



Tracy Hall

watercolour artist

DHMS talks to **Tracy Hall** about the skill of painting watercolours in miniature.

Art has always been a big part of my life. My father was an art teacher and we were always encouraged to draw and paint from the earliest age. I never stopped and eventually began to paint professionally when my children were little, just in a small way at first until, by the time they were at school, I was painting full time and have never looked back.


I especially enjoy painting birds and animals, but find lots of subjects interesting and always enjoy taking my camera for a walk as you never know when something will catch your eye, whether it's a bird, a flower or a piece of rusty metal on the beach.

I work exclusively in watercolour as I find it a wonderfully versatile medium and I have yet to find anything I can't do with it. I use both transparent and opaque colours to create the results I want; as I'm largely self-taught I've never worried too much about rules and just experimented to see what worked best for me.

Although I've now been working as an artist for many years, much of my day to day work is in illustration and I was only introduced to miniature art in 2007. There is

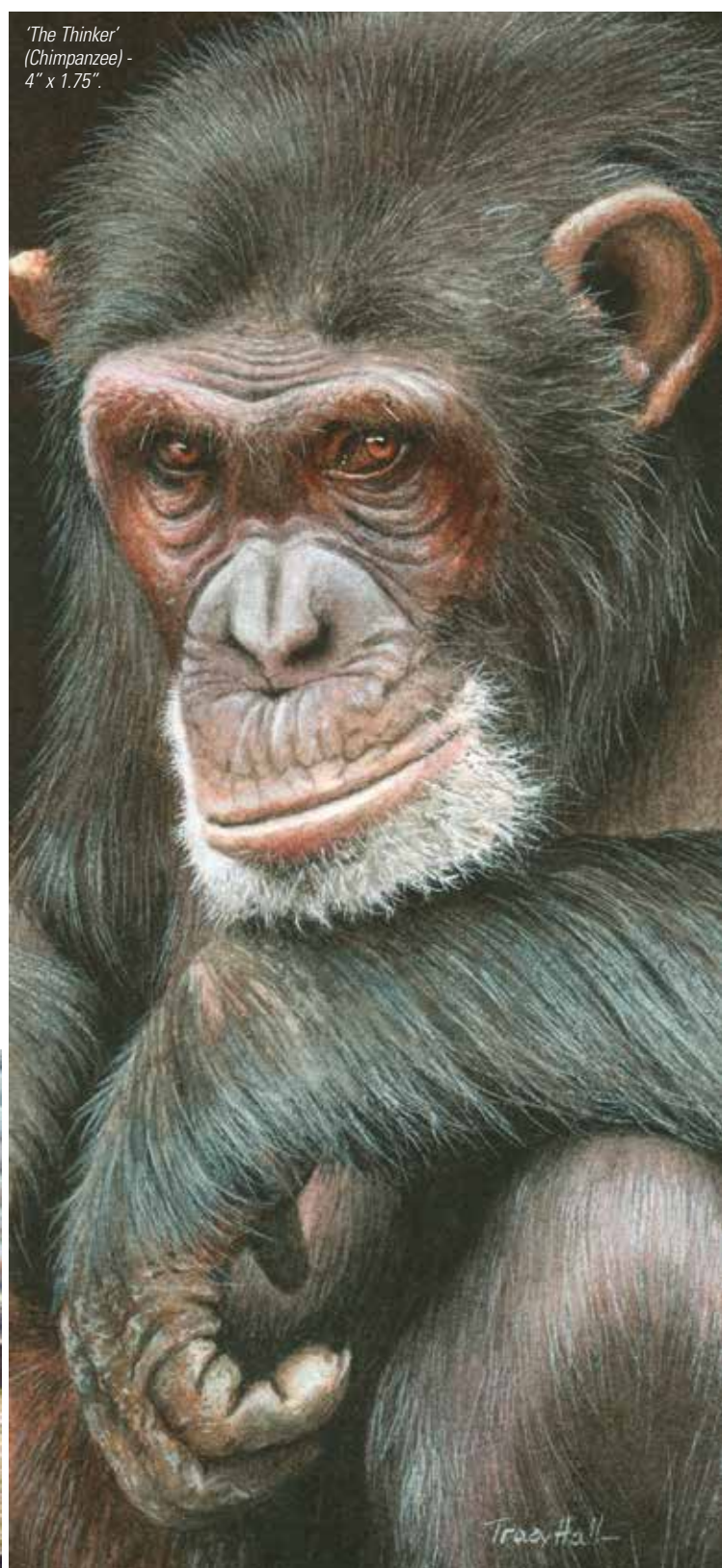
something completely captivating about working on such a small scale and you become totally absorbed in the tiny world you're creating. I became instantly hooked, spending most of my spare time practicing and learning more about this age old art form.

Painting in miniature is very precise and can't be rushed. Rather than getting faster with practice I've found the opposite to be true - the more I do, the longer they seem to take. A true miniature will fit in the palm of your hand and, while it presents many unique challenges, the same basic principles common to fine art of any size apply, such as composition, colour and perspective, and the final piece should be able to withstand considerable magnification without losing any of its impact. Not only are the finished paintings easily portable, but with a little forethought, so is working on them. I have an old painting box that's perfect for painting miniatures when I'm away from home.

I discovered that The Royal Miniature Society and the Hilliard Society both hold annual international exhibitions of miniature art and it was absolutely wonderful to be able 



'The Flying Lesson'
(Swallows) - 1.75" x 2.25".



'The Thinker'
(Chimpanzee) -
4" x 1.75".



'Young Peacock' - 4" x 1.75"



'Barn Owl' - 3.5" x 1.5"



'La Riviere D'Argent' - 2" x 3.5"

to visit both shows and see hundreds of incredible miniatures at close hand. The artists couldn't have been more helpful and welcoming, and it was very encouraging to meet them and have work accepted. I was also honoured to be awarded the Gold Memorial Bowl in 2008, which is the highest award from the RMS, and soon became a member of both societies. I would highly recommend anyone who is interested in miniature art to visit one of their exhibitions; they even supply magnifying glasses to help you enjoy the work to its full potential!

How long does it take you to complete a picture?

That's a regular question for artists - it's so hard to answer! It really does depend on the subject and how complicated the overall composition is. Miniatures really can't be rushed; the beauty is in the details and that takes time and patience. They all take many hours and I honestly don't keep a track of the time - on purpose. To be realistic you would also have to factor in the preparation work before you even begin the piece - gathering suitable reference material, working out the composition in the initial sketches... and of course the twenty-odd years learning how to paint the way you want to!

Is it hard to let them go if someone buys them?

Yes and no. I paint for a living so it would be awful if no one bought my work, but at the same time you do get attached to certain paintings and it's nice to live with them for a while. That said, my favourite is usually the one I'm working on and I'm very happy if someone else likes a painting well enough to buy it, it's the ultimate accolade.

How did you come to be interested in miniature painting?

A friend lent me a book about miniature art - 'The techniques of painting miniatures' by Sue Burton - which I read repeatedly, bought and is still the book I recommend to anyone seriously interested in learning more. It's the best book on

miniature art and tells you everything you need to know to get started. I was looking for something to do just for myself, aside from my day to day commissioned work. Now I exhibit my miniature paintings regularly in the UK and overseas and find it gives me the perfect balance.

What different skills, techniques and tools do you need to work in miniature?

Patience and lots of it! Really the basic principles common to all fine art apply and the very best miniatures would be just as impressive whatever their size, rather than because of it. It's also true that just because a painting is small it doesn't make it a miniature, nor is fine detail alone enough. It's a combination of factors that

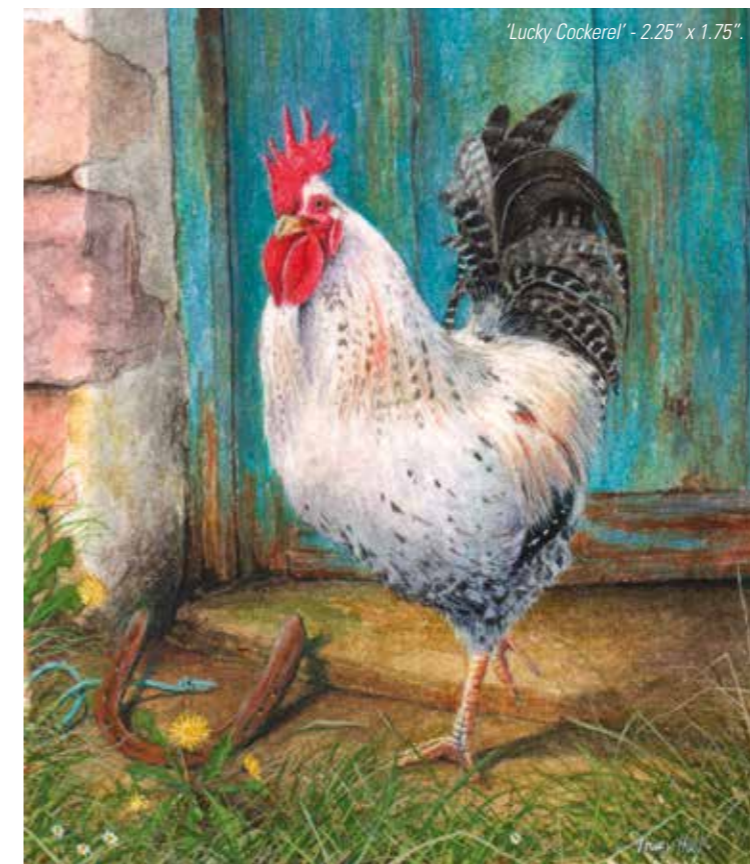
makes a true miniature - it's painstakingly executed on a minute scale using very fine brushstrokes on a smooth surface.

Have you always been based in Scotland or did you move there for the flora and fauna?

No, I was born in Cornwall but have lived here since I was 21. Scotland is a beautiful country, but I don't think my work is specifically 'Scottish'. I tend to find inspiration everywhere I go and often use photographs from trips away as well.

Why farm animals?

I paint them because living in the country I'm surrounded by them and they make good models as they tend to be used to people - much easier to sneak up on than a wild animal!



'Lucky Cockerel' - 2.25" x 1.75"



'Lift Off' (Black' Lift Off) (Black headed gull) - 2" x 4"



'Meerkat' - 3.25" x 2"



INFORMATION

The Royal Miniature Society has its annual exhibition at the Mall Galleries, London in October and the Hilliard Society holds its annual exhibition in Wells in the first week of June.
W: www.royal-miniature-society.org.uk
W: www.hilliardsociety.org

To see more of Tracy's stunning miniatures visit:
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Next month

In the November issue, Tracy shows us the vital steps to creating your own miniature watercolour painting.

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