

The world in miniature

Ray Winder discusses his miniature carvings and
the Royal Society of Miniature Painters, Sculptors & Gravers



Figgy – This a straightforward portrait of a friend's horse, carved from boxwood and painted in acrylics. 5cm from nose to tip of ears



Dancing Butterflies – You will need to go back to 1966 and a song by Bob Lind to appreciate the inspiration for this piece.

Carved from boxwood and inset into walnut with watercolour details.

Backboard 15cm x 15cm

In December 2020 I was honoured to be elected the president of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters, Sculptors & Gravers. The Society is 125 years old this year and I am only the 11th president in all this time, but what I am particularly proud of is that I am the first predominately sculpture-based president. So how did this all come about?

Art and creating has always been my passion even from my primary school years where one school report said I was 'good with my hands'. They weren't impressed with me academically obviously. Despite being damned with this faint praise, my love of painting and drawing took me to Kingston Art College and a degree course in Graphic Design, yet by the final year I was back to painting and drawing, intent

on a career in commercial illustration. Within weeks of leaving college, I found an agent and suddenly became a professional commercial artist. With tight deadlines and producing art to order I had to learn fast. This was my life for some 20 years until I discovered woodcarving. I began exploring 3D illustration using carved wood with some success, but the times were changing and computers, with their ability to manipulate images, were now becoming widespread.

I was mainly concentrating on woodcarving by this time and those readers old enough may remember some of the many articles I did for *Woodcarving* magazine back in the early 1990s. I was also fortunate enough to start a great working relationship with the American Hardwood Export Council, producing carved pieces

and, later, wooden models for its trade shows and general promotion. All made from American hardwoods of course. This also led to creating bespoke hardwood trophies for the prestigious annual Wood Awards and the Timber Trades Journal.

Smaller carvings

It was in 2013 that I first visited the Royal Miniature Society annual exhibition in London. I had started to produce much smaller carvings by then but I was hugely impressed by the miniature paintings and sculptures on display. It also rekindled my love of painting, which had been largely forgotten for some years. To comply with entry rules a sculpture should not exceed 8in in any one direction, including the base, but most tend to be considerably smaller than



Of Flesh and Bone – Another unusual receptacle, this time carved from beech and then bleached. 15cm high



Primordial Splash – One of a series of unusual receptacle ideas I have been working on. Carved from boxwood and English walnut. 15cm high

this. One of the first pieces I was to enter the following year was a combination of carving and painting called *The Passage of Time*, a double portrait of my mother as a young woman and in old age. It is made from boxwood carved to resemble thin curling paper. This was awarded the Art Critics Award at the 2014 RMS exhibition and the President's Choice at the Hilliard Society of Miniaturists exhibition earlier in the same year. With my work being accepted and winning several awards in the annual RMS exhibitions for three years running I was first elected associate and two years later full member of the society. I was eventually invited to join the RMS Council before being elected president in December 2020.

Boxwood has always been the choice for small, intricate carving. With no discernible

grain but only available in relatively small sizes, it will hold the most astonishing detail, which is why it has been used by netsuke carvers for so long. Easier to work with and having much richer colours, I also love walnut and laburnum. I sometimes think it is rather more accurate to describe what I do as shaping wood rather than carving it as I no longer use conventional woodcarving chisels. I use a bandsaw when needed to reduce the wood to a rough size before using a range of burrs, from coarse tungsten and diamond coated ones down to tiny dental ones to grind and shape the wood. I will often make an actual-size maquette from clay before starting a carving as an aid to getting the form correct before roughing out the shape. A specialist jeweller's dust extractor to suck

the dust away while I work is an expensive, but necessary, luxury. Carved details are refined, particularly on boxwood, with tiny scrapers and blades, which you simply have to make yourself as they are not commercially available. A perfect, crisp, scratch-free finish is possible but it does take a lot of time and patience. The new Tormek extra-fine diamond wheel is an excellent piece of equipment that I find perfect for making and sharpening the micro scrapers and blades.

Clear ideas

I occasionally allow the wood to dictate form, or at least parts of it, but generally when working on such a small scale it is essential to have a clear idea of exactly what you want and how to achieve it. Unlike



ABOVE: *Passage of Time* – Carved from boxwood mounted on walnut with watercolour paints. 13.5cm x 11cm.

BELOW: *Still Life in the Ocean?* – A comment on the pollution that sadly affects the wildlife in the sea. Carved from boxwood and mounted on walnut. It won the sculpture award in the 2019 RMS exhibition. Backboard 16cm high x 13cm wide. BELOW RIGHT: *Slaying the Dragon* – A recent and topical carving paying tribute to all those dedicated people whose work is making such a difference in this terrible pandemic. Boxwood and walnut, around 14cm high excluding the base



clay modelling, if you take too much off you can't put it back or easily change it, so it can be a slow process always having to be mindful of what areas you have to leave until you are ready to carve.

My work is nowadays more ideas based than simple representations of things, although I recently carved and painted a tiny horse head in boxwood as a portrait as I was intrigued to see how realistic I could make it appear. This single head has now proved to be the inspiration for a bowl supported by three painted horse heads. Once you achieve a certain technical competence, I think it is necessary to push yourself and explore new ideas. I have always kept what is best described as a scribble book where I jot down anything that comes into my head. Many of the

drawings can be easily dismissed but often there is a germ of an idea that can be returned to and developed and worked up later. My inspiration for carvings can come from anywhere, the more unusual the better. For now, I probably have more ideas than I have time to carve them.

Although my work is generally representational and relies on traditional craftsmanship, I do admire some of the digital art created on computers, where apparently random images can be seamlessly woven and blended into each other. Art today is now so diverse and at times difficult to comprehend, I think you have to find something you are comfortable with and enjoy doing. In miniature art I have found just that. Although one foot appears to be firmly in the past with old-fashioned

technical ability needed, be it painting or sculpting, there is a growing interest in this most traditional of art forms. As for subject matter, there are no restrictions, it is only limited by your imagination – and perhaps how small you can carve or paint.

After cancelling last year, The Royal Miniature Society's 125th Anniversary Exhibition will now go ahead at the Mall Gallery in London from 25th November to 5th December. Entries from non members are welcome through our easy online submission process and I would encourage *Woodcarving Magazine* readers to submit photos of their work for consideration. Details on our website: www.royal-miniature-society.org.uk

raywinder.co.uk [instagram.com/winderart](https://www.instagram.com/winderart)