

RECORD-BREAKING EXHIBITION

PAUL SPOONER

internationally-revered automata-maker, maybe the most famous exponent on the planet, erstwhile cardboard-box crusher, master of the surreal, founding exhibitor with Cabaret Mechanical Theatre.

"September Already?"

*to mark the year he hits **60***

Some 60 artists, from the UK and abroad, incl. 40 automatists, co-exhibit in salute:



perhaps the largest ever assembly of such makers in the world

PARASITE ISLAND
© Paul Spooner 2008

Sat 13th – Sat 27th Sept



2 – 7pm daily (or by appt.), incl. Suns.

1 Burnham Chase Bitterne
Southampton SO18 5DG UK

TheFirstGallery.com 023 8046 2723

With **120+** exhibits (and counting), this may be the largest concentration on record

TIGER © Sam Smith Estate 1970



We also celebrate the centenary of **SAM SMITH** (1908 – 83), the uncategorisable Southampton-born artist whose work, if not automata 'per se', inspired a great many of these co-exhibitors

On show: 7 sculptures, 2 pictures, books, ephemera, from several private collections

INTERNATIONAL CONTINGENT
Paul Spooner is so highly thought of in his field that this veritable A – Z of automatists wished to show alongside:

(With any luck) four continents will salute **PAUL SPOONER**

40 automata-makers are confirmed; is this the largest concentration on record?

(including kineticists / puppet-makers in this roster may look like 'cheating' but, even without them, this may still be a world record number of co-exhibiting automatists. In practice, the distinction between the disciplines is not clear-cut. We've used the Japanese *Karakuri Expo 2005* pattern of counting each maker, or team of makers, as one).

John ALDEN — dolls' house miniaturist, but making small automata alongside for a while; now intending to concentrate on it more.

Jonathan ANGELL — kinetic sculptor; special-effects designer on the first *Harry Potter* film, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Sleepy Hollow*, etc. Work in collections of **John Lennon**, **Dave Dee**, **David Niven Jr.**, among others.

Nigel ASHFORD — lower-profile member of the automatist 'family'; has been making since at least the early 90s. Influenced by Sam Smith, but that's hard to detect now. Deceptively simple work, using mattress-springs as a mechanism.

Paul CLARKE — a picture-framer who gets side-tracked! Showing 1970s jumping jacks, co-created with his father, Geoff D. Clarke (1925 – 98) and a piece made on a course with Robert Race.

Sue EVANS — mixes carved-and-painted work with found objects; mostly traditional / mythical themes, especially the sea and seaside.

Emily FIRMIN & Justin MITCHELL — Kent-based, trading as *Total Pap* for some 15 years. Uniquely in the genre, they make *papier mâché* automata (often as wall pictures); also static pieces and sculpture. All are on display.

Ron FULLER — set up in 1960 as maker of mechanical toys; second automatist to show at *Cabaret*, while still in Falmouth (Spooner was the third). Cornish, now "stranded" in Suffolk, he is pretty well retired, but a piece inspired by (and about) Sam Smith is being loaned by *Hitchcock's*.

Kazuaki HARADA — has sent work from **Japan**; did his M.A. on automata over here; met and inspired by Spooner. Although using Western imagery, he brings an Oriental sophistication to the medium. Only his **THIRD UK SHOWING**.

Neil HARDY — ex-architect, making slyly witty cartoon animals turn into laugh-out-loud 3-D. Originator of the *Evolutionary Blunders* series.

Andy HAZELL — recycler of objects on a gargantuan scale (he had a jet-engine in his hall, last we spoke!) Too busy for any new work, so showing loaned pieces.

Daniel HERTHEL & Maria LEITE — puppet-makers from **Brazil**. Met Spooner last year. Sending DVD of short film involving their puppets and automata; also (tbc) a real puppet.

Rachel HIGGINS — metal animals; had ceased to make them move but, inspired by this show, revisited the form. Superbly observed, their subtle movements nudge them into 'art' territory.

Rob HIGGS — one of the Cornwall 'charmed circle'; rocket-propelled pieces are a speciality. Having just sold his entire stock the week we invited him to exhibit, he determinedly rooted out an older – truly unignorable! – theatre prop in order to be part of it. Made film for the **Science Museum** with Paul Spooner late in 2007.

Rachel LARKINS — New Forest-based, trading as *Made, not Born*, with haunting themes of birds and the sea. Also jack-in-a-boxes, but not yer archetypally pretty "toy" style ones. Originally (and still) a doll-maker, a late convert to automata.

Hansjörg LEIBLE — organ-builder from **Germany**, which has a long tradition (from the clock industry) of incorporating figures into the instruments. **PREMIERE UK SHOWING**, of a *Dumpling Eater*, a jaw-dropping [pun intended!] *tour de force* of engineering, combined with world-famous Black Forest carving skills.

Peter LENNERTZ — retired plumber, sucked into automata-making after visiting *Cabaret Mechanical Theatre*. More than one piece here tips its hat to Spooner, or his work.

Philip LOWNDES — for many years, a part-time, high-quality toymaker. Early retired in 2008, has turned to automata full-time.

John LUMBUS — former maintenance man at *Cabaret*. Now designs for himself, but also part of the *Laikingland* set-up.

Ian McKAY — one half of *Hitchcock's*, the UK automata centre second only to *Cabaret*. Inspired to take it up by Sam Smith's Serpentine Gallery show in 1980.

Alan MAHON — Ireland-based collector, photographer (see Peter Markey's 75th birthday party images on our site) and, on a modest scale, maker. **Debut automata-exhibitor**.

Tony MANN — doyen of the scene, moving freely between styles: some are cutting-edge contemporary, others are traditional in appearance.

John MALTBY — renowned mainly for ceramic sculpture, but had a fairly major sideline in sea- themed, pendulum-driven pieces in the 1980s / 90s. Very early on, made automata which were more actively operated: some on show here. Other wood sculpture on show (rarely seen now) is very much after the manner of Sam Smith.

Peter MARKEY — painter / first founding automatist exhibitor at *Cabaret* (while they were still in Falmouth); inspiration for Paul Spooner. A regular in *The First's* programme for 25 years, with 3 solo shows, plus *The Animated Eye*, of paintings and models, which toured the UK for eight years.

Syd MEATS — singer-songwriter of surreal material: songs twice broadcast on BBC Radio 4. Vegetarian (really!!). **Debut automata-exhibitor**, inspired by a course with Robert Race.

Virginio MOUTINHO — **PREMIERE UK SHOWING**. Portuguese sculptor and architect, a background evident in his presentation.

Keith NEWSTEAD — seeing the film *Sam Smith — Genuine England* inspired him to make automata; one of his pieces here pays homage to a Paul Spooner figure, and is exhibited alongside it. Much public work. Another Cornwall resident.

Frank NELSON — long-established maker, originally from an industrial design background. Met and was encouraged personally by Sam Smith. Much inspired by circus / fairground / end-of-the-pier elements of UK popular culture: risqué puns (his website is called *Bare Arts!*) and glossy finishes feature. Now retired and in ill health, so a privately-owned piece on show.

Rodney PEPPÉ — author / illustrator of c.80 books, many for children, and latterly on automata (three titles for sale here). Creator of TV's *Angel-Mouse* and *Huxley Pig*. Big fan of, and involved with, Sam Smith. Exhibits only very rarely.

Sergio PINESE — collector, of Italian descent, from **Switzerland**, and **debut automata-exhibitor**. Brilliant visual wit, typical of the field. At *The First* in person on final Saturday (27th).

Robert RACE — pioneer of use of driftwood in the genre. Organised European contingent for Japan's *Karakuri 2005* (a high-profile automata show, which probably set the last record for most automatists showing together). His earlier visits probably opened Oriental eyes to the European automata scene (which is very active in the Far East). Veteran of three solo shows at *The First*.

Jane RYAN — under the trade name OPI, runs workshops and makes smaller automata and other decorative wooden items. ANOTHER of the Cornwall contingent, the most westerly-located in the UK. Happily (or unhappily for us!) she sold all her current production just before "*September Already?*" started, so only one piece on display.

Angela & Laurence St LEGER — Laurence originally trained as a watchmaker; now dolls' house miniatures are their mainstay. Started making truly tiny automata 25 years ago; currently have about 250 lines!

Martin SMITH & Nick REGAN — **PREMIERE SHOWING** of new battery-operated design, launching *Laikingland*, their joint venture. Smith is already known for "applause machines".

Jeff SOAN — unrivalled timber-finisher, ex-student of John Gould (who also inspired Ron Fuller). Renowned for "wobbly wood" articulated animals. Shows at the Medici Galleries regularly, televised twice, and had one solo exhibition here in 2002.

Wanda SOWRY — one of the youngest true automatists; her *modus operandi* involves solely wood, for everything: she even effects colouring by using different varieties of timber.

Melanie TOMLINSON — makes in metal, individually screen-printed to achieve finish. Along with her movable piece, she is also showing some jewellery, made by a similar process.

Mary TURNER — one half of *Cinematic*, the puppet-making team (*Century 21 / Rupert the Bear / Munch Bunch*) with the late **John Read** (1920 – 2006). Both were central to the development of 1960s / 70s children's TV, before taking up automata-making to commission in the 80s. Mary T's Viking ships here remind people of *Noggin the Nog*.

Simon VENUS — maker and collector (with 250 – 300 automata, probably the UK's largest private collection). Intriguing witty vision, using simple shifts of context to overturn perceptions of ordinary objects. Those who recall Allan Bennett's creations here in 2001 / 02, will enjoy Venus'.

Douglas WILSON — **Scottish** maker, who had gone the way of all [of most automata-maker] flesh, and got a "proper job" to pay the bills. Having quit the making scene, the siren effect of that name Spooner has lured him back, at least temporarily. A rare treat: makes sophisticated, fluid pieces, using wire as a "drawing" material.

Jan ZALUD — Czech-born puppet-maker / carver, admired for his matchless limewood finish. **Southampton City Art Gallery** has one of his coin-collecting boxes. His work has that dark, edgy feel common to East European culture. An unsung giant of the automata field, in our opinion.

Carlos ZAPATA — Originally from Colombia. Yet another Cornwall-based automata-maker: the only one to have shown at the **Royal Academy**. His portrait-piece is in homage to Paul Spooner.

ARTISTS IN OTHER DISCIPLINES ("September Already?" is not all automata)

Lucy CASSON — once teamed with Andy Hazell and led the field in use of tin and re-cycled metal. Now mainly fabricates quirky 3-D tableaux from metal and a 'palette' of other found materials.

Hilda Margery CLARKE — painter and fabric puppet-maker, among many diverse talents. Highly individual wide-ranging style, and (like Sam Smith) happy being hard to pigeonhole. She also founded and runs "*The First*" Gallery, which was never intended as a vehicle for self-promotion.

Victor Stuart GRAHAM — extraordinarily multi-faceted man, finding his feet as an artist midway between sculpture and painting, combining many of his past strands. Imagery resounds with Humanity and the sea, even if both are absent from his work. Much use of reclaimed materials.

Andrew LANYON — painter and artist in several disciplines. Son of the late Peter Lanyon, the St Ives artist, his painterly language echoes his Cornish roots. Also showing a "hollow book" sculpture, and [tbc] a DVD featuring Paul Spooner.

Beryl OWEN — maker of stylish pots, but too modest to have a large output. Part of the Markey creative clan (using her maiden name when showing ceramics) she's also a gifted gardener.

Tatjana Tekkel PEPPÉ — fabric artist and children's author (two titles due on sale, illustrated with her own fabric collages). Uses old fabrics, for preference, inspired by their innate 'mini-histories'.

Sue SPOONER — tapestry weaver, who explores natural themes using hand-dyed threads. Trained in sculpture and printmaking at Cardiff, at the same time as Paul. She has worked in textiles professionally for 30+ years. 11 pieces on show.

Tim SPOONER — painter, poet and theatre designer son of Sue and Paul. In addition to paintings, he is showing [tbc] some of his hand-made books. **This is the first time any of the Spooner family have exhibited together.**

Andrew WALTON — widely-travelled artist friend, and fellow student of Spooners at Cardiff in mid-60s (later tutored there). Drawing tutor was Leonard McComb. Work is meditative, often dark, and on a large scale. A range of phases on show.

Fionna WIRE — printmaker / automata fan, art-trained at four colleges, including the RCA.

Others – some not listed, e.g. Timothy BENN, automatist and Sam Smith's publisher – may confirm after the opening date, so please re-visit this page periodically during the show.