

# A world in miniature

Exquisite landscapes, scenes of nature and still lifes – Tracy Hall has a definite talent for watercolour. But what is even more admirable is that these works are all in miniature, as LC Littlejohn finds out

**I**t was just two years ago that a friend sent Tracy Hall a book on miniature painting by the late Sue Burton. "I was just captivated," says Hall, "and decided I must have a go."

Having a go proved so successful that less than a year later she won the Mary Scott Kestin Award for Animals and Wildlife at the Hilliard Society International Exhibition in Somerset. She followed that by winning the prestigious Gold Memorial Bowl for the most outstanding piece in the annual exhibition of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters Sculptors and Gravers, and the Llewellyn Alexander prize to boot.

"I was just overwhelmed. In fact it's not quite sunk in yet. I feel like a young upstart, as I never thought I could win. I was delighted to have my work accepted, never mind anything else."

Hall is a highly successful watercolour artist living and working in the Orkney Isles. She specialises in wildlife art and her work is sought after by companies and individuals. She works flat-out to meet her commissions but a part of her was unfulfilled: "There was nothing that was just for me." All that changed when she fell in love with this tiny art form.

The society stipulates that a miniature painting must be no larger than four-and-a-half inches by six inches (see page 39), including the frame and the



**ABOVE** Snow Leopard, 4.5x5.7cm **BELOW** Peekaboo, 5x5cm. All works in watercolour on archival hot pressed paper or board

mount. "In fact, that seems large to me," says Hall, "I like to work quite a bit smaller than that."

Her miniatures are miracles of composition and attention to detail. Almost all are of wildlife – here a tiny squirel eyes a tasty nut and its bushy tail seems to have every hair vibrant with life; there a dainty wren sits on a shed door and spies a minute earwig on a log. Other miniature subjects include a meerkat and a pony, and she is even experimenting with tiny seascapes. "I have so many ideas that I go to bed at night with my head buzzing. I see so much around about me that would make a wonderful miniature painting."

The present work on her baby-sized easel shows blackbirds in leaves. "I saw the sunshine and shadows on the clematis on the back wall and it looked so lovely, I couldn't resist."

She has taken innumerable photographs of the clematis and of blackbirds, and the final composition is an amalgam of all of these plus her ideas of what might be happening in the feathered family. She chose to place the bold male in the foreground in light, but hidden in the shadows of the leaves, if you look carefully, is a tiny, brown female on the nest.

Because the easel is so small and portable, Hall can work almost anywhere. She doesn't have to be away from the family as she can paint wherever she likes. On the other hand, her studio is also available. This



**ABOVE** Red Squirrel, 4.5x5.7cm **BELOW LEFT** Jerry Mice, 5.7x7.5cm **BELOW RIGHT** The Lumber Shed, 5.7x4.5cm

small, square room was once the kitchen and there is even an old washing machine still in the corner. Otherwise, it is recognisably an artist's lair, with walls covered in framed paintings – large and small – and the necessary computer taking up space, as well.

"It's the internet that has been the catalyst to me being commercially successful," says Hall. "It allows me to live and work in Orkney and be a full-time artist at the same time."

Business needs necessitate that, as well as miniatures, she also sells reproductions of her normal-sized watercolours. At this size, there are different mark levels and many people are happy to buy copies of her work, while for others the only way is to commission an original. But it's all quite different when it comes to miniatures.

"I won't take commissions or make reproductions.



Each one is unique. I do keep one copy for myself but that's just to keep a record of my work as they all seem to sell from the shows.

"Miniature art seems to be having something of a revival in the UK – and in America, where they have two major exhibitions, one in Washington DC and the other in Florida."

In fact, she won awards last year from these American juried exhibitions and one of her paintings was secured by the Miniature Art Society of Florida for its permanent collection.

"I don't have time to enter every miniature exhibition so I choose carefully in the UK and America and it spreads it nicely through the year. I'm often asked what miniature art is and the National Gallery in London has a wonderful definition. They say that a miniaturist is '...an artist who paints in great detail on a very small scale'. That's exactly what I do."

And size is no problem when it comes to sending them to exhibitions from Orkney. "This is so much better than handling big paintings by post. The miniatures are so easy to pack and send."

Hall is delighted with her success. "It would be lovely to think that 10 years from now I would be doing nothing but painting miniatures."

Turn the page for tips on how you can paint in miniature >



**Tracy Hall** is a watercolour artist who lives and works in the islands of Orkney. She began painting miniatures in 2007 and her latest miniatures will be on display at the RMS 115th Annual Exhibition at the Mall Galleries, London SW1, 13–25 October – see page 39. Further examples of her miniature paintings can be seen at the Llewellyn Alexander Gallery in London. [www.watercolour-artist.co.uk](http://www.watercolour-artist.co.uk)

