



# THE MINIATURE ETCHINGS OF JOHN ANTHONY MILLER

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Each miniature room in our collection is a still life portrait, a snapshot of a moment in time. From the inlaid floors to the light fixtures, the furniture to the décor – every detail is a testament to accuracy, that tenuous ideal that pushes miniaturists closer and closer to small-scale perfection. Visitors walking through our galleries are awestruck by the vast and intricate details, each working in unison to create satisfying, rich historical scenes and modern day marvels. The majority of these pieces are the collaborative efforts of numerous miniature artisans, extraordinary specialists dedicated to their craft. One such artisan is John Anthony Miller, whose outstanding miniature etchings are direct evidence of this relentless pursuit.

The beauty of John Anthony Miller's etchings cannot be overstated. His impeccable, miniscule lines – finer than a human hair – and breathtakingly delicate layers of scenery give his images a depth that can only truly be appreciated upon intimate inspection. They are produced entirely by hand, with no photo enlargement processes, using traditional intaglio methods. In her article, "The Etchings of John Anthony Miller," Dana Gearhart details Miller's procedure, beginning with a small piece of 16 gauge copperplate.<sup>1</sup> "The plate is coated with wax 'grounds' and John draws upon his wax with various dental tools. When the drawing is complete, he dips the plate into an acid bath until it etches the appropriate grooves in the copper."<sup>2</sup> The plate can then be inked and sent to press, creating limited edition runs with each print as beautiful as the first. Miller then numbers, titles and signs each print by hand, producing exquisite and highly collectible pieces of art. Our own Museum Founder, Patricia Arnell, loved one of Miller's etchings well enough to place prints of it in three locations within our collection: *Around the World* can be found on the walls of our *Cheshire Regency* (George & Sally Hoffman, 1981), *Country Store* (Ron & April Gill, 1985), and *San Francisco Victorian* (Michael Lewis, 1979). This lovely scene of hot air balloons in flight highlights Miller's remarkable skill, with many details being little larger than the



*The Osborne House*. John Anthony Miller, 1981. Part of The Mini Time Machine Museum's Study Collection. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

period at the end of this sentence.

Our museum has also acquired two of Miller's prints for our Study Collection: *The Osborne House* and *The Balmoral Castle*, both printed in 1981. Distributed through Reminiscence<sup>®</sup>, these last two works are marvelous examples of Miller's collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago, wherein he recreated Baxter etchings from the Thorne Rooms Gallery.<sup>\*</sup> George Baxter (1804–1867) gained fame for his patented color printing method, commonly known as the Baxter process, which combined relief and intaglio techniques. One of Baxter's licensees, Abraham Le Blond, used some of Baxter's original blocks to reproduce many prints, including a needlebox<sup>3</sup> set of 10 prints, entitled "The Regal Set," c. 1853. These 10 small prints existed on one sheet, and the individual prints could be cut out for use in individual needle boxes. They are highly sought after miniature prints by antique collectors, with a number of fakes in existence. A few of these Regal Set prints are featured in the Thorne Rooms, and Miller painstakingly reproduced these etchings in stunning accuracy, using Burnt Sienna ink rather than the original Baxter colorations. Miller gives copyright credit to the Art Institute in the lower right corner of each



*Around the World* (detail, left). John Anthony Miller, 1987. Prints of this etching can be found in three pieces within our museum collection. This photograph features the print found in *Cheshire Regency* (George and Sally Hoffman, 1981). Photos by Emily Wolverton.

etching, in his unfathomably small font. A Certificate of Assurance and authenticity was included with each limited edition etching, and he even included a signed miniature version of this certificate on the back of the framed print itself. The quality of Miller's production process, from the delicate etchings themselves to the professional framing, sets a high standard in miniature artwork.

Like many miniature artisans, John Anthony Miller came into the field through a mix of opportunity and happenstance. A graduate from Fresno State University, Miller received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Science, studying Zoology and Anatomy, as well as doing post-graduate work in Physics.<sup>4</sup> But art was to be his true passion: a self-taught artist, Miller enjoyed success with his pen and ink drawings, which paved the way for his interest in engravings – with which he could achieve a similar look and the ability to make reproductions.<sup>5</sup> Even so, his venture into miniature engravings came about as a means merely to conserve the leftover strips of copper from his full-scale works.<sup>6</sup> It was not long thereafter before miniature enthusiasts from around the world were eagerly anticipating Miller's next intricate, limited edition prints.



*The Balmoral Castle*. John Anthony Miller, 1981. Part of The Mini Time Machine Museum's Study Collection. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

While it is easy to marvel at Miller's skill as an artist, perhaps what sets him apart most is his personal philosophy. "Everything has to come from love. My work has to leave humanity a little better off than it was before I did it."<sup>7</sup> Here at The Mini Time Machine Museum, we can relate to this way of thinking. Our galleries are comprised of a lifetime's passion of not only the Arnells, but of the multitude of artisans such as Miller himself, dedicated to capturing glimpses of our world and preserving them in perfect morsels for future generations to study and admire. Here, you may find an object smaller than a dime which is the result of a lifetime of research, preparation and patience. We hope that your next visit to our museum brings you in just a little deeper, even closer – you never know what miniature masterpiece you may discover.

Emily Wolverton  
The Mini Time Machine  
Museum of Miniatures

1. Gearhart, Dana. "The Etchings of John Anthony Miller." *Miniature Collector*. February, 1982. No 29. p. 52 – 53
2. Ibid.
  - ♦ Reminiscence Inc., a manufacturer of antique reproductions in miniature was located in Camarillo, CA, and is no longer in operation.
  - ♣ Narcissa Ward Thorne (1882 – 1966) created 99 miniature rooms, 68 of which are on display at the Art Institute of Chicago. The Thorne Rooms are 1:12 scale historically accurate and lushly decorated interiors featuring Europe, Asia and North America from the late 13th to the early 20th century.
3. "In the early fifties of the nineteenth century it was customary for ladies to purchase their needles in small boxes, on the outside of which was a print of about the size of 6 inches by 4 inches. Inside the box were numerous smaller boxes, containing needles of various sizes and on the cover of the smaller boxes was a 'needle-box' print. Baxter printed a good many of these prints, and also a good many of the needle-box sets. Baxter was probably the originator of these, coloured needle-prints, and, as in other things, Le Blond copied him. Both these colour printers published them in sets. Baxter, besides using them for needle-boxes, put some of his on stamped mounts." - "The Le Blond Book 1920" by C.T. Courtney-Lewis. For more information and to see these original prints, please visit: [George Baxter \(1804 – 1867\): A Bicentenary Exhibition of Prints and Illustrations at the E. J. Pratt Library, Victoria University](#).
4. Frank, Lee and Alice Frank. *A Reference Guide to Miniature Makers Marks*. 1996. p. 292
5. Gearhart, Dana. "The Etchings of John Anthony Miller." *Miniature Collector*. February, 1982. No 29. p. 53
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.