



Beatrix Potter
Drawn to Nature
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Beatrix Potter

Drawn to Nature

Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) was the bestselling author of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (interior) and twenty-two other beloved children’s books. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London—home to the world’s largest collection of Potter’s artworks—organized this playful exhibition, which at the Frist Art Museum is complemented by experiential learning activities in the Martin ArtQuest® Gallery. Primarily through books, letters, photographs, and watercolors, the show illuminates how Potter developed her stories and such characters as Benjamin Bunny, Jemima Puddle-Duck, Squirrel Nutkin, and a dapper frog named Mr. Jeremy Fisher. It also reveals that Potter’s animal tales were just one manifestation of her love of nature. She engaged in scientific study, farming, and land conservation too. The exhibition explores the full breadth of her achievements in four thematic sections. In every gallery there are labels specially designed to engage children with questions and activities.

Town and Country focuses on the first half of Beatrix’s life. She was born in London into a wealthy family and resided in the same house until she was forty-seven years old. She was educated at home by governesses and pursued her interests in art and science. By age eight she was filling sketchbooks with scenes from nature and her imagination. She often found inspiration in large gardens owned by her family and carefully observed their plants and flowers in delicate, light-filled watercolors (cover). Every spring and summer her family traveled to rural areas of Britain, which helped her to realize that she strongly preferred the country to the city. The long summer vacations in Scotland and the Lake District in North West England were especially formative.

Under the Microscope looks more closely at Beatrix’s passion for the natural world. She and her younger brother Bertram surrounded themselves with dozens of pets,



including bats, birds, hedgehogs, lizards, mice, rabbits, snakes, and a dog named Spot (flap). Beatrix also collected fossils, insects, plants, and rocks, and used microscopes to examine her specimens. *Mycology*—the study of mushrooms and other fungi—particularly fascinated her.

A Natural Storyteller shows how Beatrix translated her close observation of animals and nature into pictorial storytelling. Many of her characters, including Peter Rabbit, first appeared in the entertaining letters with pen-and-ink vignettes that she wrote to the children of her former governess Annie Moore, who encouraged her to transform them into books. In 1902 Beatrix secured a publishing deal with Frederick Warne & Co. and issued two titles every year over the next decade, the most prolific period of her literary career. She wanted her books to be small to fit into children’s hands and to keep them affordable for all “little rabbits.” In this section two cozy carpeted spaces—one with oversized flowerpots and another with giant spools of thread as seats—invite visitors to read Potter’s stories surrounded by her drawings and watercolors.

Living Nature follows Beatrix to the real country life she made for herself. Her books brought her financial independence, and in 1905 she began using her royalties to purchase property in the Lake District. Having frequently visited the area with her family, Beatrix felt at home among its cottages, farms, and villages nestled into the mountains and between the lakes. Many of her books are set there. She found new purpose as a farmer raising Herdwick sheep and became concerned with protecting the Lake District from development. When Beatrix died in 1943, she left the thousands of acres she had acquired to the National Trust, a nonprofit organization that continues to care for the breathtakingly beautiful landscape she loved. The exhibition concludes with a film that transports visitors to the Lake District, where nature still thrives. Beatrix left behind not only her beloved picture books for us to enjoy but also an inspiring model for saving the environment.

Cover: Beatrix Potter. Spring, Harescombe Grange, Gloucestershire (detail), ca. 1903. Watercolor and ink on paper; 11 1/2 x 9 in. V&A: LC 4/A/1, given by the Linder Collection. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, courtesy of Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd. Flap: Rupert Potter. Beatrix Potter aged 15 with the family’s spaniel, Spot, ca. 1881. Albumen print on paper; 8 x 1/2 in. V&A: Linder Bequest BP1425. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, courtesy of Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd. Interior: Beatrix Potter. Variant artwork for *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (detail), 1902–7. Watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper; 5 6/8 x 3 7/8 in. V&A: Linder Bequest BP468. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, courtesy of Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd.