



press release

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World's Largest Collection of Paper Peepshows Acquired for the Nation and Allocated to V&A

The world's largest and most comprehensive collection of paper peepshows has been donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) under the Cultural Gifts Scheme. The Scheme was introduced by the Government in 2013 as a major initiative to encourage life-time giving to UK public collections. This is the first gift under the scheme to be allocated to the V&A.

Paper peepshows resemble a pocket-sized stage set, complete with backdrop and paper cut-out scenes, which expand to create an illusion of depth. The gift of over 360 paper peepshows, along with other optical wonders, spans nearly 300 years and 12 different countries. The collection was formed over 30 years by Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner and is now part of the V&A's research collection, soon to be accessible in the reading rooms of the National Art Library.

Covering a wide range of subjects, the peepshows allow viewers the chance to join a vibrant masquerade, have a peek inside the Thames Tunnel or to follow Alice down the rabbit hole. Others commemorate historic events, such as the coronation of Queen Victoria or Napoleon's invasion of Moscow in 1812. They come in many shapes and sizes and are printed or handmade. Some are no larger than a matchbox, while others expand to over two metres in length. First engineered in the 1820s from paper and cloth, peepshows became an inexpensive pastime for adults and children. Most commonly sold as souvenirs, they offered a glimpse into a choice of vistas, celebrating particular events, famous places or engineering feats.

Nearly two hundred years since their invention, paper peepshows continue to delight viewers with their ingenuity and visually arresting scenes.

Culture and Digital Minister Matt Hancock said: "This rare and comprehensive collection highlights a historical form of entertainment that very few people will have seen before. It's wonderful news that thanks to the Cultural Gifts Scheme this collection will now be enjoyed by the wider public for years to come."

Dr Catherine Yvard, Special Collections Curator at the National Art Library, V&A, said: "This collection is a real treasure trove and makes a wonderful addition to our holdings, which focus particularly on the art of the book. Peeping into one of these tunnel-books is like stepping into another world, travelling through time and space. In an instant you can join Napoleon on the Island of St Helena or a rowdy masquerade on London's Haymarket. Peepshows were 19th century virtual reality. They offer wonderful insights into social history. Considering that most of them would have been made quite cheaply, it is a miracle that so many have survived."

Edward Harley, Chairman, Acceptance in Lieu Panel, said: "The acquisition of this important and enchanting material highlights the diverse range of objects accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme. The collection provides a rare and exciting opportunity for an under-represented area in visual culture to be understood, studied and enjoyed in the public domain."

Mr and Mrs Gestetner said: "We are thrilled that, through the Cultural Gifts Scheme, our collection charting the origin of the paper peepshow from the 1820s to the present day, which has given us immense pleasure over the years, will now join the V&A's collections where it can be enjoyed by many others and used for study purposes."

Highlights from the collection include:

- **Oldest paper peepshow in the collection:** *Teleorama No. 1*, by H. F. Müller, c.1824-25. Made in Austria, this peepshow presents an idyllic garden leading to a large country house.
- **Smallest:** *L'Onomastico*, c.1900. This Italian peepshow is the size of a small matchbox, but expands to nearly 20cm long, revealing a lively street party.
- **Most popular subjects:** The Thames Tunnel and the Crystal Palace are each represented in over 60 examples within the collection, each slightly different from the other.
- **Longest:** A handmade peepshow picturing riflemen on manoeuvre c.1910 expands to over two metres in length.
- **Most unique:** A view from L'Angostura de Paine in Chile was probably hand-made by the British writer Maria Graham c.1835 when she travelled in Latin America.
- **Oldest item in the collection:** A British boîte d'optique c.1740, one of the precursors of the peepshow, consists of a mahogany box with a lens to view prints through.

The collection will soon be available to search online on the [National Art Library Catalogue](#) and on '[V&A Search the Collections](#)'. Anyone wishing to access the peepshows can view them by appointment at the V&A's [National Art Library](#).

This extensive collection is a well-documented resource, as a full illustrated catalogue was published in 2015 by the late Ralph Hyde (R. Hyde, [Paper Peepshows: the Jacqueline & Jonathan Gestetner Collection](#), Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2015).

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Notes to editors

The acceptance of these two collections will generate a tax reduction of £294,600.

About the Cultural Gifts Scheme

The Cultural Gifts Scheme was launched by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport in March 2013 as an important element of its expanding programme to encourage philanthropy for the arts. The Acceptance in Lieu Panel, chaired by Edward Harley, advises Ministers on all objects offered under the Cultural Gifts Scheme. The Scheme is administered by Arts Council England and enables UK taxpayers to donate important objects to the nation during their lifetime. Items accepted under the Scheme are allocated to public collections and are available for all. In return, donors will receive a reduction in their income tax, capital gains tax or corporation tax liability, based on a set percentage of the value of the object they are donating: 30 per cent for individuals and 20 per cent for companies.

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/tax-incentives/cultural-gifts-scheme>

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2015 and 2018, we plan to invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and an estimated £700 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.

www.artscouncil.org.uk

About the V&A

The V&A is the world's leading museum of art and design with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 5000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform.

www.vam.ac.uk