



THE WONDER ROOM:

A CABINET OF (SCULPTURAL) CURIOSITIES

From 3 - 23 October Norfolk artist, Christine Pike, takes over the iconic Custom House in Kings Lynn, filling it with her striking and fantastical sculptures. We caught up with her to find out what inspires her fantastic work

How does your environment impact your life and the way you design your artwork?

I am based in Downham Market, which is at the tip of the Ouse Washes. I feel extraordinarily lucky to be living with the River Ouse right behind my house. Living in the Fens means adapting to the landscape and environment - because it sure as sure won't adapt to you! I rather like the uncompromising nature of this landscape, although it has taken me a number of years to be at peace with it and not worry every time there's a high tide.

What first attracted you to sculptures?

I have always been pretty rubbish at drawing but found I could 'draw' much more easily in three dimensions!

I have experimented with

all sorts of media throughout my life. Professionally, I started out working in textiles and soft sculpture, before transitioning to fired clay. However, although I appreciate its amazing qualities - especially its ability to render skin and fur - it was never a perfect fit for me.

Eventually I hit upon paperclay - which isn't actually a clay at all! Air-dry paperclay has a much higher proportion of paper pulp, along with other filler ingredients, such as chalk, which make a sculptable paste that dries rock hard without the need for a kiln.

Can you tell us about a typical day for you?

With normal clay you have quite a small window in which to work before it starts to dry out, however with paperclay there are no such concerns as you can

add fresh material to an already dried sculpture. I also don't need to worry about the size of my pieces as they don't have to fit into a kiln's firing chamber.

However, you do have to be more organised and plan what you are going to make with paperclay as everything will need an armature or some kind of support inside. I use whatever will work - including plastic milk bottles and crushed up disposable aluminium pie tins!

If I'm teaching, rather than in my own studio, the previous day will have been spent prepping a quantity of paperclay and making sure the tutorial space is ready. I usually use the Discover Downham Heritage Centre for group workshops as it has great facilities, including a kitchen - so the day is fuelled by copious amounts of tea and biscuits!

What can visitors expect from your show, and what inspired the theme?

Antlered figures, 'hare women', dancing rats, nature goddesses, and more will occupy the ground floor of the Custom House, which is the temporary home of the Greyfriars Art Spaces collective, of which I'm a member.

I'm a trained curator (MA Norwich University of the Arts) and, in this case, the space itself was the inspiration behind my exhibition. I'm fascinated by the 'wunderkammer' aesthetic and the Custom House makes a perfect-sized Wonder Room, which is the literal translation - hence the title of the show.

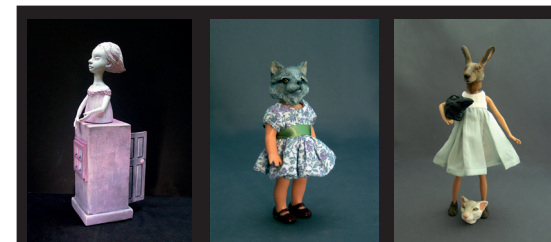
Also, my work is very eclectic in terms of subject and scale, so this exhibition allows me to give free rein to my imagination. I hope it will intrigue and delight visitors just as cabinets of curiosity once did.

What does the future hold for you?

People are always curious about paperclay as it isn't very well known in the UK. I get asked about workshops a lot and it isn't possible for me to be travelling to teach all the time, so I am working on some online tutorials, together with my husband, Kit Lewis, who is a film maker in his spare time.

I am hoping to have the first workshops available as purchasable downloads before the Christmas shows at Blackthorpe Barn, Bury St Edmunds, start in November. Blackthorpe is my most favourite venue and I look forward to it every year.

You can find Christine's work at art fairs around the country, and through several galleries, including the Imagine Gallery in Long Melford, Suffolk. You can contact Christine through her website, or via Facebook and Instagram where she often posts pictures of current work for sale. She also accepts commissions. For further information please contact **Christine Pike on 07968 287999 or via email at christine@christinepike.com**



• The Wonder Room: A Cabinet of (Sculptural) Curiosities will be running from Wednesday to Saturday, 10am - 4pm at Custom House, Purfleet Quay, Kings Lynn PE30 1HP between 3 - 21 October. Find out more at **www.christinepike.com/wonderroom**