



O P E N

Oz Puppetry Email Newsletter Part 1

This special issue of O.P.E.N. is dedicated to Axel Axelrad who died on 13th November, 2018, aged 99.

Axel was the doyen of puppet-makers for the beginning of children's television in Australia in the 1960's, having established his own puppet making company, Lamont Puppets, in 1950. In this issue we celebrate his achievements and recollect his contribution to Australian Puppetry history.

Contents:

Biography; Lamont Puppets

Television Puppets, Children's Puppets,

Awards and Acknowledgements



Werner Heinz Harald Axelrad, (Axel Axelrad).

24/10/1919 to 13/11/2018.



Werner, (Axel), was born in Germany; he was the younger of two boys born to Hermann and Elisabet Axelrad. Hermann was of Prussian background and a very successful engineer, receiving the “Persian Order of the Sun and Lion” from the then Shah of Iran, early last century.

Elisabet’s maiden name was Meyer, coming from a Jewish background.

Werner and his brother, Heinz, grew up in a wealthy Berlin household and the children were often cared for by nannies. The family would regularly travel around Europe on holidays. With the rise of Hitler and nazism during the 1930’s, Hermann and Elisabet decided Germany was no longer a secure place to live; Elisabet would watch SS trainees march by their house regularly. In 1937 the family sailed to England under the pretence of wanting to witness the Coronation if George VI. Once there, they sought refugee status and remained.

For the duration of the war the family survived The Blitz and also lived in an internment camp on the Isle of Man. Werner worked long hours in factories for the war effort. He would sometimes suggest improvements to the manufacturing processes, demonstrating his keen eye for engineering.

But ever since he was a school boy, Werner had a love of puppets. During the war he joined a puppet group that was part of an International Club. He was not interested in performing, preferring to make and design. During the remaining 1940’s he studied puppetry at the London City Literary Institute and worked with one of W.H.Whanslaw’s groups. Mr Whanslaw was co founder of the British Puppetry Guild.



*Photo:
Werner
(left) , his
mother
and
brother,
Heinz.*

After the war, Werner graduated as a licensed aircraft engineer and worked as an instructor at Hawker Siddeley (UK). His brother, Heinz, became a landscape gardener and was later invited back to Berlin to help re-landscape the devastated city. Tragically, he died from an infection. There were no antibiotics available then in Berlin.

Miraculously, the family was able to recover a lot of their pre war possessions in Berlin and transported them back to London, only later to have them all destroyed by a London warehouse fire.

While working at Hawker Siddeley, Werner met Janet Lamont, a young Scottish woman, who had served in the Women's Army Corps in India and was manager of the aircraft factory food services. They became engaged.



Werner - aircraft engineer



Werner (Axel) and Janet's Wedding 19/05/50 Toorak

Werner took up a job offer in Alice Springs with Conellan airlines and later, ANA,(Ansett). In May 1950, he sailed to Australia and was later joined by Janet. They married in Toorak, Melbourne. This was the beginning of **Lamont Puppets**.



Werner's early puppets in London



lamont puppets



LAMONT PUPPETS.

Lamont Puppets was registered in Australia as a puppet making company in 1950.

In the early 1950's, Werner, (who was now nicknamed 'Axel'), and Janet were living in a flat in South Yarra, Melbourne. Axel wrote; "Looking round Melbourne, I could see that there weren't any puppets available in the shops that not only looked good, but worked well, so I designed some."

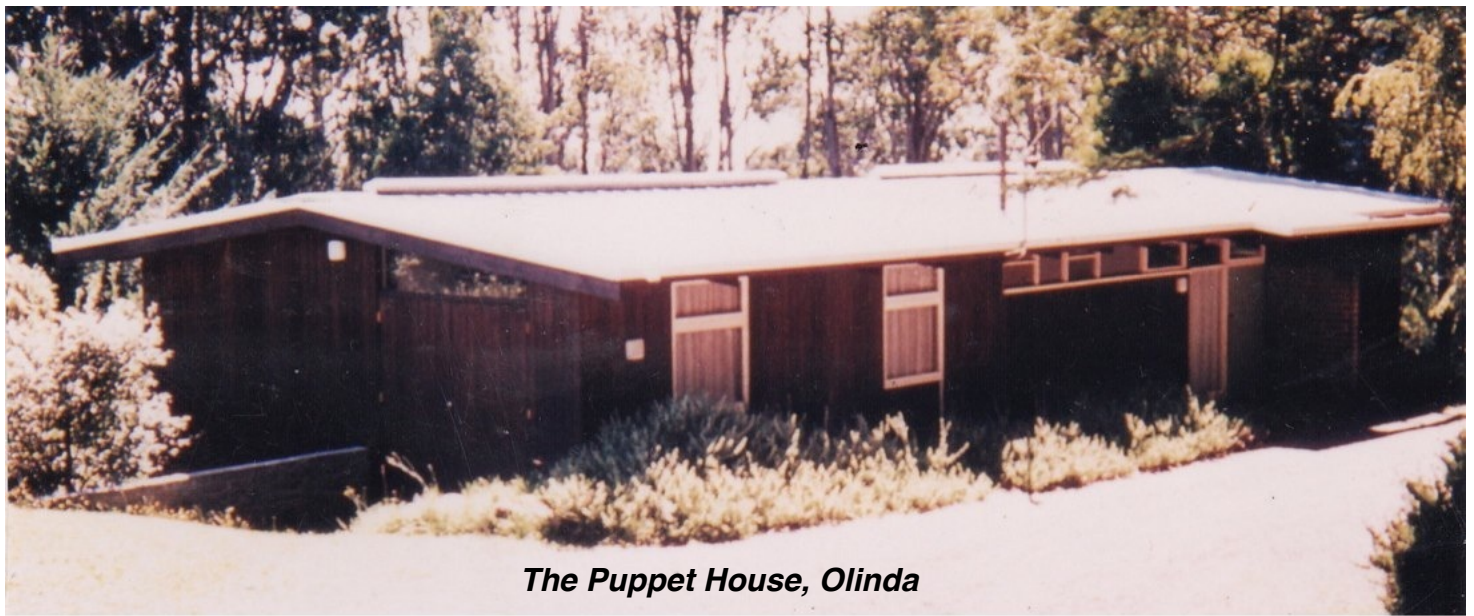
Axel and Janet were making puppets in their spare time. Farmers Department Store in Sydney was their first customer. This led to so many orders for these appealing and original creations, that Axel had to give up his engineering job with ANA to focus on puppet design and manufacturing full time.

Using his engineering skills, Axel designed the puppets and packaging while also making the components that were far too expensive to outsource. Janet dressed the puppets, made their hats, packaged them and did all the bookwork. Axel once described her as "the office".



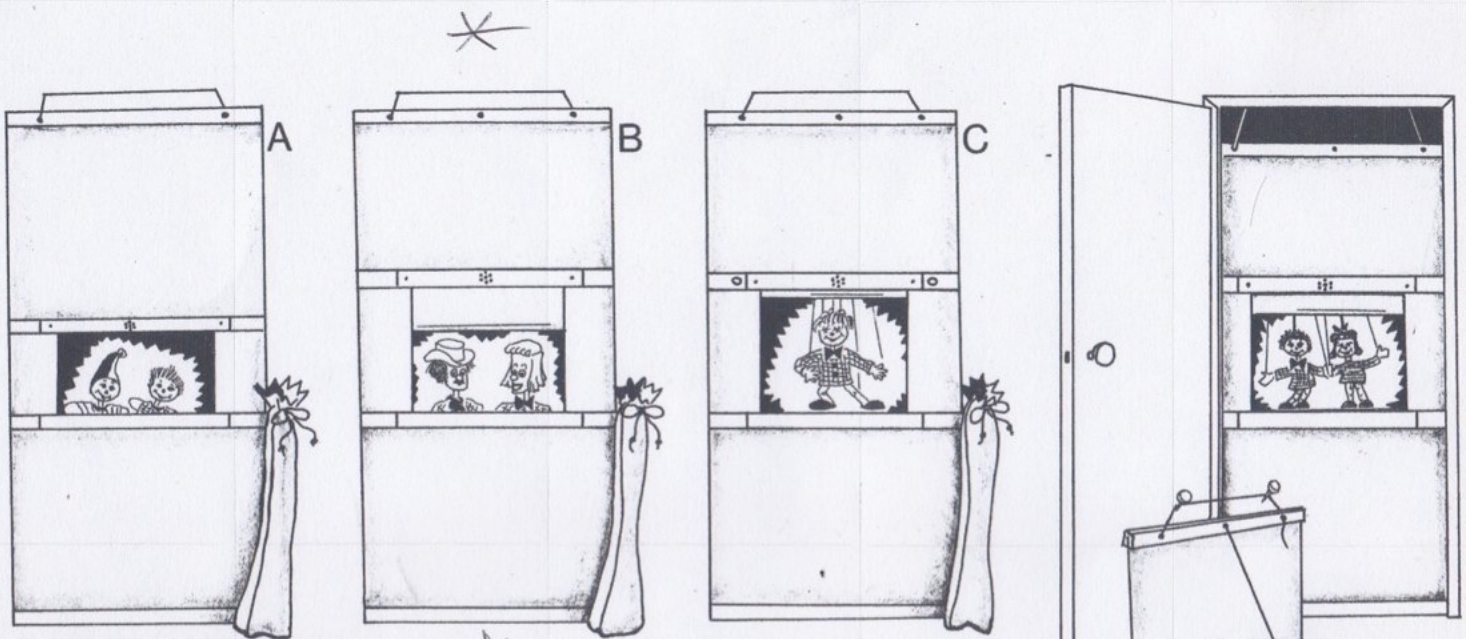
In 1956, they purchased a two acre property in Olinda, (Dandenong ranges), with a rambling wooden house and moved there to set up a home and workshop. By the end 1962, they had built a new three bedroom house and studio close to Coonara Road which became: **"The Puppet House. Home of Lamont Puppets"**.





The Puppet House, Olinda

During the 1950's Lamont Puppets was the only mass producer of toy puppets in Australia. One of their puppets was the first toy made in Australia to be awarded a "Good Design" label by the Australian Design Council. In the early years they were producing seven different types of puppet that grew to 60 by the early 1980's. They also produced a range of kits and stages.



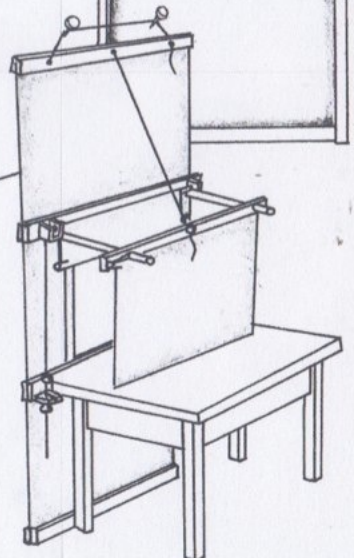
LAMONT PUPPET STAGES

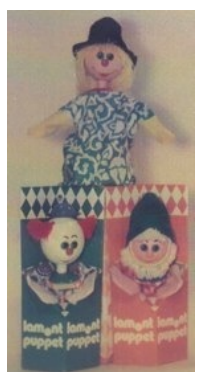
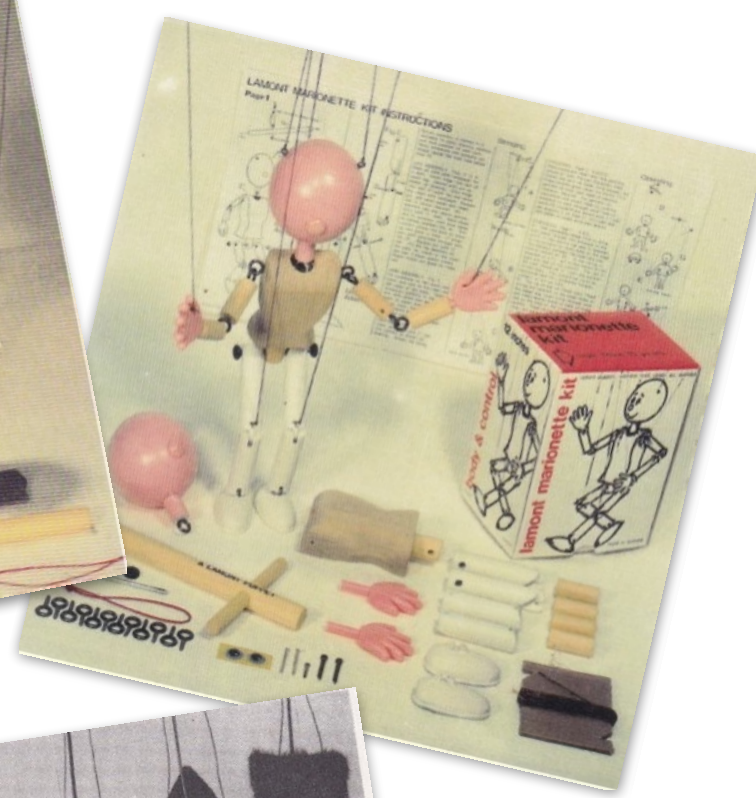
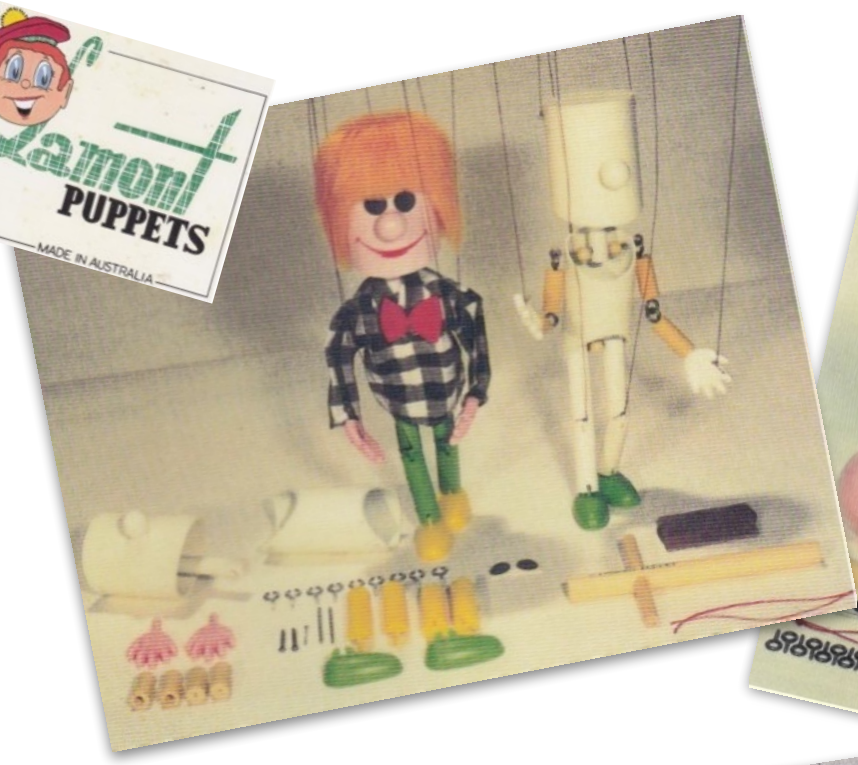
There are three different Lamont Puppet Stages. All stages are made from coloured cotton material and hardwood. Overall size: 72" x 36".

STAGE A has a simple stage opening 24" x 12".
 STAGE B has a roll up curtain which is operated by string. Stage opening 24" x 12".
 STAGE C has a roll up curtain and a back cloth. The stage opening is 24" x 12", or 24" x 15" for marionettes. A rear view of Stage C is shown.

All stages are packed in a coloured bag and easily assembled. Stages are hung on to a door frame for use, as shown.

PRICES: STAGE A GREEN
 STAGE B RED
 STAGE C BLUE





LAMONT PUPPETS:
Range of marionette and glove
puppets for children.





The Television Years

For around 40 years, Lamont Puppets also produced displays, educational projects, puppets for TV commercials and film, Polyglot, the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre and some iconic puppet characters for Television.

Perhaps Axel's most recognised design for television is Ossie Ostrich which for many years was operated by Bernie Carrol. Other television programs included *The Happy Hammond Show*, *Fred Bear A Go-Go Show*, *The Magic Circle Club*, *Adventure Island* and *Young Talent Time*.



Samson the Cat



Cassius Cuckoo and Leonardo de Fun Bird - THE MAGIC CIRCLE CLUB



Max Mouse



Early Bird - TV Commercial
Safeway Stores



Matilda Mouse

The Magic Circle Club was launched on the new Channel 0 (now Channel 10) in 1965 and was the first Logie winning Children's show on television. The show was broadcast daily in black and white format and was hosted by Nancy Cato and later, Liz Harris. It included variety numbers, comedy skits, serialised stories and puppet characters, which Axel designed and created out of felt and wood with mechanical mechanisms. 'Cassius Cuckoo' and 'Leonardo de Funbird' were two memorable puppets. Cassius lived in a cuckoo clock near Mother Hubbard's cupboard in the Magic Cottage and answered viewer's riddles and Leonardo lived in an IKAN (An Instantaneous Knowledge Accumulation Network) , in other words, a computer! The Cassius and Leonardo characters also appeared in a live musical at the Tivoli Theatre in Melbourne and went on to perform as featured artists in **Fredd Bear's Breakfast-A-Go-Go**. After Channel 0 axed the show in 1967, the ABC revived the production, now called **Adventure Island** and still hosted by Nancy Cato, with puppets, Max Mouse, Matilda Mouse, and Gussie Galah. Each show concluded with the host chatting with Samson, the magic cat, who would appear from 'beyond' in response to a tricky question and disappear by sneezing. He was a large handpuppet. His mouth was operated by a mechanical rod, as were the beaks of Cassie Cuckoo and the other birds. When the show was axed in 1972, to be replaced by Sesame Street, there was an outcry, resulting in a group of MP's led by David Kennedy (ALP) campaigning and raising questions in parliament.

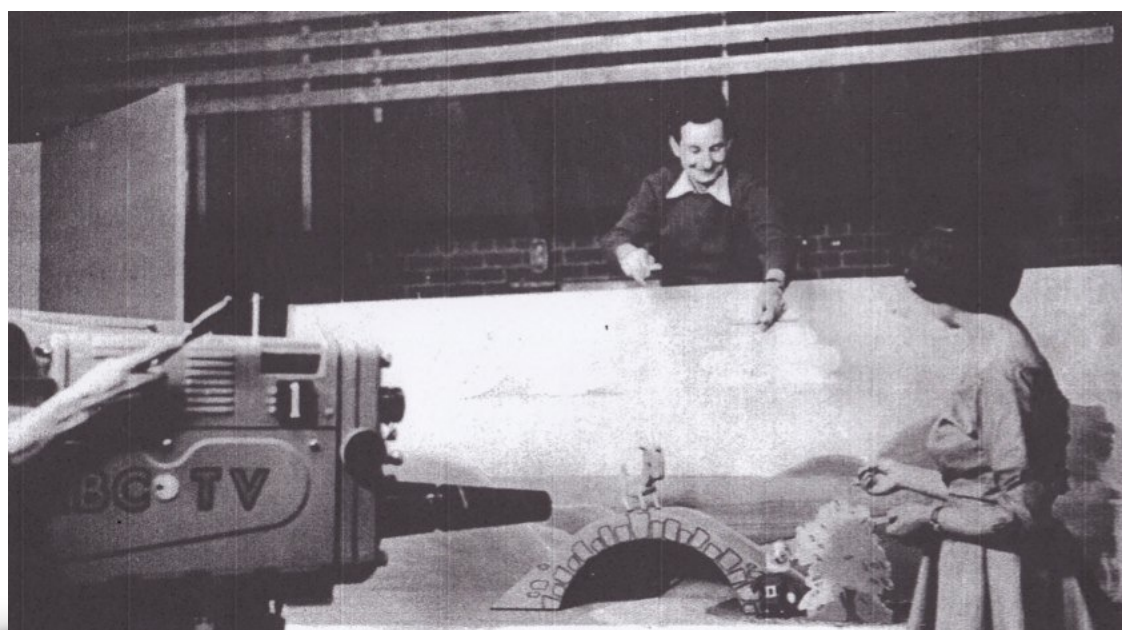
The Magic Circle Club https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=the+magic+circle+club+tv+show

Adventure Island https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=adventure+island+tv+series

CHUM-so chumpy
you could carve it.



Puppets for Advertising, Display and TV



Despite his long career in puppetry, Axel never described himself as a 'puppeteer'. He disliked performing, preferring to design and make. This photo of him performing *The Billy Goats Gruff*, at the ABC studios, Elsternwick, in the 1950's is the only known time he performed with a puppet in Australia.

Lamont Puppets - Awards and Recognition

Axel received a number of awards and recognition for his achievements as a puppet maker and designer. He was the recipient of the National Packaging Association of Australia's First Prize in 1971 for the packaging of the Mass produced Lamont Puppets for children; Toy of the Year Award and an award for his foam puppet designs, among others.



Toy of the Year 1950's



Olinda man's prize
 • Mr. WERNER AXELRAD, of Olinda South, on Monday was awarded the prize for the toy of the year. Below he is seen at his home on Monday night with his wife and children, Chris (left) and Robyn (right). The puppet on the left is similar to the one that won him the prize. (See Uphill column also).

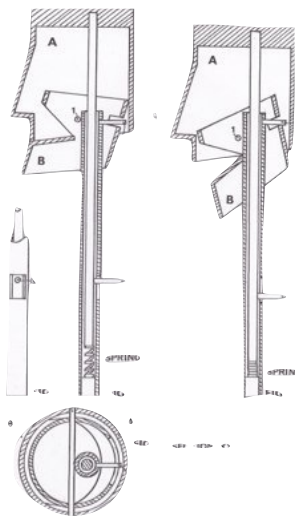


First prize for packaging 1971

Axel, Janet, and their children, Robyn and Christine



Patent for opening mechanism for lower jaw and beak for hand puppets



Foam critters win award

These cute little puppet fellows pictured with their creator, Olinda puppetman, Mr Axel Axelrad, of Coonara Rd, were one of three toy products to carry off the Design Toy of the Year award last week.

It is the first time Mr Axelrad has used polystyrene foam for his puppet-making.

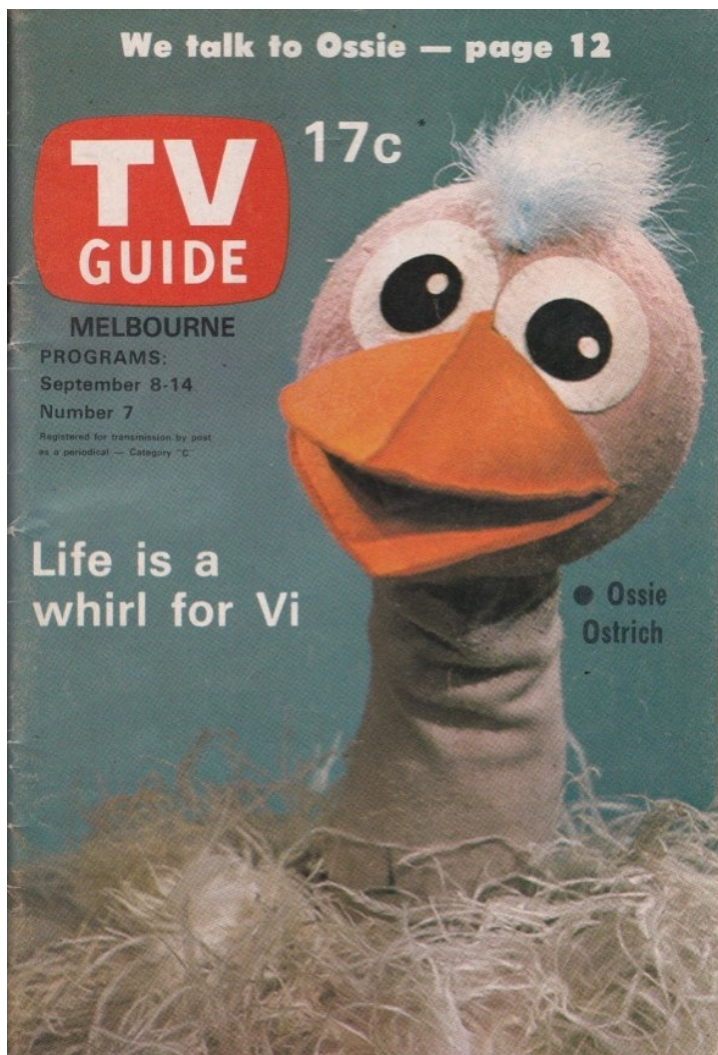
Seeing his little foam critters went over so well with Design Toy of the Year judges, Mr Axelrad now plans to market them under the brand name, Lamont Puppets.

Mr Axelrad, a German-born aircraft engineer, and his wife, Janet, have been making and marketing puppets in Australia since 1950.

Several of the puppets have been the Good Design



Acknowledgement and Media Coverage



Have you seen Leonardo and Cassius Cuckoo and Maxie Mouse on TV?



The man you see in the picture is Mr Axelrad, with Samson the cat, one of his puppets. He made the puppets which you can see in the *Magic Circle Club* and *Adventure Island*. Mr Axelrad comes from Germany. When he was a boy he loved playing with puppets. Now he makes lots of puppets for children to play with.

Mr Axelrad used to make all his puppets by hand. He made the heads, the arms, and the legs. He painted on their faces and gave them hair. His wife helped him. They made clothes for the puppets. Now Mr Axelrad sells his puppets to toy shops.



Ossia Ostrich: 'Hey, Hey It's Saturday' Front page of TV Guide (70's)
Babes in Toyland (animated display - Myer)



Puppets for Sanyo Promotion



Puppets Design for TV department, Swinburne University

Lamont Puppets have also been exhibited in London, Los Angeles, Osaka for Expo 70 and the Sydney Opera House as part of a 50 Years of UNIMA event, to name a few.

Axel has published two books; "Hand and Rod Puppets" and "Making Rod and Hand Puppets". His other book, "Der Hund der Nicht Bellen Konnte", was published by the Goethe Institute and in Germany.