

# Victoriana: The Art of Revival

08 August 2013

Come and be Beguiled by this Fascinating Miscellany of Curiosities

Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London, 7 September - 8 December 2013

From the macabre to the quaint, the sensational to the surreal, 'Victoriana: The Art of Revival' is the first-ever exhibition in the UK to offer a major retrospective of Victorian revivalism in all its guises. Featuring graphic design, film, photography, ceramics, taxidermy, furniture, textiles and fine art, this fascinating multi-media, multi-sensory show at the Guildhall Art Gallery, provided by the City of London Corporation, explores the work of contemporary artists who have been inspired by the 19th century and offers an intriguing perspective into the on-going cultural legacy of our Victorian forebears.

This momentous period in British history, which covers Queen Victoria's reign from 1837-1901, is remembered as the era of empire, exploration, huge industrial expansion and social & economic change. Look around and you will see its visible legacy at every turn, from architecture and invention to fashion, fiction and film. Dig deeper and you enter the Victorian underbelly, a world where the notorious Jack the Ripper roamed the streets of London, and art, ideas and literature were often dark and unsettling. This assorted medley of inspirations has fired the imagination of artists ever since and spawned the label 'Neo-Victorian'.

The Guildhall Art Gallery, has built a reputation for its outstanding collection of Victorian paintings and this new exhibition offers an original dimension to the gallery's exhibition programme by bringing together 28 major contemporary artists, including Yinka Shonibare, Grayson Perry, Paula Rego, Dan Hillier, Paul St. George, Rob Ryan, Kitty Valentine and Jake and Dinos Chapman, who encapsulate the essence and diversity of Victorian Revivalism.

Combining past with present, the exhibition will feature over 70 works, including the entertaining 'Geistlich Tube' created by Paul St. George especially for the show, which enables viewers to 'see' another viewer from a different part of the Gallery, Yinka Shonibare's reimagining of Dorian Gray, via the 1945 Albert Lewin film, Paula Rego's sinister revisioning of Charlotte Brontë's 'Jane Eyre' (2001-02), Stephen Kenny's bold pastiche of a Victorian advertisement entitled 'Drink More Gin' (2010), Miss Pokeno's poignant fox-filled armchair, 'Trophy' (2008), Carole Windham's whimsical Staffordshire figure, 'Dearly Beloved' (2012), which depicts David Cameron and Nick Clegg as Queen and Consort in a commemoration of their policies on gay marriage and the surreal 'Octopus Portrait' (2009) by Yumiko Utsu.

'Victoriana: The Art of Revival' represents an eclectic and, at times, eccentric exploration of the 19th century as seen through the eyes of these modern-day artists which will appeal to 'gentlemen, ladies and children'.

Sonia Solicari, Principal Curator at Guildhall Art Gallery, comments:

"From Rossetti to Tissot, the Guildhall Art Gallery is famous for its outstanding collection of Victorian painting. This exhibition, one of the most ambitious ever staged here, takes a new twist on the 19th century, offering a contemporary look at the period across all media. Visitors can expect a show that is both playful and thought-provoking – a phantasmagoria of the all the neo-Victorian things in our lives."

David Pearson, Director of Culture, Heritage and Libraries for the City of London Corporation, comments:

"The City Corporation is one of the UK's largest sponsors of arts and culture. This unique, multi-media exhibition of Victoriana, presented by our Guildhall Art Gallery, is a great example of our innovative and inclusive approach. It is the first-ever exhibition in the UK to offer a major retrospective of Victorian revivalism and, as such, could not be better located given the gallery's strong association with Victorian art, its excellent collection of Victorian masters and our re-imagined Roman Amphitheatre which sits next door to the galleries in which the exhibition is housed (and is a part of any visit). A show containing the weird, wonderful, macabre and inventive rethinking of Victorian ideas is therefore in just the right home – a home where we've a history of engaging audiences with our cultural and heritage assets by providing new perspectives for viewing them, the last of these being the performances of 'Medea' in the amphitheatre which played to full houses, with many in the audience visiting for the first time."

## Exhibition Outline

The exhibition has four major themes:

### The Neo-Victorian Identity:

- From Queen Victoria to Dorian Gray, tattoos to corsets, this theme explores the heroes and villains of the past who loom large in the contemporary imagination, and the aesthetics of personal adornment that enable us to negotiate our hopes and fears in the neo-Victorian dressing up box.
- Examples - Yinka Shonibare's 'Dorian Gray', Paula Rego's 'Jane Eyre', Carole Windham's 'Dearly Beloved', Phil Sayers' 'Shalott', Piers Jamson's 'Self Portrait', Grayson Perry's works from 'The Charms of Lincolnshire project', Nick Knight's 'Aimee Mullins for Dazed and Confused'.

### Time Travel:

- Works that play with the idea of time, such as retro-futurism and anachronism. This strand examines the growth of the graphic novel and the pre-occupation with invention and exploration in the Steampunk imagination.
- Examples – Paul St. George's 'Crookes Tube', Kevin O'Neill's designs for 'The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen', Otto Von Beach's 'Penny Dreadful'.

### The Cute and the Curious:

- A look at the interpretation of the Victorian aesthetic as weird and wonderful, surreal and macabre, dark and unsettling, but also uplifting and inspiring.

This strand will explore the phantasmagoria of 19th century images that are being reclaimed and reworked by contemporary artists, as well as the fascination for science and medicine.

- Examples - Dan Hillier's 'Mother', Yumiko Utsu's 'Octopus Lady', Jake and Dinos Chapmans' 'One Day you Will no Longer be Loved', Mat Colishaw's 'Lantern', installations by Chantal Powell and Tessa Farmer.

The Reimagined Parlour:

- This strand will look at ideas of the interior in the broadest sense – the ways in which Victorian 'things' have captured the imagination of post-Victorian artists and designers, from taxidermy and Staffordshire dogs to pattern and ornament.

- Examples - Jane Hoodless' 'Pteridomania', Richard Slee's 'Grill', Miss Pokeno's 'Trophy' chair, Mathew Weir's 'Hangman', Mark Titchner's 'I Want a Better World, I Want a Better Me'.

Associated Events - Guildhall Art Gallery is holding a series of events to support the exhibition, including:

Late View: 'Guildhall Gothic Ball', after-hours party on Friday 25 October, 6-10pm.

Tickets £10 in advance, £12 on the door, subject to availability.

Guildhall opens its Art Gallery and medieval crypts - the oldest in London - for a Victorian-inspired Gothic celebration. Dress the part and enjoy the pop-up bar, music by the 'Singing Victorians' cabaret events.

Talks: Join the team at Guildhall Art Gallery for an 'in focus' 30-minute tour of 'Victoriana: The Art of Revival' on the hour from 11am-4pm on Thursday 26 September, Thursday 17 October and Thursday, 21 November. Talks are limited to 12 people per timed entry and are included in the ticket price.

Group Tours:

- Tours will be available from 16 September.
- There is a maximum group size of 12 – though back-to-back tours can be arranged (so a party of 24 could have two tours of 12 each).
- The cost is £82 per group – not including entry fees to the exhibition.
- Contact details for arranging a group tour: 020 7332 3700, textphone 020 7332 3803 or [guildhall.artgallery@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:guildhall.artgallery@cityoflondon.gov.uk).

Film Season: In collaboration with the Department of History of Art, Birkbeck. FREE. Birkbeck Cinema, 43 Gordon Square, Tuesdays, 2pm, 22 October - 26 November. A season of films selected around the themes of the exhibition.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

Featured Artists

Barnaby Barford, Su Blackwell, Ligia Bouton, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Piers Jamson, Tessa Farmer, Dan Hillier, Jane Hoodless, Stephen Kenny, Nick Knight, Kevin O'Neill, Grayson Perry, Miss Pokeno, Paula Rego, Rob Ryan, Paul St. George, Patrick St. Paul, Chantal Powell, Phil Sayers, Yinka Shonibare, Richard Slee, Yumiko Utsu, Kitty Valentine, Simon Venus, Tom Werber, Otto von Beach, Mathew Weir, Carole Windham.

Curator - Sonia Solicari

Sonia is Principal Curator of Guildhall Art Gallery, having previously held posts of Curator, Ceramics, and Assistant Curator, Painting, at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Sonia has written and lectured widely on Victorian art and culture and on revivalism in art and design. Her most recent essay, 'Towards a Neo-Victorian Interior' can be found at <http://pastinpresent.courtauld.ac.uk/past-in-present-iii/>. Sonia is the editor of the forthcoming publication 'Victoriana: A Miscellany', Guildhall Art Gallery, 2013.

Accompanying Publication

'Victoriana: A Miscellany' is an assemblage of fact and fiction, words and images around the themes of the exhibition, with contributions from leading writers, artists and commentators.

Guildhall Art Gallery

- Located in the heart of the City, next to the medieval Guildhall, the Art Gallery houses and displays paintings and sculptures collected by the City of London Corporation. Visitors can view the highlights of this historic collection, including iconic Victorian paintings and fascinating scenes of London life from the 17th century to the present. Steeped in history, the Gallery also houses the remains of London's Roman Amphitheatre, which was discovered here in 1988 and is open to the public.
- Guildhall Art Gallery and London's Roman Amphitheatre, Guildhall Yard, London EC2V 5AR; Tel: 020 7332 3700
- Admission: Free to the gallery's permanent collection and the amphitheatre. Admission to 'Victoriana: The Art of Revival' costs £7 (£5 concessions).
- Open: Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm, Sun 12-4pm.
- Visit our website at [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/victoriana](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/victoriana) and join the conversation on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GuildhallArtGallery](http://www.facebook.com/GuildhallArtGallery); or Twitter @GuildhallArt. We'd love to chat!

- The nearest Underground stations are: Bank, St. Paul's, Mansion House or Moorgate.

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High-res images available on request

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