

# POP UP PUPPETS, Stockholm 22-25 August 2024

## A festival report for UNIMA PASSPORT PROGRAM

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I had the honor to visit astonishing Pop Up Puppets International Festival 22-25 August 2024 at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm. The festival is organized by Marionetteatern and it offers an excellent opportunity to experience both local and international world class puppetry. What a thrill it was! After the festival I felt inspired, empowered and full of love towards the puppet theatre community.

The four-day-festival had an interesting program: in addition to the wide variety of super talented puppet theatre performances, the festival offered artist talks (with Yael Rasooly, Duda Paiva and Ezequiel Garcia-Romeu) introductions of Swedish puppet theatre companies (Dockteatern Tittut, Malmö Dockteater) and a meeting organized by Unima (A World of Puppetry). And since we were in Sweden, of course we had a *fika* with coffee, buns and lots of chatting and laughter.



Unima – A world of Puppetry. From left: Clément Perentjako (Unima Europe Commission), Annette Dabs (Unima Passport Program), Cariad Astles (Unima Research Commission), Timo Väntsi (Aura of Puppets), Leino Rei (Estonian Theatre for Young audiences) and the facilitator Margaret Sörenson.

I loved the performances. All of them. It amazes me how people put different visions of the world on stage, with love and passion. Puppetry is definitely high art. It can be fresh, crazy, abstract, beautiful, funny and sad in so many ways. A show that caught me from the very beginning with its magical intensity, wit and creativity was the puppet theatre – story telling performance *A Very old Man with Enormous Wings* (Ireland, Dan Colley and the Riverbank Arts Center), which is inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's tale. Another one that made a huge impact was *Dimanche* (Belgium, Focus and Chaliwaté) - the massive, miraculous, funny and dark show about humanity and people trying to maintain the normal life in the middle of climatic chaos. Marionetteatern showed two very different shows from their catalogue: warm and fluffy *Pet Performance* based on the interviews of people of all ages about their stories and dreams about pets, and the abstract, beautiful, funny and poetic *Traces*, a show that gave space for imagination to take over and wander. *Origin of a Tale* (Lebanon, Collectif Kahraba) is a stunning piece

that plays with clay and fables, combining live sculpture, drawing, movement, object manipulation and sound. Fellow colleagues from Finland performed with a show *Ariadne – a Mess* (Finland, *Dirty Duckling*), a beautiful and messy (in a good way!) performance about lost loves, layering antique myths and labyrinths of one's identity.

There were three artist talks with the performers of the festival. Artist talks gave a chance for deeper dialogue. One was Ezequiel García-Romeu, the director of *Opus II* (France, *Théâtre de la Massue*). *Opus II* is a puppet theatre performance in a form of a happening or an installation, where audience is invited to move freely around the seemingly deserted stage, landscape, where strange creatures wander in search of better life. In the artist talk García-Romeu mentioned something about watching the performance with your whole body. In this performance I felt it: as a spectator I was also part of the 'strange creatures', with my presence and desire to move around. The show was a full body and mind- experience.

Duda Paiva's *Bruce Marie* (Netherlands) uses dance and choreographies between the performer and the beautifully sculptured puppets and explores the idea of trans-humanism and eternal life. In the artist talk Duda Paiva spoke about the reasons to be drawn into puppetry: sometimes it is love at first sight, sometimes it's maybe the way of survival.



Artist talk with Duda Paiva interviewed by Py Huss Wallin. Next to Duda, listening, Muffin, the star of the show *Bruce Marie*

Yael Rasooly's *Edith and Me* (Israel) is a touching, healing and virtuous puppet performance about survival through art. In the artist talk, Rasooly told about the process of the play. She opened the topic of the show – abuse and violence against women – which in this case is personal but also so sadly common. The topic of a show can be dark. An important question arose in the talk: is the process or the show healing for the artist and is it also healing for the audience? Through your art, you can put the light in the dark. That truly happened in Rasooly's performance.



After the show Edith and me

What I took home with me from the artist talks was, like Yael Rasooly put it, that as artists, we all probably share the same fears of failing, not being good enough etc. With or without fear, we must do our thing anyway. Sometimes we all need a little encouraging and for me this reminder was the one. Sometimes the process matters more than the result. Sometimes we might repeat the same topic throughout many performances, until we're done with it. A trigger for the creative process can be anything: an image, a poem, an article etc. Or a trauma. Puppetry isn't always light and dreamy, it can be heavy and dark, as Duda Paiva mentioned. The importance lies in knowing one's inner self and what arises from inside.

Kulturhuset in Stockholm is a great venue for a festival. Since the events were all under the same roof, it was very convenient to wander from one show to another. A true festival spirit was present: the days were full of interesting encounters with other professionals from different places.

Special thanks to the Unima PASSPORT program and Louise Lapointe for enabling the visit to the festival, and to Helena Nilsson and the staff of Marionetteatern for being such a great host! Also thanks to all the wonderful puppet theatre people I had a chance to meet and chat with during the festival. I'll treasure this experience forever in my heart.



After the performance Traces, actors Ida Steén and Magnus Erenius