

Qualifications for Miniature Painting

These are the standard guidelines for miniatures, however, each guild/exhibit venue might have slight deviations. Always read the prospectus carefully!

Definition

“Miniature paintings and sculptures are fine art on a small scale, with minute attention to detail, which can withstand close inspection or enlargement.”

1/6 rule

- Any representational art must be 1/6th life-size or less (9” human head can be no larger than 1 ½”)
- If not feasible (such as painting a small insect), then it must be done in the *spirit* of miniaturism: per MASF, “*Subjects too small for portrayal in 1/6th scale or non-representational work such as abstracts or surrealism may meet the spirit of a miniature if the work meets the above definition of miniature art.*”
- Abstract works should be proportionally delicate. If in doubt, try enlarging a sketch to an 8” x 10”, and see if the lettering size/design makes sense enlarged. Miniature paintings are literally full-size paintings in a tiny format

Size

- Two-dimensional work must be 25 square inches or less
- Sculpture may not exceed 8”x8”x8”

Framing

- Outside dimensions of frame must not exceed 64 sq. inches, and may not exceed 9” in either direction. Please note: This guideline can vary in different exhibits
- Frame depth cannot exceed 1”, and cannot exceed 1 lb.
- No sectional or tabletop frames
- Frames, mat, and glass should be in good condition. This also is judged, particularly in the larger exhibits. Neat backing, quality moulding, neutral mats are all strongly encouraged. Mats should be proportional to the artwork and frame.

- Typically, frames are 1” wide or less, with ½” and ¾” wide mouldings being most common
- Each prospectus will detail how the hanging hardware should be attached. Read carefully. Some require a small Velcro hook glued to the bottom back of frame, as many of the exhibits are displayed in carpet-back cases, this keeps the paintings from slipping. MASF prefers a single point of hardware at the top back center.

Number of works allowed, commission fees, entry fees, return shipping varies greatly. Read each prospectus carefully!

The following are typically not accepted:

- Ivory, including old piano keys
- Feathers
- Photographic work
- Computer-generated artwork in any form
- Photographic, digital, laser, or giclée techniques
- Jewelry
- Craft work
- Functional objects or any artwork created on functional objects such as boxes, plates, etc

Guilds/Exhibit Venues – Visit each website for prospectus and deadline information

- Miniature Art Society of Florida (MASF) – **miniature-art.com**
- Miniature Painters, Sculptors & Gravers Society of Washington DC – **mpsgs.org**
- Seaside Art Gallery – **seasideart.com**
- Parklane Gallery – **parklanegallery.org**
- Hilliard Society (England) – **hilliardsociety.org**
- Royal Miniature Society (England) – **royal-miniature-society.org.uk**
- Australian Society of Miniature Art (ASM) – **asmansw.com**
- Miniature Art Society of South Africa (MASSA) – **miniatureartsocietyofsa.co.za**
- There are also other Miniature & Small Works exhibits around the country, google “miniature art prospectus”

Materials that I use:

Substrate:

I primarily work on parchment, either calfskin or goatskin, and occasionally deerskin. Nearly all parchment that I purchase is from Pergamena Factory in NY. I purchase both whole skins and bulk scraps.

Usually the scraps need to be prepared. For the less finished surfaces, I'll begin with lightly sanding with 320 grit, working in circular motions, then move to 400 to begin smoothing it. It's finished off with 600 wet/dry sandpaper. I enjoy goatskin just as much as calfskin, as it frequently is thicker, and has more character in the shading, however if it's too "pebbly" it can be difficult to work on.

Watercolor:

I typically use Winsor & Newton opaque watercolor (gouache) for painting. The pigment is ground a bit thicker, so for lettering (particularly when using black), I use transparent watercolor. Koi is a favorite. The gold pigment I use is Kuretake gold mica paste, available through John Neal Bookseller.

Gold leaf:

Prior to 2011, I prepared gesso using the recipe in *The Calligrapher's Handbook*. It could be frustrating at times, so when I started over in 2019 I began using instacoll, also available through John Neal Bookseller. It's easily thinned, and I store small portions in a plastic condiment cup & lid (they're generally available at grocery stores).

I use 23k gold leaf, purchased from The Gilded Planet.

Nibs:

I almost exclusively use Brause nibs, as I have a heavy hand. For very fine lines, I use an assortment of fine-pointed nibs, I have no favorite and they've been collected from various sources.

Brushes:

Some of my favorites are W&N Cotman line, and Princeton Select. I haven't tried investing in sable brushes yet, and the synthetic brush tips do wear out (bend) easily. For miniature work, I always use round brushes, generally 3/0 down to 12/0. I find the spotters give more control over the longer length bristles with painting things like tiny dots/eye highlights, however, they don't hold much paint and dry very quickly, so I use longer bristle brushes for things like painting fur or lines.

Once the tip begins to give out, the brush is downgraded for use with instacoll. I like to buy very cheap brushes to mix paint, and to load my nib. I usually purchase brushes from Dick Blick.

Sources:

Pergamena Factory
www.pergamena.net

John Neal Bookseller
www.johnnealbooks.com

Gilded Planet
www.gildedplanet.com

Paper & Ink Arts
www.paperinkarts.com

Dick Blick
www.dickblick.com