

The Wonderful World of Rodney Peppé

Education Pack



Ruthin Craft Centre

15th March – 12th May 2013

The Wonderful World of Rodney Peppé: Introduction

16th March – 12th May 2013

Gallery 1, 2 & 3

Rodney Peppé's Wonderful World is a million miles away from the technology driven hubbub of our modern lives. The exhibition at Ruthin Craft Centre spotlights the career of one of Britain's most charming and talented artists. Besides being a prolific writer and illustrator of popular children's books and television series, such as Huxley Pig and Angelmouse, Rodney Peppé created an amazing collection of hand-crafted models, toys and automata.

This pack is designed to support teachers and educators in planning a visit to the exhibition with suggested ideas, workshops and points for discussion. It focuses on story-telling as a means of engaging with the works and thinking about the relationship between making art and creating stories. The activities are suitable for all ages and can be adapted to your needs before, during and following your visit.



Travelling Toilet Roll, 1991
Model for *The Mice and the
Travel Machine*, Viking (1993)

Contents

Introduction to Rodney Peppé	page 4
History of Automata	5
Making Models and Telling Tales	7
Transport	9
Animals	11
People	13
Further resources	14
Visiting the Exhibition and Workshops	16



Sardine Tin Boat, 1981
Model for *The Kettleship
Pirates*, *Viking Kestrel* (1983)

Introduction to Rodney Peppé

Peppé was born in Eastbourne but spent much of his early childhood in India where his family had an estate. His father had been a lieutenant commander in the navy during WWI and with the outbreak of WWII, joined the Indian Navy. He sent his young family back to England where Rodney and his brother would receive a boarding school education in Oxford.

He recalls his mother's inventiveness as a doll-maker, seamstress and creator of elaborate fancy dress costumes for her twin sons. Rodney seems to have inherited her resourcefulness and creative vision which he applied to his own artistic ventures and model-making. He was an imaginative boy who could turn any household object into a plaything or source of entertainment. He remembers making a figure with a conker for a head and one particular childhood incident where he 'struck up a conversation with a mop, holding it by the handle, animating it like a puppet.'

Peppé trained as a fine artist and wood engraver before embarking on a career in advertising as a graphic designer. His break came in 1968, when he published *The Alphabet Book*, the first of over eighty books as a popular children's author and illustrator.

His approach to story-telling is unique in that it has its origins in model-making. He evolved a way of constructing models to copy for his book illustrations and this inventive process often fed into the stories. For example, a sardine tin converted into a boat could be the starting point of endless escapades for the sailor mice on board.

A visit to an exhibition of Sam Smith's works at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inspired Peppé to make moving models and initiated a close friendship with the man he called 'my idol' and 'the father of modern automata.' His first mechanical creation was *The Jumping Jacks* which earned him a British Toymakers' Guild award and the commission for a book, *Rodney Peppé's Moving Toys* (1980) which contained detailed designs and instructions for making wooden toys.

Peppé's success as a story-teller and model-maker has resulted in a wide range of beautifully illustrated books and also numerous television series of his characters' adventures, such as *Huxley Pig* and *Angelmouse*. There has also been interest from museums and galleries in Peppé's vast collection of models which he has kept over the years, resulting in exhibitions that capture the imagination of adults and children alike.

A Brief History of Automata

Automaton: a self-operating machine or robot

The word comes from the Greek word αὐτόματον, meaning 'acting of one's own will,' and it is generally used to describe non-electronic machines such as clockwork toys. Complex mechanical devices are known to have existed in Ancient Greece. The mathematician, Hero of Alexandria wrote about machines that included a water siphon, a fire engine and a programmable cart. The only surviving example, however, is the *Antikythera* mechanism from 150-100 BC which is now displayed in the National Archeological Museum at Athens. This is thought to have been used for calculating the positions of the stars and planets.

There are also accounts of automata in Ancient China. The *Li Zie* text of the 3rd century BC describes a human-shaped robot created by the 'artificer' Yan Shiand. In the 5th century BC *Han Fei Zi* text there are descriptions of wooden birds that could fly.

Machines and robots were popular forms of entertainment at mediaeval courts and Eastern palaces. The Persian brothers known as *Banu Musa*, compiled an illustrated work, *The Book of Ingenious Devices* in 850, which describes 100 automata, including a self-playing flute, a wind-powered fountain and a device for picking clams. The sketchbooks of 13th century artist Villard de Honnecourt reveal designs for mechanical animals and angels.

During the Renaissance, artists such as Giovanni Fontana and Leonardo da Vinci produced ingenious designs for both practical gadgets and mechanical spectacles. Fontana's treatise, *Bellicorum instrumentorum liber* of 1420-30, describes fantastic automata such as a rocket-propelled fish, bird and rabbit. Leonardo's inventions included flying machines, tanks and various military contraptions. He also said to have created an animated lion and robotic knight in armour to entertain the court of the Duke of Sforza in Milan. In England, the mathematician John Dee devised a wooden beetle that could fly!

As watch-making developed in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment, so did the art of making mechanical objects. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Paris became the centre of a thriving industry, exporting clockwork models and machines worldwide. Famous automaton makers include Jacques de Vaucanson, Pierre Jaquet-Droz, John Joseph Merlin and Henri Maillardet and businesses such as Vichy, Roullet & Decamps, Lambert, Phalibois, Renou and Bontems whose goods are now prized by collectors.

In Britain, the Victorian era was a period of rapid development, discovery and also the 'Golden Age of Automata.' Robots and mechanical toys were attractions at expositions, funfairs and circuses.

Many of today's artists continue the tradition of automata making. Cabaret Mechanical Theatre is an organisation based in Britain that has staged exhibitions of contemporary automata worldwide for over thirty years. Other artists include Dug North, Thomas Kuntz, Arthur Ganson and Le Défenseur du Temps.

Rodney Peppé cites Sam Smith as the major influence on his own models, along with the mobiles and moving sculptures of Alexander Calder and Jean Tinguely.

Activities

Find out about mechanical objects used throughout history (eg cuckoo clocks, water clocks, watermills, weapons etc) collect pictures which you could cut up to make a collage. You could team up with other pupils and all contribute parts to a giant mechanical collage.

Make a list of mechanical objects that you use in everyday life? Make sketches of the moving parts. Find out how they work. Try to describe them - or write a poem about machinery!

Imagine a world without computers, digital technology and electricity. How would you survive? Write a story about life without modern technology. You could imagine that you are shipwrecked on a desert island, lost in a jungle or a survivor from an air crash in a remote place.

Design a robot! Use your drawings to make a model with recycled materials such as cardboard boxes, tubes, fabrics, buttons, plastic containers etc. Give your robot a name! Describe the tasks it can perform – can it talk? Imagine having a robot at home, accompanying you to school, going on holiday or taking it out with your friends. Make up a story about your adventures.

Make a mobile or kinetic sculpture in the style of Alexander Calder.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2p44uZnWHE>

Or automata with food! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvjCWIOFYLU>

Watch videos of historic automata:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifeNC28vpYo&feature=player_embedded

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WofWNcMHcl0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GN7WFr-anqY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7oSFNKllaM&list=PLQH9WM6LVBTOAIXYHVMKFSAPX71DIPQ9H>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiLWBzxyzuk>

Making Models and Telling Tales

Model: *a three-dimensional representation of an object or person, usually made on a smaller scale to the original*

Story: *an account of real or imaginary people, places and events, related for entertainment*

Rodney Peppé has been a modelling enthusiast since childhood. As a teenager, he made highly detailed scale models, including a replica of Captain Cook's HM Bark Endeavour. For his reconstructions of famous vessels, he carried out extensive research, studying manuals and making sketches in the maritime sections of museums.

His introduction to moving models was during his childhood at Eastbourne, where he became fascinated by the penny-in-the-slot automata in the seaside resort's amusement arcades and even attempted to make his own mechanical 'haunted house.' During his teens, Rodney's mother, a skilful craftswoman herself, discovered a 19th century clockwork magician in a local junk shop. It had been made by Roullet et Decamps, a Parisian firm from the 'Golden Age of Automata' and under the eyes of her enthusiastic son, she set about restoring it to working order.

As an art student, he became interested in the kinetic sculptures of Alexander Calder and Jean Tinguely's robotic art. He was also influenced by Pop artists such as Peter Blake who found inspiration in everyday objects and popular culture.

Model making has become integral to Peppé's career as a children's writer and artist. Not only has he made models as aids for his book illustrations, he has also found inspiration for stories in the objects he has made. A good example is the tale *The Mice Who Lived in a Shoe*. He originally intended to write something based on the nursery rhyme about the old woman who lived in a shoe. His search for an old-fashioned ladies laced-up boot was proving unsuccessful and so his father offered a pair of his cast-off desert boots. Rather than suggesting a plausible home for an old woman, the man's boot seemed more suitable for a family of mice, and so the writer began thinking about how these creatures could adapt the footwear as accommodation. The idea for a whole series of books was hatched, as Rodney explained:

'The subtext would be about family teamwork and the story would show how they build their wonderful shoe-house, safe from the weather and the cat...Most of the drawings for the Mice who Lived in a Shoe are made from the various stages of construction, a feat I could not have invented without a model.'

Activities

Visit a museum and collect pictures or photographs of interesting objects. Distribute these images in class and see if your friends can guess what they are or what they were used for. Imagine a history for one of these objects – who made it? Who has owned it throughout its lifespan? What events have taken place around it? How did it finally arrive in a museum?

Imagine being a tiny figure on a toy ship or in a dolls house (or a model in the exhibition!). Write a story about your adventures in Toyland, in the gallery afterhours or simply negotiating your way through everyday life as a miniature person.

Make a list of uses for models in everyday life (eg architectural models, artists and designers' scale models, dressmakers' dummies, dioramas in museums, shop displays etc). Write a story about a dummy in a shop window or model in a museum coming to life.

Find examples of other artists who incorporate objects or models in their works (eg Salvador Dali, Peter Blake, Tony Cragg, Claes Oldenburg etc.) Discuss their use of materials – what have they used and why? What does it remind you of? Make your own versions of, say Dali's *Lobster Telephone* (1936) or Blake's *Toy Shop* (1962) using old toys and recycled materials.

Design accommodation for a family of birds, insects, reptiles or small mammals by adapting a household object or item of clothing (eg vacuum cleaner, football boot, lampshade, biscuit tin, handbag, cycling helmet etc) Make up names for your characters and think how they would go about renovating their new accommodation. You could collaborate with others to build a village of 'creature homes'. You could make up a 'soap opera' about your animal community and take it in turns to suggest storylines.

Brainstorm! Rodney Peppé insists that THE IDEA is the most important part of making a picture book. Pool your resources to come up with ideas for stories and how you could illustrate them. Work as a team!



Shoe House, 1980.

Transport

Throughout his life, Peppé has travelled extensively and lived in other countries, which possibly explains his fascination with different forms of transport. Living near the sea at Eastbourne and his father's naval career inspired his childhood love of boats and ships. He remembers being given toy ships for his eighth birthday, whilst on board the troopship Windsor Castle during an exciting voyage back to England with his family during WWII.

The characters in his books and television programmes make use of a wide range of transport for their journeys, including sardine-tin boats, kettleships and toilet-roll planes. Amongst the examples in the exhibition are *Flying Basket* (1981), *Huxley and Horace in Huxley Pig's Motor Car* (1985-88) and *Uncle Sam Cyclist* (1988).



Flying Basket, 1983

Activities

Visit a maritime, car or aviation museum and make sketches or collect pictures of different forms of transport. How were historic forms of transport different from those we use today? Who invented the car, train, helicopter, bus etc? How do they work? How did people travel before cars, trains, planes etc were invented?

Collect discarded household items to convert into galleons and flying machines. You could look out for interesting objects in thrift shops and car-boot sales: eg kettles, baskets, watering-cans, colanders, trays, boots, hats, etc. Talk about the value of recycling old materials.

Use natural materials for the above activity as an alternative to man-made objects. Examples could include coconut shells, driftwood, seashells, leaves, bark etc. Talk about how natural materials can be used for making baskets, fabrics, paper, pottery, paint, utensils etc. How can you tell the difference between machine-made and hand-made objects? What are the advantages/disadvantages of mass-production or hand-crafted objects?

Choose one of Rodney Peppé's wonderful creations to write a story about. Imagine that you are taking a journey back in time or into the future in a kettleship or flying basket. What would you take with you? Where would you go? Who would you take with you as a crew?

Plan a trip around the world using a variety of Peppé's vehicles in order to cross land and sea. Consult a map to work out a route and decide which countries you would like to visit. Write an account of your imaginary journey – the people you meet, the animals you encounter, the sights you experience, the smells, the sounds etc. You could illustrate your story or cut and paste pictures from magazines.

Make a life-sized model boat using big cardboard boxes, cushions, old clothes, string etc. Dress up as pirates, sailors or explorers and act out a story such as a mutiny, a sea battle, the discovery of a new land or a shipwreck.

Write an account of different forms of transport that you have travelled on. What was the most exciting journey you have undertaken? Have you ever travelled overnight on a plane, train or ship? Have you been on a model railway/balloon/ mountain train/helicopter/motorcycle ride? Describe your experiences – what do you remember? How did it feel?

Research transport in art history: cave paintings of horses and chariots; tapestries, illuminated manuscripts, sculptures and carvings, modern video installations etc. Discuss how some artists have attempted to capture motion (eg Ivo Pannaggi, *Speeding Train* 1922) or the power and effects of natural forces (eg JMW Turner, *Dutch Boats in a Gale* 1801) or to tell the story of a journey (eg William Frith, *The Railway Station* 1862) or depict the drama of a shipwreck (eg Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa* 1818)

Reconstruct a famous painting in the style and spirit of Rodney Peppé using found materials and animal characters instead of people! Be inventive and have fun!

Make a toilet roll plane or sardine tin boat! Use drawings or pictures of Peppé's examples in the exhibition as a guide but customise your design to make it unique!

Animals



Tyger! Tyger! 1993.
Hand-operated automaton,
44x43x20cm

Peppé's lifelong love of animals is reflected in the characters of his stories, such as Huxley Pig, Angelmouse, Henry the Elephant etc. Many of his models were made as homes and transport for his characters and some of his most inventive works are based on animals, both wild and domesticated.

Growing up in India, Rodney was familiar with the exotic creatures of this continent. He recalls: 'two cobras fighting over a bird...me falling off an elephant.....watching crocodiles on the riverbank....listening to a mynah bird reciting a play in different voices...' The jungle features in many of his works including, *Jungle from Puzzle Book* (1981) and *Jungle Box* (2003). One of his most popular moving models is *Tyger! Tyger!* (1993) which was inspired by the William Blake poem, 'The Tyger.' A turn of the handle sets exotic birds in motion across the starry sky and the ferocious beast's eyes glow as her opens his jaws to roar.

Activities

Read the William Blake poem, *The Tyger* and talk about some of the words that the writer uses to describe this beast. Look at other examples of poems about creatures, eg Brian Patten's, *A Small Dragon*, Joan Poulson's *Crick Crack Crocodile* or *On the Ning Nang Nong* by Spike Milligan

Look at representations of different animals in art and make drawings and paintings from your favourites. Eg George Stubbs, Franz Marc, Henri Rousseau, Picasso, Henry Moore, David Hockney etc.

Compare Rodney Peppé's drawings of Henry the Elephant and Huxley Pig to his wooden models. Make your own models to draw from. This can help you to work out light and shade and the relationship of a figure to its surroundings.

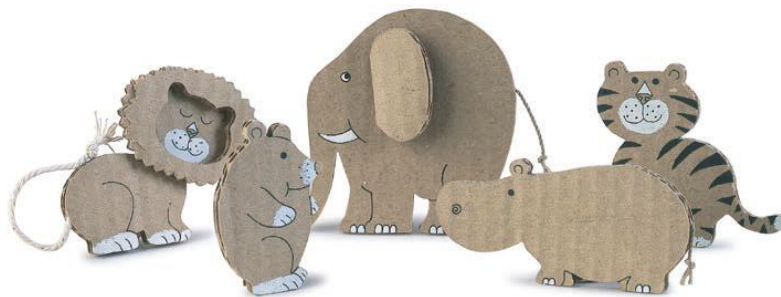
Make your own Clothes-Peg Alligator! Invent your own snapping creatures with moving jaws. (Details and instructions for making this and other models can be found in this free pdf download: <http://bookos.org/g/Rodney%20Peppe>)

Design a new wardrobe for Huxley Pig or invent a female pig character and dress her! You could cut pictures of outfits from magazines and either copy them or make a collage.

Create a cardboard zoo... or farm.. or jungle...or sea.. or Noah's Ark.... use your imagination! Make templates in paper and draw around them onto cardboard. You could colour them with pencils, crayons or paints. You could do this as a group activity to make as many different creatures as possible!

Compile a list of animal characters from books, television and films. Which are your favourites and why? You could collect pictures of them and make a giant collaged 'menagerie' with your classmates.

Invent your own animal character! It could be a cartoon character or a model. Make up a name. Design (or make!) its clothes, home, transport, friends and props. You could work in a group and undertake different tasks for this activity.



Cardboard Zoo, 1989.

People

Peppé had early ambitions to be a concert violinist or an actor: ‘my dreams revolved around the fame and adulation the film stars received.’ It is therefore not surprising to find that his ‘Wonderful World’ is populated by musicians, dancers, circus folk and performers. One of his most unusual pieces is *The Choir* (2006), where the maestro conducts a group of singing dentures which open to reveal sheet music inside their mouths.

Some of his works were based on songs or verse, for example *The Twelve Days of Christmas* (1990) and *The Owl and the Pussy Cat* (2011). *A Different Drummer* was inspired by the philosopher Henry David Thoreau’s lines from *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854):

*“If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears, however
measured or far away.”*

These lines are apt for describing Peppé’s performers, for while many of the works depict teams working together, there is also an emphasis on originality and individuality. His acrobats and dancers may be carved from the same template, but each has his or her own personality and subtle differences in facial features and outfits to mark their own unique identity.



Hole & Peg Acrobats,
1976. Slot-together toy

Activities

Read poems or nursery rhymes in class and then suggest ideas for art related to the verses eg a painting of 'The Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll; a collage of letters and words for Edward Lear's *An Alphabet*; an assemblage based on the Dish running away with the Spoon, from *Hey Diddle Diddle* (using plastic cutlery and paper plates) etc

Make 'hole and peg' acrobats – each pupil could have a figure to paint before they are assembled as a 'troupe'. You could use corrugated cardboard instead of wood for your figures and paste paper to them.

Design a circus poster! Look at some examples of Victorian advertisements for inspiration or listen to the Beatles' *Being For The Benefit of Mr Kite*, which was based on a circus poster that John Lennon had seen. Find out how posters are printed using machinery, screens or digital technology. You could create a hand-made poster for Rodney Peppé's acts.

Make cut-out figures of acrobats, dancers, clowns etc with movable arms and legs (attached with clips) using Peppé's Humpty Dumpty (below) as a guide.

Create an orchestra! Allocate different instruments to pupils for them to find out about, make sketches or collect images and then make a model of in plasticene or card. Try to find a wide range of instruments from other countries and from history. Discuss how they were made, what they were made from, what they sound like – find clips on YouTube.

Stage a dance competition! Invite pupils to find different images of dancers to make or paint and display on a pretend dance floor or stage (eg a box with one side removed) The class could vote for the most original design.



Humpty Dumpty, 1974.
Cut-out figure included in
Humpty Dumpty, Viking Kestrel 1974

Further Resources

Philip Hughes (ed) *The Wonderful World of Rodney Peppé*, Ruthin Craft Centre, 2013

Rodney Peppé, *Rodney Peppé's Moving Toys*, Evans Brothers, 1980 and Sterling, 1980

Make Your Own Paper Toys, Patrick Hardy Books, 1984

Automata and Mechanical Toys, Crowood Press, 2002

Toys and Models, Antique Collectors' Club, 2003

Making Mechanical Toys, Crowood Press, 2005

A list of Rodney Peppé's children's books can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodney_Pepp%C3%A9

Online Resources

<http://www.sam-smith.org/>

<http://www.darkroastedblend.com/2010/12/amazing-automatons-victorian-robots.html>

<http://www.cabaret.co.uk/>

<http://blog.dugnorth.com/2012/03/profile-of-artist-sam-smith-father-of.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6jwnu8Izy0> (Alexander Calder)

<http://www.poetryarchive.org/childrensarchive/search.do?method=theme&searchTerm=animals> (poems about animals)

<http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/songs/index.htm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuAwFhjSkFw> (Beatles For the Benefit of Mr Kite)

<http://bookos.org/g/Rodney%20Peppe> (free download of 'Making Mechanical Toys')

Episodes of Rodney Peppé's television programmes can be viewed on YouTube eg

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXjpvIZo_tQ

Visiting the Exhibition and Workshops

Ruthin Craft Centre is open daily from 10.00am - 5.30pm

Admission is free. Free parking for cars and coaches.

Directions can be found at <http://www.ruthincraftcentre.org.uk/>

To book a visit with your school group please ask or phone the gallery desk on 01824 704774 for further information.

Julie Robson 2013