



Huon Mallatieu

# All dolled up

Automata made in 19th-century France provided inspiration for the work of American artist Thomas Kuntz and a vintage dolls' house, furnished with period-appropriate pieces, stars in a charity auction

In my journalistic youth, it was standard practice to keep cuttings books as an easily referenced record of one's triumphs and embarrassments. As I was already in the habit of making personal scrapbooks and have retained them, most of my life is covered until, rather reluctantly, I began toly on computer records instead. It is often easier to find something quickly in the cuttings books, which is why from time to time I use them to compare today's objects and prices with those in my earliest COUNTRY LIFE columns, then headed 'Around the Salerooms'.

Recently, I was reading an article on the Mutualart website ([www.mutualart.com](http://www.mutualart.com)) about an American artist, Thomas Kuntz, who was born in 1965. He makes automata—often representing the inhabitants of the 'Uncanny Valley', as he calls the border region between reality and the world of spirits—and Guillermo



Fig 1: Kensington Dolls House Company house at the Museum of the Home, to be auctioned in aid of Campaign for Change

Gustave Vichy (1839–1904) or his son Henry, who were the only automata-makers to be awarded a World Fair gold medal, at Melbourne, Australia, in 1880, and a Grand Prix at Paris in 1900. The firm went out of business soon after being taken over by a former employee, Serendipitously, an Aubade was illustrated in David Profumo's article on automata (*Reality is merely an illusion, August 21*), but I can't offer an up-to-date price. However, in July 2016, Lyon



Fig 2 left: Hospital Rooms re-created at Hauser & Wirth.

Fig 3 right: Rebecca Byrne's A Stone Dropped in a Still Pond. At Hauser & Wirth

Elia Gradwell: Hospital Rooms; Tim Bowditch: Graham Taylor; Lyon & Turnbull



team Rebecca and Lucy Clayton to make commissioned examples inspired by historical buildings and interiors, using vintage fabrics and top-quality materials. In collaboration with online pre-loved furniture marketplace Vinterior, they have restored an old house (Fig 1) to be displayed in the re-furnished, -opened and -named Museum of the Home in Hoxton, East London. It includes living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, each decorated in Edwardian natural paint and meticulously furnished with period-appropriate pieces, including an Eames rocking chair and industrial pendant lamps.

The house will be auctioned in October, which will be the first time a Kensington Dolls House



Fig 6: Harp-playing Vichy doll, of about 1870. £38,000 in 2016



Fig 4 left: Rob Carter's Bronze Oak Grove at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London SE21.

Fig 5 right: A half-peeled lemon from Jan Pauwel Gillemans. At Dulwich Picture Gallery

supergloss print (Fig 5) in an edition of 95, at £1,350 unframed or £1,560 framed, which is being sold to help fund Dulwich Picture Gallery's purchase of the *Bronze Oak Grove* installation—by Rob Carter. The *Grove*, which has been planted on the gallery's lawn since 2021 (Fig 4),

## Next week Dutch autumn

### Pick of the week

I don't believe that I have ever featured an exhibition taking place in Orkney, where Victoria Crowe's 'Touching the Surface' will run until November 9 at the Pier Arts Centre, Stromness. The results of her recent residence in Orkney, where the trans-

formations during the summer-solstice white nights and the dark splendours of winter provide perfect subjects for this poet of gentle visual melancholy. She will also be showing in London from this Friday (September 8) to October 5 at Flowers, Cork Street, London W1, under the title 'Ice, Moon, Fire, Land'. Her most recent show there, two years ago, was a delight. Once again, this will be small, only 10 paintings (including *Snow Melt*, above), which will surely give a similar pit to the heart. Her magic was captured by Peter Davidson in his 2015 book *The Last of the Light*, where he wrote of her liminal pictures that 'so much of their skill and concentration focuses on the moment when twilight passes to darkness'. Both London and Orkney also include a wall-hanging woven to Ms Crowe's design by Louise Trotter of Dovecot Tapestry Studios, Edinburgh.

