

Awakening the Puppet's Soul: A Journey of Discovery at the Pop Up Puppets International Festival

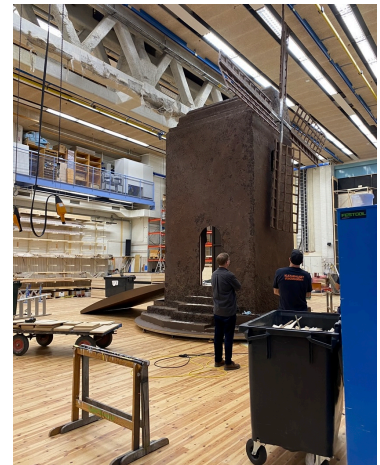
By Fernando Gurrola.



From August 22 to 25 of this year, I was fortunate to be a recipient of the UNIMA PASSPORT program, which allowed me to actively participate in the Pop Up Puppets International Festival Dir. Helena Nilsson, at the Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm. —an experience that not only enriched my professional practice but also deepened my understanding and admiration for the art of puppetry.



On the first day, actor Magnus Erenius guided us on a fascinating tour of the Kulturhuset Stadsteatern facilities. There, I had the privilege of exploring the vast scenography workshop, a space that is divided into several sections: metalworking, carpentry, and painting. What impressed me the most was the scale of the equipment and tools, designed to create colossal sets, such as 10-meter-high doors and industrial elevators—elements that speak to the grandeur of the productions created in this space.



During the same tour, we visited the puppet workshop, where I encountered an astonishing variety of prototypes, mechanisms, and articulations. It was revealing to observe the meticulous work of the puppet makers, whose construction process is very similar to what I practice in Mexico. This encounter reaffirmed my passion for creation and research around materials, especially the carving of foam



rubber, the use of sponges, fabrics, and the iconic black eyes—elements that, for me, are poetic in their ability to grant life and soul to the puppets.

One of the surprises of the day was the lightweight, collapsible wooden puppet theater, designed for easy assembly and efficient transport. We were told that its design allows a single person to assemble and disassemble it quickly, which is a testament to the creativity applied to functionality within the world of puppet theater.

On the second day, I attended the Meet a World of Puppetry conference, where several speakers shared their approaches and research on the art of puppetry. Cariad Astles, in particular, presented fascinating projects from the UNIMA research area, an intervention that deeply moved me as it demonstrated how the art of puppetry can transcend the boundaries of the stage and become a space for profound reflection and study. Her work has been a constant inspiration for my own research journey.



Additionally, the conference addressed the festivals that are setting the standards in the world of puppetry. The impressive organizational and management efforts of Leino Rei in Tallinn, Estonia, and Timo Vänsti in Finland, with the Aura of Puppets project, a network of independent artists seeking to redefine the possibilities of contemporary puppet theater, were highlighted.

The third day was filled with innovative proposals. Among them was Origin of a Tale, a piece that uses clay as a medium to create images, puppets, and shadows, building and deconstructing them in real-time before the audience. This piece, with its deeply introspective language, struck me as a visceral dialogue between the body, matter, and space, breaking down the essence of puppetry with a beauty of heartbreaking originality.



On the last day, I had the opportunity to enjoy the performance Bruce Marie by Duda Paiva. However, what impacted me the most was that, before watching the show, I attended a lecture by the creator himself. In it, Duda Paiva shared his reflections on the hybridization of the human body and the puppet, also using dance as a vehicle for expression.

His demonstration of the mechanisms that bring his creation to life, as well as his construction and animation process, was an enlightening moment. Watching the performance that same evening allowed me to fully grasp the deep poetry underlying his work—an exquisite fusion of puppet, human body, dance, and music, creating a unique and unforgettable sensory experience.



In the end, this festival was a unique gathering of creators; it was a space for growth, reflection, and continuous learning. Through conversations with masterful artists, witnessing incredible works, and participating in revealing conferences, I gained new tools for my own work. The experience has inspired me to continue researching, exploring new materials, and seeking the magic in every corner of the puppetry world. Today more than ever, I feel more committed to the art of puppetry and to the mission of continuing to create, research, and dream. I would like to express my infinite gratitude to Louise Lapointe, Helena Nilsson, the UNIMA PASSPORT programme and the entire Marionetteatern team for this unique opportunity. Long live puppetry!

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