



**ADELAIDE
FESTIVAL**

28 FEB - 15 MAR 2020

The Artist

Circo Aereo

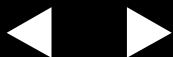
EDUCATION RESOURCE

Resource developed by
Deanne Bullen 2020

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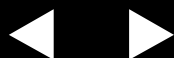
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Show rundown

Australian Premiere

1hr, no interval

An artist arrives in his studio, ready to prepare a new work of art. He waits for inspiration to strike him, however his focus strays, he becomes terrified by the blank canvas. When he eventually finds inspiration things don't proceed quite as he would wish. For him the everyday is filled with challenges until chaos is unavoidable.

This character takes lots of crazy, silly risks that put him in difficult situations. Luckily they usually work out, phew!

Themes

The Artist is a solo, physical theatre, comedy performance. It features layers of additional meaning about:

- the small and large challenges of life
- creativity

Production

Style and Conventions

The Artist is:

- a solo physical theatre and contemporary circus show by award-winning Thom Monckton and Circo Aereo
- co-designed by Sanna Silvennoinen and Thom Monckton
- played by Thom Monckton, a physical actor and clown.

Set and Costume Design

The set for *The Artist* is an artist's studio with a paint splattered floor, art materials and accoutrements. There are steps for him to get tangled up in and props that provide opportunities for the artist to put himself in difficult situations to work out.



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Curriculum links & activities

This education resource has been developed with links to the Australian Curriculum. Activities have been created to reflect each of the achievement standards, depending on the year level, including content descriptions within each learning area and the general capabilities. The resource aims to provide teachers with information to help prepare students before attending the performance, as well as structured learning activities for the classroom after viewing the performance.

SACE Stage 1 and 2 – the resources are created with links and in relation to the subject outlines.

Australian Curriculum – The Arts – Drama

Year 5 and 6

Explore dramatic action, empathy and space in improvisations, playbuilding and scripted drama to develop characters and situations.

Year 7 and 8

Combine the elements of drama in devised and scripted drama to explore and develop issues, ideas and themes.

Year 9 and 10

Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext to shape devised and scripted drama.



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Theatre Etiquette

The French word etiquette, and it's second meaning, was adopted by English speakers in the middle of the 18th Century – "requirements for proper behaviour."

This can sound a bit formal but having an understanding of "theatre etiquette" helps an audience know what to expect and how to get the most out of their theatre experience.

Why does it matter?

It respects other audience members attending the performance.

It shows respect to the performers. Don't forget – you can see them, and they can see you!

It acknowledges the hard work that it takes to bring a live performance together, by everyone and often includes a long list of people.

What are theatre etiquette expectations?

Depending on the age of an audience the expectations can vary. Theatre designed for very young audiences, think 2 to 8 year olds, will have different expectations. Often the theatre experience for younger audiences will invite and encourage participation. However, as the content becomes more complex and audiences mature, think 9 years and older, there is an expectation that students will have developed an understanding of enthusiastic participation and deliberate disruption.

What makes going to a live performance different to going to the cinema?

Many audience members have probably been to see a movie but might not have been to a live theatre performance. The BIG difference is that the actors are live and are there with you in the moment. Don't forget to show your appreciation. If it's funny, it's okay to laugh. If the actors invite you to respond, then it's okay to respond. Sometimes it can also be sad so if you know it's going to be sad don't forget to bring a tissue or two.

What to expect:

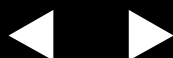
An usher will help you find your seat and you need to follow their directions. You will know the performance is about to start and that you need to settle and be quiet when the lights begin to dim or you hear a voice over or sounds.

Turn off your mobile phone. Avoid eating or rustling food packaging.

Try to cover coughs and sneezes. Go to the toilet before you go into the theatre.

Photographing and filming is not permitted and here are a couple of reasons why:

- It can disturb the actors on the stage and break their concentration
- Intellectual property is paramount. The production on stage is intellectual property of the theatre, therefore you are not allowed to take photos of it
- You will be missing out on the detail you can't see through the viewfinder



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Performance Literacy

Art is a means of expressing emotion, a way of transmitting feelings, culture, beliefs and values between the creators and performers of the work and the audience. There is some art, which is created for the explicit purpose of eliciting a strong emotional response from the audience. There are a myriad of emotions that students can experience when they are viewing live theatre from happiness to anger, surprise, annoyance, just to name a few.

Students might ask - but how is live theatre different from watching films in a cinema?

The difference is that actors are real people telling stories on stage, the audience is with the actor in the moment. [Recent research from the University of Arkansas](#), published in Educational Researcher, which spanned two years and followed school groups who attended live theatre performance or a movie version of the same story revealed significant differences. Students attending live performances experienced an increase in tolerance as well as a greater understanding of the plot and vocabulary of stories.

[Live Theatre Improves Learning and Tolerance](#)

As students engage with and watch live theatre they develop a deeper understanding of the language of the theatre. They develop literacies allowing them to 'read' the gestures and movements of a performer, develop an understanding of the intention of the set, costume, or lighting designer, or reflect on what the playwright or directors intended meaning of a setting or character could be. The [Before the Show](#) activities, for the Adelaide Festival show you are attending, are designed to support students to develop these literacy skills, knowledge and understanding.

The [After the Show](#) activities are designed to provide students with the opportunity to discuss, analyse and comprehend their responses to the show. Having a strong knowledge and understanding of theatre terminology will support students.

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Before the Show

Activities

The aim of the following activities is to support students to try out techniques and practical starting points to help them create short pieces.

Warm Up - Speed Shapes

An activity for ages 6 and older.

Older students focus on the detail of their object.

Working in small groups (4 – 6 in each group)

Shape ideas: a clock, a car, a windmill, an elephant, a bird, a kangaroo, a plane, a vase of flowers.

1. Before students begin the activity discuss how using high, medium and low levels creates visual interest and helps to tell a story.
2. To begin the activity, the teacher calls out the name of an object.
3. Students have 10 – 15 seconds to create the shape of the object with their bodies.
4. Direct students to explore high, medium and low levels when they are creating their shape.

To view the shapes:

- Half the students stay frozen in their shape while the others walk through the gallery.
- Students observe how the shapes are similar or different.
- As a class discuss what they have observed.

To extend the activity:

- Groups decide on their own shape
- Add an emotion to their shape; a sad vase of flowers, a scared elephant, a happy windmill.
- Students look at the shapes other groups have devised and guess what they are.

Physical theatre puts the human body at the centre of the storytelling process.

It relies on the performers' physical motion to convey the story. Performers can communicate through various body gestures (including using the body to portray emotions).

High, medium + low levels

Make + Observe

For younger students with no knowledge of levels begin by sitting in a circle and asking them to make a body shape at that level (low).

Freeze + observe other student's shapes.

Next stand + bend your knees and make a different shape at that level (middle).

Freeze + observe other student's shapes.

Next make yourself as tall as possible and make a shape at that level (high).

Freeze + observe other student's shapes.

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As a whole class discuss:

- What is a machine?
- How do machines operate?
- What happens when something in a machine goes wrong - malfunctions?
- What type of things could go wrong?

Building a Machine

Students build on the previous activity by building a machine that moves and works

Working in groups of 4 -6

- Decide on a machine with each group member being a moving part of the machine
- The machine can make sound effects
- Once the machine is operating one or more parts of the machine malfunction
- Again groups can include sound effects

The Dramatic Arc and **The Malfunctioning Machine:**



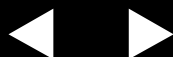
- Students check and review the movements of their machine
- Does the machine move in ways you would expect?
- Is there tension as the machine begins to malfunction?
- Is there a climax as the machine malfunctions?
- How is the machine's malfunction resolved?

NOTE: Students need to be able to repeat the movements of their Malfunctioning Machine.

Australian Curriculum – The Arts – Drama

The level of detail of the devising of the scene will depend on age and experience of students.

The group should work together to show unity. Their gestures and movements should be exaggerated or certain features emphasised.



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Before the Show

Experiment with varying the pace of the performance:

- Run the sequence of moves through really quickly

OR

- Run the whole sequence slowed down

OR

- Find a moment to slow down and then speed up.

NOTE: Whatever the combination of pace the group has chosen they need to make sure they don't lose any of the detail.

The group should decide what version they prefer and rehearse ready to perform for the class.

As a whole class:

As students are viewing the groups performing ask them if they:

- can see a story emerging
- think the pace communicates the story?

Questions to get you thinking about *The Artist*

As a whole class:

Watch the trailer of [The Artist](#)

- Discuss what do you think *The Artist* is going to be about?
- What do you know about artists?
- What do artists do?
- What could go wrong for an artist?
- What do you think is difficult for artists?

SACE – Stage 1

Creating Dance CD2

Communication of choreographic intent to an audience through composition or performance.

Responding to Dance RD2

Investigation into different cultures, historical periods or dance traditions.

SACE – Stage 2

Understanding Dance UD2

Creating Dance CD2

Communication of choreographic intent to an audience through composition or performance.

Responding to Dance RD1

Critique and evaluation of a dance presentation, performance, or choreographic piece.

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After the Show

Reviewing the show

As a class discuss:

- what you learned from seeing *The Artist*
- a memory from *The Artist* that will stick with you forever
- your favourite scene and why
- anything you thought should have been different.
- do you have any questions you would like to ask Thom Monckton?

Access appropriate year level templates for students to construct their reviews:

Draw my favourite scene

- To engage memories ask students to physically model a scene from *The Artist* – freeze and show others.
- Set up a still life with the items that were in a scene.
- What did the actor's body look like? Think – stapler scene, paint brushes on the top of the shelves. Use pipe cleaners to create the shape of the actor's body in a scene you can remember.
- If the scene was funny think about what made it funny and how can you add this into your drawing.

Younger students – write a review

Before students start to write share and discuss:

- what do you think about before you draw or paint
- describe the job of an artist
- what are the different types of artists
- are there scenes you would have liked to have seen more of, less of or done differently?

Just have **fuN!** Draw whatever scene you like.

- [Guide for Writing a Critical Response](#)

The MalfuNctioning Machine

Working in groups:

Working in the same groups students should discuss how seeing *The Artist* might have influenced their ideas.

- What would they like to change?
- Why do they want to change it?
- What new skills and abilities do they need to acquire to be able to make these changes?



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THOM MOCKTON
PERFORMER

"This sack of bones stacked around 179cm high, came into existence around 1985 and for some reason decided that the accompanying DNAcid would be best put to work as a circus artist."

Thom Monckton grew up in Patea, South Taranaki, New Zealand. He trained in circus arts at CircoArts in Christchurch and then at the physical theatre school of Jacques Lecoq in Paris. He has been based in Europe since 2006 and currently lives in Helsinki, Finland.

His debut full-length solo show *Moving Stationery* has received awards including Best Theatre, the coveted Best of Fringe Award at the New Zealand Fringe Festival 2012 and Best Male Performer at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards the same year. *The Pianist* has been a ticket-selling hit with sold-out shows in many theatres and festivals across the world, and now *The Artist* was nominated for the Total Theatre Award for Physical Theatre in Edinburgh 2018.

The Artist is intrinsically linked to a previous show called *The Pianist*, that Sanna Silvenoinen and I made years ago. I had some basic skills in playing the piano and we capitalised on them to build a physical show around a piano recital. One of the first questions when we started talking about making another show was "What else can you do?" *The Pianist* seemed like it had a good format to repeat; Use a skill that I already had that was unrelated to performance and circus and then combine the two.

I've always loved drawing, painting, and visual arts. It was by far my favourite subject at high-school, but I also loved moving and being physical. Eventually the more physical path won as a career choice when I discovered that circus was actually a thing you could learn.

Sanna knew that I had some ability in drawing and painting so she suggested using that as a starting point for our new show. From there we went to get a bunch of props that were connected to visual arts and played around with them to see what ideas they spawned. Eventually we arrived at the context of setting the show in an artist's ateliere and limiting the ideas to revolve around painting, and from there the concept of inspiration and process seeped in.

As an audience of a performance you're presented with the end result, and sometimes the ingredients that have contributed to the end result are quite unexpected or surprising. The arts in general is often viewed through a relatively magical lense, and we can't imagine the many practical elements and limitations that go into a creation when we're viewing the piece. Sometimes creations are inspired by drawing on a complex meaningful moment in life, and sometimes they happen truly by accident and have no intended meaning whatsoever. I find these thoughts encouraging when I view art and performance. Without talking with the artist personally no one really knows what the artist was thinking when creating their artwork, everyone is more or less just speculating, projecting, and interpreting. This idea that everyone is probably in the dark as equally as everyone else empowers me to come to my own conclusions, and then dissecting and discussing art becomes fun, light, and universal as I think it should be.

The Artist presents an artist going through a creative process that is not dissimilar to my own when I'm alone in the rehearsal room. Obviously it's exaggerated and compiled in a way to make it comical and entertaining, but it's still not far from the truth. It doesn't include the physically uninteresting but very important hours spent downloading and playing different games on my phone, or lying on the floor staring into space, or the internal existential crisis that accompanies every single rehearsal I've ever had... but it does include practising totally irrelevant tricks, needlessly effortful ways of reaching a result as a way to procrastinate, and anthropomorphising objects for company... as well as some painting.

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Sanna Silvennoinen

The Artist is co-designed by Sanna Silvennoinen, circus artist, choreographer and director of Circo Aereo.

Lighting design: **Juho Rahijärvi**

Sound design: **Tuomas Norvio**

Costume design: **Kati Mantere**

Circo Aereo is an international contemporary circus group active since 1996. Currently among the flagships of Finnish cultural exports, the group performed at several distinguished festivals and theatres in over 30 countries. Circo Aereo's barrier-breaking and open approach to the various forms of the performing arts mesmerises and astonishes audiences the world over.



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Additional resources

Youtube footage of other productions of Thom Monckton:

[*The Waiter – Table Wine and Other Stories*](#)

[*Moving Stationery*](#)

[*The Pianist*](#)

Interviews with Thom Monckton:

[*Interview with Thomas Monckton*](#)

[*Quirky Circus Performer Thomas Monckton Talks About His New Solo Show *The Pianist* In Melbourne*](#)

[*Glam Adelaide – interview – Fringe 2016 – *The Pianist**](#)

[*The Stage – interview with Thomas Monckton – *The Artist**](#)

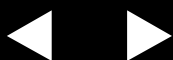
[*Interview about Thom Monckton about *The Pianist**](#)

Reviews

[*The Scotsman – Dance, physical theatre & circus review: *The Artist**](#)

[*The Circus Diaries review – *The Artist* by Thom Monckton / Circo Aereo*](#)

[*Edinburgh Fringe Festival – Review*](#)



Guide for Writing a Critical Response

Opening Paragraph

When	
What	
Where	
Plot Overview of the production and the intent of the playwright... The artistic contributors – director, set designer, lighting, costume	

Language Features:

- Usually in past tense
- Uses subject-specific language
- Descriptive language
- Third person voice
- Analytical language
- Modality (how certain we are about something)
- Cast and crew referred to by their full names or last name
- In text references (quotes or specific moments)

1st Paragraph - Who

How theatrical elements are communicated through the actors...	
Actor's name	
Character they played	
Discuss how they engage the audience - movement, voice	
Give examples	

2nd Paragraph - What else

Describe a key moment or scene from the production	
How were the theatrical elements combined to communicate meaning to the audience?	

3rd Paragraph - Technical aspects

Describe a key moment or scene from the production	
How were sets, lights, props and costumes used to communicate meaning to the audience?	

Concluding Paragraph - Summarises the viewers opinion

Your overall thoughts about the production. Note: This is not a rating of the production.	
What made it stand out?	
What did it make you think?	