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MINI-MASTERPIECES Series: WEEKEND DIVERSIONS

PAMELA GRINER LEAVY.

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The tiny portraits inside the silver locket often worn close to people's hearts aren't just treasured memories of loved ones - they're also part of the centuries-old genre of miniature art.

Such art can be seen at the Dunedin Fine Art Center, which is hosting the 30th annual International Miniature Art Show, opening Sunday and continuing through Feb. 13. Presented by the Miniature Art Society of Florida, the show features the work of more than 800 artists around the world, including South Africa, France, Canada, Belgium, England, Australia and Russia.

"The best of the best" is how organizers describe the miniature art on display and for sale, all of it rooted in a craft dating back to the seventh century.

Miniature art is based on the tradition of portrait painting in which people would place tiny paintings of loved ones in locket. During the Elizabethan era, portraits were commissioned by royalty to promote arranged marriages. Locketts often were carried off to war as reminders of loved ones at home.

And centuries later, the miniature art craft has expanded beyond portrait painting into

media including sculpture, in sizes easily accommodated in limited spaces.

"We have grown since then to all subjects - landscapes, marine life, human figures, calligraphy, birds, animals, scrimshaw, still life - every subject imaginable," said Kay Petryszak, vice president of the Miniature Art Society of Florida.

Petryszak, an artist who does miniatures in oils, views the show as a history lesson as well as an art experience.

"We want people to appreciate and enjoy and support this so it will continue to go on," she said. "This is part of our heritage, our history, and we feel strongly that this should continue."

It's a history whose golden age in the United States from 1740 to 1850 almost came to an end in the 19th century with the advent of photography, said David Shankweiler, curator at the Dunedin Fine Art Center.

"Photography was an easier, cheaper way of doing things," Shankweiler said. "But the tradition never disappeared, and the resurgence is because of organizations like the Miniature Art Society of Florida who have for many decades promoted it. Artists who have painted in other scales in the past have found a great deal of appeal in it."

Creating art on a pinhead almost defines the intricate medium.

Miniaturists widely follow a one-sixth guide, creating works that are no larger than one-sixth the subject's natural size. For example, a human head is often painted smaller than 1 1/2 inches in height.

Competition to enter the Dunedin show is tight. Judges reviewed more than 1,100 applicants before narrowing the field to 800. Last year's event disbursed more than \$24,000 in prize money.

Winners of this year's competition have already been chosen, and many will be coming to Dunedin for the show. Area winners include Edward Gazsi of Bayonet Point (honorable mention in birds and animals), Ron Parvu of Tequesta (honorable mention in landscape), Heide Presse of Tampa (third place for still life) and Terry Smith of Land O'Lakes (second place in birds and animals).

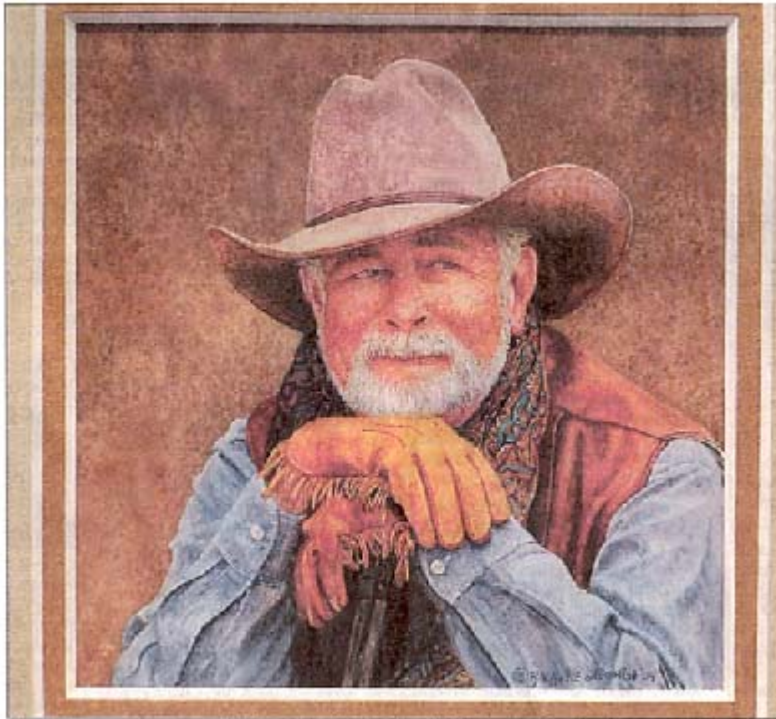
Proceeds from the annual exhibition go to the Miniature Art Society of Florida's scholarship program.

State Rep. Faye Culp and Dunedin Mayor John Doglione plan to participate in the private awards ceremony Sunday morning at Bon Appetit restaurant. Art patrons who visit the center on Sunday's opening day will share space with many of the featured artists, who will be present. Demonstrations in oil, pencil, scrimshaw and fired porcelain will also be offered.

The show in Dunedin stands in good company. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., was the site of an international miniature art show in June, hosted by

17 worldwide miniature art associations.

Petryszak recalls being at the event. "It was wonderful to see all of these miniatures from around the world," she said. "It was an awesome occasion. We all felt very important and wonderful."



An opaque watercolor called *Portrait of a Cowboy* by Rachelle Siegrist of Townsend, Tenn., won Best of Show. Judges don't let just anyone enter. They reviewed more than 1,100 applicants before narrowing the field to 800.