

The Vulkan train locomotive

Toys have often been based on objects from day-to-day life. Trains are no exception, so it is only natural to see toy trains for children from the mid 19th century. The initial pull-along train on a string gradually evolved and, by around 1875, had become a sophisticated reproduction of the steam train. The Vulkan locomotive, a good example, ran on pressurised water from its boiler, which was heated using small pieces of solidified alcohol. The regulator simply had to be opened to allow the steam to turn the wheels via cylinders fixed on either side of the locomotive. In fact, this toy functions on the same principle as a traditional steam train.

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Father Christmas in aeroplane automaton

Kept at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Paris, this Father Christmas automaton was made at the famous Rouillet-Decamps factory. It illustrates the inventiveness of automaton creators who, as far back as 1909, designed huge animated window displays for the Christmas period, at the request of major Parisian stores.

Created in 1925 for the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville in Paris, this Father Christmas flew his aeroplane over the display while handing out his precious gifts. The illusion of life generated

by this mechanical toy is only possible thanks to the interaction of various specialisms - mechanics, clockmaking, sculpture, fashion design, etc. - without which the automatons would remain lifeless... Besides shop window displays, automatons are still used in the cinema industry to create special effects.

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Apollo Capsule

The stars, the Moon and space have always been sources of inspiration. In the 20th century, this inspiration extended to the world of toys as the conquest of space became a reality. In the 1960s, Japanese manufacturer Masudaya™ offered a range of toys based on this theme. Intended mainly for the American market, this metal toy on wheels was a nod to the Apollo programme which resulted in humankind's first steps on the Moon. A genuine collection item for ancient toy enthusiasts, whom it can still take on a journey back to their childhood.

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The fabulous history of TOYS

from Prehistoric times
to the present day



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Moulding of the izard washer from Laugerie-Basse

This resin moulding is an example of the pieces found at prehistoric archaeological sites, in particular those dating from the Magdalenian period (21000 to 14000 BC). Originally made of bone, this washer tells us that, even in such a distant era, items were made by hand and sometimes used as children's toys.

Only recently, however, have archaeologists and historians considered them as day-to-day objects. Indeed, they were thought to be ritual items rather than toys, because playing was considered as non-essential to survival. In fact, it was through play that the children of Prehistory learned to throw a spear with the help of a miniature thrower, or grasped the basics of flint cutting. This new understanding of such objects therefore opens the door to new studies and a new perception of the Prehistoric era.



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Buffalo on wheels

Found in southern Italy in the 19th century and now kept at the Louvre museum, this Roman clay figurine represents a buffalo. This domestic animal provided milk, meat and hide, but was also appreciated for its towing power. This artefact is a good example of ancient artistic techniques: the use of moulded clay in which incisions were made to represent the ears, the snout and other details. There are still traces of paint, showing how much care was put into making this object. Animals were often represented in this way as a means of familiarising children with their surroundings.



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Trictrac piece: men and dragons in combat

Trictrac, the ancestor of backgammon, was played on a tray using counters and dice. A throw of the dice determined how the pieces were moved along the black and white points marked on the tray. Very finely crafted in walrus ivory, this counter dating from the late 12th century is kept at the Musée de Cluny. Standard rules for this game were established in the 17th century. It was a mixed-gender game played mainly among the aristocracy.

Paris, Musée de Cluny - Musée National du Moyen Âge

Photo (©) RMN-Grand Palais (Musée de Cluny - Musée National du Moyen Âge), picture Jean-Gilles Berizzi



Childhood Games painting by Marten van Cleve



In this 16th-century Dutch painting (oils on wood), Marten van Cleve portrays children playing outside, a subject that also inspired Bruegel the Elder. The children are enjoying themselves on the village square between the houses, with the church in the background. They are playing various games: in the foreground are two boys on a see-saw, another boy on the left is walking on stilts, while a little girl blows soap bubbles. On the right, a drum has been left on the ground. In the background, other children are running hoops and playing ball games.

Marten van Cleve, *Childhood Games*. Oils on wood. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée Municipal Ducastel-Vera, inv. 872.1.80. (c) Saint-Germain-en-Laye, picture. M. Bury

Map of America puzzle

Exhibited at the Musée du Jouet of Moirans-en-Montagne, this puzzle made in the late 18th century represents a map of America. Indeed, the first puzzles were maps cut into several pieces as an aid to understanding and learning about geography. They were made from coloured paper stuck onto a thin wooden board. The puzzle's invention is attributed to Marie Leprince de Beaumont (a French educator based in London) or John Spilsbury (a cartographer and engraver from London). They were named jigsaw puzzles after the type of scroll saw that was used to cut the wooden boards into pieces. In the early 20th century, the French language adopted the English term "puzzle" for a game of patience that entailed assembling a number of pieces into a picture.



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