



FINE ART

Big Themes, Tiny Frames: An Art Show Writ Small

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TRANSCRIPT:

SCOTT SIMON, HOST:

An art gallery in Los Angeles opens "The Mini Show" today - teensy, tiny little works made by some very big names. The gallery's nestled in a gritty part of the city in a complex that also offers artists space to live and to work. NPR's Mandalit del Barco takes us there.

MANDALIT DEL BARCO, BYLINE: Western Avenue in East Hollywood is a tangle of screaming sirens and traffic, but step inside the lodge and everything shrinks. On display in the middle of the one-room space is an architectural model.

ALICE LODGE: This is the exact replica of 1 to 10 of this space.

DEL BARCO: Well, it looks exactly like where we're standing.

LODGE: It basically is a dollhouse, I think would be the best way to describe it.

DEL BARCO: Owner Alice Lodge and I tower over the wooden scale model of her gallery, The Lodge. Artist Rob Reynolds also hovers in awe over every detail from the doorbell to the drainpipes.

ROB REYNOLDS: You've even got the wainscoting.

LODGE: Yeah.

REYNOLDS: It's perfect.

DEL BARCO: On the walls of the gallery replica hang original paintings, most just an inch-and-a-half by 2 inches. Curator Clare Crespo takes out a magnifying glass she commissioned for the show's opening reception.

CLARE CRESPO: Look at that. You can just get in there and see the tiny little brushes that were used. I mean, look at that.

DEL BARCO: Rob Reynolds contributed two tiny paintings of shipwrecks and a teeny piece of marble shaped as an iceberg. His wife, filmmaker Mary Wigmore, created an itsy bitsy portrait of a coyote. There are diminutive works by renowned painter Ed Ruscha. Crespo and I look at petite protest signs with slogans constructed by multimedia artist, Miranda July.

No tiny nukes. No tiny blood for tiny oil. We are the tiny 99 percent (laughter).

CRESPO: Votes for tiny women. Close tiny Guantanamo.

DEL BARCO: "The Mini Show" was Crespo's idea. It follows her lifelong fascination of small things considered. She's about 5 feet tall, drives a VW bug and collects tiny objects. On a kid's cooking show she created, Crespo played a pint-sized cook living inside a mouse hole. And for years, she hosted a monthly club where she and her friends made shoebox sized dioramas. Crespo says that she's enchanted by the magic of tiny worlds.

CRESPO: Because it's small, it's vulnerable. You want to take care of it. You want to put it in your mouth. You want to put in your pocket. You want to put in your heart.

DEL BARCO: Alice Lodge says "The Mini Show" is a big deal for The Lodge, which she opened in January.

LODGE: It's just incredibly delightful because it's so small. But it was also fascinating to work in on such a small scale, but also then with large egos of artists.

DEL BARCO: Lodge says there was careful consideration how and where to install each artwork. The former Hollywood set designer lives in a loft space connected to her gallery. During openings, she invites visitors to hang out in her living space and in the courtyard that's part of this small artist complex, started in the 1960s. Ed Ruscha made many of his famous paintings here and still owns the quaint buildings. His former studio assistant, Shane Guffogg, lives and works here.

(SOUNDBITE OF BEETHOVEN SONG, "MOONLIGHT SONATA")

DEL BARCO: Inside his studio, Guffogg listens to Beethoven while painting colorful calligraphic works. He recently had a show of his enormous 17 feet by 9 feet paintings at the Imperial Academy of Art Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia. He has a tiny 2-by-2-inch painting in "The Mini Show."

SHANE GUFFOGG: I had to get out some small brushes for that, the smallest ones I could find. And I love the idea of the intimacy of the space, of the miniature gallery, you know, and it changes our perspective on things. And everything now is so quick, we don't have time to process information, so this forces us to slow down a little bit, take notice, really look.

DEL BARCO: "The Mini Show" at the Lodge Gallery in Los Angeles opens for just a little bit this afternoon and runs for three weeks. Mandalit del Barco, NPR News.