

Cabaret Mechanical Marvel

Large Print Guide

**Please leave in the gallery for other
visitors to use.**

Panel by the entrance

CABARET MECHANICAL THEATRE

This exhibition celebrates the fascinating world of automata (mechanical sculpture) and showcases exhibits from some of the finest contemporary automata makers.

Marvel at these colourful, humorous and thought-provoking masterpieces, which come to life at the push of a button. You can also learn more about the artists who made them, and the revival of this inspiring art form. The automata are on tour from Cabaret Mechanical Theatre whose exhibits have recently been enjoyed in New Zealand, Germany and the USA, with the collections being seen by over ten million people worldwide over the past 30 years.

Look out for these automata in the exhibition:

LION TAMER by Ron Fuller

This colourful automata by British toy maker Ron Fuller was inspired by early Circus posters from the 1850's. The brave lion tamer puts his head in the lion's mouth, watch to see if he is quick enough to avoid the lion's teeth.

BABA YAGA'S HOUSE by Keith Newstead

Artist Keith Newstead brings an enchanting fairytale to life. 'Baba Yaga' is a sometimes-friendly witch from Slavic folklore. Her house walks on chicken legs, and

she was said to hide inside a barrel and entice children with apples.

THE BARECATS by Paul Spooner

'Barecat' is an anagram of 'Cabaret' and this piece was designed by Paul Spooner in the early 1980's. Who is winding-up whom? When the small cat points the big cat looks up. Look at the mechanisms and try to work out how it works.

Labels & panels in cases by the entrance

Case one

The Salaman Collection

In 1946, when visiting his father and friends in their workshops at Barley in Hertfordshire, Raphael Salaman realized that two wars, the depression, and the internal combustion engine had virtually wiped out their trades, although some of the old men lingered on doing repairs for a few customers.

Inspired by a desire to protect the knowledge being lost he set out to collect every tool of at least the major trades and to discover how they were used.

In the 1970s Salaman donated part of his collection of tools to St Albans Museums. This collection comprises of thousands of tools from the tiny watchmaker's pin holder to huge saws used in saw pits.

The collection was displayed in a special gallery in the Museum of St Albans at first but since then it has been displayed in exhibitions, used by Product Design students at the University of Hertfordshire for research and even taken out to Homebase for today's DIY enthusiasts to discover some of the tools of the past.

Images:

1.1 Old John Lock, an 80 year old wheelwright from Hawksbridge, Exmoor. (Salaman Collection, St Albans Museums)

1.2 A display of Clockbuilders tools in the Museum of St Albans (Salaman Collection, St Albans Museums)

1.3 A group of moulding planes from the Salaman collection showing stamps from all of their previous owners (Salaman Collection, St Albans Museums)

Labels:

Iron lantern-headed brace

This brace was made by a smith and would have been used to turn square-tapered bits.

Pincer spanner

Pincer tools are used where additional mechanical strength is needed to cut, pinch or pull something. They work as levers to concentrate force.

Wheelwrights Traveler

A Traveler was used by wheelwrights to measure the circumference of a wheel they were replacing. This one is made of elm.

Mallet

This mallet with a cylindrical head has a replacement handle made of pine. Many tools in the Salaman collection have been repaired and adapted by their owners.

Axle cap spanner

Hammer

Mystery tool

Case two

	Smoothing plane	Carpenter's plane
	Carpenter's smoothing planes	Smoothing plane
Plane with parallel blades Wheelwright smoothing plane	Rebate plane	Carpenters plane

Case three

The Plane

In his *Dictionary of Woodworking Tools* Raphael Salaman allows nearly 100 pages for the Plane and he starts their entry with this passage:

“The invention of the Plane was the most important advance in the history of woodworking tools in the last two thousand years and it appears to have taken place during the Roman era since no Planes have been found among Greek or Egyptian remains.

The essential feature of a Plane is the built-in control provided by the sole which allows the worker to employ his full strength simply as a driving force.

The various tasks of which Planes are capable can be performed by simple edge tools, i.e. a Chisel, but so much more skill and sheer physical effort are required to keep the edge of a Chisel on course, and to prevent it from ‘digging in’, that many wood-working operations which we take for granted would be impossibly laborious without Planes. A worker with the right Plane for a particular task has only to concentrate on holding it in the correct attitude in contact with the workpiece, and he can then push away freely until the task is completed.”

Images:

2.1 A Cooper at work using a Coopers Sun Plane (Salaman Collection, St Albans Museums)

2.2 Mr Spary, a carpenter from Markyate, in his workshop in 1959 (Salaman Collection, St Albans Museums)

2.3 Staff at Homebase with the Salaman Collection as part of artist Katy Gillam Hull's Rescued Retained Revered project in 2016 (St Albans Museums)

Labels:

Dictionary of Woodworking Tools by R.A. Salaman

Thumb plane

The smallest plane in St Albans Museums collections. This would have been used for making small, delicate objects like toys or musical instruments.

Large plane and giant plane

The smaller of these planes is a metre long and the longer is 1.83m, or 6 feet, long. You can see that the giant plane had two handles originally as it would have taken two people to use because of the weight and length.

Case four

Moulding Plane	Sash Fillister planes	
Stanley Universal Plane	Moulding planes	Sash Fillister planes A sash fillister plane is an old plane designed for rebate / rabbet work on a sash window.
Coachbuilder's combined tongue and groove plane	Wheelwright moulding planes with adjustable bases	Spokeshave or plane

Case five

Tools belonging to Mr A.J. Hardy, Beech Road, St Albans

- Box containing three Jewel setting rubbers for setting jewels in a watch mechanism
- Watchmaker's oil pot
- Watchmaker's polishing stake

Tools belonging to Mr Jeffs of Harpenden

Mr Jeffs was a Greengrocer when Salaman met him in 1950 but he had previously been a clockmaker.

- Watchmaker's eyeglass
- Polishing block for Jewellers rouge, metal lidded box
- Polishing block for Jewellers rouge, metal lidded box
- Watch brush

Case six

Watchmaker's Tools

One of the crafts collected by Salaman was that of watchmaking. Historically, in England, watchmakers would have to undergo a seven-year apprenticeship and then join a guild, such as the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers in London, before selling their first watch. Today most watches are made in factories but individual watchmakers are still needed to do repairs and they still use many of the same tools.

The tools on display here come from three craftsmen. The smaller collections below are from local makers Mr Jeffs (Harpenden) and Mr A.J. Hardy (Beech Road).

The larger collection in the case to the right are tools from Alfred William Curzon a Watchmaker from London. Curzon was born in Tottenham in 1864 and his father was a watchmaker and an escapement maker (an escapement is a mechanical link in a watch or clock. Curzon had a workshop and shop at 312 St John Street, Clerkenwell until the 1930s.

Images:

3.1 A page from the Twentieth Century catalogue for Watchmakers, Jewellers and Kindred Trades (St Albans Museums)

3.2 The Watchmaker - Maja Stosic(photographer)

3.3 A Modern Watchmaker (Creator- Christopher Jue
Credit- Getty Images for Glashuette)

Labels:

A W Curzon, watchmaker

In 1951 Salaman collected the tools of A W Curzon a watchmaker who had a workshop at 312 St John Street Clerkenwell. Alfred William Curzon was born in Tottenham and his father had been an escapement and watchmaker as well.

Panel on the left of the ‘Winter’ flying birds automata, wall opposite the gallery entrance

History of Cabaret Mechanical Theatre

In the late 1970's interest in automata was revived when Sue Jackson opened Cabaret Mechanical Theatre (CMT) in Falmouth, Cornwall. A local group of artists including Ron Fuller, Paul Spooner and Peter Markey supplied automata for Sue's shop, and Tim Hunkin soon became involved, making larger arcade style amusement machines when Cabaret moved to Covent Garden in 1984. Since leaving Covent Garden in 2000, CMT have toured extensively internationally, adding to their extensive collection of contemporary automata, with artists Keith Newstead, Carlos Zapata, Pierre Mayer and John Lumbus joining the group during the 1990's. Tim Hunkin went on to open his own popular amusement arcade on Southwold Pier after CMT closed in Covent Garden. Automata making has now become a popular pursuit and is widely taught in schools and colleges.

Images:

5.1 Guitar Player and Dancer by Peter Markey

5.2 Paul Spooner sketchbook

5.3 Paul Spooner and Sue Jackson Cabaret, Falmouth 1983

- 5.4** Left: Piano Player by Peter Markey
- 5.5** Cabaret Mechanical Theatre Covent Garden, 1990
- 5.6** Three Physical Jerks by Paul Spooner
- 5.7** Cabaret, Falmouth, 1984
- 5.8** Shanghai Science Museum – Spaghetti Eater by Paul Spooner

Panel on the right to the 'Flight From Egypt' automata

HISTORY OF AUTOMATA

Humans have had the desire to create versions of themselves since ancient times. Pre-historic cave paintings and primitive clay figures were the earliest examples. Around 2000BC small figurines with moveable limbs were found in Egyptian tombs, some of which used the action of the lever to make them perform. Jackal masks with articulated bottom jaws and terracotta doves with detachable wings – these are among the first examples of automata. More elaborate machines followed, often encouraged by royal patrons, such as the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus (c. 835) whose throne was flanked by mechanical roaring lions and birds that sang in trees of gold. Clockwork figures were used in churches from around 1480, and many city clocks, particularly in Germany and Switzerland featured automata. The Golden Age of automata came in the 1700's including the life-like machines of Jacquet-Droz (Neuchatel, Switzerland) and the Silver Swan of John Joseph Merlin. (Bowes Museum, Co. Durham). By 1820 English and Swiss mechanics had refined their highly complex automata, into writers, musicians and exquisite singing birds. These marvels were expensive and made for exhibition and as gifts for the nobility. By the 1830's in the narrow alleys of the Marais district of Paris artisans were developing ingenious ways of bringing automata into the home. They perfected

batch production of the singing birds, Circus and Music Hall celebrities and animated them in automata form so that by 1844, when Robert-Houdin opened his Soiree Fantastiques, a mix of magic and automata, there was huge public interest. Automata reflected the artistic and cultural atmosphere of the time and now had the ability to make every owner a Showmen in their own homes. With automata featuring in regular Trade Exhibitions throughout the second half of the 19th century, exports were huge and during the 1889 Paris Exhibition one American diplomat noted that fine French automata were now to be found in all the large department stores in America. By 1920 the dominance of French automata across the world had finished, ended in part by the advent of the electric motor. Although the popularity of automata waned in the 20th century, the enchanting machines of Rowland Emmet brought mechanical delight to post-war Britain, and sea-side style 'end of the pier' machines such as the laughing sailor, and coin-operated graveyard tableaux.

Images:

6.1 Silver Swan by John Joseph Merlin, 1773

6.2 Moon Dandy Man 'Fin de Siecle' 1890

Panel behind 'Manet's Olympia' automata

CREATIVE PROCESS: PAUL SPOONER

'I make machines about things I find funny or absurd, hoping that others will feel the same. Even if I am a little annoyed when I start making something, the feeling has usually worn off by the time I've finished. Better for me to start with an idea that strikes me as wonderfully funny, hoping that some vestige of that survives the making process.'

Images:

7.1 Paul Spooner's studio

7.2 & 7.3 Paul Spooner's sketchbooks

7.4 Paul Spooner sitting in his studio in front of his automata

Cases at the back of the gallery displaying objects from Cabaret Mechanical Theatre

Case one

AUTOMATA MAKERS FEATURED IN THIS EXHIBITION

PAUL SPOONER

(b.1948)

In 1974 Paul moved to Stithians, Cornwall. He made weaving looms for his wife Sue, but mainly worked as a van driver. It wasn't until 1981 that he made his first edition of automata featuring the Egyptian Jackalheaded God, Anubis.

RON FULLER

(1936–2017)

Ron Fuller must have been born a maker. His father was a wheelwright in Liskeard, Cornwall and his mother worked as a seamstress. So from an early age Ron worked in his father's workshop shed and as a child he would take apart radios to see how they worked. After graduating from the Royal College, Ron embarked on a lifetime of making beautiful wooden toys and automata.

KEITH NEWSTEAD

(b.1956)

Keith counts his childhood memories of the machines

in the Penny Arcade at Southend, as being one of the most important influences on his work. When he saw a TV film on David Secrett (Automata Maker) he was inspired to start making his own machines.

PETER MARKEY

(1930–2016)

Peter studied painting at Swansea Art College and taught art for 25 years in secondary schools. He left teaching in 1980 and began making simple wooden automata after someone innocently suggested that he try making his footballer sculptures move. This coincided with the opening of Cabaret in Falmouth where he lived.

CARLOS ZAPATA

(b.1963)

Colombian artist Carlos Zapata started making automata in 1998 inspired by a visit to Cabaret Mechanical Theatre in Covent Garden. He makes both mechanical and non-mechanical sculptures, and his work is widely exhibited in the USA.

Labels:

Angry Couple

Sue Stolpe

1991

The lady in the red dress mimes something operatic, and the man sticks his fingers in his ears. Original price £42.50 as sold at Cabaret in Covent Garden.

Heart-o-Matic

Will Jackson

1993

When opened cupid's arrow flew out, with a message wrapped around it. Arrow is missing in action. These were sold in Cabaret in Covent Garden.

'Cabaret Theatre' Card

Francis Hewlett

1981

This is a New Year's Card made by artist Francis Hewlett whose work was sold at Cabaret in Falmouth. This card is addressed to Sue Jackson (1936-2016), Founder of Cabaret Mechanical Theatre.

Submarine

Ron Fuller

1978

Toy-maker Ron Fuller supplied a variety of toys for Cabaret in Falmouth. This submarine sold for £3.25, alongside sand-toys, hens laying wooden eggs, and tap-dancing ladies.

Case two

1. Ceramic Fox

Peter Markey

1980

Peter Markey's wife Beryl worked as a potter, and Peter was inspired to create small ceramic animals in her pottery studio. These were sold in Cabaret, Falmouth in the early 1980's.

2. Peacock

Peter Markey

1998

This was a birthday present from Peter Markey to Sue Jackson. Peter loved to create simple designs with few parts, and in his later years preferred natural wood to painted pieces. The feathers of the tail can be moved to open and close.

3. 'Maggie's Bird'

Maggie Wareham

c. 1981

A decorated ceramic bird. This was one of the first pieces sold at Cabaret in Covent Garden. Artist Maggie

Wareham also made larger highly decorative moving sculptures for Heal's store in London and private collectors.

4. Sea Scene

Peter Markey

1980

Peter made many of these static scenes, before going on to create automata. This piece also appeared as paper cut-out kit for 60p at Cabaret in Falmouth.

5. Be Prepared

Paul Spooner

1994

This Paul Spooner design was made by Matt Smith and sold for £21.50 in Cabaret, Covent Garden. Paul's description reads 'At first sight it's just a piece of asparagus poking out of the sand, but press the knob and hey presto, it's a boy scout raring to do his good deed for the day'.

6. Pussy in Well (2)

Paul Spooner

1994

This Paul Spooner design was made by Matt Smith and sold for £19.50 in Cabaret, Covent Garden. Paul's description reads 'A little pussy wobbles springily in a wooden box to celebrate 1994: Not the year of the cat.'

7. Strawberry Fool

Paul Spooner

1996

This piece made by Matt Smith Anubis dressed rather foolishly in a strawberry-like dress.

'It's another of those sweet little things which balance on a clock spring and wobble if prompted'.

Sold in Cabaret, Covent Garden for £26.50.

8. Bombe d'Amour

Matt Smith

c. 1999

This Paul Spooner design was made by Matt Smith and in Cabaret, Covent Garden. Lift the wooden panel, and small wooden hearts are ejected.

9. Sealed Heart

Paul Spooner

This Paul Spooner design was made by Matt Smith and sold for £27.50 in Cabaret, Covent Garden. 'Break the seal, or better, give it to a loved one to break, lift lid and reveal a vibrating heart and the message: My heart trembles on the brink of explosion. PS: hope you don't mind.'

Panel left to the display cases at the back of the gallery

CABARET MECHANICAL THEATRE IN FALMOUTH

Cabaret Mechanical Theatre started life in 1979 as a one room, first-floor crafts shop on the High Street in Falmouth, Cornwall. Sue Jackson, its creator simply named it 'Cabaret,' after the Liza Minelli film. She sold a vast range of locally made delights (both in the shop and by mail order, including colourful knitted jumpers (new designs every Friday), ceramics, traditional wooden toys, and harlequin merchandise, and she boasted that the merchandise at Cabaret couldn't be purchased anywhere else.

Image:

8.1 Interior views of the original shop in Falmouth

Panel right to the display cases at the back of the gallery

CABARET MECHANICAL THEATRE IN COVENT GARDEN

In 1984, five years after opening a small crafts shop in Cornwall, called simply 'Cabaret', Sue Jackson moved Cabaret Mechanical Theatre to London's Covent Garden. The new location was in the vaults of the former fruit and vegetable market and the interior was dark and cave-like.

Sue painted all the walls black, and this worked well with the brightly lit automata.

The small retail area of the new venue had opened in December 1984, and by March 1985 the relocated permanent exhibition, with 52 motorised automata, was ready to receive its first intrigued visitors.

Cabaret Mechanical Theatre would remain in Covent Garden until 2000, and during the first years it became cult destination for those in the know, and it was always difficult to explain exactly what it was without seeing it first-hand.

Images:

9.1 'Junkas Giles Agriplane' by Keith Newstead and 'Barman' by Tim Hunkin in London's Covent Garden

9.2 Sarah Alexander and Sue Jackson

Panel to the right of the 'Lion Tamer' automata

CREATIVE PROCESS: KEITH NEWSTEAD

'I find the mixture of art, craft, graphics and movement very exciting and I love to experiment with new styles and materials and to find new ways of creating movement. I never aim my work at a particular age group, and it makes me happy that both children and adults enjoy my work.'

Images:

- 10.1** Keith Newstead working on automata in his studio
- 10.2** Sketches of automata by Keith Newstead

Panel behind 'Baba Yaga's House'

BABA YAGA'S HOUSE BY KEITH NEWSTEAD

Keith Newstead was inspired to make this fairy tale themed automata as it featured a house that could walk around on mechanical chicken's legs. The playful and colourful style of the piece belies the slightly menacing undertones as the witch tries to capture the young child.

Images:

11.1 Sketch of Baba Yaga's House

11. 2 & 11.3 Photos of Baba Yaga's House automata