

# BENJAMIN POLLOCK'S TOYSHOP

## WHAT WE DID IN 2018

### All the world's a stage

Toy theatres were keeping children entertained long before television arrived on the scene. Charlotte Cory delves into a magical world being reimagined for the modern age

TOY theatre has long been a staple of the intelligent nursery and dusty toy museum. These printed-cardboard miniature theatres are instant scene-setters in period films such as Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*. A box in the corner, pre-small screen, they kept children quiet—or, rather, kept them noisily cutting out and colouring characters and scenery, rigging up makeshift lighting (you can do amazing things with a torch and candle), attaching the cast to bent wire from metal clothes hangers and pushing them on and off stage, acting out stories.

They're great fun and can be very simple or taken to astonishing levels of sophistication. Many a writer, theatre director and even politician has ascribed their success in later life to the possession of one in their youth: Robert Louis Stevenson, Dickens, Thackeray, Churchill and Diaghilev, to name but a few. Paper theatres are the kind of 'toy' some adults (myself included) never relinquish. However, unlike the slightly uncomfortable

aspects of doll or teddy-bear collecting—the suspicion that someone hasn't grown up or has more time and money on their hands than is sensible—these playthings are innately interactive and demand intense creative input. Every design studio in London should keep one in the corner. Stumped for ideas for the latest advertising campaign? Have a quick run through of a papercut.

It is perhaps for this reason that toy theatre is currently enjoying a resurgence in interest. And it's not merely a few surviving shops and museums enjoying a small but steady trade in reproducing antique theatres, largely selling to those who remember them from their own childhood and buying them as gifts for grandchildren. Against the odds of rapidly rising rents—which have seen the rest of the vibrant plaza fill up with the usual high-street chains—Louise Heard keeps Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop in Covent Garden full of the best traditional toys, which she actively sources. Determined to take toy theatres to a new level for the 21st century, she commissions contemporary artists—including me—to create limited-edition paper theatres. These sell to fans around the world, who buy online and make pilgrimages to the shop

'holding up the queue' (the title of Louise's new podcasting enterprise) recounting their love of this artform. The first-floor shop, reached by deliciously decorated steep steps, right in the middle of Covent Garden, is a bit like the little theatres themselves. A colourful and crowded world of its own, it's staffed by artists and actors who share a passion for the subject. Louise took over the shop (it's been going for 130 years) from the late Peter Baldwin, the *Coronation Street* actor whose 1992 book *Toy Theatres of the World* is still an authority on the subject. 'Peter would be buying by all that's happening now,' she says fondly. 'I can imagine him enjoying our Harlequinade Club.' This new venture is an attempt to satisfy the needs of toy-theatre lovers across the world, with a quarterly folder of goodies, podcasts >

Left: Confectionery magic in Clive Hicks-Jenkins's *Hansel and Gretel*. Middle: *Puss in Boots*, by J. F. Schreiber, 1870. Right: The classic *Cinderella*, a Pollock's best-seller



### WHAT WE DID IN 2018

We launched our quarterly podcast 'Holding Up The Queue' where manager Simon Seddon explores esoteric ways of thinking, the magic of storytelling and some unexpected corners of creativity inspired by toys and transformation through play. The podcast is accompanied by a quarterly folder of ephemera of exclusive and limited items around the quarterly theme which is available to buy from our website.

The 'Harlequinade' Club and Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop, Covent Garden

was featured in the November issue of **Country Life** guest edited by HRH Prince Charles.

Our Benjamin Pollock's own brand product range was expanded with a luxury paper theatre by decorative artist **Lucinda Oakes** "One of the world's leading decorative painters and a favourite of more than a few AD100 designers, Oakes was commissioned by Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop to create this miniature marvel" @adaesthete Mitch Owens, decorative arts editor - **Architectural Digest**.

The theatres were included in our new trade website and supplied to **Colefax and Fowler** along with a select group of independent shops in the UK and Europe.

We also added to our range of illustrated pop-up cards with a Woodland Fairground card featured in a **Keep It Local campaign for Visa Uk** by **London blogger @cassiesamji** "Even in the heart of metropolitan cities like London, there's nothing better than experiencing the rich history and thoughtful service from small and

independent shops like this one! Walking into this store is like being transported into a whimsical fairytale world!"

Our Hansel & Gretel Theatre by artist Clive Hicks-Jenkins continued to delight audiences and took on another life as part of tour 'A Nightmare in Eight Scenes' chamber music set to words by Queen's gold medal winner poet Simon Armitage. Benjamin Pollock's



# BENJAMIN POLLOCK'S TOYSHOP

Toyshop supported the marketing of the tour with merchandise.

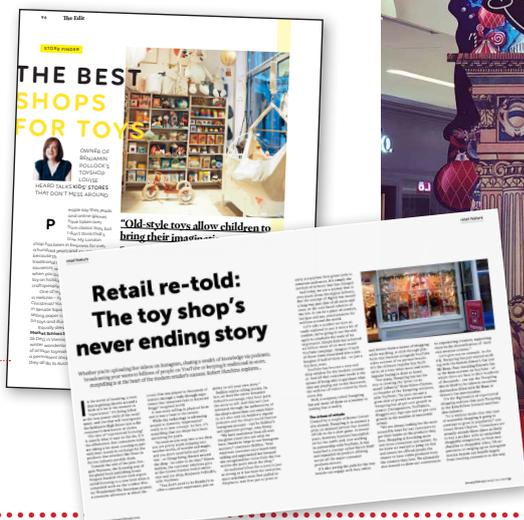
The first toy in a new range of toys illustrated by Hannah Dyson was put on sale and featured in **The Telegraph Christmas Gift Guide** by style maker **Alex Eagle** for the “Mini Aesthete” @eagletta  
“...I have adored your shop forever!”

An instagram art sensation **Annie Montgomerie** created commissioned pieces for the Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop Christmas window. Her sought after pieces sell out in minutes, so we ran a raffle for a chance to purchase one. With **broadcaster Zeb Soanes** helping to pick out the winning tickets live from Rules Restaurant in Covent Garden. The raffle raised over £350 for charity 'Mind'.

In December 2018, owner **Louise Heard** travelled to **China** to

open the Pollock's pop-up shop/exhibition in **Foshan Lingnan Tiandi**. The theatrical theme by Pollocks was represented by life size toy theatres and shadow boxes in the Shui On Land village as well as the nearby Nova shopping centre and Marco Polo Hotel in the city of Guangdong province (population 7.2 million)

Pollocks products were featured in **The London Magazine, Country Life Christmas issue, Homes and Garden online** and Louise Heard was interviewed for **Easy Jet magazine** with a reach of 7.2 million.



Louise Heard visits Benjamin Pollocks pop up shop in **FOSHAN LINGNAN TIANDI, China** Dec 2018



Nova shopping centre in **FOSHAN LINGNAN TIANDI, CHINA** dedicated to Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop

## BENJAMIN POLLOCK'S TOYSHOP IN 2019

We have opened the year in 2019 with features in industry publication **Toy News**. We begin with an article *2019, The year of the independent toyshop*, followed by a feature *Retail re-told: The toy shop's never ending story* “Whether you're uploading live videos on Instagram, sharing a wealth of knowledge via

podcasts....storytelling is at the heart of the modern retailer's success’.

Our team member Amy was also featured in the 30 under 30 category for her #toptoytuesday posts on Instagram and is “an enthusiastic link between traditional toys and a new generation”.

We look forward to the release of the **Universal Pictures** film ‘**Last Christmas**’ shot in Covent Garden and featuring a Christmas Shop using Benjamin Pollock's Toyshop as inspiration. Writer and actress **Emma Thompson** says “Pollocks’ Theatres were a really important part of my childhood. I love your shop...”