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It's history, but not as we know it

A steam-punk rhinoceros, secret drawings of a Lambton Worm-powered Turbinia and a corset based on a parasol – all fantastical reimaginations of Victorian history and part of a unique exhibition capturing the imagination of visitors to Newcastle's Discovery Museum.

Entitled *Fabricating Histories: An Alternative 19th Century*, the exhibition features work by five contemporary artists who have taken existing pieces from the Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums collections and come up with their own fascinating reinterpretations.

These include imaging how mathematician Ada Lovelace might have been portrayed if she had been a man and reworking the art of celebrated North East painter John Martin to give it an alternative twist.

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The project is a collaboration between Northumbria University and Tyne &

Wear Archives & Museums, with support from Arts Council England.

[Dr Claire Nally](#), Curator and Senior Lecturer in Twentieth-Century English Literature at Northumbria University, said: “There is a fascination amongst the modern day audience with the Victorian era and we have seen TV shows such as *Penny Dreadful* reimagine the fashion, literature and lifestyle of the nineteenth century in a way that really appeals to viewers.

“The Fabricating Histories exhibition does something similar, but looking more broadly at the Victorians, through gothic and steampunk – a genre of historical science fiction which often features steam-powered machinery rather than modern technology.

“The exhibition launch was an appropriately fantastic event, featuring vintage photography, aerialists and even a demonstration of Bartitsu – a Victorian martial art. We had attendees dressed in all manner of Neo-Victorian splendour, and a wonderful cake shaped like a top hat! Since the launch we’ve had great feedback from visitors and are looking forward to welcoming even more people between now and May.”

In a review of the exhibition, arts writer and blogger [Robyn Colclough](#) said: “It is an enjoyable and fascinating exhibition; the well-documented insight into the peculiar possibilities of modern life making it an interactive journey of discovery.

“Covering a range of topics, from the fashion world to the impact of Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution, there is plenty to absorb. The focus on the impact of these inventions in the region of the North East was often cleverly intertwined throughout the exhibit, making the history more relatable and even more enjoyable.

“The possibilities of our future are endless, and this was just one insight into how things could be very different.”

The five artists and designers featured in the exhibition are Dr Geof, Nick Simpson, Larysa Kucak, Phil Sayers and Charlotte Cory. Their work uses a range of media, including photography, literature, drawing, fashion and textiles, bringing together commissioned pieces alongside artefacts from the museum’s collection, which were previously in storage and unavailable for

public viewing. There are also items from the Science Museum in London, and from private collections.

Fabricating Histories: An Alternative 19th Century runs until 21 May from 10am to 4pm weekdays and 11am to 4pm weekends. Entry to the Discovery Museum is free and donations are welcome. Share your thoughts about the exhibition on social media by using #fabricatinghistories

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.

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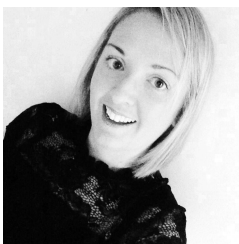
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