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Discover an alternative path through a fabricated history in visionary new exhibition

From steam-powered airships to clockwork computers and Neo-Victorian fashions, *Fabricating Histories: An Alternative 19th Century* explores what might have happened in science and art had history taken a different path.

Inspired by the research of Northumbria University's Dr Claire Nally into the subcultural phenomenon of steampunk and Neo-Victorianism, the new exhibition features the work of five contemporary artists who have reimagined the art, fashion, and technology of the 19th century. Fabricating

Histories: An Alternative 19th Century is a collaboration between Northumbria University, and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, with support from Arts Council England, and opens tomorrow, Saturday 12 November, at Newcastle's Discovery Museum.

Five artists and designers – Dr Geof, Nick Simpson, Larysa Kucak, Phil Sayers and Charlotte Cory – visited the museum archives and produced new artworks, reinterpreting pieces from Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums collections. Dr Geof has redesigned the famous Turbinia vessel as if it was powered by the Lambton Worm, while Larysa Kucak has designed a corset based on a nineteenth-century parasol. Phil Sayers meanwhile has reimagined Ada Lovelace's legacy as a woman in science, and Charlotte Cory has been reworking the art of celebrated North East painter John Martin.

Dr Nally, Curator and Senior Lecturer in Twentieth-Century English Literature at Northumbria University explains, "Research for my upcoming book, 'Steampunk: Gender, Subculture and the Neo Victorian', has revealed how much we are invested in redefining the 19th Century – TV shows such as *Penny Dreadful*, for instance, rethink the 19th Century and its literature. *Fabricating Histories* does something similar, but we are looking more broadly at the Victorians, through steampunk and gothic.

"The artists have taken objects from the museum's extensive collection, and reinterpreted them from the perspective of the contemporary moment, reframing traditional expectations about art and society, and exploring ideas, questions, and practices that construct a fabricated history."

The exhibition will present a range of media, including photography, literature, drawing, fashion and textiles, bringing together commissioned pieces from the five artists and designers, alongside artefacts from the collection, which were previously in storage and unavailable for public viewing. There will also be items from the Science Museum in London, and from private collections.

Dr Nally added: "The exhibition explores why the Victorians still exert such a fascination over us. For steampunk, this is inflected with sci-fi themes such as dirigibles and anachronism, but it's more than that – it's about what might have happened in science and art, if history had taken a slightly different path."

Carolyn Ball, Manager at Discovery Museum states, “The story of our 19th century inventors and pioneers is all around us. But with so many experiments, ideas and notions jostling for position, history could have lurched off on a tangent at any moment and been very different. *Fabricating Histories* celebrates the almost, might-have-been world and encourages us to think about the stories we tell about history, our place in the world and how we relate to the past.”

A number of public events are also scheduled to take place as part of the exhibition, including talks by the graphic novelist Sydney Padua, and Bryan Talbot, who received an honorary Doctorate of Letters from Northumbria in 2012. There have also been contributions to the exhibition from Dr Carol Davenport and the Think Physics team at Northumbria, Creative Writing lecturer Tony Williams, and New Writing North. The launch night for the exhibition will also benefit from generous donations of Puffing Billy and Hickey the Rake beer from Wylam Brewery, gin from Steampunk Gin and Fentimans soft drinks.

Fabricating Histories: An Alternative 19th Century follows an earlier exhibition at the Discovery Museum by Northumbria’s Fashion students. *Re:fashion* featured 60 exquisite objects from the collection at Newcastle’s Discovery Museum, made between 1701 and 1916. These objects were selected as a starting point for the University’s Fashion students to explore the idea of real and imagined histories. *Fabricating Histories* is supported by the Arts Council North East.

Northumbria’s Humanities department features a range of fascinating courses, including English Literature, Creative Writing and History, and is currently ranked Top 15 and Top 20 in the UK for History and English respectively for the quality of its research publications. To find out more about studying at Northumbria come along to our next Open Day on 26 November. Click [here](#) to find out more.

Fabricating Histories opens this weekend and runs until Sunday 21 May 2017. Discovery Museum is open seven days a week, with free entry. Donations are welcome. Click [here](#) for full details and share your thoughts about the exhibition on social media by using #fabricatinghistories

Embedded image: *Dr Crighton's apparatus for the exploration of other worlds being without the benefit of a breathable atmosphere* by Nick

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