

43 Years of Family Friendly Automata Exhibitions

By Lisa Finch, Development Director
Cabaret Mechanical Theatre
lisa@cabaret.co.uk

Cabaret Mechanical Theatre is an iconic collection of automata, or moving sculpture. These whimsical mechanical artworks illustrate their inner workings at the push of a button or turn of a lever often reflecting on social and cultural identity through a mix of ingenuity, irreverence, idiosyncrasy and humour. Simultaneously they give viewers of all ages and interest the opportunity to marvel at the wonder of mechanics, engineering and design.



History

Cabaret was founded by Sue Jackson, who is considered central to the automata revival that continues to this day around the world. It started as a craft shop in Falmouth Cornwall in the UK in 1979, from here the collection grew until it relocated to its legendary premises in Covent Garden, London from 1984 to 2000.



Paul Spooner & Sue Jackson Cabaret, Falmouth CMT Covent Garden, London



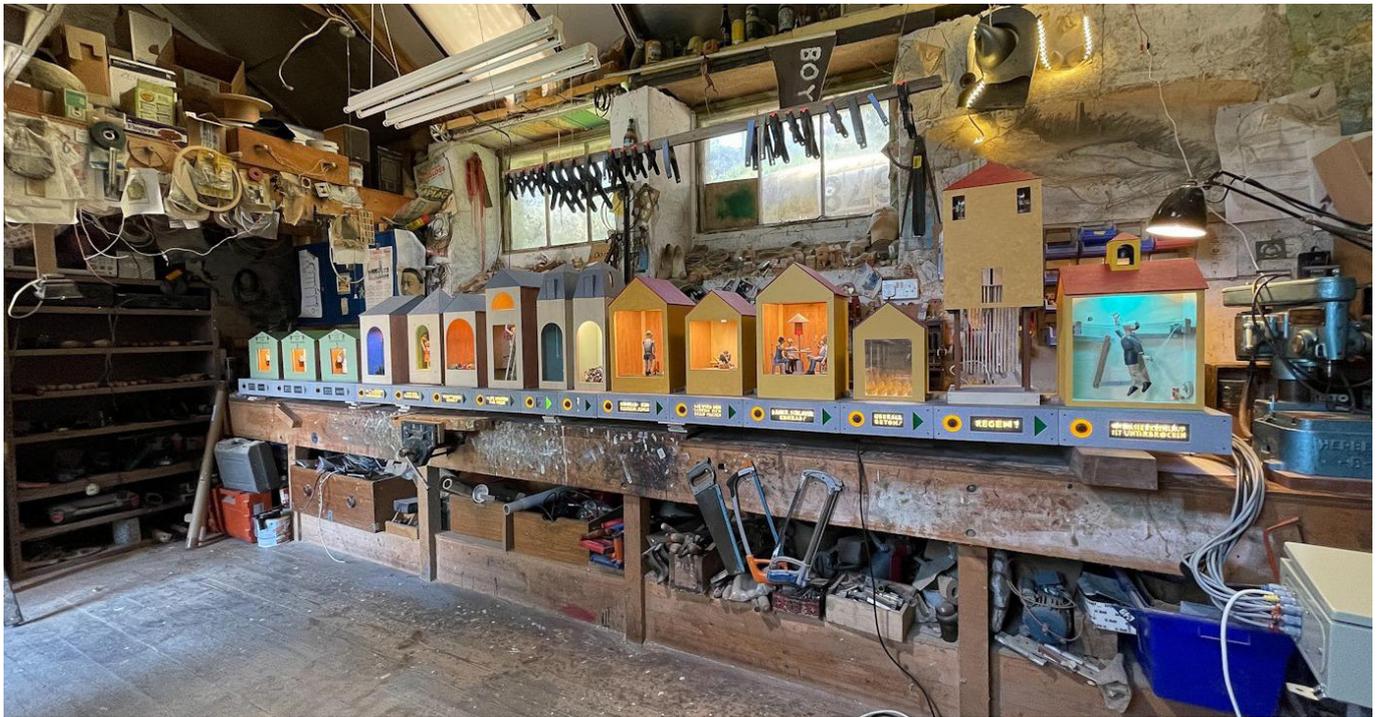
CMT Covent Garden, London

Her daughter Sarah Alexander, has continued by touring the collection that has grown to over 160 automata of international importance together with its historic artefacts. Sarah is regularly invited to contribute and co-curate exhibitions as well as making temporary loans of automata for major international exhibitions. The automata are part of numerous private collections around the world.

About

Cabaret Mechanical Theatre continues to commission new work from contemporary makers and encourages people of all ages to make their own automata through affordable and easily accessible online and in-person workshops, kits and manuals.

Their appeal spans all art forms including sculpture, craft, design and fine art as well as crossing over skills needed for technology, programming and engineering. The exhibitions delight hundreds and thousands of visitors of all ages at museums, galleries and science centres worldwide.



Paul Spooner's workshop

Touring

Our versatile collection of over 160 automata is made up of original art works by 18 contemporary artists that have toured worldwide adapted for large major science centres such as the Exploratorium in San Francisco as well as to regional museums and galleries across the UK. Some examples of venues where our exhibitions have been hugely successful include the Derby Making Museum, Cabaret Mechanical Marvels with the Hampshire Museum Trust and the Fantastic Fairground Factory at Tullie House.

Visitor and venue feedback, Tullie House, United Kingdom summer 2019: "Absorbing! The quality of the work and entertainment is wonderful. It was the best!" Visitor numbers were up by 61% on the previous 4 years.

Our exhibitions can also be themed and adapted to enhance the venue's own collections by incorporating artefacts that resonate with the mechanisms, materials, themes and design of our collection.



Te Manawa, New Zealand 2021

Interactive Exhibits

Alongside the push-button artworks we offer multiple options of interpretation that support the exhibition. This includes playful large-scale interactive exhibits that demonstrate how a mechanism works that are robust for everyone to operate.



The Museum of Making, Derby 2022

They generate interest and curiosity into how automata and mechanics work so that visitors, of all ages and abilities, can explore and observe the exhibitions with new understanding and insight.

The Ensemble Workshop

Is a collaborative artwork that is part workshop, part performance and part exhibit, an attention-grabbing centrepiece display that offers visitors the opportunity to exercise their making and creative skills, and learn mechanical movement and control.



Our Cardboard Automata Kits and Cranky Contraptions can be used in the gallery or part of group activity and they are wonderful take-home projects.

Participants make individual cam driven automata from push-fit components and a junk box of curious and striking objects. The automata are linked together to create a single machine, an impressive snaking line of spinning cams, colours and shapes turned by a single handle or motor.

Tinkering - In-house training & drop in STEAM workshops

CMT's workshop kits have been tried and tested with our expert facilitators with thousands of global participants developed to deliver quality creative and exploratory activities that correspond to STEAM, programming.



The upper section of the creations allows space for reflective play with creative storytelling through designing characters and decorative animated

objects. The lower section provides the opportunity to explore components and the mechanics of cams, drives and cranks with accessible everyday materials.

CMT provide specialist training for in-house engagement teams to share experimental, hands-on learning activity to create individual workshop programmes and professional development

opportunities. We love tinkering and want to share our years of tinkering and maker space environments to create, play and experiment with materials and ideas with everyone.

For a family day out with plenty of activities for the children and adults CMT's exhibitions are the perfect solution.



The Museum of Making, Derby 2022