

MEDIA RELEASE

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Celebrated children's author Shaun Tan discovers the weird and wonderful in *The Odditorium* at the Powerhouse Museum, opening 27 June

Something odd is stirring in the basement of the Powerhouse Museum...

Discover the weird and wonderful in *The Odditorium*, a new display opening at the Museum from 27 June that features a selection of oddities and curiosities from the deep vaults of the Museum's collection.

The extraordinary mix of objects has been carefully selected for their individual peculiarity, creating a display of oddities not normally seen; indeed some of the objects have never been on display in the Museum before!

The objects in *The Odditorium* have in turn been transformed by award-winning children's author and illustrator Shaun Tan, who has created an intriguing story for each blurring fact and fantasy.

Tan is the author and illustrator of an array of children's books popular both here and overseas, including *The Red Tree*, *The Lost Thing* and *The Arrival*, which was included in the *New York Times*' top 10 list of illustrated children's books for 2007.

'Who do you write and illustrate for?' is a question often put to Tan. His reply: '...anyone who reads and looks. That is, anyone who is curious, who enjoys strangeness, mystery and oddity, who likes asking questions and using their imagination....'

For Tan, the strangeness of each object in *The Odditorium* is where the trigger for his imagination is drawn. He has replaced factual descriptions with captivating fantastical stories resulting in a very potent and humourous mix that will inspire the curiosity of visitors young and old.

A giant licorice allsorts shoe bicycle from the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games closing ceremony, as imagined by Tan, becomes a guide dog testing device, used to test young guide dogs for their susceptibility to distraction while on duty. According to Tan, other 'canine distracters' commonly used include a Volkswagen covered in sausages, an ice-cream van that spills colourful rubber balls, and a litter of kittens riding on a miniature steam train!

Other curiosities in *The Odditorium* that have been transformed by Tan include a large zinc sculpture of a griffin from the Wunderlich Collection that featured on the facade of the now demolished Kings Cross theatre (and identical to the sculptures on the Grace Bros building at

Broadway), horse's teeth, a shirt covered in balls of human hair, an oversized model of a silkworm moth and a 19th century botanical specimen. Visitors will be no less intrigued when they discover the actual stories behind the objects selected.

Visitors can also let their imaginations soar by writing their own labels and stories about some of the weird and wonderful oddities on display.

To accompany the display Powerhouse Publishing has produced a book on *The Odditorium* featuring a newly commissioned cover illustration by Shaun Tan. The book will be available for \$9.99 from July through the Museum shop, the Powerhouse Discovery Centre and online at www.powerhousemuseum.com/publications. In addition the commissioned cover illustration will be available as a limited edition print signed by the artist.

The Odditorium will be on display at the Powerhouse Museum from 27 June and during the school holidays (11 – 26 July), it will be joined by a Museum 'sideshow' including a robotic petting zoo, the 'Hill of Heads', storytelling, craft, Madame Zelda the gypsy fortune teller and even a bearded lady! Visit www.powerhousemuseum.com for more details.

About Shaun Tan

Shaun Tan currently works full time as a freelance artist and author. He began drawing and painting images for science fiction and horror stories in small-press magazines as a teenager, and has since become best known for illustrated books that deal with social, political and historical subjects through surreal, dream-like imagery. Books such as *The Rabbits*, *The Red Tree*, *The Lost Thing* and the acclaimed wordless novel *The Arrival* have been widely translated throughout Europe, Asia and South America. In 2006, *The Arrival* won the "Book of the Year" prize as part of the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards and in 2007 the Children's Book Council of Australia "Picture Book of the Year" award and was also included in *The New York Times*' top 10 list of illustrated children's books. Shaun has also worked as a theatre designer and as a concept artist for the films *Horton Hears a Who* and Pixar's *WALL-E*. He is currently directing a short animated film adaptation of *The Lost Thing* with Passion Pictures Australia; his most recently published book is *Tales from Outer Suburbia*.

INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS & IMAGES:

Hayley Gallant, Powerhouse Museum

Tel: 02 9217 0157 or 0413 985 277

Email: hayleyg@p hm.gov.au