

PRESS RELEASE

## ***Morris Mania***

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow  
5 April to 21 September 2025



William Morris (1834-96) has gone viral. Today, we find his infinitely-reproduced botanical patterns on shower curtains, phone cases, on film and TV, and in all corners of our homes, dentist waiting rooms and shopping centres. Opening on 5 April 2025, during the 75th anniversary year of William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, *Morris Mania* will be a major exhibition showcasing the remarkable versatility and lasting influence of William Morris's designs in popular culture, both in Britain and abroad.

One of our greatest designers, Morris argued that beautiful objects could only be created through a responsible and close relationship with the natural world and enjoyable, creative working conditions. These principles continue to influence subsequent generations of designers, makers and consumers today.

The exhibition will explore a complicated legacy. Over 125 years since his death, Morris's work continues to grow in popularity. His patterns are now affordable, well-loved and available to people across the globe, something he failed to achieve in his lifetime. However, this has been achieved in the context of mass-production, computer-generated design, global capitalism and environmental crisis. *Morris Mania* will consider the ongoing impact of Britain's most iconic designer in our increasingly cluttered and commodified world.

Objects from William Morris Gallery and private and public international collections will include a 'Rose' patterned seat from the 1980s British Nuclear Submarine Fleet, 'Willow' pattern Nike trainers, and Loewe fashion inspired by Morris's designs. The exhibition will also feature Morris-patterned objects donated by the public. Revealing how the designer's work has permeated our everyday lives, visitors are invited to continue to lend and donate their own Morris-print objects throughout the course of the exhibition. Morris-patterned donations to date include chopsticks, a waving cat from Japan, hand-embroidered wedding jackets, Wellington boots and an array of mugs and biscuit tins.

A highlight of the exhibition will be *Wallpaper (2025)*, a newly-commissioned work by archive documentary filmmaker Natalie Cubides-Brady, exploring how William Morris's designs have been used in screen history. A montage of scenes from film and TV will reveal the diverse and sometimes surprising range of narratives, settings and moods that Morris designs conjure up. Cameos in everything from *My Fair Lady*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and *Django Unchained*, to *Gogglebox*, *Coronation Street* and *Peep Show*, highlight how Morris designs form part of the fabric of 20th- and 21st-century popular culture.

The exhibition will look at the notion of taste, and how Morris's business was underpinned by the patronage of wealthy clients, rubbing up uncomfortably against his commitment to social equality. Prestigious commissions, including at St James's Palace and Castle Howard, home of the Earl and Countess of Carlisle, solidified his designs as symbols of luxury. Leveraging aristocratic connections, Morris marketed his work to affluent tastemakers and positioned his designs as exemplars of refinement. As evidenced by recent fashion collaborations by international fashion designers such as Marc Jacobs, Morris's work continues to symbolise belonging to a community of good taste.

As well as being a poet, designer and social activist, William Morris was also a businessman. While his socialist principles demanded that his workers be fairly paid to create high-quality goods, his success nonetheless depended on its commercial popularity. In addition to making bespoke pieces for the elite, Morris's business strategy expanded to cater to a growing middle-class market. Items with a repeating print, such as wallpaper and fabric, could be created in large quantities, resulting in a larger profit.

The role of the museum gift shop in the proliferation of Morris related ephemera will be explored within the show: as museums and galleries face financial cuts, the need to generate income from merchandise and licensing continues to increase. Loaned items such as a silk scarf from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and Morris thimbles and paperweights from the National Trust, reflect a shift in contemporary museology, and the need for cultural marketing in order to financially survive.

The idea of "Joy in Labour" was at the heart of William Morris's philosophy. Influenced by the art critic John Ruskin who railed at the poorly paid, repetitive labour of Victorian factory production, Morris believed that everyone had the right to enjoyment and creative freedom in their work. In an age of computer-driven mechanised production, sales on global platforms such as Amazon, Shein and Temu push makers to compete harder than ever for the cheapest price for products. However, skilled labour and pride in making something well, can still be found. A section of the exhibition will examine some of the ways Morris's work continues to be produced - often with care and by skilled artisans.

*Morris Mania* is curated by Hadrian Garrard, Director of William Morris Gallery. The exhibition will be accompanied by a programme of events at the Gallery.

For press information and images please contact:

Kitty Malton

kitty@sam-talbot.com

+447514 803 577

The exhibition will be on view from 5 April to 21 September 2025.

Gallery opening hours are Tuesday to Sunday, 10am – 5pm; Admission free (suggested £5 donation).

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### About William Morris Gallery

Owned and run by Waltham Forest Council, William Morris Gallery is the only public Gallery devoted to William Morris: designer, craftsman and radical socialist. Housed in the Grade II\* listed building that was Morris's family home from 1848 to 1856, it displays the world's largest collection of his work. In recent years the Gallery has developed an ambitious programme of contemporary and historical exhibitions by artists including Jeremy Deller, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Althea McNish and May Morris. Other special exhibitions have explored 20th-century political posters, African textiles and the Japanese folk craft movement.

### Image credits:

Left: Japanese waving cat, Strawberry Thief design © William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest

Right: Dr Martens, Strawberry Thief © William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest

William Morris Gallery

Forest Road London

E17 4PP

[www.wmgallery.org.uk](http://www.wmgallery.org.uk)



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**