



# THE WILDLIFE SCULPTURES OF MARY McGRATH

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There is a transcendent feeling that can overcome a person while walking through the wilderness. The natural world holds endless fascination in the form of crackling leaves, chirping insects and the songs of birds. The hum of life itself penetrates the branches, a music that sinks deep into the soil, creating a wondrous calm so utterly disparate from the bustle of everyday life with its clanking horns and beeping appliances. It is no wonder that people are forever seeking some small token to remind them of the Great Outdoors – a shell from the beach, pressed leaves in a book, an acorn from the woods. There is an irresistible desire to take some small piece home, tucked into a pocket, a keepsake of the fleeting moment. Sculptor and painter Mary McGrath is a master at capturing these moments, gathering the lush forest into penny-sized treasures, with every tender petal and fragile feather intact. Her ability to recreate flora and fauna in the one inch scale is unparalleled, designing intricate vignettes of diverse habitats in every season.

Here at The Mini Time Machine Museum, Mary McGrath's work is not hard to find. Our museum founders, Pat and Walter Arnell, have collected her work for years, delighting as so many others have at her exquisite details. In our A Little Magic Theater gallery, visitors can marvel at more than 60 of her pieces, including chipmunks, raccoons and rabbits, and of course a dazzling variety of wild birds. There are cardinals, cranes, quail and owls – an avian parade of feathered friends captured in striking poses: geese



Wildlife Sculpture by Mary McGrath. A Little Magic Theater Gallery. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

gliding on the water, pheasants hiding in the thicket, wrens in midflight. There are wild birds building nests, tending to their young, and perched among the



Wildlife Sculpture by Mary McGrath. Transition Hallway. Photo by Amy Haskell.

branches in still life perfection. A walk through our transition hallway into Exploring the World Gallery will reveal even more of McGrath's work, a charming assembly of 14 pieces, including one scene set inside of an actual egg (this technique is one of McGrath's specialties). And still our visitors can find even more – many of our roomboxes and dollhouses contain McGrath masterpieces, hidden among the minute décor like undiscovered treasures. Look for her stunning sculptures in *Cheshire Regency* (George & Sally Hoffman, 1981), *A Touch of Class Regent Street* (Bob Bernhard, 1996), and *The Boat Builder's Study at Lake Tahoe* (Madelyn Cook, 1993), among many others.

McGrath's excellence in miniature art stems from her personal touch on every piece. No two are exactly alike, with every element made by hand. No part of her work is mass produced; she creates original works to display at tradeshow, which become samples from which customers may place orders. She creates her birds, reptiles, and mammals using polymer clay, which is



Wildlife Sculpture by Mary McGrath. A Little Magic Theater Gallery. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

then painstakingly painted by hand. In an article for *Miniature Collector*, Bryce Webster writes with admiration at McGrath's abilities:



Wildlife Sculpture inside pigeon egg by Mary McGrath. Transition Hallway. Photo by Amy Haskell.

“Working with delicate brushes, a diamond tipped saw, and other fine tools, she can transform an ordinary chicken’s egg into an incredible portrait of nature.”<sup>1</sup> The simplicity of her process is astounding – she does not use magnifying lenses or even specialized brushes: “A size 00 is fine,” notes McGrath, “as long as it’s a good one and holds a point well.”<sup>2</sup> Another unique aspect to her process is her rejection of pre-design work. “I don’t sketch these things out; they’re all in my head from beginning to end.”<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that Mary doesn’t do her homework – each sculpture is scientifically accurate. There is no plant out of place or season, nor are there animals that would not naturally coexist. She also enlists feedback from her husband, a Math teacher, who checks the correctness of her scale and proportion.<sup>4</sup> Her strict obedience to accuracy has propelled her career, becoming a fellow in the International Guild of Miniature Artisans and a member of the Academy of Honor in the National Association of Miniature Enthusiasts.

During this special time of year when Fall fades into frosty Winter, try to take time out of your day to enjoy the scenic changes. If you can’t find time to escape the city, be sure to visit the museum – Mary McGrath’s wildlife menagerie will guide you through Winter’s chill and on into Spring’s return, one delicate branch at a time.

Emily Wolverton  
The Mini Time Machine  
Museum of Miniatures

1. Webster, Bryce. “A Souffle of Small Wonders.” *Miniature Collector*. August 1980, Number 20. P. 27.
2. Ibid. p. 28
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.



Wildlife Sculptures by Mary McGrath. A Little Magic Theater Gallery. Photos by Emily Wolverton.



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