



Press Release
3 February 2024

Suffragette artist and master toymaker gets first solo show, 77 years after her death

Exhibition at the Heath Robinson Museum in Pinner places Mary V Wheelhouse (1868-1947) in the spotlight at last.

In her lifetime Mary V Wheelhouse was many things: a book illustrator, painter, suffragette and toymaker whose charming wooden creations are still sought after by collectors. But until now, there has never been a solo exhibition of her work.

Wheelhouse was born in Leeds in 1868. She studied at Scarborough School of Art in 1895, and then at the Académie Delécluse in Paris, and began to exhibit her oil and watercolour paintings in Paris, London and Leeds. By 1899 she was living in London and working at Pomona Studios in Chelsea.

In 1915 she teamed up with fellow artist and suffragette Louise Jacobs to start Pomona Toys in Chelsea. Later, after their partnership came to an end, she teamed up with sculptor Aileen Blanche Ellis to continue the business, which sold wooden dolls, animals, Noah's Arks and dolls' houses at craft fairs and from the shop in Chelsea, and then in its new location in Kensington, until the outbreak of WWII.

Wheelhouse was actively involved in the Suffragette movement, joining the Artists' Suffrage League (ASL) in the early 1900s. By 1910 she had created two hard-hitting political cartoons for the ASL, which were published as postcards.

They included *Those who ask shan't have, those who don't ask don't want*, which shows Britannia feeding 'votes' to a boy while turning her back on seven hungry-looking girls.



Postcard for the Artists' Suffrage League by Mary V Wheelhouse © The Women's Library at LSE

The original drawing for this postcard features in a landmark exhibition of Wheelhouse's work, running from 13 January 2024 – 24 March 2024 at the Heath Robinson Museum in Pinner.

The show also includes 39 illustrations, five Pomona dolls, a selection of Pomona wooden animals, a Pomona toy theatre with more dolls and puppets, photographs of Wheelhouse, Pomona ephemera, and more.

The suffragette theme is expanded with prints of work by other members of the Artists' Suffrage League, and photographs of suffragette marches.

While Wheelhouse enjoyed significant successes in her time, winning an award for her book illustration, featuring in exhibitions, and creating toys that were highly sought after, her name and work have been largely forgotten.

The new exhibition – her first-ever solo show – aims to rectify that.

Exhibition curator Hannah Whyte explained:

“This exhibition highlights one of Britain's many 'forgotten' women artists - and explores the plight of the activists and artists who made huge progress in their lifetimes for little recognition.

“Mary V Wheelhouse was a remarkable artist, illustrator, and toymaker. The beauty and skill of her work shine through in this exhibition, as does her ability to address anything from sentimental to political subjects. She was an enormous creative talent, as well as a suffragette and a successful businesswoman. Her versatility, talent, and determination speak for themselves. I’m delighted to place her back in the public eye.”

-END-

NOTES TO EDITORS

Further images can be found at the end of this email. For further images and all press enquiries, please contact Jamie White as detailed below.

Dates and Opening Hours:

The exhibition runs until March 25

Thursday – Sunday from 11am to 4pm

Admission

Special Exhibition entry is included in the standard cost of museum entry. Tickets can be purchased on walk-in or prebooked online at the [Heath Robinson Museum Website](http://www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org), www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org.

Sponsors and Lenders

This exhibition has been made possible as a result of the Government Indemnity Scheme. The Heath Robinson Museum would like to thank the HM Government for providing Government indemnity and the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.

Special thanks to the Chris Beetles Gallery, The Women’s Library at LSE, the Museum of London, The University for the Creative Arts, Ken Hampson, Geoffrey Beare, and the Verden family for lending items for this exhibition, and to the dedicated team of volunteers who helped to get the artwork on display.

Social Media

Instagram, Facebook, Twitter: @heathrobinsonmuseum

ABOUT THE HEATH ROBINSON MUSEUM

Heath Robinson lived nearby in Pinner from 1908-18, some of the most productive years of his life.

Situated in Pinner's Memorial Park next to the historic West House, the Museum complex has created a thriving artistic, cultural, and community hub in the region. The Museum provides a permanent home for the Heath Robinson collection of original artwork and other artifacts. In addition to the permanent exhibition chronicling the life and works of Heath Robinson, the Museum has a rolling program of Special Exhibitions. These focus on highlights of the museum's extensive collection of William Heath Robinson's work as well as showcasing other renowned artists and illustrators.

www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org

Registered Charity Number: 1086567

Heath Robinson Museum, Pinner Memorial Park, 50 West End Lane, Pinner HA5 1AE



Toy Theatre by Mary Wheelhouse



Illustration by Mary V Wheelhouse from the book 'Carrots' by Mrs Molesworth (first published 1876) © Chris Beetles Gallery