Public access description

Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) is one of the world's best-loved children's authors and illustrators. She wrote the majority of the twenty-three Original Peter Rabbit Books between 1901 and 1913. The Tale of Peter Rabbit (Frederick Warne, 1902) is her most famous and best-loved tale.

As a young woman Beatrix Potter studied natural history with some seriousness, exploring the collections of the Natural History Museum, including the insect cases and fungi specimens. She had a collector's cabinet full of specimens, from shells to dead butterflies and moths, and used a magnifying glass and a microscope to examine them more closely. She made numerous carefully observed studies of animals and plants from life. The Peter Rabbit books reflect her interest in natural history. The illustrations are full of accurately rendered examples from the natural world, from foxgloves to the animal characters themselves.

On this sheet Potter made detailed studies of two common species of British butterfly, the Small Tortoiseshell and the Painted Lady. Next to her detailed study of each specimen, Potter included a magnified study of the scales on the wing.

Descriptive line

Drawing: watercolour studies of Small Tortoiseshell and Painted Lady butterflies, with magnified studies of the wings, by Beatrix Potter, c.1887; Linder Bequest cat. no. LB.335.

Physical description

Study of a Painted Lady butterfly, with magnified wing scales shown on the right (above); study of a Small Tortoiseshell butterfly, with magnified wing scales shown on the left (below).

Dimensions

Height: 350 mm sheet, Width: 265 mm sheet

Museum number

BP.249

Object history note

Drawn by Beatrix Potter, ca. 1887. Acquired by the V&A from Leslie Linder (1904-1973) in 1973 as part of the Linder Bequest, a collection of ca. 2150 watercolours, drawings, literary manuscripts, correspondence, books, photographs, and other memorabilia associated with Beatrix Potter and her family.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1374591/studies-of-small-tortoiseshell-and-drawing-potter-beatrix/