

GREER TWISS theatre WORKSHOP

THE ARTIST

Greer Twiss was born in 1937 and was, from an early age, interested in making puppets and putting on marionette performances for both live audiences and television.

When he went to art school he became interested in casting metals like bronze. This had never been done by artists in New Zealand and so he had set up his own **foundry** and also had to teach himself how to make special moulds for his sculptures. These had to withstand the high temperatures of molten metal 'There's a lot of skill in it and its dangerous - explosions!'

He had a long career teaching other artists at the University of Auckland and has been a sculptor for over 40 years.

His works explore both **form** and **space** but meanings need to be arrived at by looking for the clues he gives us.

His most famous public sculpture is *Karangahape Road Fountain* 1966-9 near the corner of Symonds Street in Auckland. He lives above his studio in Ponsonby where he continues to make works for exhibitions.

This education resource explores three ideas which emerge from the exhibition and can be used both during and after visiting the exhibition.



1

THE ARTIST'S STUDIO



The studio shows us where the artist makes things. You can see the things that interest him, the tools he uses and the objects he makes. If you look carefully you can also know something about **the way that he thinks and works**.

This studio is a bit like a handyman's garage or maybe a scientist's or inventor's laboratory. Of course it's not his real studio - it has been [re]constructed by the artist - it's a facsimile or replica - like many of his sculptures, **it looks like the real thing but it isn't**.

Making this **tableau** has allowed him to play with our ideas about materials - the bench is not a strong wooden construction with a heavy cast iron vice attached - it's all made from light sheet steel - similar to roofing iron. But other objects, which might look light, are actually made from **lead**, one of the heaviest but softest metals and one of the artist's favourite materials. These are mixed up with real tools and pieces of equipment like the pulley and chain hanging from the beam.

The studio is full of objects that have a special fascination for the artist - often they are **models**; from a famous Italian church made from printed card to antique toys, puppets, sailing boats and dolls. This space holds the keys to unlock the whole exhibition - the studio is also a piece of theatre, a tableau or stage set with props that are a mixture of the real, the imagined and the remembered.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Think about the relationship between Greer Twiss's art work and real objects - try using words like; actual, authentic, genuine, artificial, copy, fake, real and imagined to express these.
- Other than making art, what are some of the things that interest Greer Twiss?



2 MAKING THINGS



In his sculptures we can see Twiss's **obsession** with the processes and tools that he uses; saw-horses, clamps, drills, wooden folding rulers, metal rulers, hammers, drills and many more.

His fascination with tools began at an early age when he played in his father's cabinet-maker's workshop. He also used to walk through the backyard of a sculptor on his way to high school and here he would have seen the tools and materials of sculpture as well as sculptures in various stages of completion. You can also trace his theatrical **manipulation** of figures and objects in his sculptures to his involvement in the making and staging of puppet theatres.

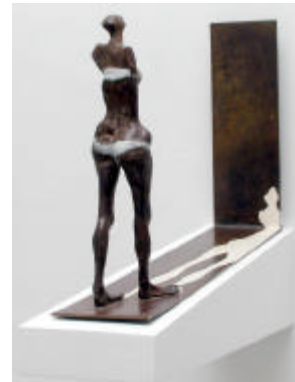
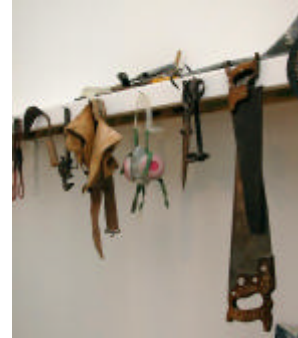
PROCESS

The works in this exhibition are either **cast** or **fabricated**. How something is made, called **process**, determines its final **appearance**.

Casting requires an original object, in Twiss's case it could be modelled in wax or it could be a real object; a hand, a toy car or a piece of rope. This object is used to make a mould into which molten lead or **bronze** is poured.

Fabrication is the construction of a three dimensional form, in flat sections. Patterns are made which, when folded and bent and joined, give the final shape.

Remember his collection of paper models the kind that are printed on thin card – you cut out the shapes and slide 'tab A' in to its corresponding slot. Some of these are of very complicated three-dimensional shapes – the model Statue of Liberty in the studio or in his own sculpture of Queen Victoria in *Hobson's Baggage* for example.



2

MAKING THINGS

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Try to identify all the different processes used in one work – you might use words like: solder, fold, cast, grind, cut or paint. What does the label say about the materials or **media** used.
- Find a work where the surface tells you that a wax model was used to form the mould. What is special about its **surface**?



ACTION

- Make a model of an object using flat shapes cut from light card – join them as you go using tape on the inside.
- Turn the object back into flat shapes again by carefully taking it apart, so that it will lie flat but with as many pieces as possible still joined.
- Trace around the flat shapes making the folds, adding a fastening system [no tape!] and assembly instructions to make a construction model.
- Give this to somebody else so that they can make another version of your original model.



3

TABLETOP THEATRE



Many of these sculptures are mounted on squares or rectangular surfaces that are like table-tops or strange board-games. The objects are recognisable but there are strange twists of scale and reality. One way of thinking about the works in this exhibition is as crime scenes, with pieces of evidence left behind – we ask ourselves what are the connections between the objects? What story is told by the objects and the gaps between them?



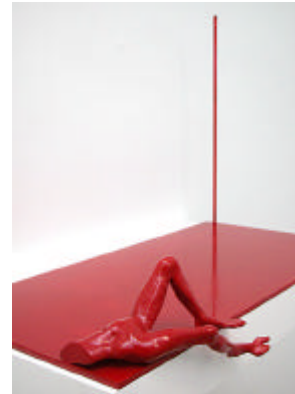
DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Discuss why some objects, like hands and legs, are cut off at the edge of the sculpture?
- Write or talk about one work and its **strange twists on reality** by inventing a narrative that connects the objects.



ACTION

- Think about table-tops that you are familiar with – choose one e.g. your desk or the dinner table, set for a meal.
- Study it and make a list of all the objects on the surface.
- Introduce another object – one that you wouldn't normally find on that table!
- Use a strong light or the sun to create shadows – now draw the tabletop from above. You can move some of the objects so that they go over the edge of the table and imagine that they are cut off at this point as in Twiss's work.



Illustrations

Greer Twiss
Puppet c. 1960s
Karangahape Road Fountain 1966-9 collection of Auckland City
4 X Installation views Artist's Studio in *Theatre Workshop*
Girl and Wall 1968 collection of Pat and Gill Hanly
Hobson's Baggage 1995 collection of the artist
Red Legs 2 1969 collection of John and Lynda Mathews
Open Barrier 1976-2002 collection of the artist
Vacation 1 Burnout 1984 collection of the artist
VW Split 1974 collection Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
Plane 1971 collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Photography by John McIver