

# Art in Motion

**O**ne sunny Thursday afternoon, in the spring of March 2023, I was invited to attend a zoom call with Nick Astbury, who works part-time at the International Centre for Eye Health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

After retiring from his consultant job in Norwich, Nick has been able to spend more time on his favourite hobbies, which include drawing and painting, repairing clocks and throwing pots. As a resident at Moorfields High Holborn (since taking the fellowship early on) Nick spent on-call evenings in the hospital workshop making a skeleton clock. That, together with visits to the Cabaret Mechanical Theatre in Covent Garden, started a life-long fascination with all things mechanical, especially clocks and automata.

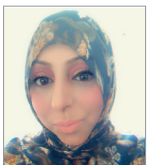
Illustrated here are two handmade automata which are ophthalmic focussed and a delight to see in motion, combining mechanics with humour. The remarkable 'Eye Clinic' took a year to make. The ophthalmologist stirring his tea is a self-portrait and the pile of notes on the floor awaiting dictation is an exact representation of real life as it used to be in the Norwich eye clinic!

It was a privilege to see pieces of automata art and how creative and marvellous they were displayed inside his home. Over the years, Nick has shared the joys of making a variety of automata as gifts for his grandchildren and friends.

'Automation' can be translated into a 'self-operating machine' with its history dating back to ancient Greece. The heyday for automata making in Europe was in the 18th and 19th centuries and today's wonderful creations have become an art form.

In 'Eye Clinic', you see the baby, the doctor and the illuminated eye chart, as well as many more features all in motion. The movements are beautifully in sync and come alive! One cannot enjoy it to the full extent in a still photo, hence the displayed QR codes will direct readers to some YouTube links, where one can see the visual impact of these wonderful ophthalmic automata in action!

## AUTHOR



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## ARTIST



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*The Eye Clinic Automaton by Nick Astbury.*

Scan to watch on YouTube.



*The Eye Clinic, showing some of the internal mechanism.*



*Clinical Demonstrations No 21: Eye Movements.*

Scan to watch on YouTube.