

Southampton City Art Gallery
Civic Centre
Southampton SO14 7LP

22nd June- 13th September 2009
Preview, 21st June, 2-4pm.

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The Truth About Faeries

From *A Midsummer's Night Dream* to *Lord of the Rings*

Since the 1970s the revival of interest in Victorian and Edwardian fairy painting and illustration has undoubtedly been a catalyst for contemporary artists. Leading dealers, Christopher Wood, Rupert Maas, Christopher Beetles and Peter Nahum, as well as collectors and art historians, Rodney Engen and Stephen Calloway, have kept fairy painting in the public's eye through a series of exhibitions and lavishly illustrated books. We have seen Peter Nahum's *Fairy Folk in Fairy Land* at the Leicester Galleries (1997), *Victorian Fairy Painting* at the Royal Academy (1997-98) and most recently *The Age of Enchantment: Beardsley, Dulac and their Contemporaries* at the Dulwich Picture Gallery (2007). *The Age of Enchantment* followed the trajectory of the illustrated book from the 1890s to the 1930s; this exhibition will bring the story up to the present day, with contemporary fairy and fantasy painters and illustrators. The works of Brian Froud, who was born in nearby Winchester, his wife Wendy Froud, Alan Lee, and Patrick Woodroffe, who now all live in 'fairytale' Cornwall, will form the core of the modern section, alongside the awesome works of Paul Gregory, who has devoted many years to his majestic *Lord of the Rings* cycle. Gregory, who has worked for over 18 years on this project, does not consider his interpretation to be definitive, rather 'a serious attempt at an impossible task'.

Fantasy is never far from the 'big screen', and Alan Lee, having won his Oscar for *Lord of the Rings*, has been called back to work on Tolkien's *Hobbit*. Brian Froud is best known for a series of illustrated fairy books that were adapted into successful motion pictures, *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*. Depictions of fairies have made their way into the popular culture in other ways as well, including clothing designs, ceramics, jewellery, needlecraft, figurative art, and quilting, marketed globally online. Fairs and science fiction conventions have also developed modern fairy art as a collectable genre.

Victorian and Edwardian illustrators, especially 'Dicky' Doyle, Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac, have clearly inspired Froud and Lee. But rather than attempting a chronological or artist driven display, this exhibition will take a thematic approach, looking at the ways in which artists have responded to Shakespeare's faeries (*A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *The Tempest*); Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* and the classic fairy tales. The *Flower Fairies* of Cicely Mary Barker form a theme in their own right. There will be mischievous and bad faeries (brownies, goblins and

trolls), as well as good fairies (the pretty one's with gossamer wings) and even fake fairies (the Cottingley Fairies and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle). This exhibition will chart a living tradition, taking as its starting point the 'golden age' of illustration, from the 1860s to the 1930s, culminating with the revival of fairy art in the 1970s. The story will be brought up to date with the current work of Brian and Wendy Froud, Alan Lee, Patrick Woodroffe, Paul Gregory, Sean Jefferson, Charles Summers and Carol Douglas. Southampton City Art Gallery has draw on public collections (British Museum, V&A, Heath Robinson Trust and Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford) and private lenders to create an exhibition that will appeal to a wide audience. Culminating in a faerie 'experience' created with the sculptures of Wendy Froud, you will discover the 'Truth about Faeries' and perhaps even come to believe in them!