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Artist Dina Brodsky with her painting materials at her home in Long Island City in Queens, New York, on Jan. 22, 2018. (Benjamin Chasteen/The Epoch Times)

## ARTS & CULTURE

# The Captivating Journey of Dina Brodsky's Miniature Paintings

BY MILENE FERNANDEZ

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NEW YORK—She's on an endless search, along an endless road. She returns to it again and again, each time resuming her journey at a different spot on the map. It may seem like an escape from convention, but for Dina Brodsky, painter of miniatures, such wandering is what feeds her creative process.

"I don't have very many new ideas [for new bodies of work]. I have one idea every year or two, and all of the ideas that I've had have been [when I'm] alone on a bicycle in a different country," she said at her home in Long Island City, with a spectacular waterfront view of Manhattan.

Sitting on the corner of her couch, Brodsky painted a bird on a little piece of watercolor paper. Birds are good for transitions from one project to the next. "Every time I don't know what I am doing, I paint a bunch of birds," she said. "It's also something I can do during a toddler nap."



Dina Brodsky paints a bird, at her home on Jan. 22, 2018. (Benjamin Chasteen/The Epoch Times)



Dina Brodsky holds one of her sketchbooks, at her home on Jan. 22, 2018. (Benjamin Chasteen/The Epoch Times)

She hasn't traveled much since the birth of her 2-year-old son. But she has accumulated plenty of memories, sketchbook drawings, and some photos from her travels to create a body of work for the gallery exhibitions she has almost every year. Between shows, she sells her work directly to clients and collectors as well as prints of her paintings online. She also co-curates gallery exhibitions, showcasing contemporary realist art, so far at three galleries in Manhattan's Lower East Side, also in the Upper West Side, in Chelsea, and one in Denver, Colorado.



"Cycling Guide to Lilliput #76," 2017, by Dina Brodsky. Oil on copper. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

attention. Despite their size, they are surprisingly powerful. The longer you look at them, the further they transport you to the resting spots along her journey—roadside views, cityscapes, birds and trees, and pastoral and solitary scenes.

She recently finished the second part of her series "Cycling Guide to Lilliput" and shipped more than 40 circular paintings to the Pontone Gallery in London. Her solo exhibition there runs from Feb. 2 to March 4, 2018.

Ranging in size from two to five inches in diameter, her paintings feel like tiny portals into the moments and places that captivated her



"Cycling Guide to Lilliput #98," 2017, by Dina Brodsky. Oil on copper. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)



"Tree No. 102" by Dina Brodsky. Pen and ink on paper. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

simply said, "I was always like this."

When she was a child, her mother introduced her to one of her Bohemian artist friends who had a small art school. "He gave me this huge easel and this huge piece of paper, and I drew something this small in the corner," Brodsky said, as she gestured with her thumb and index finger the length of an inch. She made several unsuccessful attempts at trying to draw bigger. "He told my mom he was incapable of teaching me," she said.

## A Wanderer's Passion

Born in Minsk, Belarus, in 1981, Brodsky left the Soviet Union shortly before the fall of the Iron Curtain, when she was 8 years old. The family lived temporarily in various European cities, including Vienna and Rome. As refugees, they went through the trying process of securing their immigration

documents, before eventually arriving in Boston in 1991. Although it was probably a

Some are reminiscent of the vast Hudson River School landscape paintings, but they can be held in the palm of your hand. She's inspired by the Northern Renaissance school, artists like the van Eyck brothers (Jan, Hubert, and Lambert), Hans Holbein the Younger, Pieter Bruegel, and more recently 17th-century Dutch landscape painters.

Her series of pen-and-ink drawings of trees, in gorgeous detail, titled "The Secret Life of Trees," was drawn mostly from life but also from photographs. The ancient bark and leafless branches of her trees reveal a tender sense of awe at the beauty of nature. She also created a series of abandoned buildings on plexiglass, which give a slightly foreboding sense of a forgotten presence and past time.

Now she paints on copper, which is one of the most stable surfaces for oil painting, and it

also allows for a beautiful luminosity to come through the paint layers.

In answer to why she paints so small, she



Dina Brodsky works on an oil painting on copper (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

nerve-racking process for her parents, Brodsky keeps fond memories of that time. “As a kid it was fantastic, probably the best time of my childhood,” she said.



“Cycling Guide to Lilliput #75,” 2017, by Dina Brodsky. Oil on copper. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

That experience perhaps sparked her passion for traveling. At age 17, she already wanted to hitchhike across Europe, but her parents urged her to go to college first. While taking her first art class at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst and working on a self-portrait in charcoal, she decided to become an artist. “Within a week [into the class], I knew this is what I want to do every single day for the rest of my life,” she said. “I still ended up hitchhiking around Europe.”

At 19, she went to Amsterdam on a study abroad program that was not a good fit. “I wanted to learn how to paint like Rembrandt, but I was in a place that produced Mondrian,” she said. Since she lived as a squatter and didn’t have heating, she stayed warm by frequently visiting museums—all the while drawing in her sketchbook. Six months later, she trekked around Europe by train and occasionally hitchhiked. On her subsequent trips to Europe, Iceland, and India, she toured on her bike and had a staple diet of kebabs and baguettes with Nutella.



“Cycling Guide to Lilliput #85,” 2017, by Dina Brodsky. Oil on copper. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

“I slept on park benches and wrote many little poems, and swore I would come back to some of these places. Most of them I’ve never actually come back to; a few I did. I looked forward to some glorious future when I would have enough money to stay in a hostel and have a shower,” she said. “Once I cleaned rooms in a

hotel called ‘Get Lucky,’ which is exactly what it sounded like.”

When she returned to the United States, she could not find any stable work in Boston. “Everything seemed so horrible. All my options were so limited.” But in



"Cycling Guide to Lilliput #53," 2017, by Dina Brodsky. Oil on copper. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

Manhattan. And she had enough money to travel back several times to Europe on her adventures, living on her own terms.

At some point, when she was cycling in the rain in a town called Kalmar in Sweden, she had an epiphany.

I was completely soaked, and I stopped by a coffee shop that had terrible coffee. All coffee shops in Sweden were amazing except this one. This one had horrible music playing, really loudly, but you could get infinite coffee refills. It was 6 in the evening, and I kept drinking coffee because it was a hot drink and I was so cold. I was writing a lot, and I had a thought." She said, almost in a whisper, "I no longer need to be free." She was 26 years old at that time.

"There's this Russian expression: 'It's more

"Hummingbird #155 by Dina Brodsky (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

New York she worked as a teacher, jewelry maker, antique enamel restorer, and as studio assistant for some time.

## Forging Her Path

She recalled the first time she sold her series of paintings at the age of 20. Carrying her little portfolio, she walked into several galleries along Newbury Street in Boston, asking the gallerists if they would be interested in new artists, until one gallery finally agreed to display her work.

"I remember the gallerist called me and said 'your painting sold.' I was so excited. It sold for \$600 and he gave me a check for \$300. It was much more money than I made waitressing for a week or whatever," she said.

She eventually sold enough paintings to fund her first year of graduate school at the New York Academy of Art in



important to be needed than to be free,” she said. Up until that point, she said, she felt very self-absorbed and didn’t think much about how her actions could hurt other people. “I stopped caring as much about being a famous artist, but I do want to be a good person, and I want to try to help people ... I want to do the right thing.”



Dina Brodsky at her home in Long Island City in Queens, New York on Jan. 22, 2018 (Benjamin Chasteen/The Epoch Times)

a former marriage. “This is a time in my life when not many things get done for myself, and that is OK because I had a lot of time to do things for myself,” she said.

She’s happy painting at home. “My studio is the corner of that couch. Before I got married, it was the corner of a much smaller couch. I can’t imagine what I would do if I had more space.”

“Cycling Guide to Lilliput #88,” 2017, by Dina Brodsky. Oil on copper. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)

Despite having to work on the side during most of her career up until recent years, Brodsky feels that life has been very kind to her. She was consistently selling her paintings from a young age, except during the years following the financial crisis of 2008. In retrospect, that event spurred her to become more independent. She learned to hustle and not rely so much on galleries. It also pushed her to develop her artistic vision further.

“I had spent so long figuring out how to paint things that I almost lost track of what I was painting. And then at some point, I told myself, ‘Alright, I know how to paint an onion or an apple; what do I actually want to paint?’” She went on to make a lot of what she called goofy paintings and fantasized about painting just like a manuscript illuminator from the 15th century. Eventually she found her compass again, and she continues to develop her style.

Now she dedicates much of her time to taking care of her son and spending time with her husband and his two children from



“What I could use is 800 years, more time for everything: to paint more paintings, bicycle around more countries, have more kids, and curate more shows,” Brodsky said.



Dina Brodsky paints in the corner of her couch at home in Long Island City in Queens, New York on Jan. 22, 2018 (Benjamin Chasteen/The Epoch Times)



Two miniature paintings by Dina Brodsky. (Courtesy of Dina Brodsky)