an inch.”<sup>7</sup> Perfectionist, indeed!

Acquisito’s silver can be seen throughout our museum, adding that special touch to several different pieces. For example, in *Bishop’s House* (Reg Miller, 1984), the dining room table is decked out in a stunning display of some of his finest work including his Cruet Set, considered to be his most challenging piece. In *Great Hall* (Peter Westcott, 1983), Acquisito’s silver goblets are featured alongside a William II Monteith Bowl by another legendary miniature

silversmith, Obadiah Fisher.<sup>8</sup> Fisher, like Acquisito, got his start making silver jewelry, switching his path to miniatures in the late 1970s. As is often the case, the works of one artist can compliment another. Knowing this, our Museum Founder, Pat Arnell, filled her little silver shop, *A Sterling Affair* (Doan, Acq. 1996), with the works of several of today’s top silversmiths, including Acquisito, Kupjack, Quintanar and Matusovsky. It is, quite literally, a shining example of miniatures *par excellence*.



The epergne, above, is just one of the more than 20 Acquisito pieces to be found in *A Sterling Affair* (Cortland C. Doan, Acq. 1996), below. Photos by Emily Wolverton & Balfour Walker.

The next time you visit The Mini Time Machine Museum, try to take a slower pace. You will surely be rewarded with something you never noticed before, whether it is a silver vessel, or a hand-stitched pillow made with seemingly microscopic thread, or a painting completed thanks to the help of a single-hair brush and a magnifying lens. In the world of miniatures, a small accomplishment can be mighty impressive.

Emily Wolverton

The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

1. Winter, Marguerite. “Silver in Miniature.” *Miniature Collector*. Vol. 18, No. 4. Number 91. P. 16 – 20.
  2. *Ibid.* p. 16
  3. Smith, Anne Day. “Peter Acquisito: Perfectionist in the Silversmith Trade.” *Dollhouse Miniatures*. February 2001. P. 36 – 37.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 36
  5. Winter, Marguerite. “Silver in Miniature.” *Miniature Collector*. Vol. 18, No. 4. Number 91. P. 16 – 17.
  6. Smith, Anne Day. “Peter Acquisito: Perfectionist in the Silversmith Trade.” *Dollhouse Miniatures*. February 2001. P. 37
  7. *Ibid.*, p. 37
  8. “...recalls the late 17<sup>th</sup> century tradition when monteiths were filled with ice water to chill or rinse wine glasses. Cups could be hung from the scalloped rim. The bowl got its name from a 17<sup>th</sup> century Scotsman who wore a cloak with a scalloped edge.” Winter, p. 17.
- \*International Guild of Miniature Artisans  
 ♥National Association of Miniature Enthusiasts  
 ♦Acquisito Silver Company



Want to learn more?  
 Watch the video!  
**TMTM Presents:**  
**Everyone is a Miniature**  
**Artist with Pete Acquisito.**