

AutomataCon

2024

May 17 - 19 in Morristown, New Jersey



Morris Museum
A SMITHSONIAN AFFILIATE

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Food and drink are not allowed in any museum galleries or in the Bickford Theatre. This includes all AutomataCon 2024 presentation and panel rooms. Tables and chairs are available in the museum pavilion for eating and drinking.

AutomataCon 2024 is an event by AutomataCon LLC.

WELCOME!

Welcome to AutomataCon 2024!

AutomataCon is a convention of and for artists, collectors, historians, and enthusiasts of automatons and related kinetic art. This is our fourth convention; the others were held in 2016, 2018, and 2022.

The goal of the convention is to gather people from around the world to share ideas, build relationships, and grow interest in automata new and old.

The idea for a convention stemmed from the fellowship shown on the Automata / Automaton Group and Mechanical Adventures groups on Facebook. Like the Facebook groups, I feel that the true value of the convention is in the relationships built and knowledge shared when passionate people of common interest come together. As such, the success of the convention depends on the attendees. It has been and will be what we make of it.

Thanks to Tom Loughman, Jere Ryder, Steve Ryder, Nina Hoffer, Anne Ricculli, Marcus Romero, Lewis Perlmutter, and everyone at the Morris Museum; Jean Minthe for the logo art; Andrew Terranova, Wes Swain, Maria Fleming, Ray Fleming, my wife Kathy, the panelists, volunteers, and exhibitors from the automata community for helping to make the convention a reality.

Regards,

Brett King

AutomataCon Founder and Convention Chair

Featured Events

Special Exhibitions of Kinetic and Figural Art

The convention coincides with no less than four temporary exhibitions of direct interest, and the personal forces behind these shows will be in attendance at AutomataCon. Anytime during the event, you are encouraged to stroll about and experience the exhibitions. For full descriptions, please see www.morrismuseum.org, under “On View” – *Current and Upcoming*.

Murtogh D. Guinness Collection of Mechanical Musical Instruments and Automata (museum ticket required)

Tour the museum’s permanent collection of historic automata and mechanical instruments, one of the most significant in the world.

Scavenger Hunt (museum ticket required)

Stop by the AutomataCon registration desk to pick up clues to go on a scavenger hunt through the museum’s collections. When complete, come back to the registration desk for your reward and a surprise!

Exhibitors’ Tables (museum ticket required)

The exhibitors’ and vendors’ tables are open from 10 AM – 5 PM on Saturday and from 10 AM – 3 PM on Sunday.

Spark!Lab (time-stamped ticket from the Museum required)

Spark!Lab, where everyone is an inventor, offers children accompanied by an adult a new, informal approach to hands-on learning. And there will be a special automaton workstation on this Saturday! Spark!Lab was designed for ages 5-12, but we welcome any young inventors within a smaller space called Spark!Lab Jr.

Friday Evening Reception, 6-8 PM (AutomataCon Friday ticket Required)

Friday evening from 6pm-8pm is our kickoff reception (ages 21+) with food, drinks, museum tours, and musical entertainment by the Eternal Frontier!

Saturday Evening Social

After the convention on Saturday evening, many attendees gather at the Blue Morel bar and in the lobby of the Westin Governor Morris hotel for an unofficial gathering.

SATURDAY

Saturday, May 18th, 10AM – 6PM

Events subject to change. AutomataCon ticket required.

| Time | Bickford Theatre | Main Gallery |
|-----------------|---|--|
| 10:00 AM | The State of Automata Today | Automaton Mysteries: The Archaeological Digs of Dr. Kent P. Streater |
| 11:15 AM | Opening Ceremonies Bickford Theatre | |
| 11:30 – 1:30 PM | Hands-On Workshop: Linkages with MotionGen Lower Level Classroom, Drop in anytime | |
| 11:30 AM | Kinetic Artists Panel: The Creative Process – Secrets Revealed! | Miracles and Machines: A Sixteenth-Century Automaton and Its Legend |
| 1:00 PM | The Show <i>Will</i> Go On! | Engine Turning, Clockworks, and the Learning Environment |
| 2:30 PM | News from the Netherlands: Music, Automata, and an AI Improvisor from the 1820s | An Explorer's Tour of Special Pieces from His Collection |
| 4:00 PM | Films: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chinese Automatists – from Concepts to Production ▪ The House of Automata ▪ Michael and Maria's Mechanical Party | Makers' Mashup Magic Lantern Show |
| 6:00 PM | Programming Ends | |

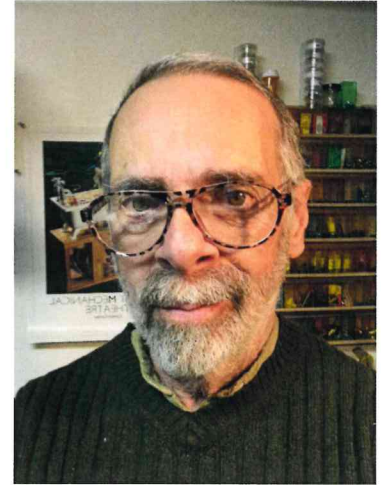
SATURDAY

The State of Automata Today

Marc Horovitz, Editor, Automata Magazine

10AM - 11AM, Bickford Theatre

We open with a brief journey through the earlier periods of automata-making, including how, why, by whom and for whom they were made. Then, taking center stage will be a discussion of modern automata sprouting from the "Cabaret" school and spanning to the present day, featuring colorful examples of who, how, materials, tools, current technology and trends. Marc's brainchild, Automata Magazine, is now in its sixth year of connecting enthusiasts worldwide!



Automaton Mysteries:

The Archaeological Digs of Dr. Kent P. Strevver

Steven Parker

10AM - 11:15AM, Main Gallery

We entreat you to consider that the most unbelievable automata of all date to ancient times. From the land of the Pharaohs comes the Oracular Bracelet, originally discovered on the arm of King Tutankhamun's mummy. The research of such unique, archeological artifacts can yield important insights into life, love, and eternity. To this end, revealed here for the very first time publicly is the tale of a 14th century Reliquary that was discovered hidden in an ancient crypt in the forests of Montpellier, France. Our host, Steven Parker of Acme Clockworks is proficient at jewelry, metalwork & storytelling.



SATURDAY

Opening Ceremonies

Brett King, AutomataCon Founder and Convention Chair

Tom Loughman, Executive Director of the Morris Museum

11:15AM - 11:30AM, Bickford Theatre



Hands-On Workshop:

Linkages with MotionGen

Lu Lyu

11:30AM – 1:30AM, Classroom, Lower Level, Drop in any time!

MotionGen is a program developed by Stony Brook University that is widely used now for designing kinetic sculptures. Our lessons start with the design process of developing moving linkages, and in the next stage you create your desired object in cardboard at group tables. Lu Lyu is a kinetic artist who finds the movements of linkages to be mesmerizing, inspiring her to create new artwork. (Laptops are available, but you are welcome to bring your own.)



SATURDAY



Kinetic Artists Panel:

The Creative Process – Secrets Revealed!

Cecilia Schiller, Tom Haney & Bradley Litwin

11:30AM - 12:45PM, Bickford Theatre

Where do ideas come from? And how are they transformed from imaginary to ultimately exist in the physical plane? How does one resolve problems when imagination inevitably collides with reality? How does the creative journey affect the finished artwork? And why is “Automata” your art-form of choice? Please expect a vigorous interchange with our panelists on these questions!

Miracles and Machines:

A Sixteenth-Century Automaton and Its Legend

Elizabeth King

11:30AM - 12:45PM, Main Gallery

In 1977, the Smithsonian Institution acquired a rare clockwork automaton made in Europe in the late Renaissance. Legend suggests the walking and praying automaton is a votive portrait of a humble Franciscan friar made a saint for a miracle performed in the Spanish court. The search for the source of this legend and the origin of the automaton “monk” is the subject of this talk, drawn from a new book by Elizabeth King and W. David Todd. Well known to AutomataCon, Elizabeth is Professor Emerita of Sculpture and Extended Media, Virginia Commonwealth University.

SATURDAY

The Show *Will* Go On!

Kathleen Maher, Executive Director, Barnum Museum

1PM - 2:15PM, Bickford Theatre

No name has left such a long-lasting imprint on Western popular culture than that of Phineas T. Barnum (1810-1891). His life was in fact punctuated by a full series of successes, and failures - the latter from which he continually rebounded. Here we walk through his life, his times, and the oddities that he placed on display, including the animate and inanimate. The Barnum Museum was devastated by an EF1 Tornado in 2010, and Kathy Maher will describe how they are reimagining and positioning the museum so as to rebound in the spirit of its namesake.

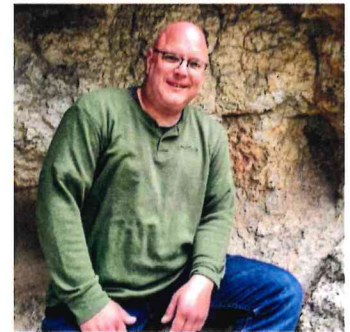


Engine Turning, Clockworks, and the Learning Environment

David Lindow, Co-Founder, the Plumier Foundation

1PM - 2:15PM, Main Gallery

Come see, feel & touch some beautiful objects! David's interest in restoring clocks of complex design led him to develop a more approachable form of Rose engine for turning ornamental works, the first such model in over 60 years. Central to the illustrated discussion is the phenomenon of an outdated apprenticeship system that is being replaced by a new energy rooted in the enjoyment of self-accomplishment.



SATURDAY

News from the Netherlands:

Music, Automata, and an AI Improvisor
from the 1820s

*Dr. Claire McGinn, Curator, Museum
Speelklok*

2:30PM - 3:45PM, Bickford Theatre

Mechanical music and moving figures are magically combined at Museum Speelklok in Utrecht. Here we are taken on a tour of a wide range of instruments and hear of an upcoming project that is focused on automata and mechanical musical instruments of the Arab-Islamic Renaissance. We also discover an antique organ that “thinks for itself,” the *Componium*, and we get to hear its replica, built by the Museum’s own Martin Paris.



*An Explorer’s Tour of Special Pieces from His
Collection*

Richard Garriott, President, The Explorers Club

2:30PM - 3:45PM, Main Gallery

Shown are an array of glittering “Mystery Clocks” by the legendary magician, Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin. These, followed by 20th-21st cent. automata by Kuntz, North, Mayer, Hardy, Smith & Spooner, and individual creations by Kinga and Ronan Garriott. The tour will start in the Main Gallery and then move to the Guinness Entry Gallery, as pieces are demonstrated by their owner. By way of background Richard is an adventurer, having become a 2nd-generation space traveler in 2008, and having been to the bottom of the deepest oceanic trench on this planet in 2021.

SATURDAY - FILMS

World Video Premier:

Chinese Automatists – from Concepts to Production

Produced & Directed by Shanna Han

4PM - 4:30PM, Bickford Theatre



Automata have gained the attention of artists & art students in China. We go behind-the-scenes of how they work together to produce a model, - from an idea, to crafting the parts, to testing public receptiveness, and then showcasing the product and selling up to 125 copies. With narrative by several of the makers, this documentary was produced expressively for AutomataCon 2024 by Shanna Han, who is a woodworker and part of the network of craftspeople.

Documentary Film Short:

The House of Automata

Produced & Directed by Euan Myles

4:30PM - 4:37PM, Bickford Theatre



World Video Premier:

Michael and Maria's Mechanical Party

Produced & Directed by Michael Start

4:37PM - 5PM, Bickford Theatre

If you have not had the pleasure of meeting them, you must certainly have heard about the doings of Michael and Maria Start. These two films come at their automata world from different directions. The House of Automata is a romantic look at their intimate perspectives about these figures, as well as their insights on how people perceive them when they are demonstrated. In the never-before-seen Michael and Maria's Mechanical Party we are taken on a whimsical, fun-filled tour of their collection and newest location in Forres, Scotland. Michael is the author of the new book, Secrets of Automata.

SATURDAY

Makers' Mashup

Brett King, Lu Lyu, Wes Swain

4PM - 5:00PM, Main Gallery

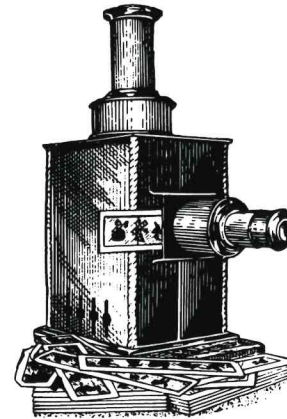
Join makers Brett King, Lu Lyu, and Wes Swain for a “shop talk” on modern tools and techniques, covering diverse topics such as 3D design and printing, creating linkages with *MotionGen*, and Augmented Reality.

Magic Lantern Show

Brett King

5PM - 5:30PM, Main Gallery

Brett will discuss the history of the antique projector known as the Magic Lantern and its role as a precursor to the film projector. He will demonstrate antique animated slides and show some recently acquired antique slides on automata from the estate of a horologist in England.



SUNDAY

Sunday, May 19th, 10AM – 4PM

Events subject to change. AutomataCon ticket required.

| Time | Bickford Theatre | Main Gallery |
|------------------|---|--|
| 10:00 AM | “Elegance” in Mechanical Design | “We Want Characters!” |
| 11:30AM – 1:30PM | Makerspace Build-Along: Crank & Linkage Mechanisms Classroom – Lower Level, Drop in any time! | |
| 11:30 AM | Kinetic Artists Panel | Gallery Tour - Set in Motion: Kinetic Worlds from the Studio of Richard Whitten |
| 1:00 PM | Art in Public Spaces: Outdoor, Kinetic & Solar Sculpture | Like Clockwork! – Guinness Collection Conservation |
| 2:30 PM | Building Quetzal | Artist-Collaboration, Product Development & Licensing |
| 4:00 PM | Programming Ends | |



Tantalus Mackerel (2005) by Chris Fitch

SUNDAY

“Elegance” in Méchanical Design

Presenter: Chris Fitch

10AM - 11:15AM, Bickford Theatre

“Elegance” in mechanical design is a question that this artist struggles with. As a subjective concept, is it even relevant? And if so, how is it embodied in a kinetic object? What constitute’s an “elegant” design solution to a mechanical problem? Illustrated are examples of his work. Well known to AutomataCon, Chris Fitch is an engineer, sculptor and inventor known for his moving sculptures, performance-based artwork and miniature theaters.



Pat Keck, Elizabeth King (photo by Olympia Stone)

“We Want Characters!”

Sculptors Pat Keck and Elizabeth King

10AM - 11:15AM, Main Gallery

What is a “character?” How is a character created, and what causes us to believe in it, when we can clearly see it is not real?... Welcome to this conversation between two artists about their shared threads and differences in creating characters, be they in the form of mannequins, puppet theaters, interactive kinetic works or stop-motion on film. Pat works mainly in wood, often inspired by magic or the carnival. Elizabeth uses a variety of materials to sculpt moving figures in whole or in part. Rich illustrations from within their workshops!

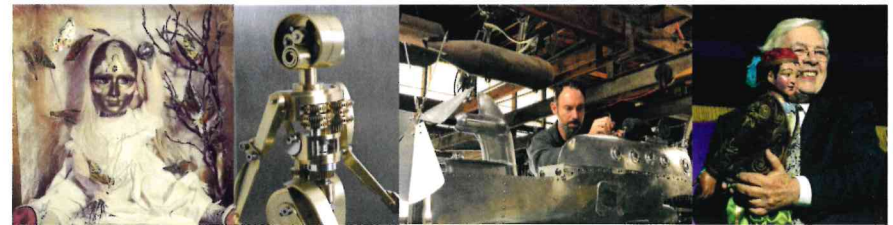
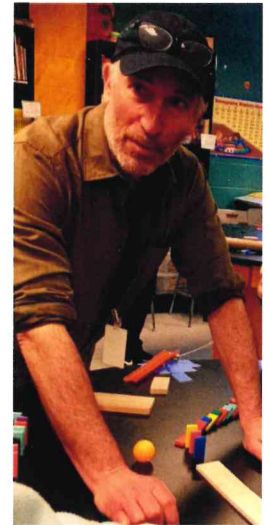
SUNDAY

Makerspace Build-Along: Crank & Linkage Mechanisms

Jay Mankita

11:30AM - 1:30PM, Classroom, Lower Level, Drop in whenever you like!

Make your own crank- or linkage-driven toy that tells a story, sets a scene or brings characters to life. Tools & materials will be provided, and no special skills or prior experience is required. Family friendly (5+), and adults are expected to be fully engaged. This session will be of special interest to educators. Led by Playful Engineers founder and teaching artist, Jay Mankita.



Kinetic Artists Panel

Brett King (Moderator), Ave Rose, Mark Galt, Nemo Gould, John Gaughan

11:30AM - 12:45PM, Bickford Theatre

Join a diverse group of world-renowned artists and makers as they discuss their work, careers, inspirations, techniques, and motivations. Expect a discussion as dynamic as their work!

SUNDAY



Gallery Tour -

Set in Motion:

Kinetic Worlds from the Studio of Richard Whitten

Richard Whitten

11:30AM - 12:45PM, Main Gallery

With an introduction by Dr. Anne Ricculi, Director of Exhibits & Collections, Morris Museum. Our tour looks into the dialogue that exists between fine art and machine. In Richard's own words, "I have researched devices such as steam engines, early airplanes and mechanical toys that are often miniature versions of the real thing. I then developed the ability to "invent" nonsensical but working machines. I construct working models of these for reference while painting." Please come and enjoy a very personal tour by the artist.

SUNDAY

Art in Public Spaces:

Outdoor, Kinetic & Solar Sculpture

Rein Triefeldt (photo by Cie Stroud)

1PM - 2:15PM, Bickford Theatre

The introduction of moving objects into public areas entertains a host of considerations, - from initial artist's concept to the challenges posed by expanded viewing angles; from method of installation to such basic questions as, "Will the public be able to touch it?;" and, from the selection of weather-resistant materials to the energy source, such as wind, water, or, solar power, - the latter in which the globe-trotting, award-winning sculptor Rein Triefeldt specializes. Please join us as he leads a colorfully illustrated discussion of these facets and more!



Like Clockwork! –

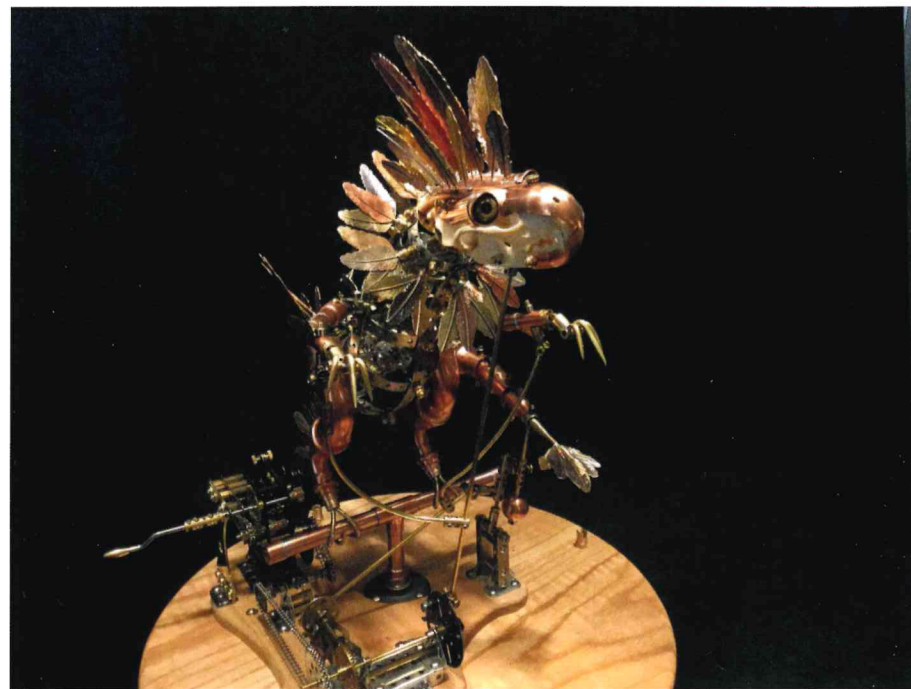
Guinness Collection Conservation

Jere Ryder, Conservator

1PM - 2:15PM, Main Gallery

This talk dovetails with an ongoing exhibition. Jere describes how hundreds of musical and animated objects in the Murtoigh D. Guinness Collection have been maintained in the 20-plus years since it was awarded to the Morris Museum. As Jere details the oftentimes delicate treatments for complex or fragile instruments, the distinctions between conservation and restoration are explored. Jere comes from a collecting family and he trained apprenticeship-style in Ste-Croix, Switzerland with the music box makers Reuge S.A. and the automata specialist Michel Bertrand.





Quetzal (2023)

Building Quetzal

David Bowman

2:30PM - 4PM, Bickford Theatre

Quetzal is a bird automaton created by David Bowman, a self-taught kinetic sculptor who, since 2013, has been creating “living” figures from either found or easily obtainable materials. Inspired by a bird cage that he bought at a flea market, David conceptualized what kind of bird should inhabit it. He devised its face, skull, beak, spine, limbs, claws and feathers, plus the mechanism to lend it animation, and he even bestowed Quetzal with a “voice.” Please come and see how he did it!

SUNDAY



Source of the Peach Blossoms (2019), photos by Colette Fu

Artist-Collaboration, Product Development & Licensing

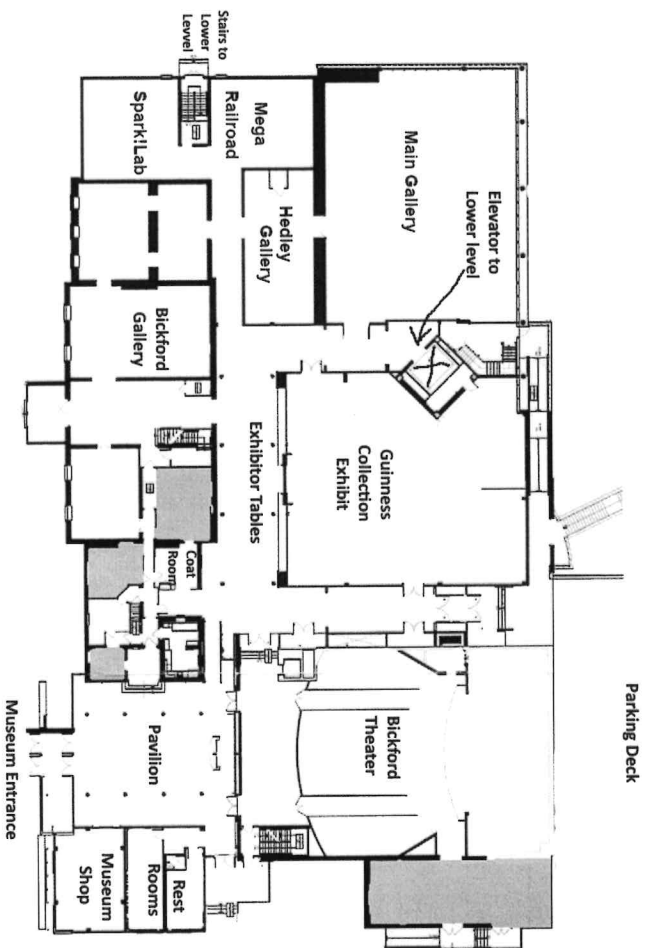
Bradley Litwin with Colette Fu

2:30PM - 4PM, Main Gallery

Featured will be several projects on which the two artists have collaborated with each other. Brad will then give a detailed look at the process of developing JigPetto, a jigsaw puzzle automata that is soon to hit the consumer toy marketplace. The ins-&-outs of licensing will also be discussed. Brad is a multi-disciplined maker of kinetic sculpture and automata. Colette Fu is the celebrated, pop-up book designer.

Exhibitors and Vendors

| | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Playful Engineers | David Lennox | Mark Hayward |
| Metal Folly | Steve and Jere Ryder | Automatown |
| Myron Tupa | Randall Cleaver | Salvagedolls |
| Artist: Lu Lyu | Brownen Densmore | Nick Mathis Workshop |
| Cecilia Schiller & Cranky Heart | Automata Magazine | Mechanical Flipbook |
| Kinetic Works | Ave Rose Art | |



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