

'World created from toys in a tray of sand from the collection of Margaret Lowenfeld'

c. 1920–70s. Tray: zinc; toys: wood, moss, plastic, lead, other metals, paint.

On loan from Science Museum, London

First Time

What you see in this case has never been displayed before. This treasure from a museum collection tells a story that hasn't been told until now. But which story?

Objects tell us about past environments, cultures, innovations and events. But they tell different stories depending on your perspective. What happens when you take something from one museum and ask experts from other museums to write the story?

First Time Out is a collaboration between five London museums:

- Horniman Museum - anthropological objects and musical instruments
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew – understanding the plant kingdom
- Natural History Museum - the science of nature
- Science Museum - making sense of the science that shapes our lives
- Wellcome Collection – the art and science of the human condition

Each object is on display at each institution for six weeks.

Visit www.wellcomecollection.org/firsttimeout to find out where and when to see them. How would you interpret the lemur skull, the Japanese wood panel or the psychologist's toys?

Wellcome Library General Collections 1966

These toys were devised as an analytical tool by the English child psychologist and psychotherapist Margaret Lowenfeld (1890–1973). They are a wide selection of small wooden and metal toys depicting various objects and people, including jungle and farm animals, trees, trains, cars and tiny figures grouped under the heading 'small people.' Lowenfeld was interested in questions of mental representation and encouraged children to make scenarios out of the toys. She then interpreted these scenes in terms of the inner mental pictures that they suggested, and in particular in terms of their sensorial qualities. Lowenfeld's work resonates with up-to-date neuroscientific research, which indicates that memories, especially traumatic ones, are often triggered by visual and other sensory stimuli.

Scientific efforts to understand mental processes (whether conscious or unconscious) have a history that stretches back at least to the 18th century. Psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy represent three major branches of this enquiry. But much art has also attempted self-consciously to probe the workings of the mind.

See if you can find the contemporary artworks by Katharine Dowson and Chris Dorley-Brown in the Medicine Now gallery.

When a toy is not just a toy

How would you set about helping troubled children who are too young to express their emotions in words? For the pioneering child psychologist Margaret Lowenfeld these toys were part of the answer.

In Lowenfeld's 'world technique' the psychologist observes the child as he or she constructs a world out of sand, water, plasticine and toys. Lowenfeld argued that this process enabled children to express fear, anger and family problems. The layout you can see was originally made by 7-year-old in 1960.

Toys as scientific instruments? From the 1920s onwards Lowenfeld accumulated and categorised thousands of miniature people, buildings, machines, plants and animals. She saw these toys collectively as a kind of instrument which was valuable, she argued, because it was not contaminated by any faddish theory, such as those of Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung.

You can see more toys alongside other items from the Science Museum's psychology and medical collections in *Psychoanalysis: The Unconscious in Everyday Life* until April 2011.

Exploring a child's inner world through toys Margaret Lowenfeld (1890–1973) was a pioneering child psychologist. She believed that the way a child moved the toys on a tray, like the one in front of you, expressed the child's inner world. These non-verbal techniques are still used today.

Children's perception of the natural world is now of great interest to botanists. In both western and traditional societies, it's clear that less knowledge about the natural world is being handed from generation to generation. This knowledge is vital for managing diet, health and natural resources. Knowledge of the natural world is also part of a society's cultural heritage.

Many botanic gardens are taking a lead in encouraging transmission of traditional knowledge from one generation to the next. This is as important at home as in the tropics: Kew is actively involved in the Remembered Remedies project, which is documenting the

herbal traditions of the British Isles. The project includes many reminiscences from older people, especially those who experienced life before the National Health Service was founded in 1948.

Born to play these toys were used by psychologist Dr Margaret Lowenfeld in the treatment of unhappy and disturbed children. By watching them play, she could begin to understand how they were feeling without the need for words.

Play is important for a child's growth and development. It is a means by which to explore the world and to learn valuable skills. By engaging the imagination, play allows a child to develop psychologically and emotionally.

What we think of as play is also observed in many other animals, though mostly mammals and birds, and is especially recognisable in primates. The primatologist Jane Goodall was among the first, in the 1960s, to record the behaviour of chimpanzees in similar terms to human behaviour. Play activities she noted included chasing, tickling and play-fighting. Young chimpanzees practice skills that will be useful in later life and learn by imitating older group members.

A tale of two Margarets

We sometimes take play for granted, as something that children do to pass time. Yet, many scientists emphasise the importance of play for the cultural and social lives of both adults and children. Pioneering child psychologist Margaret Lowenfeld was one such scientist. The toys displayed here were developed by her as part of her "world technique." Very simply put, Lowenfeld's theory was based on the idea that the way children chose and organised the toys in the sand tray could reveal how they understood their world; in play they expressed their fears, anger or fantasies. In addition to psychologists, numerous anthropologists have also studied play as an important cultural practice. The well-known anthropologist Margaret Mead, who was a close associate of Lowenfeld, also conducted several studies on child's play, in Samoa for example.

First Time Out at Wellcome Collection will showcase the following exhibits:

20th January - 6th March Livingstone's Medicine Chest from Wellcome Collection kept at Science Museum.

5th March - 17th April World created from toys in a tray of sand from the collection of Margaret Lowenfeld on loan from Science Museum.

19th April - 29th May Japanese wood, tempera and paper panels depicting botanical specimens on loan from Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

1st June - 10th July Cranium and mandible of a giant lemur and cranium of a ring-tailed lemur on loan from Natural History Museum.

12th July - 21st August Dance Paddle, Easter Island on loan from Horniman Museum.