

# Theatre People

## Props Artisan

A props artisan is a craftsperson who is responsible for all of the physical objects, furniture and decorations required for a production, within a provided budget. The props artisan works with designers to bring their vision to life and with stage management to ensure that the needs of the actors and directors are met throughout the rehearsal process. Depending on the scale of the theatre, you may be working with a team or individually, but props often has to coordinate with many different departments (paint, carpenters, wardrobe, lighting, sound etc.) to ensure a cohesive production.

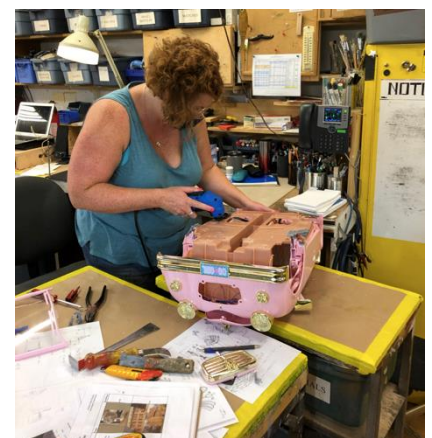
The props artisan is a jack of all trades. Depending on the production, they may produce props by pulling from the theatre's stock, buying new or used items, altering existing items, or building items from scratch. The skills required to be a props person are vast, and different ones will be used on a daily basis.

## Tasks and activities in a typical day

- Read script and generate a props list
- Research and understand the time period in which the play takes place
- Read the Stage Manager's rehearsal notes from the day before, and prioritize and delegate the day's tasks
- Provide props for the rehearsal process
- Shop for props, building supplies, running props, etc. A running prop is something that needs to be replenished through the production (for example food or a contract that gets ripped up.)
- Build or alter props (carpentry, painting, sewing, graphic design, upholstery, metal work, carving, moulding/casting, electrics, etc.)
- Refer to technical drawings and lists provided by designer
- Converse with designer and stage management. Help find creative solutions for new action.
- Attend meetings and required technical rehearsals
- Set dressing: add decorative elements that build the visual world of the show but are not interacted with
- Maintain budget and reconcile receipts
- Organize, clean and maintain prop storage
- Maintenance of prop shop and all tools
- Ensure health and safety of team members and shop space
- Remain current with regard to industry trends and fabrication techniques



Props storage is full of diverse items. Keeping them organized helps the props department make selections to show the designer based on what fits in the world of the production.



Jamie Plummer adapts a small car for the production of *Orlando*.

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## 10 skills that a props artisan uses:

- Communication and collaboration
- Attention to detail
- Time management
- Arts and crafts
- Woodworking
- Painting and colour theory
- Textile skills (sewing, dying, upholstery)
- Creative problem-solving
- Computer, internet and research skills
- Budget management



There's lots of Props work in these photos from *Matilda*: the school desks, reupholstering furniture, putting rug and TV together, building the birthday cake and presents and decorating the table, making the alphabet books, every item on Trunchbull's desk and in the medicine cabinet, making custom labels for bottles, creating a magically disappearing cake for Bruce to "eat" onstage, and more – plus lots and lots of books on shelves and in piles! (Set and costume design by Cory Sincennes, lighting by Gerald King, photos by Dylan Hewlett)

## Building Abilities

There are probably lots of things you are already doing, and things you can start to do, that will serve you in a career in props. Some of these are:

- Online and thrift store shopping
- Watching TV and film and looking at the props and set dressing
- Arts and crafts of any kind – be creative! You'd be surprised what skills you'd end up using in a prop shop
- Repairing broken items
- Graphic design and photo editing
- Painting
- Sewing and textile projects
- Woodworking projects
- Learning how to use tools safely
- Working collaboratively with others
- Reading or watching content about other time periods
- Watching DIY videos/content