

Magic Worlds

V&A Museum of Childhood

8 October 2011 – 4 March 2012



This autumn, the V&A Museum of Childhood will explore *Magic Worlds*. The exhibition will delve into the captivating world of magic, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the imaginary and fantastical realms of witches, wizards, fairies, elves, dragons, magicians and illusionists. On display will be costumes, tricks, paintings, ceramics, beautifully illustrated books and posters, games, optical toys and dramatic puppets.

Among the 200 objects on display will be Sooty and his wand, the Cottingley fairy photographs, Derren Brown's Lottery Balls and the bullet catching plate used by magician Chung Ling Soo (1861-1918).

This exhibition will look at three different aspects of magic that permeate childhood and beyond: Fantasy, Illusion and Enchantment. It will explore the origins and history of magic and will show how magical themes have influenced artists and writers in creating fantasy realms over the centuries.

Dipping into the magic worlds of Harry Potter, Cinderella, the Lord of the Rings, Aladdin and more, **Fantasy** will look at the many different interpretations of old and new magical tales.



For hundreds of years, magic and fantasy worlds have featured heavily in literature, particularly in children's books and stories. Fairy and folk tales from the traditional oral tradition were collected and written down most famously by writers such as Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault. Original fantasy writing began in the mid-nineteenth century and since then there has been a steady increase in the production of this genre.

There are three major types of magical worlds in literature: those that run alongside the real world such as the ones written about by J K Rowling; those into which ordinary children are thrust, such as Narnia and Never Never Land; and those that are purely fantasy, for example JRR Tolkien's Middle Earth. The Fantasy section will feature books, illustrations, games and toys representing many aspects of fantasy.

Illusion – From the simplicity of the cup and ball trick to modern illusion on a grand scale, adults and children alike have always been in awe of magic and its practitioners.

There has been a long and enduring fascination with optical toys and illusions such as magic lanterns and mechanisms for tricking the eye into seeing and believing the appearance of movement. For many people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these optical illusions were considered to be true magic. Using the museum's collection of optical toys the Illusion section examines the fascination of magic and illusion during the last 200 years.

The nineteenth century, particularly in Britain, saw the rise of the professional magician. Magicians and illusionists developed from the humble beginnings of fairground tricksters to celebrated performers at the best theatres in town. The exhibition will explore famous illusions and show an array of original posters. The story of magicians will be brought right up to date with a look at modern magic and the role of the Magic Circle.



Having seen adult performances of “real magic”, children were keen to copy this in play. Magic sets and conjuring tricks became available as toys and children could dress up and perform. Children have been given magic and conjuring sets as presents for over 100 years and Illusion will present a range of these and examine the classic tricks still employed and enjoyed by children today.

Enchantment Do you believe in fairies? Many people did, and some still do! Enchantment examines the impact of fairies and other fantastical creatures on both the artistic and the ordinary world.



Wizards, witches and fairies have always fascinated writers, artists and illustrators. Representations of the fairy world were popular subjects particularly during the Victorian period. This section includes stunning paintings, drawings and lustreware ceramics from the V&A's collection alongside Mabel Lucie Atwell childrens' bowls, Nordic dragons and a 1920s fairy costume.

The public was fascinated with the supposedly real photographs of the Cottingley fairies taken by Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths in Northern England in 1917 and 1920. This story will be examined and illustrated with the amazing images of the girls with their magical companions.



The exhibition is curated by Catherine Howell and designed by Pippa Nissen Studio.

Notes to Editors

The exhibition runs from Saturday 8 October 2011 to Friday 4 May 2012. Entry to the exhibition and the Museum is FREE.

The V&A Museum of Childhood aims to encourage everyone to explore the themes of childhood past and present and develop an appreciation of creative design through its inspirational collections and programmes. The Museum is part of the V&A, housing the national childhood collection. The galleries are designed to show the collections in a way which is accessible to adults and children of all ages.

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA. Nearest tube: Bethnal Green. Open daily: 10.00 – 17.45, last admission 17.30. Switchboard: 020 8983 5200
www.museumofchildhood.org.uk

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