

*Teachers in Touch*

# A Case Of Representation

*CARNEGIE CASE PROJECT*

**Greer Twiss**

*SATURDAY 25 JULY - SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 1998*



*A Case of Representation, Carnegie Case Project by Greer Twiss  
At the Fisher Gallery July/August 1998*

**FISHER GALLERY**

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<http://nz.com/webnz/fishergallery/>

## EXHIBITION DATES EXTENDED

LAURENCE ABERHART  
*ALL GATES OPEN*

GREER TWISS  
*A CASE OF REPRESENTATION*

TWO MORE WEEKS UNTIL  
SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER

ARTISTS TALK  
SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER

GREER TWISS  
TALKING ABOUT

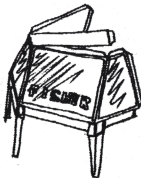
2PM

ADMISSION FREE

## WHAT IS THE CARNEGIE CASE PROJECT?

*aesthetic*: (adj & n) 1. a branch of philosophy that deals with questions of beauty and taste (esp. in art). The term, which derives from a Greek word meaning 'to perceive' 2. a set of principles of good taste and the appreciation of beauty.

The Carnegie cases are designed with an Edwardian aesthetic for museum display. They are heavily constructed with a wooden base with clear glass stabilised by brass framework. They command a space, and because of their Edwardian aesthetic constantly refer to Eurocentric belief systems prevalent at the turn of the century.



It must be considered that in the Edwardian era and the time of the cases development (1901-1910) the focus of the museum was vastly different to now. At the time museums had only recently become public institutions. Prior to this, the collections were not public but were treasures of wealthy European owners who acquired ethnographic 'trinkets' and 'curiosities' on their travels to 'exotic' places.

To understand the case it is vital to consider the way in which the role of the museum has changed. Now museums are public. No longer are collections merely curiosities, but have been reinterpreted as important cultural treasures. The museum therefore validates itself and its authority to hold the items in its collection.

Until recently the cases were vital elements of Auckland Museums display ethic. They have now been broken up and banished to storage. This decision is strongly related to the re-fit of Auckland War



Memorial Museum and the re-assessment of the modes of display and the historical and cultural framework the cases tend to place 'around' objects, most particularly ethnographic items.

In 1995 The Fisher Gallery borrowed several Carnegie Cases from Auckland Museum to display photographic equipment to accompany an exhibition. At the time, several artists visiting the Gallery expressed an interest in working with the cases to further discussion around modes of display and pathways of interpretation.

In 1996 a number of artists working in a range of media were asked to take part in the **Carnegie Case Project**. All artists worked with the cases in quite different ways. Maureen Lander wrapped 'grass skirts' around the case, Jim Vivianere combined contemporary fashion objects and ethnographic items in the installation *Inventory of an Urban Polynesian* and Monique Redmond filled a case with thousands of white buttons which glowed like mother of pearl to examine the role of women in relation to social, religious and political hierarchies in *The Confessional*.

Carole Shephard placed *Domestic Trophies* inside the cases, Cecilia Parkinson used the case as a miniature stage set for her ceramics and Areta Wilkinson presented museum catalogue cards with photographic images, written descriptions of the work and condition reports of much of her work, (there were no original items placed within).

Christine Hellyar's *Familiar Stories*, filled the case with objects from a variety of aspects in life, from the mundane, the treasured to the ceremonial. In the cases they were elevated at different levels to exhibit the hierarchies existing in modes of museum display and ordering.

Twiss' approach is to combine the two, remaking a new Carnegie Case and colonising the old case with objects which undermine the original 'intended' use.

## A CASE OF REPRESENTATION

**colonise:** 1. to establish a colony 2. plant voters in an area for party purposes. 3. become established in an area.

Colonisation is one of the grubby words of this era. Reeking of the removal of one history and its replacement by another. Social and political domination, via the process of social engineering and genetic assimilation.



New Zealand has its own history of colonisation and the re-interpretation of objects by museums, who have had an important role to play in the undermining of cultures through the European rationale. This has been done through the recording and presentation of history in biased ways and the sometimes inappropriate display of objects from a Eurocentric standpoint. The choice of exhibition subject, content and curatorial cultural context and through display methodologies, all affect how objects are perceived.

The museum context uses objects to authenticate its own existence and provides a frame from which to view the world. Discussion regarding the

Carnegie cases, from Auckland Museum, has centred around the Edwardian framework. The cases inherently overlay turn-of-the-century aesthetics and cultural beliefs over items placed within. It could be considered that the Carnegie cases are a symbol of cultural domination and assimilation.

Twiss has been aware of these assessments commenting "the Carnegie case is like the gold frame around a colonial painting

*of the Polynesian landscape with European trees and Grecian natives. The frame gives authority and truth to the scene."*

He has constructed a new case out of galvanised iron; a construction material which is most stringently identified with colonisation, specifically in New Zealand.

The installation accentuates the sculptural elements of the original case through the creation of the 'new' case out of galvanised iron - the 'fake' case - which stands beside the 'original'.



Comparing the two cases highlights Twiss' representation, not duplication and therefore poses pertinent questions about the Carnegie case and it's New Zealand relevance.

The design of Twiss' case is not direct reproduction, but representation. Twiss' case differs in construction material but it has many other anomalies. "

*This is in the nature of representation that shifts, dislocations, faults will occur. The quality of the manner of representation will carry its own message"*(Greer Twiss).

One of the legs is on a lean, both in the original and in Twiss' version recording the gradual disintegration of the Carnegie. Only one end of Twiss' case appears to open - an illusion, as it does not open at all. The Carnegie case can be opened at both ends. The function of the cases is different and therefore the form is different. What is contained in Twiss' representation? Nothing?

Twiss has wrapped the leg of the Carnegie with paper and twine,

and on his work in metal and thick wire. This could be construed -in purist terms- as interfering with the case.

Twiss says that *"from case to case, to the act of making the case, to representing the making by making the tools that did the making, to the recognition that any act occurring to the case will effect the quality of the representation, for example the paper wrapping the leg, or the wine glass at the opening"*.

Inside the Carnegie case Twiss has placed 'fake' originals of the equipment he used to construct the 'fake' case. A soldering iron with 'fake' museum label attached recording *"Representation of the Soldering Iron used in the construction of the Carnegie by the Sculptor Greer Twiss"*.

Labelling is not a neutral affair and is an element of museums which Twiss has dealt with on a number of occasions. The bird work he did for the air terminal is a case in example. " *Each*



*bird carries three labels: it's Maori name, its Latin name (the name it was given by the first European) and the name it acquired after colonisations, the common name"*.

The 'Carnegie case and it's original function of display is manipulated via its own 'intention' of display. The taxonomic system of ordering used in museums is made farcical because Twiss

has created his own labels attached to 'fake' items. The question is, if exhibited in a museum context would the objects inside the case contain an additional label using standard museum format?

By placing 'fake' tools inside the 'Carnegie case they are "labelled as if it mattered". Where does the game finish if you label the labels as fakes. Twiss' "labels fake the time zone they represent - Edwardian labels are like putting BC on a fake object - it betrays the fake."

The reworking of the case is partly possible because of the re-situation of the case into the art gallery environment, and because of the reinterpretation the re-situation enables. Aspects of colonial process' of cultural domination are examined through the cases.

"Representation is an after the fact event and just as Levi Strauss suggested that the act of observing culture will change it, maybe the act of representation changes the object, whereupon it may need to be re-represented and so on". (Greer Twiss)

*Rhoda Fowler*



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