

Something extraordinary is coming to The Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle this July as we open our major landmark exhibition for 2023. Part of the Museum's 'Year of Movement', *The Magic of the Silver Swan* celebrates the 250th anniversary of the swan's first public appearance, alongside the beauty and artistry of automata.

This cross-temporal group show features collection objects, artworks and artefacts, moving objects and images and kinetic artworks by artists, makers, designers and inventors.

The exhibition runs from 8 July 2023 – 7 January 2024. As well as items from the Museum's collection, the exhibition features pieces and archival material from contemporary artists Tobias Bradford, Bruce Lacey, Rebecca Moss, Helen Pailing, Kinnari Saraiya, Yinka Shonibare, Martin Smith, and Cabaret Mechanical Theatre.

The Magic of the Silver Swan includes loans from both national and international institutions such as The British Museum; Science Museum; Metropolitan Museum of Arts and Crafts, Paris; Royal Collection Trust; The National Archives, Bodleian Library, Victoria Art Gallery, Kenwood House and Guildhall Library as well as private individuals.

The Silver Swan is the Museum's most iconic object and was made in 1773 in James Cox's workshop in London. It's believed the inventor, John Joseph Merlin, worked on the mechanism that gives the swan its graceful and realistic movements as it gently moves its head and neck, 'swimming' on glassy water before reaching down and catching a fish from a nearby shoal in its beak.

Inventiveness will be at the heart of the exhibition, exploring movement and kinetic art from all walks of time, from the historical to the contemporary, that tell different stories but are linked by their creation. This is a celebration of automata, clockwork machines, our enduring fascination with mechanical devices, and how we can explore art through technology.

It is these stories and how they are interwoven that will allow people to interpret the exhibition in new and exciting ways, from experiencing a contemporary response to a historical artefact, with Kinnari Saraiya's *Bioscope*, which challenges and questions the original repressive use of the object, to playfulness by making items spring into life with ten interactive works from the Cabaret Mechanical Theatre.

Placement of objects is key to the flow of the exhibition, with John Joseph Merlin's patent for a harpsichord near *Performer*, a contemporary automaton by Swedish artist Tobias Bradford featuring a prosthetic arm playing a synthesiser. Footage of David Roentgen's musical automaton: *Queen Marie Antoinette*, *the Dulcimer Player*, and a cello and violin designed by Merlin will be shown alongside *Un Ballo in Maschera (A Masked Ball)*, a 2004 film by the Turner Prize nominated Yinka Shonibare. All sited near an 18th-century mezzotint by Richard Earlom of the inside of the *Pantheon in Oxford Road*, a popular entertainment venue (which also hosted masquerades) frequented by Merlin's contemporaries and customers who bought his automata.

Rebecca Moss's film *Comfort Food* will be on display, the North East's Helen Pailing's collaboration with Marek Gabrysch of a reclaimed kinetic sculptural and sound piece *Potential Energy* (2022), and Martin Smith's *Bird Wave*. The show will also include archival imagery and footage by the late British artist Bruce Lacey, known as a modern-day Merlin.

Charles Babbage's Difference Engine, the forerunner to the modern-day computer, will be on display from the Science Museum and the Rose Engine Lathe, used to make ornamental patterns on the plates used in printing banknotes and postage stamps. Alongside the Silver Swan, 18th-century automaton figurines, musical boxes and a collection of 19th and 20th-century clockwork metalwork and tin toys from the Museum's collection will add to the 'magical mechanical' feel of the exhibition.

The Bowes Museum's Director of Programmes and Collections, Vicky Sturrs, said: "The show's celebration of movement in all forms, from scientific object to automata, clockwork toy to moving image, will be a fitting tribute to the Silver Swan and the fascination it holds in people's memory. The placement of works, not by timeline, but by their intertwined stories and how they speak to each other, will give visitors a stimulating and intriguing experience, as well as an expanded understanding of kinetic art and objects; there'll be lots to look at, listen to, explore and experience."

The Magic of the Silver Swan opens on Saturday, 8 July 2023 and runs until Sunday, 7 January 2024.

The Bowes Museum is open from 10am until 5pm, every day except 6 May for the Coronation, 25 and 26 December and 1 January.

Ticket information and Pre-booking can be found on thebowesmuseum.org.uk

Notes to editors:

The media preview for the exhibition will be held on Friday, 7 July at The Bowes Museum.

To register your interest in attending, please contact

Alison.White@thebowesmuseum.org.uk

The Bowes Museum was created over 100 years ago by an extraordinary couple, Joséphine and John Bowes. Together they built up the greatest private collection of fine and decorative arts in North England and constructed a magnificent building to house them. The collection contains thousands of objects, including furniture, paintings, sculpture, ceramics, textiles and many other items covering an extensive range of European styles and periods.

The Bowes Museum receives funding from Durham County Council and, as a National Portfolio Organisation, receives support from Arts Council England. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. www.artscouncil.org.uk

The Bowes Museum is a member of the Discover Durham partnership of attractions, whose commitment is to promote Durham as an exciting and vibrant group travel destination and to provide the travel trade with a professional and knowledgeable service. discoverdurham.co.uk