



Modern British Childhood 1948-2012

13 October 2012 - 14 April 2013

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, Bethnal Green

FREE

This major new exhibition at the V&A Museum of Childhood will explore the transformation of childhood in Britain during the tumultuous 64 years between the London Olympic Games of 1948 and 2012.

From a pair of 1950s children's NHS prescription glasses to the 2005 Teddy mobile phone designed for the under 5s, the exhibition will gather together objects – exceptional or everyday, public or private, familiar or unfamiliar – that dramatise the huge changes that have occurred in children's lives.

Modern British Childhood will include artworks, clothing, toys, books, childcare items, television programmes, film and photography. It will trace the transformation of childhood through education, health, family, entertainment, fashion and play, as well as consider the impact of politics and the economy.

Rhian Harris, Director of the V&A Museum of Childhood and Curator of, *Modern British Childhood* comments: "We're very excited about this exhibition. It's history brought to life. Today's grandparents were the children of the last London Olympic Games. Much of the landscape of contemporary childhood must be unrecognisable from their own experience of childhood in the wake of World War Two. They have lived through an extraordinary period in British history, a period that has included the rise of the welfare state and a technological revolution that affects so many aspects of childhood."

The exhibition will have four major themes. First, that for most children horizons have broadened and material conditions have improved since 1948, although both poverty and inequality persist and continue to blight far too many children's lives. Secondly, childhood and children's lives are now firmly centre stage in family and national life and in public policy. Thirdly, technology has transformed children's lives, affecting education, entertainment and play, as well as fundamentally changing the way children experience the world and communicate with each other and with adults.

And the fourth theme - society has become more risk-averse and children's lives more structured and controlled. This has had successes, such as the road safety campaigns of the 1970s but has also meant that the numbers of children playing or walking to school without adult supervision has fallen dramatically. As a consequence, nowadays three times as many children go to hospital after falling out of bed than after falling from trees.

Rhian Harris continues, "*Modern British Childhood* spans a period that starts with rationing cards and children playing on bombsites and ends with 'Happy Meals', computer games and mass-produced clothing. We hope that visitors from across the generations will visit, have fun and gain a deeper insight into some of the major developments in British children's lives since 1948."

1948 to 1969



World War Two tore British families and the economy apart. Known as 'the austerity games', the 1948 Olympic Games were a low-key affair. Athletes brought their own sandwiches to eat and the British team was instructed to make their own uniforms. From the hardship of the post war years when rationing was still in place, the period 1948-1969 sees the establishment of the Welfare State, the American influenced birth of the teenager in the 50s and growing affluence and liberalisation in the 60s. Objects on display will include *Muffin the Mule*, the puppet from the 1940s BBC broadcast *For the children*, as well as objects from the 1948 Olympic Games, including the home-made vest of Joe Birrell who competed in the 100m hurdles aged just 18. Henry Moore's *Family Group* sculpture (1948-49) will be on display, on loan from the Henry Moore Foundation.

1970 to 1989



A period of economic, social and political turmoil in Britain, this section will explore the point in history when the notion of modern childhood can be said to begin. This was an era when the rights of children were brought to the fore and concludes with the UN Convention of the Right of Children being ratified in 1989. This sits alongside the dramatic impact of Thatcherism on all aspects of society and the attempt to return to a 'golden age' of childhood and traditional family values. In reality, child poverty increased from one in ten to one in three. Objects on display will range from a Tawse, a punishment strap made of hide and an early prototype of the Maclaren Push Chair inspired by an umbrella's folding mechanism. This was a period of change that began with the birth of modern computing and ended with the proposition of the World Wide Web in 1989.

1990 to 2012



The rise of New Labour saw a conscious effort to place the child and the family firmly at the heart of public policy. *Modern British Childhood* will examine 'Sure Start' and 'Every Child Matters' initiatives alongside phenomena such as the impact of mass consumerism, celebrity culture and rise of the technology on children's lives. Just as technology offers children ease of access and powerful learning tools, it also isolates and increases the pace and complexity of childhood. 60% of secondary school children own a mobile phone as do 20% of primary school children. Divorce and teenage pregnancy have also increased significantly, suggesting fractures within society. Objects from this time period will include a Primark bra size 28AA (designed for an eight year old) and a Teddyfone – mobile phone designed for the under 5s.

26 Treasures / Ministry of Stories

Writers' collective 26 and Hoxton-based Ministry of Stories, as well as children in the local community, will team up for a new '26 Treasures' project that aims to help people create deeper connections with museum objects. The project will see adult writers paired up with items from the exhibition and asked to write exactly 62 words inspired by their object. Children will also write their

responses to pieces in the exhibition. These new pieces of poetry and prose will sit alongside the objects they respond to within the display.

Child's own voice – photographic timeline

Working in collaboration with a local school (**Rushmore Primary School, Hackney**), the Museum of Childhood will create a huge 28 metre collage of photographs to illustrate the lives of real children during this period, providing a visual record of the child's own imprint or voice. The photographs will form a visual timeline, capturing a picture of childhood over the last 64 years.

Notes to Editors

Writers' collective 26 is an association of business writers, novelists and editors who aim to inspire a greater love of words, in business and in life. They have previously run '26 Treasures' projects with the V&A, the National Library of Wales, Ulster Museum and the National Museum of Scotland. <http://26tc.wordpress.com/>

The Ministry of Stories is a creative writing and mentoring centre for young people in East London. It uses storytelling to inspire young people aged 8-18, in the belief that writing unleashes their imaginations and builds confidence, self-respect and communication. www.ministryofstories.org

The V&A Museum of Childhood aims to encourage everyone to explore the themes of childhood past and present and develop an appreciation of creative design through its inspirational collections and programmes. The Museum is part of the V&A, housing the national childhood collection. The galleries are designed to show the collections in a way which is accessible to adults and children of all ages.

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA.

Nearest tube: Bethnal Green. Open daily: 10.00 – 17.45, last admission 17.30.

Switchboard: 020 8983 5200 www.museumofchildhood.org.uk

Modern British Childhood is a FREE exhibition

For further **PRESS** information please contact Rebecca Ward on 020 7613 3306 or email press@rebeccaward.co.uk.