

UNIMAX

# UNIMAGAZINE



ENGLISH  
VERSION



# THE HIDDEN HANDS

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# EDITORIAL

## BY KAREN SMITH, PRESIDENT OF UNIMA

It has been seventeen years since the final issue of UNIMA  
International's trilingual journal, *E Pur Si Muove*, Puppetry  
Today, was published. The brainchild of UNIMA's former  
President and President of Honour, Margareta Niculescu,  
that journal was issued between 2002 and 2008 in  
French, English and Spanish. Subsequently, UNIMA's  
World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts, first published in  
2009 in French as *Encyclopédie Mondiale des Arts de  
la Marionnette* and then online in the three languages in  
2017, took up most of UNIMA's publishing oxygen over the  
following decade.

And so, we are now very excited that UNIMA International's  
newest journal, UNIMAGAZINE, will be officially launched  
during UNIMA's 24<sup>th</sup> Congress in Chuncheon, Republic of  
Korea, in late May 2025.

There are any number of national puppetry journals.  
They reflect the local puppet theatre scene, with some  
international contributions, and they usually include  
reviews and reports of festivals, exhibitions, or new  
publications in the field. A journal of UNIMAGAZINE's size  
and scale offers scope for new work, new voices, new  
contributions to local and world puppetry. Such a journal  
can ensure that our puppetry world is well represented  
within its issues. This is of great importance to our current  
and future readership!

Over the past decade, UNIMA International's Publication  
Commission has contemplated the creation of a new  
online journal which would bring together the best articles  
from existing national puppetry publications, of which

there are over 60. Creating a puppetry journal of this scale  
and in three languages is a huge undertaking. Think about  
it! The dedicated Editorial Committee comprised of four  
teams covering Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific and  
Europe, has carefully curated and given us around 200  
pages of text with illustrations and photographs originally  
created by many of our members and puppetry scholars.

Interspersed throughout UNIMAGAZINE's 43  
comprehensive articles, of which around half are  
republished from national centre puppetry journals, are  
the "Portraits" of 40 living UNIMA Members of Honour, one  
living President of Honour and three Heritage awardees.  
The Member of Honour and the more rare President of  
Honour awards are the greatest acknowledgements of our  
organization. They are awarded to people in recognition of  
their exceptional contribution to the world of puppetry  
and to their service to UNIMA. They are awarded once  
every four years at a UNIMA Congress.

For now, to all of the authors and contributors to  
UNIMAGAZINE, thank you for sharing your work, your  
knowledge and your experience! And, again, thank you  
and bravo to our international Editorial Committee of  
UNIMAGAZINE.



## BY UNIMAGAZINE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

UNIMAGAZINE invites you on a global puppetry journey.

Like UNIMA, it travels across continents to share experiences, thoughts and creations from around the world in the vast and diverse field of puppetry arts.

This first issue of UNIMAGAZINE is divided into four main chapters: Origins, Languages, puppetry as a Medium, and dialogues between Territories. Throughout, authors share historical perspectives, aesthetic approaches, regional traditions, reflections on practice, on the relationship between puppetry and the audience, and on puppetry's evocative power to describe the world and sometimes to satirise it.

UNIMAGAZINE reflects the team that created it: diverse and eclectic. Artists, researchers, journalists, editors, applied puppetry practitioners from Bulgaria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, India, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Slovenia, the United States and Venezuela. The process was collaborative and we have tried to ensure that the diverse voices resonate in this edition.

But let's take a look back at the process that brought it to life...

It was in 2021, at the instigation of Frans Hakkemars and Mihail Baykov, that work began with the Puppetry Publication Online subcommittee.

An initial survey was conducted to identify and contact all the puppet magazines identified worldwide using a questionnaire. This work enabled a first global list of magazines on the art of puppetry to be posted on the UNIMA website.

Following on from this, a meeting of magazines was organised as part of the 2023 Charleville-Mézières World Puppet Theatre Festival. At the same time, Mihail Baykov and Emmanuelle Castang laid the foundations for an initial editorial project. However, a strong team was needed to see it through.

The team was formed and set to work during the 2023-2024 seasons. Focusing initially on the core of the project, the team set itself several objectives:

- To promote existing puppetry magazines,
- To cover as many areas of the world as possible,
- To create dialogue between articles.

A first call for contributions was sent out in May 2024 to magazines only, with each editor-in-chief invited to send us three summaries of published articles.

In September 2024, Alessandra Amicarelli, Franziska Vöemel and Emmanuelle Castang met in Charleville-Mézières for a week-long residency thanks to the support of the Culture Moves Europe programme. This residency will enable them to work on the second call for contributions sent to the National Centres, drawing on the themes emerging from the initial proposals received. The Editorial Committee has thus identified nine key questions, which were sent to all National Centres that do not have a magazine.

- What dialogue, confrontations, exchanges, clashes, hybridisations, collaborations, cross-fertilisation, twinning, geographical crossings, influences and/or connections does puppetry enable between cultures?
- Puppetry as a ritual object. How does the ritual object/ritual form transform to become a performance object/spectacular form?
- What unifying elements have made it possible to open up common spaces for puppeteers at the regional, national and/or international level?
- What is the relationship between puppets and puppeteers? What is the role and perspective of the audience?
- What new window of expression and connection is opening up with the use of digital tools?
- Puppets as objects of belief and symbols of power. What does puppetry make us believe? What beliefs, metaphors and symbolism are intrinsically linked to puppetry?

- How does puppetry allow us to connect with reality in a unique way during the creative process? How are real-life stories translated onto the stage? (Documentary puppetry, war dramaturgy, etc.)
- From the self to the other and then to society, how can puppets position themselves as a mediating tool between these three levels? (Social applications of puppets)
- How do puppets challenge existing conventions, norms and crises (through satire or otherwise)?

The editorial committee is then organised into continental sub-groups with representatives to liaise with the National Centres and ensure the widest possible participation.

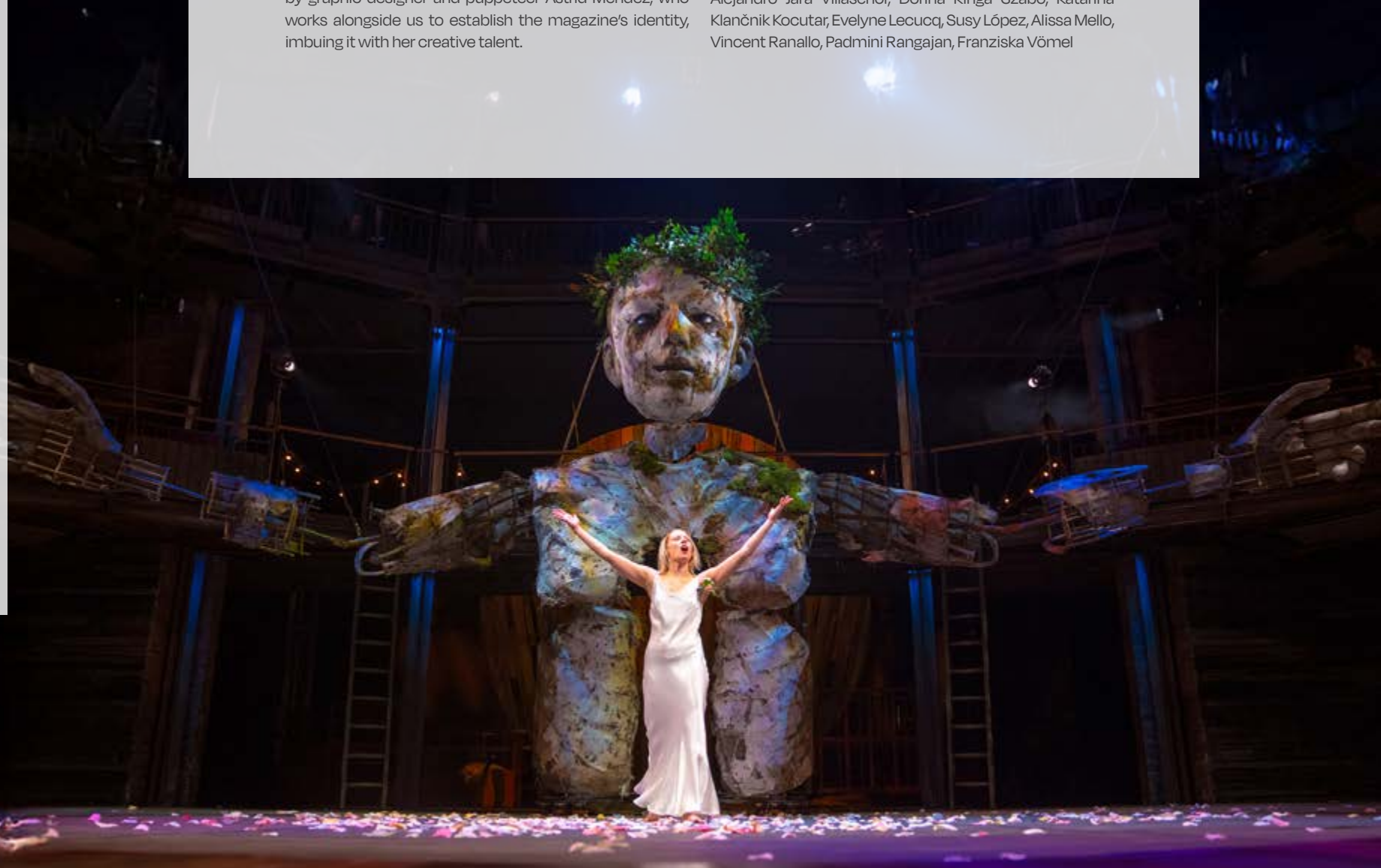
This is followed by all the stages of designing and producing a magazine, in which each member commits themselves with enthusiasm and tenacity, accompanied by graphic designer and puppeteer Astrid Mendez, who works alongside us to establish the magazine's identity, imbuing it with her creative talent.

Throughout this process, which lasted almost two years, the editorial committee continued to engage in dialogue to bring to life this beautiful object that aims to showcase the magnificent artistic community that is UNIMA – Union Internationale de la Marionnette. We would like to thank all the authors and photographers for their contributions.

It is with great pleasure that we invite you to join us on this journey across continents and faces, objects and practices of all kinds through the 43 articles that make up this first issue of UNIMAGAZINE.

## BON VOYAGE!

Alessandra Amicarelli, Ana Díaz Barriga, Mihail Baykov, Emmanuelle Castang, Yejin Choi, Maryam Iranmanesh, Alejandro Jara Villaseñor, Dorina Kinga Szabó, Katarina Klančnik Kocutar, Evelyne Lecucq, Susy López, Alissa Mello, Vincent Ranallo, Padmini Rangajan, Franziska Vöemel



03 - 05	Editorial		
06 - 07	Content		
		ORIGINS	
		UNIMA MALI: GUARDIAN OF HERITAGE AND PILLAR OF INNOVATION IN THE PUPPETRY ARTS	10 - 11
		By Boucary Ombotimbe • Mali	
		THE BRITISH PUPPET AND MODEL THEATRE GUILD 100 <sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY	14 - 17
		By Michael Dixon • United Kingdom	
		THE ARTIST WHO PULLS THE STRINGS	18 - 20
		By Hamid Dahmani • Algeria	
		OMMOK TANGOU: A RITUAL ITEM IN THE DAILY LIFE OF TUNISIAN CHILDREN USED FOR STREET PERFORMANCES	21 - 23
		By Habiba Jendoubi • Tunisia	
		THE PANDEMIC PUPPET SHOW	24 - 25
		By Sherwin Rackal • Trinidad and Tobago	
		IRRUPTION OF A THEATRE OF FIGURES	26 - 29
		Coordinated by Lise Raivard Guiot • France	
		THE PARADOXES OF WORKING SOLO	30 - 32
		By Michelle Chanonat • Canada	
		PURA BELPRÉ	33 - 36
		By Deniz Khateri • USA	
37 - 43	Life on strings • Portraits		
		LANGUAGES	
		PROJECT FRANKENSTEIN: THE CHALLENGES OF DOUBLE INTERPRETATION WITHIN UNFOLDED THEATRE	46 - 48
		By Luciano Mansur • Argentina	
		THE FLYING BROTHERS-IN-LAW PROBLEM	49 - 51
		A STATE OF THE ART PUPPET AND VISUAL THEATRE IN THE NETHERLANDS	
		By Rieks Swarte • Netherlands	
		EMBODYING THE HUMAN SOUL	52 - 53
		Testimony of Natacha Belova • Switzerland	
		THE PUPPET BETWEEN THE CHARACTER AND THE ACTOR IN PUPPET THEATER	54 - 57
		By Dr. Zainab Abdul Amir Ahmed • Iraq	
		MOMENTS THAT MAKE YOU STOP AND THINK	58 - 61
		By Silke Technau • Germany	
		PUPPET AUDIENCES IN PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION	62 - 65
		By Monica Berman • Argentina	
		ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK	66 - 69
		ARTISTIC PRACTISE AS REVELATION OF THE INFINITE WITHIN THE FINITE	
		By Mongiwekhaya • South Africa	
		ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A MAGAZINE CALLED "LA HOJA DEL TITIRITERO"	70 - 72
		By Alejandro Jara Villaseñor • Latin America	
		THOL PAAVAI KOOOTHU	73 - 75
		TRADITIONAL SHADOW PUPPETRY IN TAMIL NADU ACROSS SEVENTEEN GENERATIONS	
		By Padmini Rangarajan • India	
		THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF PUPPETRY	76 - 78
		By Erzsébet Tamás with Mervyn Millar • Finland	
		THE DIGITAL AGE AND THE REBIRTH OF PUPPETRY ARTS IN TANZANIA	79 - 81
		By Nkumi H. Mtingwa • Tanzania	
		DIGITTRY: ROMANCING REALITIES	82 - 85
		By Aga Blaszczak • Poland	
		THE ROLE OF DOLLS AND MASKS IN KENYAN CULTURE	86 - 88
		By Fedelis Kyalo and Philemon Odhiambo • Kenya	
		THE DRAMATIC CAPACITY OF IRANIAN ANCIENT STORIES (BEFORE THE ISLAMIC ERA) FOR CREATING NEW PUPPET SHOWS	89 - 92
		By Maryam Iranmanesh & Mahnaz Khatibi • Iran	
		JAMES WEBSTER AND THE ART OF KARETAO MĀORI	93 - 96
		By Hinemoa Jones • New Zealand	

97 - 101	Life on strings • Portraits	
		MEDIUM
	A FLOODED WOMAN FLOATS IN THE AIR PUPPETS AND TRAUMATIC SOCIAL EXPERIENCES	104 - 107
	By Javier Swedzky • Argentina	
	PATHS AND DISCOVERIES IN COMPANY LUMIATO'S CREATIVE PROCESSES	108 - 110
	By Soledad Garcia • Brazil	
	THERAPEUTIC PURPOSES OF MATERIAL THEATRE - SOME EXPERIENCES	111 - 113
	By Vikramjeet Sinha • India	
	TALES, IN WORKSHOPS ON TALES AND PUPPETS	114 - 116
	By Edith Lombardi • France	
	THE PUPPET, A TOOL FOR LINKING COMMUNITIES	117 - 120
	By Emmanuelle Castang with Iry Armand Gogbé and Elijah Cunnison • Ghana-Guinea	
	PUPPETS CAN DISRUPT EXISTING NEGATIVE SOCIAL NORMS: A CASE OF REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA	121 - 124
	By Agaba Denis and the UNIMA Uganda Team members • Uganda	
	MR. SPEAKER AND ME	125 - 127
	By Margareta Sörenson with Jenny Bjärkstедt • Sweden	
	WAKKA WAKKA - CLIMATE ACTIVISTS AND FORMIDABLE PUPPETEERS	128 - 131
	By Elin Lindberg • Norway	
	THE POLITICAL AND RADICAL THROUGH THE EYES OF A PUPPET	132 - 135
	By Benjamin Zajc • Slovenia	
136 - 141	Life on strings • Portraits	
		TERRITORIES
	CHUNCHEON, THE HEART OF PUPPET THEATRE IN SOUTH KOREA	144 - 146
	By Kyumi Ko • Republic of Korea	
	WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT BURUNDI IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW AFRICAN COUNTRIES WHERE THE PUPPET TRADITION DOESN'T EXIST?	147 - 149
	By Eraste Mandera Manyoni • Burundi	
	THE PUPPET, UNIVERSAL TOOL OF CULTURAL CONNECTION	150 - 153
	By Nkuissi Florence Nadège with Ousmanou Sali • Cameroon	
	AT THE CROSSROADS: PUPPETRY	154 - 157
	By Brunella Eruli • France	
	FROM HANDS TO HEARTS: THE CROSS-CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF PUPPETRY	158 - 160
	By Ana Lorite • U.S.A	
	PULLING AT THE STRINGS OF TRADITION	161 - 163
	By Victoria Hart • Myanmar	
	FROM CRISIS TO CREATION:	164 - 166
	THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN PUPPET THEATER IN JAPAN	
	By Yoko Yamaguchi • Japan	
	ELI AND THE GOLEM	167 - 169
	By Russell Dean • United Kingdom	
	CONTEMPORARY PUPPETRY IN THE PHILIPPINES	170 - 173
	By Amihan Bonifacio-Ramolete • Philippines	
	DISMANTLING THE 'DOLL'S HOUSE'	174 - 175
	EXPERIENCES FROM THE RACISM-CRITICAL WORKSHOP WEEKEND IN MUNICH	
	By Meike Wagner • Germany	
	OUT IN THE COLD:	176 - 177
	PUPPETRY AS AN IMMIGRANT ART FORM IN ICELAND	
	By Greta Clough • Iceland	
180 - 184	Life on strings • Portraits	
186 - 195	The puppet trail • Training, festivals and magazines around the world	
196 - 197	UNIMAGAZINE team	

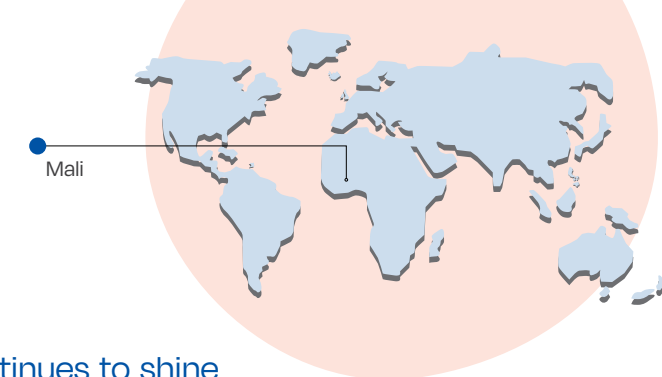




# ORIGINS

How does the past of puppetry shape its future? Can we trace the evolution of puppetry to enhance our understanding of its influences and development? These articles delve into what brings puppeteers together to collaborate and expand the form, while inviting us to consider where the life of a puppet comes from—not in terms of performance, but of our human desire to foster puppetry traditions.





# UNIMA MALI

## GUARDIAN OF HERITAGE AND PILLAR OF INNOVATION IN THE PUPPETRY ARTS

By Boucary Ombotimbe

Mali, the undisputed cradle of African puppetry, continues to shine on the international stage thanks to bold initiatives spearheaded by UNIMA Mali. From the preservation of ancestral traditions, to artistic innovation, this national organisation is shaping the future of puppetry arts. This text explores the richness of this heritage, recent achievements and future visionary projects, in particular those linked to Fesmamas, under the direction of Alioune Ifra Ndjaye.

### MALI: FATHER OF PUPPETS IN AFRICA

The Empire of Mali, heir to a rich cultural history, is recognised as the cradle of the puppet arts in Africa. Puppets, once used in religious and initiation ceremonies, still play a central role in the country's social and cultural life today.

The giant puppets of the Bozo people, for example, were once manipulated to pay homage to the water spirits, essential to the life of fishing communities. Dogon masks and puppets, meanwhile, are linked to sacred ceremonies such as the Sigi, celebrating the ancestors and cosmic forces. These practices, though rooted in tradition, continue to inspire contemporary artists to tell modern stories, marking the enduring and evolving nature of this art form.

### UNIMA MALI: AN INTERNATIONAL DYNAMIC

UNIMA Mali has established itself as a key player in the promotion and innovation of the puppet arts. In 2024, it participated brilliantly in the UNIMA international meeting in Cape Town, South Africa. With two major performances, including *The Pilgrim Cat*, the organisation captivated a worldwide audience. The aforementioned play, which combines traditional storytelling and innovative scenography, embodies the talent and creativity of Malian artists.

As well as putting on shows, UNIMA Mali is committed to preserving and disseminating the country's cultural heritage. It promotes the fusion of traditional tales with modern aesthetics, offering creations that hold a dialogue between past and present.



Dogon mask, the waders.

Images on article cover in descendent order:

- The Healer: A delicate embodiment of ancestral knowledge, the puppet honours the healer, guardian of plants and incantations. Serving sick children, she symbolises healing and protection, linking the mystical with the concrete.
- The Kondés mask: From the Bambara and Malinke ethnic groups.
- Tapama Djenapo: Young and graceful, sacrificed herself alive to build a spiritual wall in Djenné. Her singular destiny, imbued with love and devotion, resonates throughout the history of the town, leaving an immortal imprint.



©Aboubacar Babilé DRABA



This Malian puppet symbolises strength and humility through a buffalo carrying armed hunters and women pounding millet. It illustrates strength in the face of challenges, community protection and the importance of agriculture, embodying unity and social balance.

#### UNIMA MALI: A CREATIVE AND INCLUSIVE FORCE

UNIMA Mali also plays a leading role in training and empowering artists. Through its initiatives, the organisation has trained more than 100 women to be puppeteers, breaking down the cultural barriers that confined this practice to an exclusively male domain.

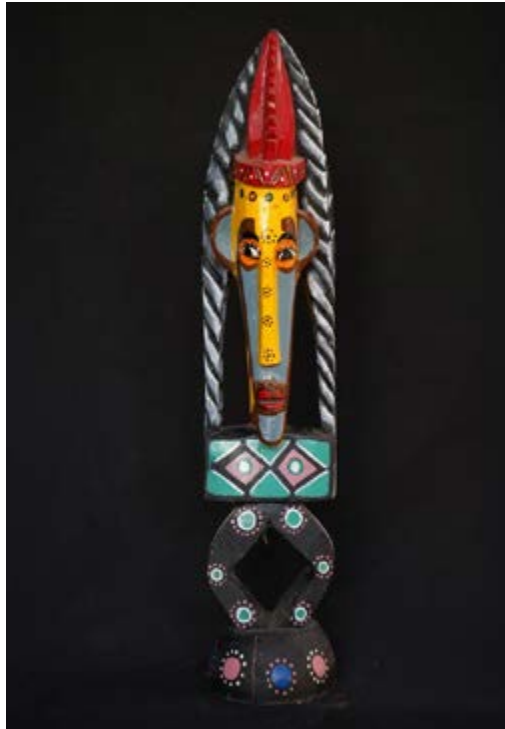
These women, now accomplished puppeteers, play an active part in contemporary creations that resonate both nationally and internationally. UNIMA Mali has also produced six major plays, exploring a variety of themes while using different manipulation techniques. These works are living testimony to Mali's ability to innovate while at the same time valuing its traditions.

#### FESMAMAS: A VISIONARY FESTIVAL UNDER A NEW DIRECTION

Le Festival des Masques et Marionnettes de Markala (The Markala Mask and Puppet Festival) referred to as the Fesmamas, one of the first festivals of its kind in Africa, is a major event celebrating the diversity and creativity of the puppetry arts. Since this year, it has been directed by Alioune Ifra Ndjaye, a renowned cultural operator whose ambition is to transform the festival into a global showcase.

In April 2025, Alioune Ifra Ndjaye is planning a spectacular creation that will mark the history of the performing arts in Mali.

©Aboubacar Babilé DRABA



The goddess of fertility embodies a benevolent force that goes beyond mere biological fertility to nurture human aspirations and balance with nature. She waters the earth and hopes, symbolising prosperity and growth. Guardian of the cycles of life, she inspires generosity and abundance.

This project will bring together:

- 40 horse puppets
- 30 Dogon masks
- 30 giant puppets

All in a monumental performance accompanied by an original soundtrack.

The Fesmamas will also welcome traditional performance groups from 30 villages, who will take part with their puppets and traditional masks, testifying to the richness and diversity of local artistic expression. There will also be an exhibition of ancient puppets tracing the history and evolution of this art form, offering an immersive journey through Mali's heritage.

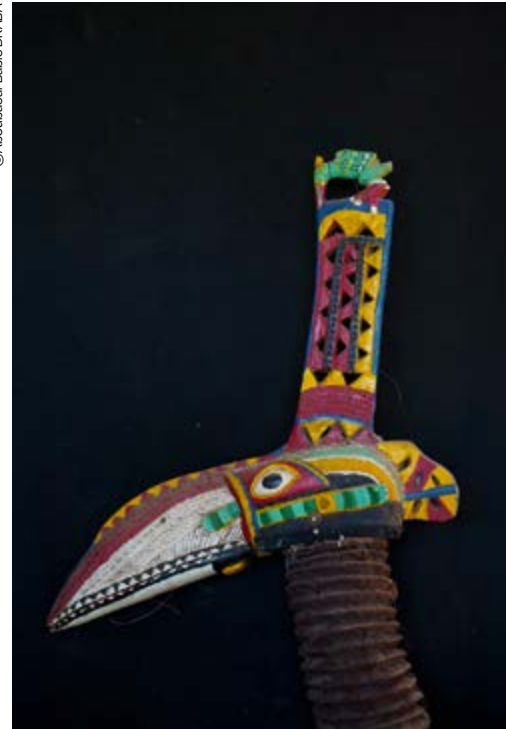
This ambitious project promises to combine tradition and modernity, offering a total immersion in the Malian cultural universe.

#### THE FUSION OF ANCESTRAL TALES AND CONTEMPORARY STORIES

In Mali, the art of puppetry is deeply rooted in traditional tales and stories. With the support of UNIMA Mali, Malian artists are drawing on this vast repertoire to create contemporary works.

Stories such as *Le Lièvre rusé* (The Cunning Hare) and *La Légende du Pêcheur Bozo* (The Legend of the Bozo

©Aboubacar Babilé DRABA



Kalawo konno. This bird represents freedom.

©Aboubacar Babilé DRABA



Momo Traoré, heroine of Sikasso, embodied exceptional courage by mutilating herself to better fight the enemy. She defeated more than 150 opponents, defending her town with unfailing determination. Her sacrifice remains a legend of bravery and resistance.

Fisherman) are revisited with a modern aesthetic, exploring contemporary issues such as ecology, gender equality and migration. This ability to update ancient tales while preserving their essence enables Malian puppeteers to make timeless, universal creations.

#### CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE PUPPETRY ARTS IN MALI

Despite these successes, the puppetry arts in Mali face several challenges.

Limited funding: the financial resources needed to support ambitious creations and international tours remain insufficient.

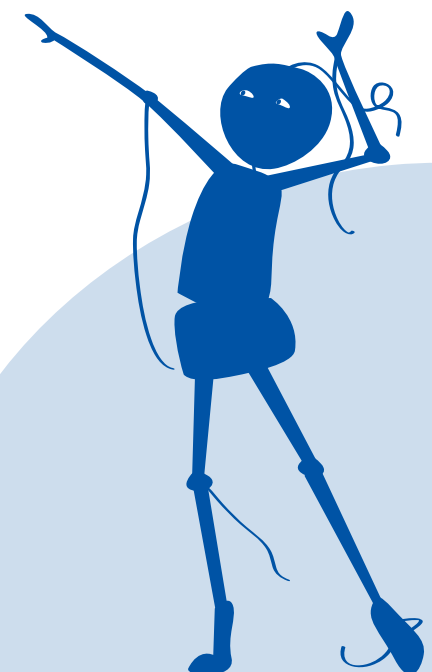
The need to transmit the art form: training a new generation of artists to ensure the continuity of this art form is a priority.

Greater international visibility: although shows like *The Pilgrim Cat* have attracted attention, further efforts are needed to establish Mali as a world reference in this field.

To meet these challenges, UNIMA Mali is exploring collaborations with international institutions, such as UNESCO, and donors, such as the European Union.

UNIMA Mali, in collaboration with key events such as the Fesmamas, continues to promote the heritage of puppetry arts. This art, which has its roots in the ancestral traditions of the Mali Empire, has been transformed into a veritable laboratory of artistic innovation.

Thanks to ambitious projects, such as the major creation planned for 2025 and the participation of the 30 villages, Mali is strengthening its position as the cradle and future of puppetry arts in Africa. Supporting these initiatives means investing in a living heritage that inspires, brings people together, and educates across generations.



# THE BRITISH PUPPET AND MODEL THEATRE GUILD

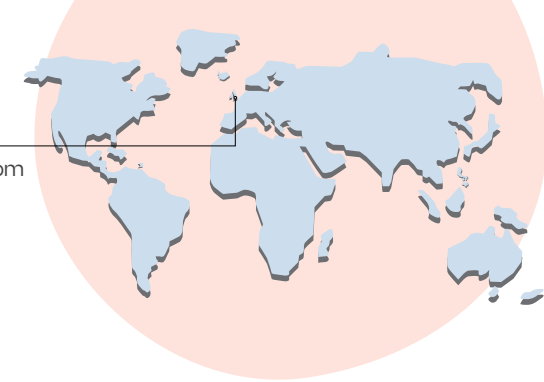
## 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

By Michael Dixon

Archivist of the National Puppetry Archive -  
British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild

Guild members get a closer look at the  
puppets of the Hanneschen-Theater  
Cologne 1954.

United Kingdom



In 2025 the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild will celebrate its 100th Anniversary, making it the oldest puppetry organisation in the world. Here Michael Dixon, archivist for the Guild, takes a look at how it all began.

In 1923 Harry William Whanslaw, of Chiswick London, wrote and illustrated a series of articles on how to make a Model Theatre for a British magazine called *Chatterbox*. The articles proved so popular that the publisher, Wells Gardner Darton & Co, asked Whanslaw to expand them so that they could publish a book. The book was called *Everybody's Theatre*, and was first published in 1924.

*Everybody's Theatre* fell into the hands of a 16 year old boy named Gerald Morice. Morice was one of the first to correspond with Whanslaw, and also visited him at his home. It was suggested, during one of their exchanges, that due to so many people having written to Whanslaw following the release of the book, that a society be formed for those interested in Model Theatre and juvenile drama. Whanslaw, encouraged by Morice, set about replying to all who had written to him announcing the proposal and inviting them to a meeting in London to discuss the proposition and the formation of a society. In Dec of 1924 the Daily Mail newspaper was already reporting on the formation of such a group.

The first meeting was held at 17 Rupert Street London on April 29th 1925. Rupert Street was predominantly residential in 1925, number 17 had been converted into a shop downstairs, and upstairs there was a rehearsal room normally used as a dancing academy for training children for pantomime and variety. Whanslaw hired the room for 2 hours and around 15 of those invited attended. Amongst them were Gerald Morice, Lucien Myers, Seymour Marks, Harold Munroe, John Ellerton (a school boy, son of a millionaire ship-owner), GP Catchpole and Dr Leigh Henry (both from the Faculty of Arts). The group that gathered discussed the proposed constitution, and after a few amendments it was agreed. The name was also decided upon, after some discussion and rejection of The Model Stage Club it was agreed that the new society would be The British Model Theatre Guild. A committee was elected and a secretary appointed, who a few days later sadly broke his collarbone and was replaced by Seymour Marks, a post he then held for 15 years.

At that founding meeting it was agreed that the first activity would be an exhibition, the representatives from the Faculty of Arts offered their venue and it took place between August 24th and 29th 1925 at the Faculty of Arts Gallery, Upper Johns Street, Golden Square, London. Following this, the first members meeting was arranged for Oct 6th 1925 at the Poetry Bookshop (owned by founding member Harold Munroe) on what was then Devonshire Street. By this time the membership had grown and several more people were in attendance including a young Waldo Lanchester. Guest of honour at that meeting was Mrs. Clunn Lewis, the widow of the well-known Victorian puppeteer, she had visited the exhibition the previous August and was asked to come to the meeting and talk about her late husband's puppets. The poetry bookshop was a small Dickensian-like shop, around 12 feet square, with books floor to ceiling, it was often to be found crammed with people who would be choosing books to then take to the reading room at the back. It was in this reading room that the Guild held its first members meeting. Quite cramped, it was a converted workroom that had been originally used by gold beaters who still inhabited a large part of the street, in fact when in the shop you could still hear the hammers of the

gold beaters working day and night. Meetings continued to be held at the Poetry bookshop until it was sold in 1929.

One of the earliest communal activities was productions of toy theatre plays with enlarged flat figures. The first of these plays being the pantomime Ali Baba staged at the Faculty of Arts in January 1926. Performances of *Robin Hood*, *Harlequinade*, *A Christmas Review*, and *The Ghost Train* all followed, with the latter having sets and props provided by a local Model Railway club.

Even from the very first exhibition, puppets had a presence within the Guild, this remained the case from the first meeting and in subsequent meetings and exhibitions including performances by Whanslaw and Lanchester. It was therefore proposed and accepted at the 1932 AGM that the word 'Puppet' be added to the organisation's name to better reflect the interests of its members, and since then it has been known as The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild.

Guild founding member, Gerald Morice, was an advocate of fostering contacts with puppet theatres and companies abroad, in fact it was Gerald who formed the British

Guild puppeteers take  
a rest during the filming  
of Puppet Parade, BBC  
Alexandria Palace, 1939.

©The National Puppetry Archive





branch of UNIMA. As part of these links Gerald organised several European tours for Guild members. The first tour was in 1936 and saw 17 members tour German puppet theatres in Cologne, Stuttgart, Munich and Salzburg. The following year saw another tour covering Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Cologne and Dortmund. 1938 saw a particularly impressive itinerary covering both Germany and Czechoslovakia, including the city of Pilsen where members, led again by Gerald Morice, met Professor Josef Skupa at his, Czechoslovakia's first, puppet theatre, before it relocated to Prague in 1943. Prague was also on the itinerary for this 1938 tour, and it was there that members got to meet American puppeteer Paul McPharlin who was also touring Europe. The following year 1939, saw the final tour, this time of France and Belgium, before the outbreak of the Second World War, during which Gerald Morice became the BBC Correspondent in Vienna. Tours resumed in 1954, '55 and '57, where newer members had the opportunity to visit theatres covered in the previous tours.

Television was only just beginning in 1930. Test shots were transmitted from the John Logie Baird Experimental Studios in Long Acre, London, but no full height human figures and certainly no "performances" were possible. Guild founder Harry Whanslaw and Guild members Waldo Lanchester and Jan Bussell have the distinction of performing the first puppets ever to appear on television anywhere in the world. The sight of puppets performing live on the postcard sized screen caused a real sensation, and one time, whilst performing their show, they were visited by John Logie Baird himself.

Guild members played an important part of BBC Television in its formative days at their very first studios at Alexandra Palace. This was aided by the fact that Jan Bussell of The Hogarth Puppets was a producer there between 1937 and 1948 and he was greatly supported by Cecil Madden, the BBC's first producer/director of television. In recognition Cecil was made President of the Guild from 1965 to his death in 1987. Puppets were seen frequently on shows such as *Picture Page* and *Puppet Parade*, with some members developing their own shows, most notably the Hogarth Puppets with 'Muffin the Mule'.

Over its 100 year history the Guild has had several notable members, both in the UK and abroad. Edward Gordon Craig, George Speight, Lotte Reiniger, Harry Tozer, John Blundall and Barry Jackson to name just a few.

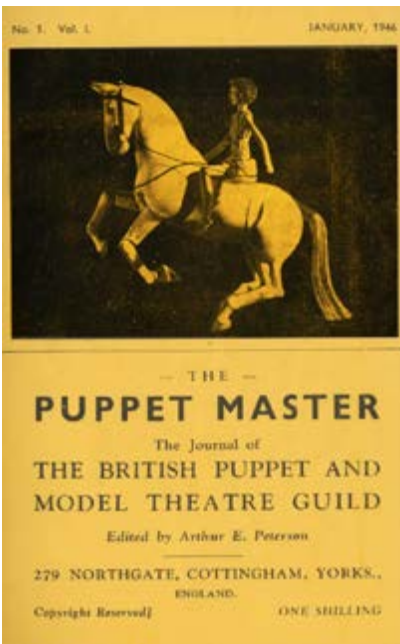
From its inception it has ensured that all members have been kept up-to-date through

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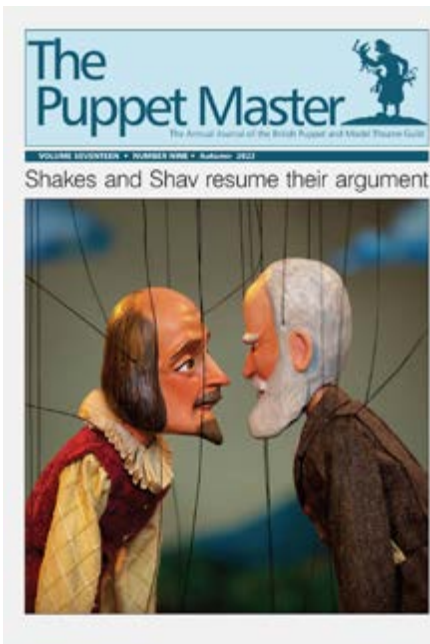
Paul McPharlin, Dr Jan Malik, Seymour Marks and Gerald Morice, in Prague 1938.

©The National Puppetry Archive



Left image: The first issue of *The Puppet Master* 1946.  
Right image: *The Puppet Master* today.

©The National Puppetry Archive



regular newsletters. The first such publication, *Notes and News*, was produced in the Guild's very first year, 1925, and ran until August 1939, the outbreak of WWII in Europe. It was then replaced by the *Wartime Bulletin*.

The 'Wartime Bulletin', first published in Nov 1939, kept members around the country up-to-date with activities that continued despite the war. 17 issues of the bulletin were published in total between 1939 and 1946, when in January 1946, to celebrate the return to some normality, the first ever *Puppet Master* magazine was produced.

Edited by Arthur Peterson, the first *Puppet Master* featured on its cover *Snowball and Estrella*, two marionettes from William Simmonds' *Circus' Show*, and inside 20 pages of reviews of performances, news from the recent Guild exhibition held in London, updates from various members and an article on scene painting – very similar to content today! Despite various changes in format and frequency over the years, the *Puppet Master* has continued to deliver a range of articles that cover the vast interests of the Guild's members.

During the Guild's 100 year history there have been 13 different editors all bringing their own style and influence on the magazine. Since 1991, when current editor Brian Hibbitt took over, the magazine has been published annually and in a larger A4 size. It was a first when, in 2012, colour was added to the magazine to celebrate Mr Punch's 350<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild at 100 years old is naturally a different Guild to the one that was formed in 1925, but the core aims still remain true:

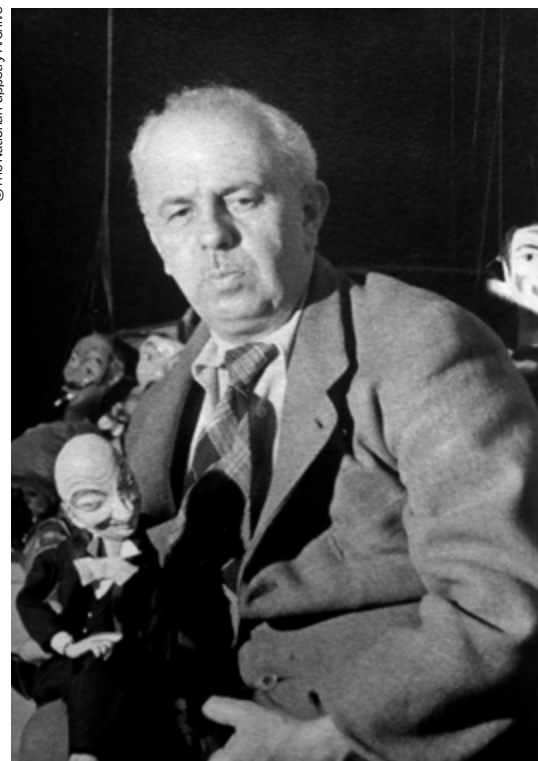
- To promote the practice of the art of Puppetry & Model Theatre.
- To maintain an effective communication network between our members, other related organisations and associated bodies.
- To preserve and share the heritage of British Puppetry and Model Theatre.

It is through those aims that the Guild gives its members the feeling of being part of a community, a group there to help and guide each other. Many discussions which would

have once happened over a cup of tea now take place via social media, but at any Guild get together whether on Zoom or in person, you can be guaranteed a warm welcome together with help and advice on anything from starting out in your puppetry career to a technical problem you need to solve. The Guild has members that cover the whole spectrum of puppetry and model theatre, both professional and amateur, and whilst the inclusion of everyone for some can be the basis of debate, and has been almost from its conception, it is this mixture of members that gives the Guild not only its uniqueness but also its longevity.

British puppetry has changed much over the last 100 years and will continue to do so. As we enter our second century it feels like a new renaissance, much like the one started by Harry Whanslaw, Waldo Lanchester, Jan Bussell and countless other Guild members who changed British puppetry forever following that initial meeting on April 29th 1925. The Guild continues to organise festivals, technical workshops, auctions and a whole host of other events that promote puppetry in Britain, and is looking forward to the next 100 years.

©The National Puppetry Archive



Harry H Whanslaw with Soko, an early TV puppet.

©The National Puppetry Archive



Young Gerald Morice performing his Toy Theatre.

©The National Puppetry Archive



Waldo Lanchester and Margaret Jackson (better known as Ann Hogarth) preparing the Guild exhibition 1929.



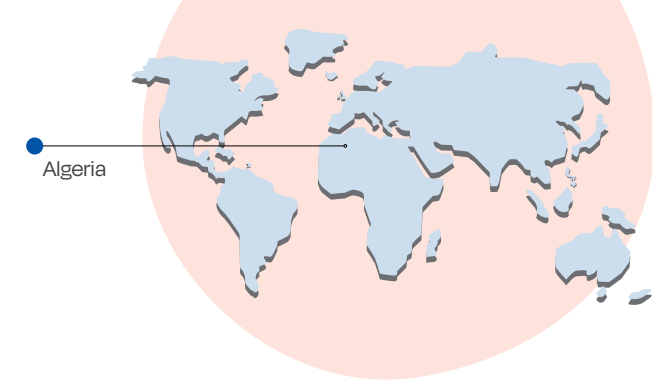
# THE ARTIST WHO PULLS THE STRINGS

By Hamid Dahmani

Once upon a time, in 1969, the Centre Sheikh Larbi Tebessi was a memorable venue for puppet shows. A magical theater to take children on a dreamlike journey, as they adored these figurines known as "ârais garagouze" (puppets), which gave them all kinds of happiness.



©Hemaidi-zouguil Mohamed



The art of puppetry is sublime when it captures the mind and makes children dream. It's also said that puppetry has the power to fascinate admirers of all ages. Puppet theater is as old as antiquity, and its history is universal. These small articulated, or inarticulate figurines are fashioned from wood, cardboard, and fabric, as well as other more surprising materials. They are works of art, manipulated by performers. These puppets delight the little ones when they move at the ends of the strings. The world of puppetry has come a long way, and today you'll often come across a puppet on the street, playing in a puppet theater booth, or on the stage of a travelling theater. Even television channels use puppets to entertain and to create caricatures of political figures, or to tell legendary stories. In fact, there's an expression that describes people who are manipulated by other people as "puppets". To find out more about this educational and attractive passion, we approached Mr. Chioune Abdenmour, leader of puppeteers in the town of Chlef, and author of several children's publications that have been adapted for puppet theater. Mr Chioune was also kind enough to tell us the fabulous story of the marvellous puppet epic in the former town of El-Asnam.

Chlef is undoubtedly the cradle of puppetry here in the country, asserts our interlocutor. It was in 1969 that the dream and artistic desire for these popular little dolls began. The story began in a youth center run by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, located on the route des carrières in the capital of the former town of El-Asnam, when the first puppet theater department was created in the region. The aim of this technical meeting was to put in place the human and material resources needed to launch the country's first puppet theatre troupe.

After a training course initiated by the Youth and Sports Department under the guidance of local trainers at the time, Mr. Boudria and Mr. Sehaïlia, the main organizers of the seminar, taught the tricks of the trade of this new artistic discipline to the trainees selected for the course, which brought together local candidates from the wilayah (state or province) of El Asnam for an accelerated course. Mr. Chioune still remembers the high points of the past, when cultural activity was precarious, but enthusiasm overflowed with these young people who chose to embrace their passion and follow an advanced training course to operate and animate puppet shows at the very beginning of Algeria's independence. It was with limited means that the adventure into the world of puppetry began in the youth center at that time, and the first puppets were fashioned from wood, newspaper paste, paper-mâché and glue by the hands of these self-taught artists to give them the appearance of fairytale characters. Chioune remembers those moments of resourcefulness, when one drew inspiration from the artistic heritage of one's land and the universal heritage to make and dress the figurines, giving them a playful appearance of the heroes of famous tales that once lulled us to sleep in our childhood: *Aladdin, Ali Baba Loundja, Afrit...*

Our interlocutor tells us that the forms of puppets used in those days were the "hand puppet" manipulated by the hand, the "rod puppet" manipulated from below with a rod, and the "marionette", controlled by strings. Giant puppets were also used as part of the set. At the time, the troupe even took part in the Hadika Sahira television program at the Cheikh Larbi Tebessi Center. At that time, there were three youth centers in the wilayah of El-Asnam, which had made puppetry the credo of their shows.

“The puppet is an instrument of communication, symbolizing the loving dream of innocence and childhood.”  
- Chioune Abdenmour



The first national puppet festival was held in the town of Miliana and formalized in Ohlef in 1973. Until 2007, the Cheikh Larbi Tebessi center hosted the festivals that were subsequently held in the main town of El Asnam. In 2008, the puppet festival was transferred to Ain Temouchent by decision of the public authorities. To this day, the actors behind these theatrical entertainments often use a puppet theater booth for their scenes to amuse the spectators. Since then, puppet theater has come a long way with a great deal of professional talent. Just look at the popularity of theater performers, who shine with the quality of their shows when they delight children in schools, nurseries and hospitals, moralizing or raising awareness of civic life on a local or national scale.

The puppet is an instrument of communication, symbolizing the loving dream of innocence and childhood, says Chioune, a passionate puppeteer. Mr. Chioune is a nationally-trained puppeteer with a diploma in educating puppeteers, and has taken part in several seminars organized for the development of this educational art. This tireless artist has received several awards during his artistic career. As a member of the jury of numerous national puppet festivals in Algeria, he has greatly contributed to the development of this art form, which fascinates children. He is a member and first vice-president of the Algerian section of the international organization UNIMA.

In the present, Mr. Chioune, is still active as a behind-the-scenes figure, devoting himself to the search for the perfect way to develop and perpetuate this art, actively transmitting this knowledge to the new generations within the organization Les amis du centre Cheikh Larbi Tebessi (Friends of Check Larbi Tebessi centre), which is now headed by puppeteer Hemaïdi Zourgui Mohamed. The good times are still there, in the heart of this center dedicated to art, and the doyen of puppetry continues to enjoy the pleasure with his friends of making these marvelous and graceful dolls adored by children, all over the world.



@Hemaidi-zourgui Mohamed

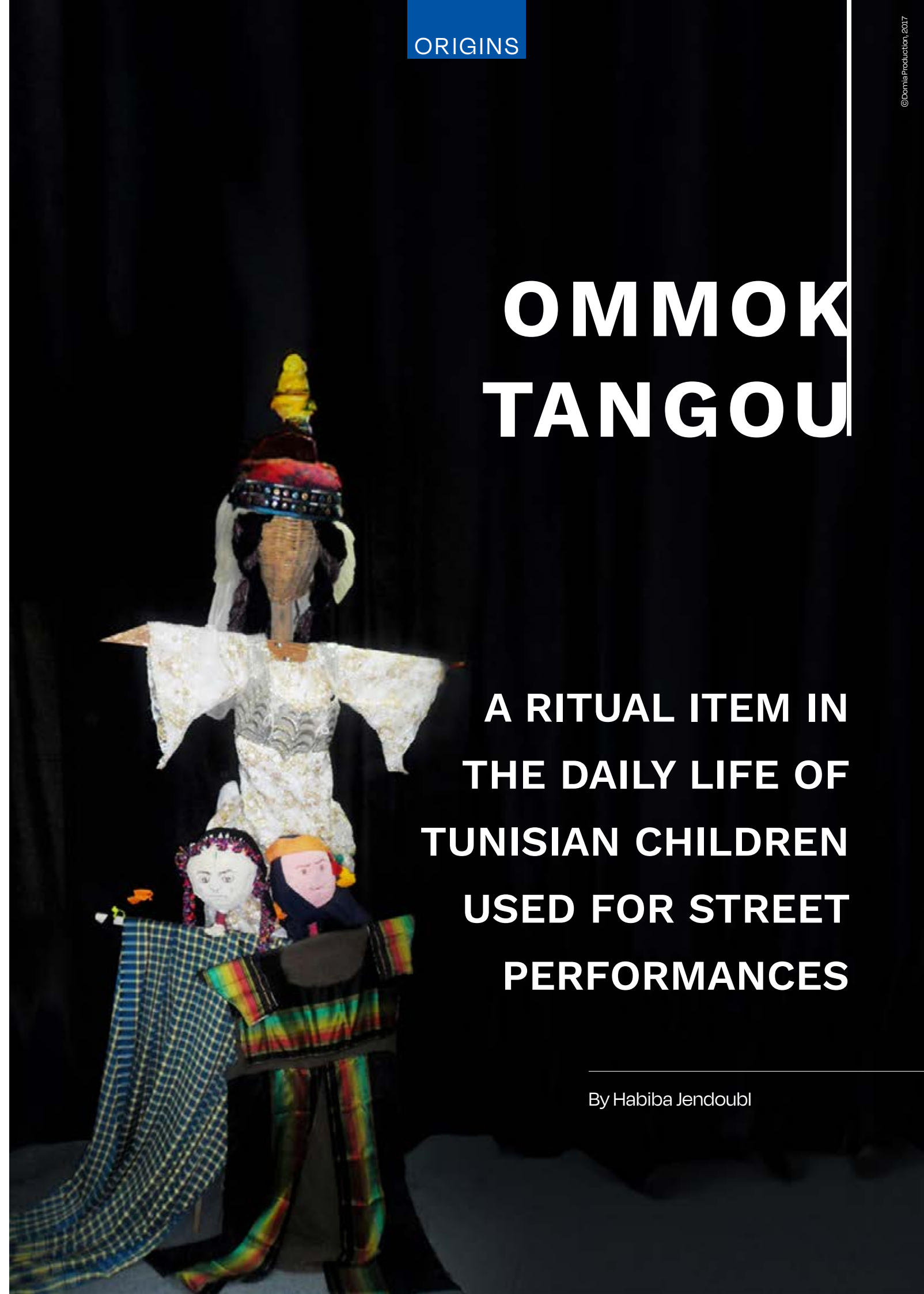


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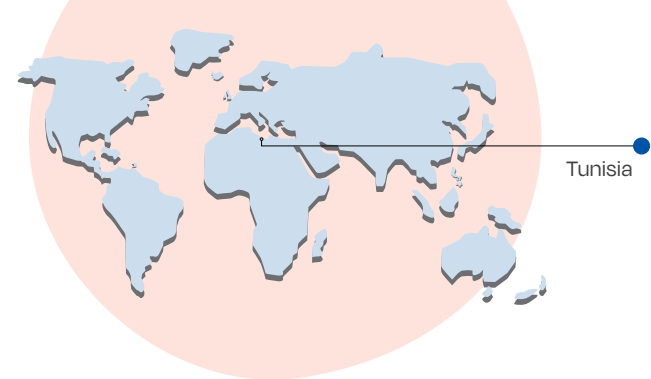
# OMMOK TANGOU

A RITUAL ITEM IN  
THE DAILY LIFE OF  
TUNISIAN CHILDREN  
USED FOR STREET  
PERFORMANCES

By Habiba Jendoubi







## ORIGINS

Habiba Jendoubi's study of the history of puppetry in Tunisia<sup>1</sup> has exposed the obstacle faced by researchers today, due to the absence of ample documentation which would provide great detail on the subject.

Only a few traces and collective memory bear to representations with various traditional puppet characters, as their place was in the daily life of Tunisians.

A range of different forms of popular entertainment once performed in Tunisia remain without any real trace, due to a lack of documentation. Only the oral heritage can testify to its richness.

Mr. Aziza<sup>2,3</sup> highlighted the different puppet categories known throughout Tunisia since immemorial times, including Ommok Tangou in the performance/celebration category. Ommok Tangou was tinged with popular beliefs and vague religiosity.

It's a very old doll (inherited from Berber and Punic traditions) known by many different names. It's customary to invoke Ommok Tangou or Omek Tannou (Mother Tangou or Tannou in Tunisian dialect) in years of drought, to bring rain.<sup>4</sup> "Baali" (ba'li) crops are referred to as non-irrigated crops, no doubt to say that they depend solely on the god Ba'al Hammon, whose consort is Tanit. Tanit, also known as Tinnit, Tannou and Tangou, was a Berber goddess of pre-Islamic North Africa adopted by the Phoenicians.

©Domia Production, 2017



Image on article cover and image above: Show *Denietna*.  
In a large trunk, an artist unveils puppets from a distant era. Each puppet recounts its own life and the richness of its era. Ommok Tangou was one of these characters.  
*Denietna* is a Tunisian show produced by domia production with the support of the Ministry of Culture. It has been performed indoors and outdoors, at least 70 times between 2017 and 2018.

## ORIGINS

Tanit was in charge of watching over fertility, births, and growth. She was the patron goddess of the city of Serepta, and her worship gained momentum in Carthage (present day Tunisia), where she was named Oum (mother), hence the shape "common to this doll"<sup>5</sup>. Her worship eventually spread throughout North Africa. Tanit is still venerated in present-day Tunisia.

She is a human-like figure made of a ladle or agricultural implements, sporadically carried around to ask for rain, from Armenia to Palestine, from Tunisia to Morocco.

In Tunisia, Oumouk Tangu is an incantatory rite in times of drought, during which a rag doll is carried by little girls<sup>5</sup>.

It's also a large cross-shaped wooden frame dressed with colorful pieces of cloth depicting a woman. Children walk it between houses during a drought, singing a song that varies from region to region. This ritual is still used today<sup>1</sup>.

This form of ceremony continues to inspire puppeteers in their various shows, highlighting the richness of an intangible heritage. They strive collectively to bring it to life, recreate it and pass it on. It's a living, interactive heritage that bears witness to cultural diversity and social ties.

Acknowledging such a heritage will enable us to face modern challenges and aim to foster the values and disposition of puppeteers and other structures such as schools and youth centers.

November 2024

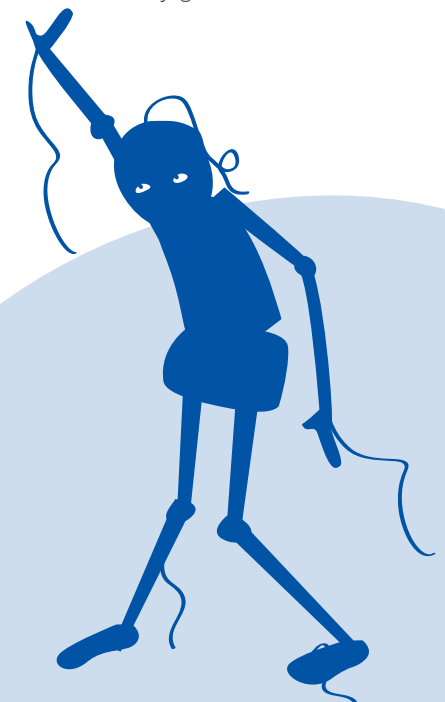
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Show *Histoire de la terre*.  
Two children notice environmental pollution after their pets fall ill. They invite Ommek Tangou to come and sing. Together, the village children celebrate, calling in the rain to clean up the mess. Flowers grow and animals are healthy again.





# THE PANDEMIC PUPPET SHOW



Sherwin Rackal and fellow puppeteer Travis Khan.

By Sherwin Rackal

The year is 2019. I'm sitting with my sister, dreaming about monumental opportunities in puppetry, like visiting the Jim Henson Company in Los Angeles. Suddenly, an ad pops up on my feed: Brian Henson promoting his improv show, *Puppet Up Uncensored*. Without hesitation, I bought tickets and booked flights to LA. Visiting the studio, meeting Brian, and experiencing the magic reignited the puppetry flame from my childhood. I felt alive and ready to follow my dreams! But like any compelling story, a villain appeared—COVID-19.

When the pandemic struck, the world ground to a halt. I found myself cut off from puppets, flights, and the joy that came with pursuing my passion. Left to my own devices, I immersed myself in every YouTube video and Facebook group I could find. To my astonishment, the puppetry community was buzzing with life. The pandemic gave people like me—who lacked access to established puppetry networks—a chance to learn, share, and grow.

Once the pandemic got less severe (between 2020 and 2022), I participated in Puppetzilla, a puppet slam mentorship with the Los Angeles Guild of Puppetry (LAGP). Under the guidance of Sesame Street puppeteer Liz Hara, I discovered the thrilling world of experimental short-form puppetry. As the pandemic continued, I found myself at the National Puppetry Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Centre in Connecticut, learning shadow puppetry from Bart Roccoberton Jr. His stories about UNIMA captivated me, and I felt an undeniable urge to establish my own arm of UNIMA in Trinidad and Tobago.

However, the journey was fraught with challenges. The first hurdle was a staggering lack of funding. In a country where puppetry is not recognized as a vital art form, securing financial support proved nearly impossible. Every attempt to host workshops or events that could spark interest felt like climbing a mountain with no summit in sight.

Then came the overwhelming apathy from the general population. Many in Trinidad and Tobago view puppetry as mere entertainment for children, failing to grasp its rich potential for storytelling and social critique. This lack of understanding created a formidable barrier, making it difficult to attract interest from potential collaborators, audiences, and sponsors. With each rejection the weight of isolation grew heavier, leaving me to wonder if my dream was truly viable.

The absence of a local puppetry community added to my struggles. With few fellow puppeteers to connect with, I often felt like a voice crying out in the wilderness. I turned to online platforms in search of connection, but digital interactions could never replace the sense of belonging that comes from face-to-face engagement. The loneliness of this pursuit was palpable.

*“The puppetry community has shown me that, even amid adversity, we can create spaces for creativity, connection, and collaboration.”*  
– Sherwin Rackal

As the pandemic began to wane, a glimmer of hope emerged: I was accepted into the National Puppetry Conference in 2022, becoming the first Trinidadian to participate. Representing my country amidst such talent was exhilarating! I forged connections with puppeteers from around the globe, discovering a community that embraced my passion. Sharing breakfast with Jim Kroupa,

and hearing stories from Pam Arciero and other Sesame Street veterans filled me with renewed inspiration.

Throughout the pandemic, puppeteers from countries like Kenya, China, and Venezuela showcased their work in online puppet slams. Initiatives like the 48hr Puppet Film Project and Heather Henson's support kept the community alive, allowing us to share our art across borders. With Taylor Bibat's help, I organized the first Virtual Puppet Slam in Trinidad and Tobago, a small but significant step toward building a local community. We made a call for acts that resulted in 8 amazing mentees that were given a scholarship and paired up with their mentors who then helped them create a virtual Puppet Slam piece. These experimental works were screened via an amazing technology called ohYay. These artists continue to work in their respective territories: Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Curacao. These artists were given the opportunity to join UNIMA Trinidad and Tobago, but due to language barriers and other constraints, it has not materialised.

Despite the daunting challenges of establishing a puppetry presence in a country with little support, the pandemic fostered a global network that allowed us to express our love for the art. Today, my small creature shop, SRackal Productions, along with UNIMA Trinidad and Tobago, although it is not a recognised centre just yet, continues to fly the puppetry flag, undeterred by obstacles. I look forward to participating in festivals in Martinique and Mexico in 2025, hoping to build on the connections made along this journey.

The odyssey that began with a simple conversation about dreams, evolved into a quest filled with both struggle and triumph. The puppetry community has shown me that, even amid adversity, we can create spaces for creativity, connection, and collaboration.

Peace and Love.

Trinidad and Tobago



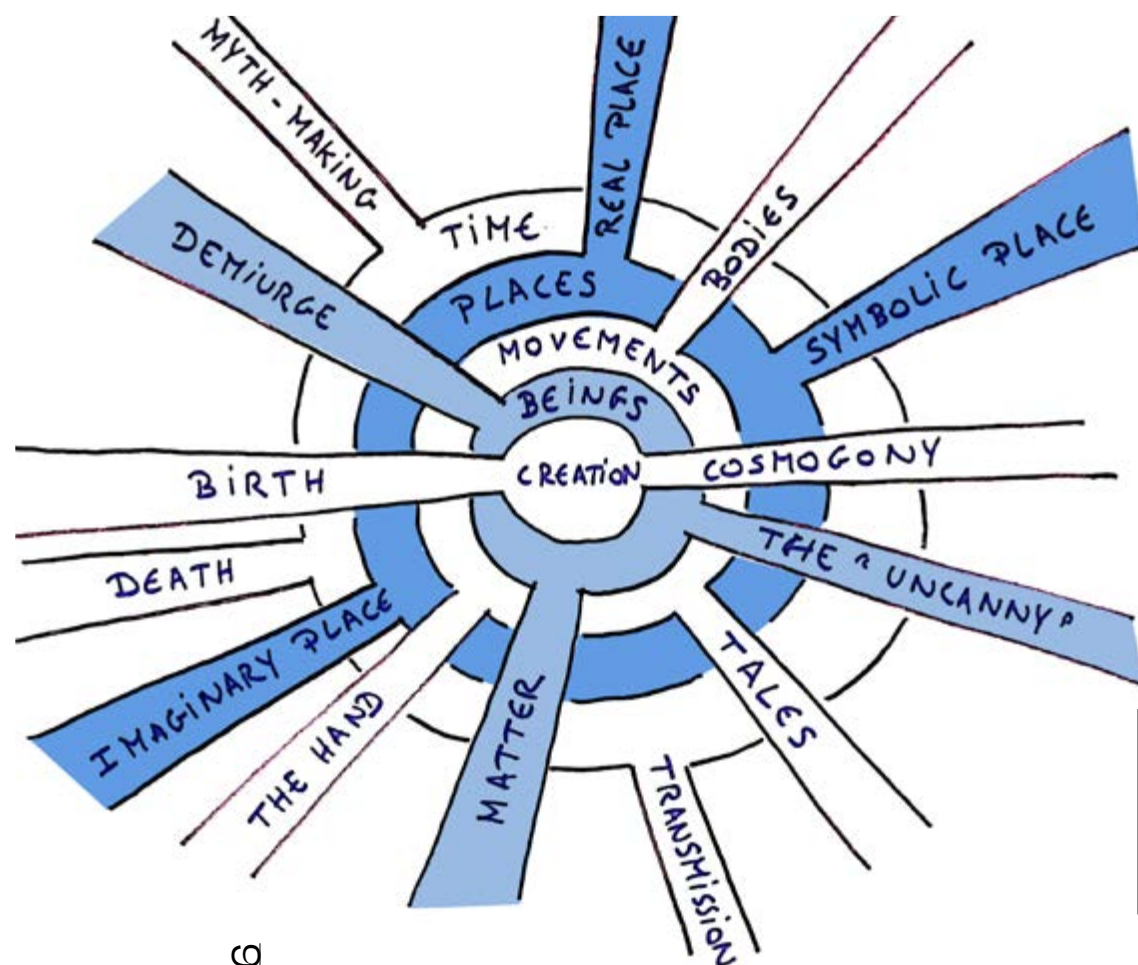
# IRRUPTION OF A THEATRE OF FIGURES

Manip - Le Journal de la Marionnette - n° 67 - 2021



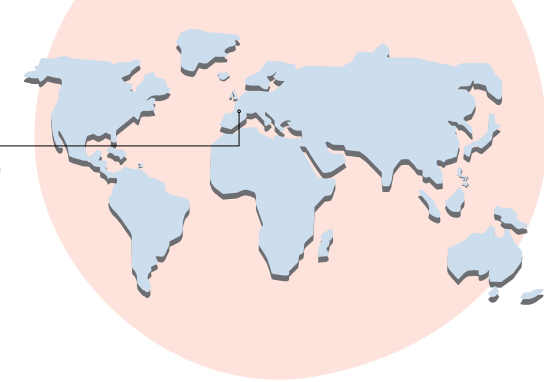
Coordinated by Lise Raivard Guiot

University of Montpellier 3



Pierre Blaise,  
spring 2021.

France



“Mi convinsi, cioè che noi dobbiamo scrivere come dei primitivi:  
voglio dire con l'animo dei primitivi, come coloro che inventano i miti.

I was convinced that we had to write like primitives:  
I mean with the soul of the primitives, like those who invent myths.”  
- Massimo Bontempelli, 1932

## MYTHS...

Cristina Grazioli, professor at the University of Padua

“Birth of the Puppet”: the uncertainty as to the choice of an “origin” myth for the Puppet among the multitude of Myths relating to this polymorphous figure comes perhaps from the fact that the Puppet itself embodies this process. It (re)doubles creation. The gesture of the demiurge, the material used, the breath that animates the first creation. Considering the “birth myth of the puppet”, the artists are directing their focus towards the creation/animation of the puppet itself...

Wouldn't it be useful at this point to evoke a few myths? The one handed down by Pliny the Elder, of the potter Butade, who, depending on the case, was at the origin of painting, portraiture and sculpture, at the origin of a 'Figure'. This figure - a profile of the shadow of his daughter's beloved - traced on the wall by the potter Butade bears witness to an absence, a passion appeased through the medium of a fluid, evanescent silhouette, like clouds or the forms of nature, objects of pareidolia, dear to François Lazaro. The myth of Pygmalion? A tale of “incredible loves”, transforming a love affair between the artist and his inspirational muse into a “portrait”. A puppeteer Pygmalion slips the breath of life into the statue: his fascination and his gaze “activate” the image, giving it life (soul). The myth of the Golem? Giving form and body to a creature has a disturbing, disorientating but also invigorating effect; the double is not a copy and goes beyond the will of its creator. Pirandello's *Les Géants de la Montagne* (The Giants of the Mountain) is a dramaturgical text in which the poet's creatures are born without the mediation of reality, without the compromise of the flesh and bones of human actors. It is the puppets that make this miracle possible.



PRESENCE OF FIGURES

**Antoine Laprise, co-founder of the Théâtre du Sous-marin jaune in Quebec, and François Lazaro, founder of the Clastic Théâtre**

Where does puppetry come from? Where did the theatre come from that we cannot separate from the puppet? And what was there before the theatre?

Tracing the origins of puppetry seems hazardous. Sources are non-existent before antiquity, and the reasons that led humans to set up puppetry practices undoubtedly vary according to era and tradition. In the same way that writing appeared in several civilisations (Sumer, Egypt, China, Mexico), puppetry is a practice found in so many different traditions that it must have originated in different places and times<sup>1</sup>. The less emphasis we place on its origins, the more we take into account its functional and, to some extent, archetypal role. As Donald Keene explains, “Man has been making images of himself for so many millennia and in so many parts of the world that this habit has come to seem an instinctive part of human behavior<sup>2</sup>”. On the other hand, we can try to pick out traces of our relationship with the “figure”.

As children, we feared the jacket on the broom, the shadow of the branch on the wall, the indefinable, persistent creak behind the door. Presences were there, fascinating, watching us. We imagined a multitude of stories and invented a thousand ways of behaving to ward off our fears.

In the same way, as a child, humanity has imbued certain places and certain natural hazards with identities and presences. The rocky spur at the top of the cliff has become “The Sentinel”, the gnarled trunk bearing faces has become an entity to be considered and honoured, the reef in the middle of the sea has become Charybdis or Scylla, the clouds capable of making horses and gods rise and disappear have brought us messages as have the flight of birds.

This human propensity to project presences and reasons onto evocative forms, known as pareidolia, is nourished by our ongoing inner narratives. It is a constituent of our humanity. We cannot envisage a presence without constructing a history for it.

Collective ritual undoubtedly stems from the need to codify how we live together and to agree locally on a certain number of presences, duties and privileges. Pareidolia played a key role in shaping the periodic dramatic rituals that would much later shape theatre.

For us, these presences have a life of their own, appearing hostile or benevolent depending on the light and the time of day. Imitating them through sculpture and modelling will bring them even closer to us. We will learn to light them, to give the illusion that they are moving, that they are alive, on their own, and then we will make them move, without showing ourselves so as not to break the illusion. Some will speak for these presences, to make them intelligible, driven by the duty to serve the collective or the temptation to manipulate the group.

It was only much later that the officiants, revealing themselves, would bring these presences closer to increasingly human forms, which they would end up investing, and the figures would become characters. But that’s where the art of puppetry lies, in the ability to use the irrepressible projection of the assistants onto suggestive forms to invent a representation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bensky, R.-D., *Recherches sur les structures et la symbolique de la marionnette*, Nizet, Paris, 1971, p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Keene, D., *Nô and Bunraku*, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 123.

“As children, we feared the jacket on the broom, the shadow of the branch on the wall, the indefinable, persistent creak behind the door. Presences were there, fascinating, watching us. We imagined a multitude of stories and invented a thousand ways of behaving to ward off our fears.”

– Antoine Laprise and François Lazaro

BIRTH OF THE PUPPET

**Camille Trouvé, co-creator of the Les Anges au plafond company, co-director of the Centre Dramatique national de Normandie-Rouen**

I remember a time in my workshop when I prepared birth rituals for each of my puppets. At the edge of the workshop, I had a little altar with a character sitting on a chair, a candle at his feet, little porcelain hands, photos and flowers. How is life going to enter the object? What secret will be implanted in the material? I put on the cartridge mask, gloves and goggles. The little altar protects the moment when the mould is opened in two parts and the face emerges. A birth.

I worked on several shows in this way until a puppeteer friend came to join me in the studio. She delicately pushed the altar coming with a scale to precisely weigh the two components: summoning a more scientific way

of thinking to the birth of matter. The chemical reaction of expanded polyurethane foam demands this kind of precision. This transition also freed me of a weight.

But later... Later, in the puppet's first passage on stage, this question resurfaces. Is this where the character's energy lies? Is this the real birth? In that first improvisation when the puppet comes to life on stage? The question shifts but remains.

Like all puppeteers, I'm sensitive to that precise moment when the object comes to life. “To ‘animate’, to give it a soul. In these times of crisis, when my puppets never leave their cases in the storage room, I wonder and worry. Is this puppet still alive? If I haven’t played with it for 6 or 8 months, has it lost its vitality? Has it become an object again? Is the secret I implanted in it still alive? It's difficult to theorise...But these are questions that are constantly on my mind when I work with animated matter.

THE BIRTH OF THE MASK

**Dominique Bernstein, artistic director of Compagnie Xénos**

*A look at the production of the Epic of Gilgamesh - one of the oldest human stories: the birth of Gilgamesh's rival, Enkidou.*

The actress moves imperceptibly beneath the canvas covering her. Her heart is beating, but the audience is listening to the narrator. Nothing moves under the cloth. The spoken word continues in a silence tinged with rustles and whispers. *Amnios* - the play's first musical improvisation - begins in a whispered silence.

Then the viewer perceives the movements, which have become more ample, the narrator has fallen silent, the attention is on the canvas in the centre of the space. It moves, it organises itself... like the music that follows this movement... or does it guide it?

A foot, we understand what's happening: it's a birth, the narration explains it.

The rustling has given way to more organic, more familiar sounds, the flute sounds like a flute, the murmurs become psalmodies. *Amnios* builds from start to finish in a lentissime crescendo.

The earth's belly let out leg, hand, arm... breech birth, the head will come out last.

The mask may or may not appear, but the gaze does; it is the arrow that crosses space, that breaks through the barrier of our pupils. Anyone who has experienced an eclipse of the sun knows that darkness is accompanied by a strange silence offered by birds and trees; the birth of the gaze is accompanied by the same telluric phenomenon. The crescendo of *Amnios* marks a pause... like a suspension, as if in the end the birth of the mask called for silence.

It is the immobility of the mask that bothers us; it is the mask that speaks to us of what we want to keep silent about, of death.

What about the look? Is the mask looking at me?

No, the objects aren't looking, we're in the illusion... but is the actor under the mask looking at me? And if so, can I see it?

The immobility of the mask tears through immanence, and the gaze draws me in like the void on the edge of a precipice. It is the doorway to an unknown space. Levinas speaks so well of the face as a passageway.

The almost motionless actress opens the way to my mysterious other - the window between me and the other - and keeps it open for as long as possible.

BURSTS OF CONVERSATION

**Evelyne Lecucq, freelance journalist, historian and pedagogue of the puppetry arts**

Theatre has to start by deconstructing the other myths in order to give birth to another, absolutely gigantic one, which is the ability to create characters, to create fiction, which we give to others to share.

**Hubert Jégat, author and director of CréatureS compagnie**

I'm working on *Intraterrestre*, a show born of a collaboration with a visual artist who creates clay giants. [...] The immobile presence of these mounds of clay already tells a story. We're not looking for a character, we're looking to recreate the intra-terrestrial phenomenon that emerges to create an upheaval, a change that becomes theatre. The puppet is born there and it is also born in the slow process of construction.

**Pierre Blaise, founder of the Théâtre Sans Toit, educational and artistic director of the Théâtre aux Mains Nues**

Doesn't puppet theatre invent a space with its own particular grammar that is reinvented each time? Using a tool - puppet, object, etc. - which the puppeteer must absolutely master, the imaginary projection invites to pareidolia. The puppeteer's quality, or the puppeteer's invention, is to leave room for the spectator's pareidolia.

This article have been written in the context of an exchange group composed of Dominique Bernstein, Pierre Blaise, David Girondin Moab, Cristina Grazioli, Hubert Jégat, Antoine Laprise, François Lazaro, Evelyne Lecucq and Camille Trouvé.



# THE PARADOXES OF WORKING SOLO

Marionnettes • n° 8 • 2022-2023



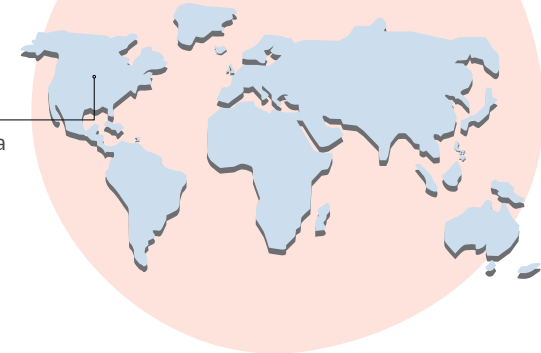
By Michelle Chanonat

Editor-in-chief



La femme blanche, Magali Chouinard

Canada



©Christina Alonso

Ti Gus, Noe Cropsal.

There are some who, like Louis-Philippe Paulhus of Théâtre de Deux Mains and Francis Monty and Olivier Ducas of Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, are true believers. There are others, like Magali Chouinard, who work solo to maintain their creative freedom and movement. Then there are those, like Marcelle Hudon and Antonia Leney-Granger, who work solo as a way to assert their independence. And then there are artists like Noé Cropsal who had no other choice but who, in the end, just really like the form. In short, there are as many ways to work solo as there are soloists.

## WALKING THE WIRE

Among all these artists, Louis-Philippe Paulhus is a special case. He really does it all, and almost always alone. He writes and directs, performs and manipulates. "I even have the audacity to manage the sound and lighting," he adds. For the last twenty years he has been touring seven different shows, entirely on his own. This means he can perform anywhere, in places without support facilities, in schools and outdoors. "I really like this form of theatre," he continues. "At the start of a performance, I feel a certain lightheadedness. When performing solo, there's a greater sense of danger. It's very stimulating. I'm the master of my own stage."

Noé Cropsal also enjoys being master of his stage: "It's easy to work alone. I go at my own pace, I have a lot of freedom, and I can change the story without throwing anyone off!"

The two fellows behind Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, Francis Monty and Olivier Ducas, are also firm believers in working alone. "There's a certain pleasure, something like a sports challenge and a rather pleasant performance experience," says Francis. Olivier adds, "For the audience, the idea of a solo communicates something, a message: 'For you, I'm going to walk the wire, and I may fall!' This vulnerability gives

the experience a heightened importance, specifically because of the fragility. To perform solo is to play the storyteller. There is no fourth wall in our shows; we're in direct contact with the audience."

Choosing to go solo is also about meaning, since the relationship with the audience is different. It is more frontal, and more intimate. "In puppetry, you can't see what the audience sees," says Antonia Leney-Granger, who began her puppetry career with a solo show for logistical reasons: "I didn't know anyone... It would never have occurred to me, a few years prior, that I would work on a one-hour, solo object theatre show! Looking back, I can see the risks involved. What I liked about it was the flexibility of response-improvisation, the great latitude it affords you in terms of rhythm and pauses. But you don't create in a vacuum: you create with an audience, and the show evolves over time in response to your audiences."

## WORKING SOLO TOGETHER

There is often teamwork behind the joy of performing alone. An artist may feel the need to be surrounded by a team, by colleagues or experts, so that the work can be enriched by the imagination, knowledge and ideas of others. "It is essential to find the right people to work with when you're doing a solo piece," says Magali Chouinard. On this everyone agrees: There is no such thing as an entirely solo production. Both a design team and technical support are essential when developing a show. "After creating *The White Woman* alone," adds Magali Chouinard, "I realized that I would have needed an 'outside eye' on my work. This would have allowed me to advance more quickly."

At Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, works are developed in a collegial environment. "Being the playwright and stage director, as well as performing, it's very demanding! And who will make the decisions?" says Francis Monty. "The artists and design teams always have something to say," adds Oliver Ducas. "There is room for discussion, and that's important to us."

As an independent artist, Marcelle Hudon conducts creative research and develops her works on her own, then she takes it to a group. "This way, I can collaborate with all sorts of different teams, with circus people and people in visual arts or contemporary music. The imagination of the people I work with always enriches my experience. Feeling locked into a structure would be stifling." But, after a pause, she adds, "I would like someone to manage my agenda and my bills. I'm fed up with spending my weekends on administrative tasks!"

After her first solo experience, Antonia Leney-Granger wanted to surround herself with a team. Although she appreciated the resulting intellectual and artistic emulation, she found the administrative burden less





Une brève histoire du temps,  
Antonia Leney-Granger.

enchanting. So for her next project she returned to a more intimate formula. "In a group, energy and ideas flow so fast. Solo projects allow me to stay more grounded in the core issues that are important to me."

While there are artists whose solos require a fleet of trucks on the road, a host of technicians working the controls, and assistants buzzing about behind the scenes, our puppeteers' solos are a more modest affair. The solo benefits from the flexibility and freedom inherent in its small forms: minimal technical requirements, small quantities of materials, and few people on the road. Magali Chouinard was able to fit her *The White Woman* show in a road case and a suitcase and toured the world with it for several years. "This allowed me to experience some extraordinary moments, perform in incredible places, meet wonderful people," she said. "A show that packs up light gives you more independence, more freedom."

Is a solo easier to tour? Looking at international festival programs, one would be tempted to say yes. It's just basic math: two people on the road and in hotels cost less than five. However, as Francis Monty points out, the problem with the solo is its smaller audience size! Often, small form equals a limited number of spectators: "You need to find a balance," he says, pragmatically. Noé Cropsal adds, "A solo can't compete with four puppeteers performing in a theatre set on a large stage. What's nice about a solo is the ingenuity behind it, the pleasure of doing everything on your own, and being able to leave audiences astonished."

Lastly, the solo has an economic upside, since the entire fee goes to the artist. Louis-Philippe Paulhus does not apply for any grants. "I want to make a living from my work without taking public money," he says. "I don't want to

*"For the audience, the idea of a solo communicates something, a message: 'For you, I'm going to walk the wire, and I may fall.' This vulnerability gives the experience a heightened importance, specifically because of the fragility. To perform solo is to play the storyteller. There is no fourth wall in our shows; we're in direct contact with the audience."*  
- Olivier Ducas

depend on grants in order to go on tour." Magali Chouinard works with touring grants, and Marcelle Hudon with research grants. "The solo format allows me to live off what I do," says Magali Chouinard. "For my next show, I'll be alone with a suitcase." As for Marcelle Hudon, what interests her is being creative and digging into the research. "I'm booked on the specialized festival circuit," she says, "So I don't need to do any marketing."

Our solo puppeteers are a good illustration of what Goethe said in his *Memoirs*: "A creation of importance ... is a child of solitude."

# PURA BELPRÉ

## A REVOLUTIONARY AMERICAN PUPPETEER

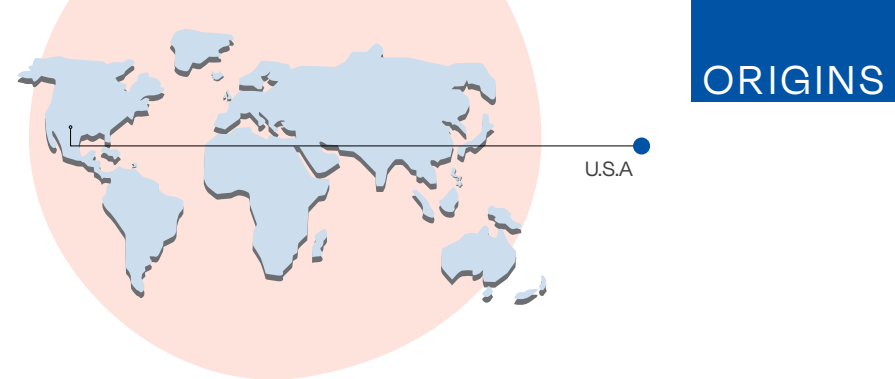


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**Puppetry International Magazine • n°51 • 2022**  
By Deniz Khateri

Pura Belpré with Puppets for Perez and Martina.  
Photo: Courtesy of The Pura Belpré Papers; 1989-03,  
Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios  
Puertorriqueños Archives, Hunter College, CUNY.





## ORIGINS

### ADVOCACY, EMPOWERMENT AND STORYTELLING IN NEW YORK CITY LIBRARIES

Puerto Rican-US puppeteer, storyteller, folklorist, essayist and author. Pura Teresa Belpré (1899-1982, married name: White) was a Black Puerto Rican born in Cidra who immigrated to New York in 1920 shortly after completing her first year of college at the Universidad de Puerto Rico located in Río Piedras (today, the Río Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico). Her archive and sample puppets are in the Centro Collection (Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York).

Pura Belpré was the first Puerto Rican librarian in the New York Public Library (NYPL), and perhaps in the whole of the United States at that time. She authored eight children's books as well as important essays on the role libraries can serve in children's development. Noted librarian Ernestine Rose (1880-1961) hired her, in 1921, at the 135th Street Branch Manhattan Carnegie Library in Central Harlem to respond to the growing island diaspora in the Harlem of the 1920s. This library functioned as a community center and gathering place for emerging voices of what became known as the Harlem Renaissance. For example, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg (1874-1938), a second Black Puerto Rican, would later work in the same branch, curating his important collection devoted to African American culture. Just as in the New York settlement houses – which offered new Americans access to educational, recreational and arts programs, and where Belpré also performed – the Harlem library was working to engage immigrant voices while promoting cultural literacy.

Belpré later developed into a charismatic performer-storyteller. She recalled her first days as a librarian:

*My first assignment was to read all the books on the fairy tale shelves. Thus the folklore of the world opened for me. As I shelved the books, I searched for the folktales I had heard at home and had told to my cousins and friends. To my amazement, I found not even one. A sudden feeling of loss rose within me... the knowledge of [the Puerto Rican child's] folklore would develop a sense of pride and identification in him. But how was I to accomplish my wish... to make the folklore of the Puerto Rican child [grow] stronger[?]*<sup>1</sup> (p209)

Realizing the lack, Belpré studied storytelling with Mary Gould Davis (1874-1956) at the New York Public Library School in 1925, and for class projects Belpré first mined

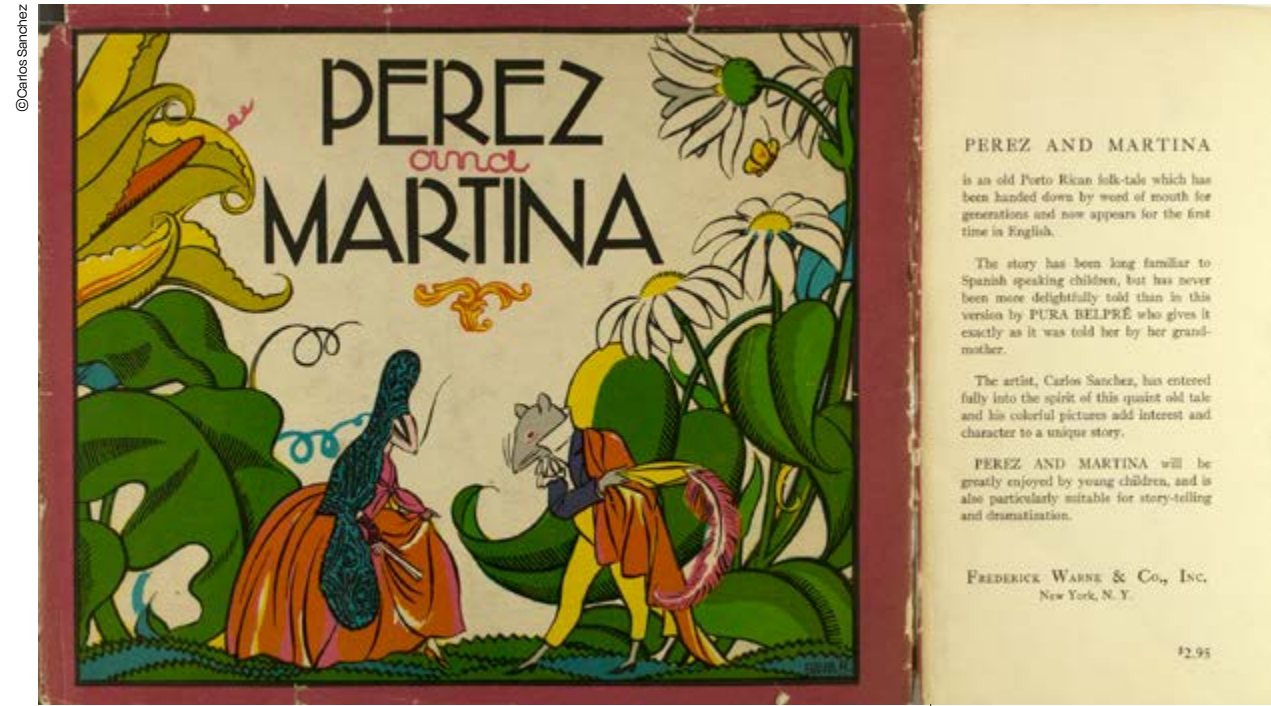
the island folklore. Anne Carroll Moore (1871-1961) was another instructor in the program: she was the founding mother of the children's library programs in New York, author of children's literature, and an active promoter of storytelling in libraries which she modeled for the rest of the country. These two mentors guided Belpré's early efforts, coaching her lively delivery. Belpré expanded on their vision by adding puppets and movement. With these author-mentor's support and publisher connections, tales moved from performance to print.

Through such efforts, the growing interest in folklore and anthropology in New York academic circles found its parallel thrust in children's libraries' theory and practice. Belpré realized her grandmother's tales had prepared her well to share Puerto Rican lore. By 1929, Belpré had developed storytelling into puppet performances for the celebration of Epiphany, or Feast of the Three Kings, offering the puppet performances in Spanish and English. She made the library a community center for Puerto Rican children and also coached children to perform tales themselves, creating pride and cultural competency.

Her first book, *Pérez and Martina: A Portorican Folk Tale*<sup>2</sup> (also, *Perez and Martina* and *La Cucaracha Martina y el Ratoncito Pérez*, 1932), was the first-known Latinx children's storybook in mainstream US publishing history as well as the first bilingual (Spanish/English) publication. With illustrations by Carlos Sanchez, it tells of an elegant lady cockroach (Martina) and her dashing rat spouse (Pérez) who would later meet his death when greed entices him into a cooking pot. In mourning, the bereaved Martina dons her black mantilla. Belpré's first New York employment was in the garment industry, ensuring craft skills in making her hand puppets and Martina's frocks when she presented the tale as a puppet show.

Belpré sought to empower children of all nations by going back to folklore to extract the values and qualities with which children could identify. She became an advocate of and contributor to the Spanish-speaking community in each library branch she worked, by expanding the Spanish section, implementing programs that were related to traditional Spanish holidays, and developing children's reading rooms in the NYPL. Nuyoricans (a blend of the terms "New York" and "Puerto Rican" and referring to the members or culture of the Puerto Rican diaspora located in or around New York City, or of their descendants) who came of age from the 1950s to 1970s, as adults, remembered her performances and cited them as models for their subsequent efforts in performance, writing, cultural revival and resistance.

## ORIGINS



Belpré was fluent in Spanish, English, French and Portuguese. She wrote books in English based on what she remembered from the tales heard in her childhood and also translated books from English into Spanish. These, with her puppet performances, were her strong responses to the lack of resources for her community that she witnessed. Belpré once noted she wished to be a "Puerto Rican Johnny Appleseed"<sup>3</sup> (p436), planting seeds that would grow, and her success is apparent in the next generation of New Yorkers of Hispanic descent.

As a puppeteer, she traveled throughout the city, often with her husband and noted African American violinist and composer Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960), to tell stories with puppets in Spanish and English. The puppets that her librarian trainees made are part of her Archive at Hunter College, CUNY. Sanchez-Gonzalez (2019, 5) details how Belpré recalled in her essay, "Bilingual Storytelling", how she started puppetry at the 115th Street Branch and then later launched her puppet theatre at the Aguilar Branch and reinforced boys' participation in the children's reading room activities due to her free, bilingual puppet shows. Since the boys found hand (glove) puppets too "girlish", Belpré went back to school at Columbia and took a marionette course so she could teach the group this technique for the puppet show, St. George and the Dragon. She later launched a mobile puppet theatre project at the South Bronx Library in the 1970s (Sánchez-González 2019, 5).

Over her fifty-year career she published a number of fully illustrated works, including *Pérez and Martina* (1932), *Juan Bobo* and the *Queen's Necklace* (1962), *Santiago* (1969), and *The Rainbow-Colored Horse* (1978), as well as many unpublished tales – a portion of which are included in a book collected and edited by Lisa Sánchez-González<sup>1</sup>.

Most of Belpré's stories put women as the protagonists. The stories were special to bicultural and working-class children. Contemporary author, Marilisa Jiménez-García (2014), argues: when "Pura Belpré first lit the storyteller's candle at the New York Public Library, she actually took up and then imparted a tradition of writing and performing to children as a means of explaining and building nationhood"<sup>4</sup> (p112).

Shortly before her death in 1982, Pura Belpré received the New York Mayor's Award for Arts and Culture. And, in 1996, an annual award by the American Library Association was established in her name, honoring the memory of this revolutionary librarian and artist. The award, and its accompanying Pura Belpré Medal, is given each year to authors and illustrators whose original literature for children and youth best represents Latinx culture. More recently, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies or Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños has produced a documentary on her work directed by Eduardo Aguiar. Teatro SEA, the New York Latinx theatre company for young audiences, created the *Pura Belpré Project*, a one-person touring show in which the performer plays Belpré presenting her stories and features Belpré in the documentary on Puerto Rican puppetry (Morán and Morán 2016). A children's book on her life and impact is *The Storyteller's Candle*.<sup>5</sup> The legacy of this important performer-librarian is thus alive and well in 21<sup>st</sup>-century New York.

Article edited by Kathy Foley (2020).

Excerpt from *Four Black American Puppeteers* published in *Puppetry International* issue 51, USA





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# LIFE ON STRINGS



GABRIEL "GUAIRA" CASTILLA, 1951

#### ARGENTINA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2021

Argentinian master puppeteer and author of plays for the puppet theatre. Gabriel Castilla is considered one of the most important solo puppeteers in Latin America, a master of glove puppetry. Raised among painters, poets, sculptors, at a young age he began writing short poetic prose and took workshops in ceramics, theatre and painting. He initially worked with José García Bes, and it was Bes's brother, Rodrigo Bes, who introduced Castilla to glove puppetry. He participated in many festivals around the world, including the Cervantino Festival in Mexico, the festival in Bielsko-Biala, Poland, the Bilbao International Puppet Festival, the Segovia International Festival, among many others in Europe and the Americas.

Castilla is also the author of texts and pantomimes full of poetry and humor. He has written for both children and adult audiences. He has created an important legacy, enriching the repertoire of plays written specifically for the puppet theatre. His more significant works include: *Telón de cielo* (Curtain of Sky, 1955) which received a Special Mention in the National Prize for Children's Literature (1997/1999); *La Trampa* (The Trap, 2004); *El Soñador* (The Dreamer, 2007), which won the 1<sup>st</sup> International Prize Barriga Verde for *Texts for Puppet Theatre*, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in 2003; *Obras cortas de teatro de títeres: Sueño del niño dormido* (Short Puppet

Theatre Plays: Dream of the Sleeping Child); *Historias de Titiriteros* (Stories of Puppeteers, edited by Raúl A. González), about the adventures of puppets and their companions through their many years of tours and experiences; *El Pensamiento del Títere* (The Puppet's Thought, 2009), a collection of reflections that critics defined as the Tao of this ancient art; *Una vez fue jamás* (Once Was Never), which includes *El Pensamiento del Títere*; and *Slurp, Obras de títeres y una rutina para payaso* (Slurp, Puppet Works and a Routine for a Clown).

Castilla has been an advisor to Argentina's National Theatre Institute. In September 2000, the secretary of Culture and Education of the Municipality of San Fernando de Catamarca named him "Huésped distinguido" (Distinguished Guest) at the Puppet Festival held that year in his honour. In 2009, he was awarded the prize, "Premio Nacional de Teatro Pablo Podestá", for his career achievements by the National Congress and the Argentine Actors Association. In 2016, he received the "Premio Nacional Javier Villafañe a la Trayectoria" (Javier Villafañe National Prize for his life achievements). In 2021, he was chosen by his peers as "el Guaira", a "Master Puppeteer", to represent them and receive his award—UNIMA Member of Honour—"for his noble and ancestral art of Puppetry".

Reflecting on his career and life's work, the critic Juan Cristian Marthi says in his book, *Origen del teatro de títeres en Argentina*, "Guaira Castilla will become one of the most important puppet theatre playwrights in the Spanish language."

<https://prensa.municipalidadsalta.gob.ar/el-miercoles-se-inaugura-la-muestra-gabriel-guaira-castilla-la-magia-de-los-titeres/>



# PORTRAITS





**ANA MARÍA GUADALUPE TEMPESTINI, 1948**

#### ARGENTINA • SPAIN

UNIMA Member of Honour 2021

A key figure in the development of puppet theatre in Argentina and Spain and an influential member of UNIMA. In Argentina, Guadalupe Tempestini was a member of the Teatro de Títeres El Farolito and contributed to the founding of UNIMA Argentina in 1971. She was co-founder and teacher of the Escuela Nacional de Títeres in Rosario. In 1981, Tempestini went into exile with her family and settled in Seville, Spain. In 1981, she co-founded UNIMA Andalucía. UNIMA Federación España (UFE) will be created in 1984 and Tempestini will serve as its first general secretary.

All subsequent puppetry activities in Spain were initiated by UNIMA Andalucía: the International Puppet Fair of Seville (FIT, Feria Internacional del Títere); the puppet courses for Spanish-speaking Latin Americans (Cursos de Títeres para Latinoamericanos); the Teatro Alameda, dedicated to children up to fourteen years old. As the director of Teatro Alameda, she organized and programmed twenty-five seasons of The School Theatre Cycle.

From 1981 to 2015, Tempestini programmed and organized the FIT of Seville. In parallel to the FIT, she organized courses, workshops and seminars for puppeteers, led by prominent international artists, who influenced the training of professional puppeteers in Spain and Latin America. She created scholarships for Latin American and Spanish participants. Each Latin American puppeteer participating in the workshops was committed to sharing the knowledge acquired with colleagues from her/his home country.

The one-month-long puppet theatre courses organized by Tempestini took place under the direction of Margareta Niculescu and Alcides Moreno. These events contributed

exponentially to the growth of puppet theatre companies, the quality of their shows, as well as the increase in the audience, including parents and educators, who developed a more critical and participatory vision of puppet theatre, fundamental in the development of puppetry.

In 1980, as a delegate of UNIMA Argentina at the 13<sup>th</sup> UNIMA World Congress in Washington DC, Guadalupe Tempestini proposed Spanish as one of the official languages of UNIMA. This was an important moment in the history of the association. The congress had a strong Latin American participation. Tempestini was a member of the Executive Committee of UNIMA International from 1984 to 1996 and a member of the Latin America Commission. As an international councillor, she was part of the Spanish delegation to the main meetings of UNIMA. In the 1990s, she was an official delegate of the general secretary of UNIMA at the meeting of the Latin American national centres and at the 12th National Meeting of Puppeteers in Córdoba, Spain.

In 2015, Guadalupe Tempestini retired but remained in contact with UNIMA Andalucía and the Andalusian puppeteers..



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**RICHARD BRADSHAW, 1938**

#### AUSTRALIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2016

Australian puppeteer. In 1952, Richard Bradshaw joined Clovelly Puppet Theatre in Sydney where he gained his first experience using glove puppets and marionettes under the direction of Edith C. Murray. After gaining a Bachelor of Science degree in 1959, he taught, mainly mathematics, in Australia and London until 1968, while puppetry, especially shadow puppetry, remained a hobby. Encouraged and assisted by Edith Murray, he performed

at a festival of amateur puppetry in Czechoslovakia in 1964, and that year he also worked briefly with the Hogarth Puppets in London parks.

He was invited by Joan and Betty Rayner, directors of the Australian Children's Theatre, to create, with their help, a solo shadow puppet programme for schoolchildren, which toured for them in Australia and New Zealand in 1969-1970. In 1972, with encouragement from Edith Murray and Jan Bussell, he performed at the 1972 UNIMA festival in Charleville-Mézières, France, and the Puppeteers of America festival in Oakland, California. Before retiring in early 2020, he had performed for adults and children in nearly thirty countries on five continents. He also created items for children's television.

His shadow puppet shows were made up of short items, mostly humorous, many of which he played for years. He used colour sparingly, and many figures had no colour. The puppets were operated by rods from behind, a cross between the Chinese and Turkish-Greek methods, and he explored ways of achieving varied and lively action. There was no recorded sound, only his voice. His best-known items were *The Ostrich*, *the Mouse* and *the Hippopotamus* (a mime) and *Super Kangaroo* (a song).

From 1976 to 1983, Bradshaw was Artistic Director of the Marionette Theatre of Australia based in Sydney. He steered the company away from traditional marionettes to explore a variety of puppet forms for both adult and child audiences, favouring humorous, Australian themes. In *Smiles Away* (1981) and *Aussie Rules* (1983) he used large figures worked from behind by puppeteers who spoke for them, but were also involved with the puppets in the play.

He formed a partnership, Living Dodo Puppets, with his wife, Dr Margaret Williams, a senior lecturer in the theatre department at the University of New South Wales, where she had introduced a post-graduate course on puppetry.

ADVD of his show was issued by Werner Nekes in Germany in 2004 and Richard Bradshaw's *Guide to Shadow Puppets* was published by Charlemagne Press in Canada in 2015. Richard Bradshaw was one of six puppeteers chosen by Jim Henson for the television series *Jim Henson Presents the World of Puppetry* (1985). In 1986, he was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).

Since 1984, Richard Bradshaw has continued to investigate early puppeteers in Australia.



**NEVILLE TRANTER, 1955**

#### AUSTRALIA • NETHERLAND

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Australian puppeteer, living and working in the Netherlands. Neville Tranter studied theatre while also working with Billbar Puppet Theatre (founded by Barbara and Bill Turnbull in Toowoomba, Queensland, that performed traditional puppetry) where he learnt to manipulate and create his own puppets. Having completed his training with the American director Robert Gist in Queensland in 1976, Tranter established his own company, Stuffed Puppet Theatre. In 1978, he was invited to participate in the Amsterdam Festival of Fools, after which he moved permanently to the Netherlands. This was the beginning of Tranter's career as a solo puppeteer performing for adult audiences.

Tranter performs almost always with life-size puppets. He is visible as manipulator, mostly as an opponent to his puppets. Essential in his work is the relationship between himself and the characters he manipulates. He brings them to life in such a way that he is barely able to control them. The relationship between puppeteer and puppet is ambivalent: he animates his puppets with humour, tenderness, almost love, but at the same time he confronts them with cruel games; at times, the puppets appear to provoke the puppeteer. This ambivalent relationship is one of the more distinct characteristics that run through Tranter's work.

If his own past was his source of inspiration at the beginning of his career, since 1990, Tranter presents himself more and more as an actor: actor, manipulator and puppet became equal. He creates a magical world in which man and puppet possess the same degree of reality. Tranter is drawn to texts and themes from classical theatre including *Macbeth*, *Kaspar Hauser*, *Salome*, Molière's plays, and, in 1999, *Frankenstein*. In 2003, he produced

*Schickelgruber alias Hitler*, a corrosive play that focuses on a set of characters from Hitler's regime. In 2025, Tranter will be the director and puppet builder in a remake of *Schickelgruber*. Due to his astonishing figures, sophisticated lighting, music and advanced technology, he has built an audience for adult puppet theatre.

In 2009, Tranter returned to a more "traditional" approach to puppet theatre with *Punch & Judy in Afghanistan*, wherein none other than Osama Bin Laden plays the principal role. In conjunction with Music Theatre Hollands Diep (Dordrecht, the Netherlands) and instrumental ensemble Die Freitagsakademie (Bern, Switzerland), Tranter was involved in several opera productions. In 2012, the children's opera, *The House that Sings*, was produced in Paris. In 2025, he will co-direct and build puppets for *Offenbach's Les Contes d'Hoffmann* by the Deutsche Oper am Rhein (German Opera on the Rhine) in Düsseldorf (Germany).

After a successful tour of Ubu in 2024, Neville Tranter decided to stop performing. He now focuses on directing, coaching, puppet building and teaching.



©Belarusian State Puppet Theatre

**ALINA FOMINA, 1942**

#### BELARUS

UNIMA Member of Honour 2000

Belarusian puppet theatre artist and educator. Alina Fomina's work was pivotal in shaping the aesthetics of the Belarusian puppet theatre of the 1960s-90s. After graduating from the Minsk Art College, in 1962 she joined the Belarusian State Puppet Theatre, the leading puppet theatre in Belarus at the time. She worked as a production designer while simultaneously studying at the Belarusian Theatre and Art Institute in Minsk. After six years of study, she earned a

Diploma of Higher Education. In 1976, Fomina became the chief artist of the theatre. She held this position until her retirement in 1998, creating dozens of productions that became landmarks in the history of Belarusian puppet theatre. She was considered a co-creator alongside the theatre's two main directors, Anatoly Lelyavsky and his son Alexei Lelyavsky.

For her work in theatre, she received the "Crystal Angel" award from the Belarusian Union of Theatre Workers, the title "Laureate of the Lyubov Mozalevskaya Prize" and the honorary title "Distinguished Artist of the Republic of Belarus".

Fomina's work inspired the national puppet theatre to move away from the naturalism prevalent in Soviet art during the mid-20th century. She studied the dramatic core of each text, finding innovative visual means of expression. Her work was distinguished by its stylistic diversity. She paid special attention to Belarusian national art. In productions based on works by Belarusian playwrights, for example, in the *Ded i Zhurav!* (The Old Man and the Crane) 1973, which has become famous for its uniqueness in Belarus, she stylized folk art, infusing folklore motifs with contemporary meaning. The scenography and puppets of many of Fomina's performances became significant events in Belarusian theatre, showcasing its potential. The 1987 production of *Master i Margarita* sparked discussions about the puppet theatre's capacity to surpass actors' theatre in its means of expression. Her scenography can still be seen on stage. Many of her puppets, which became "classics" of Belarusian art, are now housed in the theatre museum.

Belarus has long faced challenges in training puppet theatre artists. For a time, the Belarusian Theatre and Art Institute in Minsk offered a course for puppet theatre artists and Fomina was the artistic director. She trained many prominent professionals, including one of the renowned Belarusian puppet artists of the 21st century, Tatiana Nersisyan, the current chief artist of the Belarusian State Puppet Theatre. Nersisyan is a recipient of numerous national awards in Belarus and Russia and a set designer for productions across Europe.

The artistic search for new expressive means initiated by Alina Fomina continues to thrive in her students, allowing Belarusian puppet theatre to be at the forefront of Eastern European theatres and an important member of the world theatre.





**DENISE DI SANTOS, 1947**

## BRAZIL

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Brazilian puppeteer and artist. Denise Di Santos established herself as an artist throughout her life and in various sociocultural contexts. Born in Bahia, a state located in the northeast of Brazil, a region rich in history, art and culture, Di Santos spent her childhood in contact with artists and artisans from various fields of popular traditions, from whom she learned to make ceramic and fabric dolls, clay pots and masks used in the popular festivities of her hometown. Growing up immersed in folk traditions was crucial to shaping her art, rooting her work in a rich cultural heritage.

The great-granddaughter of a freed slave woman, she worked from an early age to help her family, demonstrating a determination that permeated her entire career. At the age of 9, she moved with her mother to Salvador, the capital of Bahia, where she sold cigars that she made herself and where, years later, she finished high school and began to do amateur theatre, with a focus on puppet theatre. She graduated in Pedagogy with a specialization in Animated Forms Theatre at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA).

During her professional training, she took several courses at the Latin American Centre for Puppet Theatre in Arcozelo (FUNARTE/ABTB - Centro UNIMA Brasil), taught by Álvaro Apocalypse, Ana Maria Amaral, Osvaldo Gabrieli, Manoel Kobachuk, Mestre Zé Lopes, Fernando Augusto Santos and Nini Beltrame. Together with other puppeteers, she founded the Associação de Teatro de Bonecos da Bahia - ATBB (Bahia Puppet Theater Association) and the Puppet Theatre Centre of SESC/BA.

In 1989, she created Teatro Lambe Lambe, in partnership with Ismine Lima (in memoriam).

This new puppetry language form was inspired by the photographic boxes (lambe-lambe) of travelling photographers that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. The Lambe Lambe shows take place on a miniature stage confined in a box of reduced dimensions, where very short theatrical pieces are presented through puppets, animated objects and/or shadows for one or a few spectators at a time, who watch the show through a small opening. In addition to being an innovation in theatrical language, the Lambe Lambe provides the conditions for artists, especially for women, to be autonomous as authors and directors of their own shows. The theatrical form first spread throughout Brazil and other Latin American countries and is currently spreading in Europe and countries in Asia and Africa.

In 2020, Denise di Santos, together with Ismine Lima, founded the Associação Nacional dos Titeriteiros do Teatro Lambe-Lambe (National Association of Puppeteers of the Lambe-Lambe Theater); they were awarded by Cultura Viva of the Brazilian Ministry of Culture. Denise Di Santos had an important impact on the global expansion of the Lambe Lambe. In 2025, she was designated a UNIMA Member of Honour.



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**WEREWERE LIKING, 1950**

## CAMEROON - IVORY COAST

UNIMA Heritage Awardee 2015/2016

Theatre artist, researcher and writer of Cameroonian origin, working in Côte d'Ivoire. Of Bassa ethnicity, Werewere Liking Gnepo pursued studies in Côte d'Ivoire; she continued studying the traditions by working with the Bambaras in Mali, in 1977; she settled in Côte d'Ivoire in 1978. Researcher at the Institute of Negro-African Literature and Aesthetics at the University of Abidjan

from 1979 to 1985, she founded, in 1985, the Ki-Yi Mbock Theatre, a professional troupe of multidisciplinary artists, based in the Ki-Yi villa in Abidjan. The Ki-Yi Mbock supports and trains disadvantaged young people in artistic practice; many of them pursue international artistic career. Currently, Ki Yi Mbock is a cooperative village, welcoming artists of various traditions and origins including puppeteers, dancers, actors, musicians, sculptors, painters, costume designers, sound and light technicians. Singer, dancer, actress, painter, novelist, essayist and poet herself, Werewere also wrote plays that she staged with Marie-Josée Hourantier whose work she greatly influenced. She received the "Prince Claus" award for services rendered to culture and society and the "Noma 2015" award for her book *La mémoire amputée*.

Her work began with research into the ritual bases of African theatre, trying to see how they could influence contemporary issues and promote Pan-Africanism and other positive values rather than nationalism. Influenced by the Ki-yi (ultimate knowledge), a secret initiation from the Bassa ethnic group, she takes its techniques and philosophy to modulate a theatre where the texts often denounce the abuses and decline of today's Africa. This ritual theatre is based on tradition but purifies it to keep only its primary meaning, the taking charge of man by himself in the face of the universe and the divine. This awareness of the human through the rite is one of the strong ideas of Werewere Liking's theatre and it is in this perspective that, for her, in the conception of powers, the approach to the relationship between God and human seems similar to the relationship between man and puppet. Her theatre uses all the performing arts including circus. Her giant puppets, sometimes manipulated on stilts, improve old manipulation techniques and are often played by female puppeteers while, traditionally, women were not allowed to perform in shows in ethnic groups.

Werewere Liking participates in international tours with her company and leads workshops in other countries. Today, she is unanimously recognized both for her research and for her work as a manager, stage director, actress and writer.

"With arts and culture as its base, the Ki-Yi has proven that its training and educational offerings are indisputable elements for an alternative form of social and economic development, with the human placed at the center." – Werewere Liking

©Claire Ranger



**JACQUES TRUDEAU, 1948**

## CANADA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Canadian puppeteer. Jacques Trudeau launched his theatre career at 18, initially as an actor and contemporary dancer with L'Arabesque (Longueuil). He completed his studies in theatre with a Master's degree from UQAM (Montreal). Interested in puppetry, Trudeau joined Théâtre Sans Fil in 1972, a company using giant puppets and influenced by Japan's Bunraku. He has toured internationally with *The Hobbit* (1979) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1985), shows based on Tolkien's novels, which Trudeau co-adapted for theatre. Since 1990, he has served on Canada's international puppet festival, FIAMS (Saguenay, Quebec), as board member, artistic and diplomatic consultant. He has been a jury member at international festivals, the most recent in Matanzas, Cuba, in 2024.

Trudeau's relationship with UNIMA began in 1980 when Théâtre Sans Fil represented Canada at the World Puppetry Festival in Washington, DC, part of the 13<sup>th</sup> UNIMA Congress. From 2002-2004, he served as president of the Association québécoise des Marionnettistes; in 1986, AQM became the Quebec representative of UNIMA-Canada. He was a UNIMA councillor representing Canada (1999-2011) and the first president of UNIMA-Canada. In 2004, Trudeau was elected a member of the UNIMA Executive Committee (Rijeka UNIMA Congress). In 2004, he founded UNIMA's North America Commission and served as its first president. Elected General Secretary in 2008 (Perth UNIMA Congress), Trudeau became the first person from outside Europe to hold this position.

As UNIMA General Secretary, supported by Margareta Niculescu and Dadi Pudumjee, Trudeau worked with editor in chief Thieri Foulc and publisher Christophe Bara from l'Entretemps on the *Encyclopédie Mondiale*

*desArts de la Marionnette*, published in French in 2009, the result of thirty years of immense effort and involving several hundred people from five continents. The encyclopedia was voted the best book on theatre for 2009-2010 by the circle of French critics.

In 2012, Trudeau was re-elected UNIMA General Secretary (Chengdu UNIMA Congress). With fellow Executive Committee members, he achieved three important tasks: the creation of a new interactive website; the release of the trilingual encyclopedia (editor in chief, Karen Smith) on its own Internet site at [wepa.unima.org](http://wepa.unima.org); and UNIMA's expansion to 100 National Centres.

During his eight years as General Secretary, Jacques Trudeau promoted UNIMA activities and championed its core mission: together with UNESCO, to promote peace in the world. He accepted invitations from more than 35 countries and met puppet masters from around the world. As president of UNIMA's Heritage Commission, he created the first Certificates of Recognition, awarded to three African master puppeteers. He remains active in the puppetry world.



**ANA MARÍA ALLENDES OSSA, 1942**

## CHILE

UNIMA Member of Honour 2016

Chilean actress, puppeteer, educator. Ana María Allendes has an M. Ed. in Educational Planning and Management (Diego Portales University, 2005), a postgraduate degree in Oral Language Disorders (Universidad Mayor) and has taught Differentiated Instruction at Mariscal Sucre University. She is founder and curator of the Fundación Ana María Allendes para la Dignificación del Teatro de Muñecos (FAMADIT, Foundation for the Dignification of

Doll Theatre) and creator of a private library dedicated to Latin American puppetry.

Her many decades in the performing arts field began with puppetry. From 1971, she was a member of the puppet company Bululú, directed by Clara Fernández. Allendes travelled to Argentina, Mexico and Spain, where she met puppeteers and witnessed the current trends in staging, scenography and repertoire for the puppet theatre.

In 1980, Allendes created the Compañía de Teatro de Muñecos Guiñol. Its members included Victoria Gamucio, María Paz Santibáñez, José Miguel Santibáñez and Carlos Ferrada. The company staged more than thirty puppet and shadow theatre plays, including for children: *El Principito* (The Little Prince) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry; *El fantasma Pluft* (Pluft, The Little Ghost, 1982) by María Clara Machado; *La muñeca abandonada* (The Abandoned Puppet, 1983) by Alfonso Sastre; *La gallina papanata* 1985 by Berta Finkel; *La flauta encantada* (The Enchanted Flute, 1986) by Alicia Morel; *La jirafa distraída* (The Distracted Giraffe, 1987); *El ladrón de margaritas* (The Daisy Thief, 1988); *La tortuga marina* (The Marine Turtle); *Tranco largo* 1989 by María E. Coymans; *Circo mágico* (Magic Circus, 1992). Shows for adult audiences include: *Trilogía del agua* (The Water Trilogy, 1984) by Verónica Cereceda; *Mariana Pineda* by Federico García Lorca (adapted by Ana María Allendes, 1988); *Las dos serpientes de la Tierra del Sur* (The Two Serpents from the Land of the South) 1990 by Alicia Morel; *Circo en sueño* (Circus Dreams, 1995) by Julia Ahumada.

Compañía de Teatro de Muñecos Guiñol had its own workshop studio where puppets and sets were designed and built, music composed, and productions realized and rehearsed.

Ana María Allendes is a member of the professional organization of Chilean puppeteers and UNIMA Chile (created in 1983). She served as an international councillor representing Chile and was a member of UNIMA International's Executive Committee. She is actively involved in using puppet theatre in education, contributing to scholarly publications and conferences in Latin America, Europe and Israel.

[www.titeresenfemenino.com/2012/07/ana-maria-allendes-ossa](http://www.titeresenfemenino.com/2012/07/ana-maria-allendes-ossa)





**ELIZABETH GUZMÁN FLORES, 1962**

**CHILE**

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Chilean traditional puppeteer, puppet maker, playwright, designer and manager. With a degree in folklore, Elizabeth Guzmán Flores sees puppetry as an excellent tool for education. As a puppeteer, since 1975, she has performed throughout Latin America and in Europe.

Born to traditional puppeteers Luchita Flores and Tito Guzmán (founding directors of the Títeres Candelillas, recognized by Chile's Ministry of Culture in 2016 as "Living Human Treasures"), Guzmán Flores is heir to an enduring tradition. For over 40 years, she has promoted puppetry in areas including health and community development.

She is the founder of Maipú Municipality Inter-School Puppet Festival, Banco Estado Cultural Institute Puppet Festival, Recoleta Open Schools Puppet Festival and the creator of the Lo Espejo Itinerant Puppet School, which in 2003 had 40 children between the ages of 3 and 23. She produces the "Candelilla brings the Muppets", which in its 24<sup>th</sup> edition included troupes from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Venezuela, Spain, France, Italy, the Czech Republic and Romania. She regularly tours with her puppets throughout her country.

Childhood inspires her writing. Her plays include: *La Ratona Filomena*, *La Gata que se enamoró de un Lobo de Mar*, *Miel Esperanza*, *De Color Miel*, *La Gata Gigi*, *El Dentista Dormilón*, *El Libro Rey*, *Agua Tierra y Aire*, *Piratas sin Barco*, *El Peumo y el Picaflor*, *Petronilo y su vida saludable*.

With her *Kuiyen sueño mapuche* (written to spread the culture of the Mapuche community), she has toured internationally, to festivals and conferences, including:

World Social Forum in Mexico City (2010); "Galicreques" festival in Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2008); "Teatrul de Marioneta" international festival in Arad, Romania; "33 Internationale Puppen theater tage" festival in Mistelbach, Austria (2011); International "Divertiteres" Festival in the Roma Theatre in the city of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala (2013); 21st International Puppet Festival hosted by UNIMA Córdoba (2015); and has performed at "Titiriltlan" and presented in Guatemala City, Sololá and Antigua Guatemala.

She conducts workshops: PRODEMU Art School, Santa Cruz Bolivia Puppet Festival, Cochabamba Bolivia Arts Convention, Titiriltan Guatemala International Festival, FIT-Ocelot Festival (San Salvador), Cultural Council Heritage Seminar, municipalities of La Granja, Lo Espejo, San Miguel and Maipú, National College of Teachers and the Intangible Heritage of the Ministry of Culture, the Arts and Heritage. And participates in events such as: "Puppetry Therapy Without Borders" (UNIMA Chile), Títeres Chile A.G., Union of Folklorists and Guitarists of Chile, among others.

Elizabeth Guzmán Flores is the recipient of many national and international awards.



**TANG DAYU, 1945**

**CHINA**

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Chinese Ping Opera actress, artistic director, arts administrator, producer. Tang Dayu has dedicated over 60 years to the arts, earning the "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the China Puppetry and Shadow Arts Association. She has judged major competitions funded by the Ministry of Culture, international arts festivals and National Arts Fund projects, and served on the Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Experts Committee. In 1959, Tang joined the Ping Opera class at Chengdu Drama School

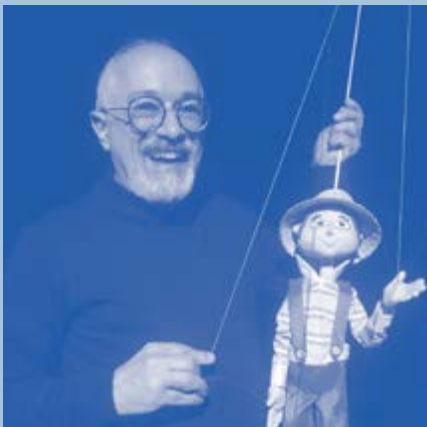
and was selected to study at China Ping Opera Theatre in Beijing. Upon graduation, she joined Chengdu Ping Opera Troupe, where she played lead roles in over 20 classical dramas.

In 1984, she became director of Chengdu Puppet Troupe, touring dozens of countries and regions. The troupe brought Chengdu puppetry to the global stage and was nationally acclaimed. In 1989, she expanded the troupe into Chengdu Puppet and Shadow Play Theatre, which featured diverse puppets and included Sichuan opera's "face changing" and "fire spitting" techniques into unique puppetry acts. The plays she directed, including *Nezha*, *Red Earth and Blue Sky* and *The Mystery of Sanxingdui and Jinsha*, won many awards from the Ministry of Culture. In 1997, a large-scale puppet-play adaptation of the Chinese classic, *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, co-created with Japan's Kageboushi Theatre, toured Japan for eight years, visited ancient kingdom sites in China and embarked on a world tour, marking Chengdu puppetry's first successful cross-national collaboration.

Since the 1990s, Tang worked with the China Puppetry and Shadow Arts Association, joining UNIMA and securing Chengdu's role in hosting the 21<sup>st</sup> UNIMA Congress and World Puppetry Festival. She organized the Association to apply for UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List for "Chinese Shadow Puppetry", which was inscribed in 2011. She helped revitalize the Quanzhou International Puppet Festival (1986) and played a key role in promoting festivals in Shanghai and Nanchong.

As President of UNIMA's Asia-Pacific Commission (2012-2025), Tang took the initiative to join the Silk Road International League of Theatres, established the Asia-Pacific performance and exhibition base in Nanchong, co-hosted symposia with UNIMA's Research and Professional Training commissions, invited international experts to teach at the Shanghai Theatre Academy, and to hold lectures and workshops at international puppet festivals. With the Commission, she aided endangered puppet theatres in India and Indonesia, facilitated the acquisition of exhibits from the nearly bankrupt Sri Lanka National Puppet Museum and produced short videos highlighting disappearing Nepalese puppets.

Since 1984, Tang Dayu has been a key promoter of China's UNIMA membership and international exchanges, contributing to preserving and promoting world cultural diversity and puppetry arts' international development.



**CIRO LEONARDO GÓMEZ ACEVEDO, 1957**

**COLOMBIA**

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Colombian puppeteer, actor, playwright, director, mentor, producer, and cultural manager. **C**iro Gómez Acevedo has dedicated over 50 years to theatre through his renowned company, Hilos Mágicos.

He began his training at the Escuela de Teatro in Bogotá where he learned the basics of string puppetry, a technique that he would later perfect at the Instituto del Teatro in Seville, Spain, with influential teachers including Albrecht Roser and Henryk Jurkowski. He received the Laureate degree in Performing Arts from the Universidad Distrital of Bogotá (2012), with his study, *Un método de dirección escénica en el teatro de títeres* (A Method of Stage Direction in Puppet Theatre). He was later awarded an Honors for his thesis *El títere, desarrollo conceptual y de sus prácticas* (The Puppet, Conceptual Development and its Practices), upon completing his Master's degree in Advanced Theatre Studies from the Universidad de la Rioja in Spain (2018).

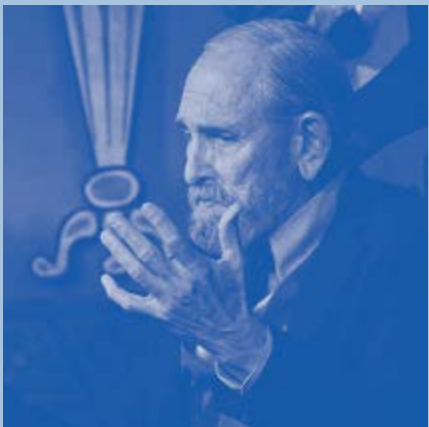
With Hilos Mágicos, he has created over 50 productions and toured over 30 countries. He has also directed and consulted internationally in Italy, Mexico, Spain, and Ecuador. His research has received numerous national and international grants, including from the Instituto Distrital de las Artes (IDARTES) in Bogotá, Colombia's Ministry of Culture, and from TOPI in Tolosa, Spain. His written work includes eight books and hundreds of plays, research and essays published in performing arts magazines.

Acevedo is widely recognized in Colombia and beyond, receiving awards such as the Ollantay Prize, CELCIT Award (1992), IDARTES Puppet Theatre Career Award (2011), National Stage Direction Award (2012), Life and Work

Award from Bogotá's Secretariat of Culture (2022), Medal for Cultural Merit from the Ministry of Culture (2024), and the Civil Order Medal for Merit, Grand Cross, from the Bogotá City Council (2024).

He directed the Teatro del Parque Nacional, coordinated the children's theatre and puppets at the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro of Bogotá, directed Bogotá's Jornadas Iberoamericanas de Teatro Infantil (Ibero-American Children's Theatre Days) and the Jornadas de Títeres (Puppet Days), and more.

A health-themed puppetry project of his became the model for a UNICEF publication used in Latin American education. He also leads training workshops and has overseen university diplomas aimed at advancing the practice and pedagogy of puppetry among theatre professionals.



**RENÉ ALBERTO FERNÁNDEZ SANTANA, 1944**

**CUBA**

UNIMA Member of Honour 2016

Cuban theatre director, playwright, choreographer, designer, teacher. In 1964, René Fernández Santana founded Teatro Papalote (created initially in 1962 as Grupo Guiñol de Matanzas), the puppet theatre company based in the city of Matanzas, which he directed from 1964 to 1971 and again from 1981 to the present. The company creates works based upon traditional popular culture, Afro-Cuban folklore, universal classics and contemporary themes about childhood and youth.

For over sixty years, Teatro Papalote's productions have drawn upon local and classical literature, most of them adapted

or written by René Fernández Santana. The most notable include *Okin*, *eyé ayé* (1988), *Otra vez Caperucita y el lobo* (1991, a free version of the work of Charles Perrault), *Una cucarachita llamada Martina* (1991), *Los Ibeyis y el Diablo* (1992), *Disfraces* (1992), *El poeta y Platero* (1993), *Divertimento Moderato* (1993), *Historia de burros* (1994), *Obiaya Fufe lele*, *Romance del Papalote que quería llegar a la Luna*, *El tambor de Ayapa*, *Nokán y el maíz*, *Tierra a la vista*.

The company has premiered numerous works in Cuba and abroad. It has participated in many local festivals (Havana, Camagüey, Topes de Collantes, Cienfuegos, Santiago de Cuba) and in important festivals in Europe, Africa and Latin America, including Biels Kobiala (1984), Latin-American Festival in Cádiz and theatre exhibition in Mérida (Spain, 1985), gira artística por Andalucía (Andalusia, Spain, 1987), Puppet Art 88 International Festival of Puppet Schools (Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, 1988), Teatro Malic (Barcelona), Festival Internacional de Títeres Ollin Yoliztli (Mexico, 1988), Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes (Charleville-Mézières, France, 1991), Theatre tour (Gothenburg and Stockholm, Sweden, 1991), Festival Theatre Centre Lund (Sweden, 1994).

Since 1994, Teatro Papalote has organized the biennial international puppetry workshop, Taller Internacional de Títeres de Matanzas (TITIM) in Matanzas. The company has also been an important partner in publishing the *Boletín de Títeres la Mojiganga* (Bulletin of the Mojiganga Puppets), which appeared for several years.

Teatro Papalote is still operating after sixty years of existence and with Santana as its director. With a new generation of puppeteers and designers—including Migdalia Seguí, Rubén Darío Salazar, Freddy Maragoto, Lea Milagros Hernández, Ulises García, Mayda Seguí, Amelyd Cejas and designer Zenén Calero Medina—the more recent plays he has directed include *Tres somos tres* and *Nubes azules*.

With Teatro Papalote, Santana has received many awards, including the Villanueva Critics Prize (1999), Cuba's prestigious National Theater Award (2007), the Maestro de Juventudes Award and at the 19<sup>th</sup> World Congress of ASSITEJ held in Cape Town, South Africa, the "Inspirational Playwrights Award".

René Fernández Santana served as president of UNIMA Cuba from 2010 to 2022.







# LANGUAGES

How can puppets communicate stories and characters? These articles explore the relationship of puppet, puppeteer, and audience; of puppets and their stories; and of objects and their intrinsic meanings. Considering the evolution of puppetry alongside technology, we are invited to ask: how can interactivity and the digital further expand the unique possibilities of puppetry?



# PROJECT FRANKENSTEIN: THE CHALLENGES OF DOUBLE INTERPRETATION WITHIN UNFOLDED THEATRE

La Hoja Titiritera • n°1 • 2024



By Luciano Mansur



From the point of view of an Argentinian stage artist, I am interested not only in contemporary puppet theatre but also in the research and findings around it. This article presents part of the theoretical and practical processes that guided the creation of my show *Project Frankenstein*, which was later compiled into a book,<sup>1</sup> that addresses the challenges of performing in puppet theatre in which the puppeteer is in full view of the audience and performing two characters - one as an actor/actress and the other as a puppet. It also delves into the concept of "unfolded theatre" (Paska, 2000)<sup>2</sup>, which is directly related to this type of performance and the conception of my show. Then, we dive into what I call "Simultaneous Double Performance", breaking down the practical interpretive work linked to this dissociation, particularly the vocal one, which includes notions of ventriloquism, and was put to test in the search for a dynamic systematization.

## THE LIVING AND THE INERT

In a puppetry performance where the actor is in full view of the audience and is simultaneously a puppeteer, it is essential to understand the high degree of complexity to which he is being subjected. It involves operating on different technical levels on stage: the use of the direct (actor) and indirect (puppeteer) types of acting; the relationship between puppet and puppeteer on stage, applying the *counterpart mode* where a double presence stands out (character/actor and character/puppet); and the techniques that creates the illusion of autonomous life in a puppet. For the latter, it is necessary that the performer is able to yield part of his presence to the puppet, while keeping another part for his own character. That is, developing the necessary intuition to build a sense of disassociation. One that allows the performer to play the scene with both characters, while paying attention to the rest of the elements: lighting, space, the puppet's body, the actor's body. All these aspects become supporting points to deal with performance within unfolded theatre.

## SIMULTANEOUS DOUBLE PERFORMANCE AND ITS TOOLS

In one of the relevant sections of the book, I relate this type of performance to one of the operational modes that define the relationship between puppet and puppeteer on stage: the "counterpart" or "partner"<sup>3</sup> mode, which from my point of view, needs expansion as a category, given its high degree of complexity, especially when using the puppet as a double of the human (Paska, 2000).

Therefore, I propose a new category to define what has been previously stated, which I call "Simultaneous Double Performance", hereinafter DIS (following the

Spanish initials). Since we can't firmly count, at least in my territory, with an organized system of studies on the subject, I define it this way because it allows me to frame my research. Far from establishing certainty, it is there to be confronted, discussed, and set into motion, simultaneously for practical purposes, it helps me name what has been found in these explorations.

Using my play as the starting point, and analyzing a scene where I play *The Creature* (puppet) and Victor Frankenstein (actor), here are the characteristics that make up DIS:

- There are two characters.
- Both are performed simultaneously by the same artist in full view of the audience.
- The unfolded theatre becomes evident: *The Creature* (character/mouth puppet) as a double of Victor Frankenstein (character/actor).
- The "counterpart" or "partner" operational mode is used for the relationship between puppet and puppeteer.
- The puppet character was built through indirect acting, with a dissociative technique.
- The human character is approached with direct acting.
- The sound source is the performer themselves, creating two different voices, one for each character.
- Two different bodies can be seen on stage, occupying different spaces, despite sharing parts of one single body: the performer's, completing the puppet's body.

Within the strategies used to approach this complicated performance, the main one seems to be dissociation: separating each character's presence and actions to define them. But there are other tools related to the vocal, which are of great importance. Although these are incomplete approximations (I do not intend to establish a definite list or order), I begin with something particular and paradoxical in the puppet: speech.

## SPEECH IN PUPPET THEATRE

When we refer to the puppet's use of speech, there is something fundamental that, because it seems obvious, could be neglected, but deserves particular attention: Paska comments that "puppets don't really say anything.



Words can be a great illusion in puppet theater [...] but [...] puppets are mute and their words are false, it's a simple trick of synchronization [...] it is natural for the flesh and blood actor but for a puppet it is against its nature"<sup>4</sup>. And if we refer to words as illusion, Mauricio Kartun (2015)<sup>5</sup>, quotes Paul Claudel<sup>6</sup> saying: "The puppet is not an actor that speaks, it is a word that acts" (141). When we realize that in puppet theater words are an illusion emitted by the performer, and that it is accomplished through synchronization with the puppet's movement, there is a tool that will allow us to create verisimilitude of the puppet "speaking", while contributing to dissociate it from the person manipulating it. That is, lip synchronization or *lip sync*.

LIP SYNC AND GESTURES

Lip sync involves coordinating the opening and closure of the puppet's mouth with our voice, and uses different opening degrees according to the vowels. It also involves embodiment. By this, I mean the movement transmitted from the performer to the puppet. The movement comes from the performer's spine, moves through the shoulder, arm, hand and finally impacts the puppet's body, to create its movement, gesture and character. That's why we need an available body, in pre-expressive terms, to be used in service of generating the desired image, and contributing to the visual composition of the scene.

At this point, I would like to highlight an important feature: character in the puppet. We humans have a wide array of gestures, skin that changes color and temperature. Puppets don't, yet they have a power that turns their limitations into opportunities: synthesis within the gestures shown to the audience. Hence, through synchronization, the character's nuances can be shown from the diversity of movements, how it opens and closes its mouth, to the possible gestures which build up its personality.

VENTRILOQUISM

There is another tool, generally not considered by puppeteers, to be used as a dissociation element, as well as to build speech in the puppet: ventriloquism. It is largely self-taught among those who perform it, and there are unavoidable similarities between the work of ventriloquists and puppeteers that align with the present research. Its basic feature is to speak with a semi-closed mouth to cast the sound, "and it is the tongue what will do all the work, moving inside the mouth, [...] it shall be the one creating the words"<sup>7</sup>.

CONCLUSION

The Simultaneous Double Interpretation, DIS, is definitely a challenge for the performer, with many layers to define, practice, and structure, both on a physical, visual and vocal level, as well as for what they contribute to the character's personality, the progression of the play and even in the reception of the audience. May this article, or my book, contribute as a starting point for the creative puppeteer, or the curious spectator, who wants to delve into the wonders and complexities of unfolded theatre and its performance.

Article translations by Susy López P.

\* The present article extracts fragments from the book *Proyecto Frankenstein*, by Luciano Mansur, which includes the full script, adapted to puppet theatre from Mary W. Shelley's novel, as well as his final paper *El Trabajo de Disociación de los Titiriteros en el Teatro Desdoblado: Problemas de la Doble Interpretación Simultánea*, thesis to obtain the Bachelor's degree in Dramatic Arts with focus on Puppets and Objects, at Universidad Nacional de San Martín. The homonym play *Proyecto Frankenstein*, directed by Román Lamas, is part of the degree and was premiered in April 2022 at San Martín, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina.  
\*\* I appreciate the translations and style correction made by Susy López Pérez, for the publishing of this article in the present magazine.

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3 Editor's Note. Derived from *partenaire*, French term referring to the one with whom you work, play, dance, or have a relationship. Popularized as a puppetry operational mode by European theater scholars, such as Henryk Jurkowski or Michael Meschke, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.  
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# THE FLYING BROTHERS-IN-LAW PROBLEM

## A STATE OF THE ART PUPPET AND VISUAL THEATRE IN THE NETHERLANDS



De wereld van het poppenspel •

n° 66 • winter edition • 2021

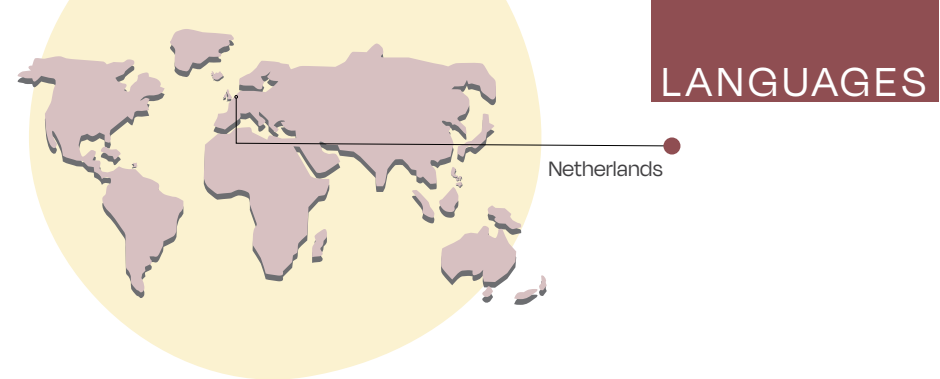
By Rieks Swarte

On 10 September 2021, I delivered a lecture at the opening of the 6th International Microfestival in Dordrecht. This article is the (almost) literal text of that speech.

It was a cry from the heart and an ode to imagination from the puppet theatre on the *Aardappelmarkt*.<sup>1</sup> It was in the newspaper and we saw it on the news: three super-rich people competed with each other for a trip to

outer space. The highlight for the Netherlands was that an 18-year-old Dutch boy was allowed to go. Well, allowed... it has been said that his father paid an unknown amount of money for him. I heard somewhere that the amount was three million euros. Apparently, the trip lasted eleven minutes and they were weightless for one minute. Everyone was euphoric, but why?





## LANGUAGES

Netherlands

### THE POWER OF THEATRE

How many millions of euros (or dollars) must those space trips for the super riders have cost? What could you not have done with all that money? I immediately think: keep your feet on the ground or go for a swim, experience weightlessness that way, and that's it. As far as I'm concerned, that money could have eradicated malaria in one go, or, more topically, ensured that everyone on the planet who could not afford vaccines be vaccinated<sup>2</sup> at once, which would have combated the pandemic for good. But no, bad hobbies are applauded while what really needs to be done remains to be done.

A few years ago, I directed two actors that were making 'something about' space travel because it was 'their thing'. They created a visual performance that involved flying and... weightlessness. They had thought of all kinds of things, but it didn't really take off. In one of my performances I had actually made someone fly. Of course, I did not tell the two guys that, because they had to find it out for themselves. They worked their asses off and yes, one day they actually flew. How was beyond our comprehension, but it happened.

What took Branson, Bezos and Whitesides millions to do, they managed in that rehearsal room. They discovered 'theatre flying'. If you saw it, you really believed it. That is the power of theatre: experiencing what you know cannot be real.

### GRANM'MA

What these actors finally managed to do, is ten times easier for a puppet. In his puppet theatre performance *Granm'ma*, Wensley Piqué plays his grandmother waiting for a phone call from her grandson. As she lies in bed, suddenly she rises above the bed. Does she dream that she is flying? Or is it her spirit? Piqué cautiously puts her back in bed and carefully removes his hands. And then she lies still. And slowly it dawns on us that she must have left us. Because she can fly, she can also lie much deader than a stage actor ever could. All kinds of doubts enter your mind about what you actually see. Suggestions, open questions. What is true?

### IMAGINE...

As an audience member, puppet theatre makes you work hard. You have to make sure that dead things become alive and real. That is exactly what makes this form of theatre so special. Because puppets can do so much more than actors (flying, for instance). Everything relates to the suggestion that something is true. We believe in what we see, while we also know that we are being played, and that we ourselves make the suggestion the truth for a moment. I think that when earth was created with its gravity, its creator/ inventor/evolution also invented the ability for humans to believe. Not as a fact of truth, but as a tool to evolve.

Suppose you are a scientist and you suspect that something is true, but it is not yet known as true. Your name is Albert Einstein and you establish a theory of relativity. What you have discovered is only in your head a possibility. But is it true? Einstein needed to pretend, needed this belief as a tool until he could prove his theory. He assumed his idea was true and could therefore proceed with his search for evidence to make his proposition true. Faith is very different from what many cultural groups would have us believe, that holy faith is true by definition, but it is not true.

### HOLD ON, BACK TO SQUARE ONE...

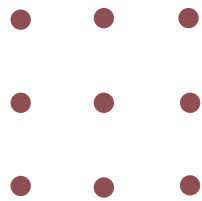
Surely my story would be about how difficult it is for today's new creators to build a life in the arts? What should you do as up-and-coming in our profession, with your abundance of talent, and otherwise lack of everything?

How do you broaden your view if you can only invent everything within your own bubble?

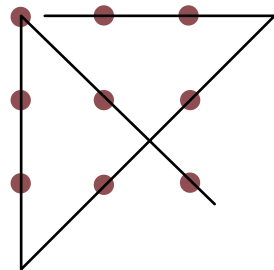
How are you supposed to be presented with opportunities, learn to develop your talents and learn your own shortcomings and your strengths. If there are no training courses for puppet and imaginary theatre makers, who will teach you how imagination works, what is true? Or rather: truthful. And above all, who teaches you, how to think outside the box to get to the essence of what you want to tell the world?

### OUTSIDE THE LINES

At primary school, a teacher once decided to give us no homework, but to send us off with a puzzle: You draw three times three dots, so you get a square of nine dots with a dot in the middle. Now try to draw a line through all the dots with only four straight lines that are all attached.



The next morning, the teacher looked at the results. None of us had guessed the riddle. So, he drew the nine dots on the board, drew a diagonal through the square, from the corner the line continued to the right and then what happened was the miracle: he extended the line beyond the square to be able to cross the other dots as well. By repeating that trick once, he did hit all the dots.



Of course we protested, but the teacher was right. After all, he had not said that you shouldn't draw outside the dots, more to the point: the intention was specifically to draw outside the lines to get to the solution. That was what he wanted to teach us. This was the best lesson I had learnt: "Think outside the lines." During your professional training in the arts, you have to learn to think outside the lines to create a good work of art. Thinking outside the lines gives you imagination, space. To discover that space and imagination, young talents need the experience of older artists.

### LACK OF IMAGINATION: THE BROTHER-IN-LAW PROBLEM

Long ago, for a puppetry show<sup>3</sup> on Boxing Day, a baker's family from Haarlem with five daughters had bought out the second and third rows. There they all sat: dad, mum, five

daughters, five brothers-in-law and a number of children. What happened was bizarre. While the whole room sympathized with the fate of rabbits, badgers, foxes, mice, we couldn't get the brothers-in-law to join us, and to make them laugh with us. Even during the hilarious final scene, where the players dressed as mice helped a life-size dollhouse go to hell, the brothers-in-law were the only ones who would not laugh about it. They did not participate in the game between players and audience. For them, it just wasn't real. For them, it actually needed to be real. They were those guys who, like little boys at a performance, continually say, "I know how they do it." But is that what theatre is all about? No.

Since then, therefore, men's unwillingness to go along with the imagination is called the 'brother-in-law problem'.

### OVER ANOTHER TACK

This shows that imagination is a very important part of human existence and puppet and visual theatre excels in this enormously, and therefore is of great importance to the human spirit. Science and art are related to each other. Einstein played the violin and told jokes all the time. He nurtured imagination like no other, realizing that imagination is the ability to take something as a provisional truth.

That is a good reason to cherish puppet theatre, because in no other art is it possible to create possibilities you thought were impossible before. Possibilities that could, for instance, lead you to a theory of relativity, or that can make you fly. Surely, you would think, it would be in the general interest of mankind if we honored puppet and visual theatre as much as possible, with a place immediately linked to it where you can also learn that wonderful profession, and that puppet and visual theatre as a branch of theatre should be taken seriously, at least by those who run the country and claim they have the best interests of the people at heart.

Feike Boschma<sup>4</sup> thought the best way to learn the trade was by practice. Bearing him in mind, Feikes Huis<sup>5</sup> and I made a plan for a large puppet theatre production, accompanied by a number of teaching blocks to immerse ourselves in the profession. Something with young talent and experienced makers. We called it a puppet theatre school, but our application for a government grant was rejected: too many applications, too little budget. At the same time, Feikes Huis risked losing its structural subsidy. Luckily Feikes Huis survived.

Again however, our profession was not taken seriously. Puppet and visual theatre are no charity work! It is a profession!

Meanwhile, we as theatre-makers are just stuck with this reputation. Often perceived as a left-wing hobby, allegedly dependent on the subsidy drip, the guardians of hysterical capitalism meanwhile engage in their money slurping hobbies, such as taking space trips to think for one minute that you are actually flying. I know how they do it. By turning off everyone's imagination and thinking that this would then be 'real'. How bad of a brother-in-law can they be?

I can tell you that Wensley Piqué's grandmother is the world's best flyer, followed by those two actors I directed all those years ago. Flying a real rocket has nothing to do with it.

### TURN ON IMAGINATION

True, making art costs money, but artists give back a lot of beautiful things that cannot be monetized! I say that grants for the arts should be increased tenfold, because then we can do our job properly, be paid properly, educate again through a theatre institute with a puppet theatre department, produce seriously, establish a serious network, build a serious audience, introduce the subject of 'theatre' in schools, broaden the profession, apply new techniques, look beyond the borders, think out of the box, professionalize, grow up and make the world a better place again. I think that we have been compliant with administrators too long. If we as artists and artisans immediately assume that a tenfold increase is impossible, we are thinking in the wrong direction. After all, theatre is necessary! Not for profit, but to make beautiful things. To really fly!

Therefore: Embrace the absurd, ignore the norm. Start drawing outside the box, nine dots and four lines. Why? Because you have to!

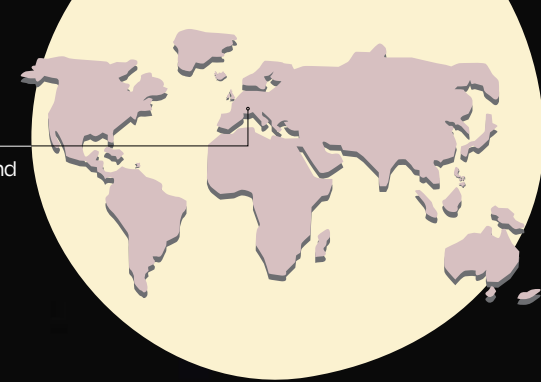
### References

- <sup>1</sup> Location of HQ of the International Micro 2 Festival at Dordrecht, The Netherlands.
- <sup>2</sup> Against COVID.
- <sup>3</sup> Called 'Potters Beasts'.
- <sup>4</sup> Dutch puppeteer and maker (27 April 1921 – 13 November 2014)
- <sup>5</sup> A Dutch production company for visual theatre.



Image above: *Potters Beests* Show.  
Image below: *Doggy* Show.





# EMBODYING THE HUMAN SOUL

MAGMA • n°4 • 2024



With Natacha Belova

Collected by Irène Le Corre

The actresses Marta Pereira (left) and  
Tita Iacobelli (right) in the show *Loco* (2021).

The corporeality of the puppet has always fascinated the costume designer, puppet constructor and director Natacha Belova. In this testimony, she relates, using the example of the numerous interactions between human bodies and puppets explored over years and how puppets allow us to express our interiority.

My first contact with puppetry dates back to 2006 when I worked as a costume designer for Jean-Michel d'Hoop's Cie Point-Zéro. He wanted to produce *The School of Ventriloquists* by Alejandro Jodorowsky, a play in which puppets embody the dark, repressed part of the human soul. Jean-Michel entrusted me with creating the costumes, as well as the puppets. I followed a short training course at ESNAM\* in Charleville-Mézières and then we got started! Neither he, nor I, nor the actors had any experience in this area. We researched and experimented together. It was exciting!

For *The School of Ventriloquists*, which finally saw the light of day in 2008, our intention was not to create a puppet show, but a play where the actors found through puppetry an additional means of expressing themselves, while using their body and their presence as an actor to the fullest. The puppet then became a working tool to create expanding figures, a sculpted medium, an extension of the actors. From the beginning, we therefore worked on the concept of life-sized puppet with direct animation, visually playing on the monstrous, grotesque, "larger than life" aspect.

This show opened the way to further research focused on the play of bodies. Over the course of our following creations (*Trois Vieilles* [Three Old Maids], *La Tempête* [The Tempest], *L'Histoire du Soldat* [Tale of the Soldier]), the objective was no longer just to "augment" the human body, but to create another body in its own right. The actor manipulated this other body, while playing his own character. Puppet and puppeteer acted at the same level, on the same equal footing, and no longer "serving" one or the other. What interested us was to play with the idea of the double that the puppet represents and the confusion that results from it. Between puppeteer and puppet, who manipulates whom? Who is more "alive"? This tenuous border between the object which becomes humanized and the human which becomes an object fascinated us.

After almost 15 years spent with the Point-Zéro Company, I wanted to explore these questions through my own productions. With the actress and director Tita Iacobelli we created our company in 2015. For our first show, *Tchaïka*, inspired by *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov, I distanced

myself from the aesthetic of the strange to favor a realistic approach. This one woman show, performed by Tita Iacobelli with a puppet, tells the story of an actress at the end of her career (Arkadina in Chekhov), literally brought to life by the young actress that she was. For us, it is a being in dialogue with themselves. The presence of the puppet and Tita's performance make it possible to show these two voices in a single body and the intimate, complex and contradictory tug a being struggling with age experiences.

Making invisible troubles visible, which are nevertheless very real and take up a lot of space in our inner world, is also the aim of our second show *Loco*, adapted from Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*. To tell the story of a character's perception of his own body when that character is considered crazy, we call on two actresses who lend their limbs to the protagonist, whose only purely puppet attribute is his head. This allows us to literally make him "lose his mind", but also to play on the fragmentation of the body, the fragmentation of the personality, and to show how the protagonist himself feels.

Through this play of bodies, we like to question our subjectivity, the way we look at ourselves, others, and the world around us but also the image that others have of us and reflect back to us. The lines between the real and the unreal, the inert and the living, the visible and the invisible are blurred. In this type of theater, the gaze, perception, and feelings of the spectators are constantly solicited and are part of the equation.

This will be even more the case in our next creation, an adaptation of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, in which we would like to go even further in our exploration of the concept of the illusion of the body, which was initiated with *Loco*. Through abstract material (fabrics, shadows, mirrors, etc.) and the way it is manipulated, we want to make bodies, monsters, and presences appear, to give life to the characters who populate Alice's imagination. Instead of creating disturbance through the resemblance of the puppet to the human body, I now seek to create disturbance through the suggestion of a presence beyond the physical notion of the body.

MAGMA is the magazine of Puppet Theater of Genève (Switzerland).

\*École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette (National School for Higher Education in Puppetry Arts).

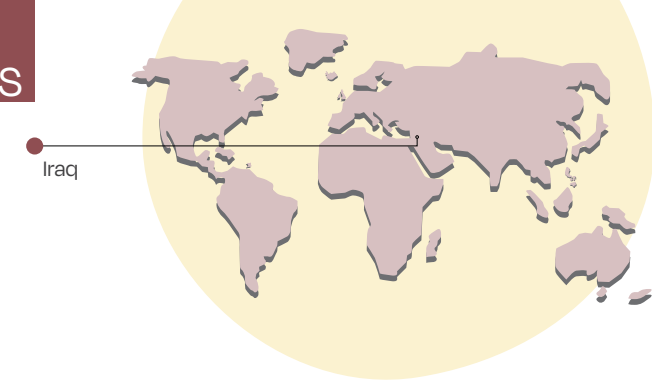


# THE PUPPET BETWEEN THE CHARACTER AND THE ACTOR IN PUPPET THEATER

By Dr. Zainab Abdul Amir Ahmed

Head of UNIMA Iraq

“...events are related to the character and revolve around it, and this in turn sheds light on the complex dynamic nature of the character’s involvement in conveying a dramatic narrative, through the expression of its external and internal features, in collaboration with its continuous interaction with other artistic elements...”  
- Zainab Abdul Amir Ahmed



Puppet theatre shows are devised with a set of essential artistic elements which overlap in a harmonious manner to translate a theatrical text through embodying the narrative of the show, as they constitute for everything that is visible and audible within a theatrical show. The character is deemed one of the most important artistic elements in dramatic narrative, “as it is the tangible presence that viewers see and through which they follow its behavior, emotions, passions, and all the meanings that the theatrical event carries”,<sup>1</sup> because it is the pivotal element that drives and motivates all the other artistic elements that it interacts with on the stage. “The character draws on the events that develop to create a successive series through dialogue and conflicting wills”.<sup>2</sup> This is because the events are related to the character and revolve around it, and this in turn sheds light on the complex dynamic nature of the character’s involvement in conveying a dramatic narrative, through the expression of its external and internal features, in collaboration with its continuous interaction with other artistic elements, such as lighting, costumes, scenery, music and song, sound effects. throughout the duration of the theatrical performance.

Thus, dealing with the dramatic character requires defining its external and internal features. Those features represent the main dimensions that both the author and the director rely on to portray the character on the stage. In puppet theatre, the puppet embodies the dramatic character, and it is created according to the dimensions of a specific dramatic character. The dramatic character (the puppet) is unique in a way that makes us exclude the three main familiar dimensions that both the author and the director rely on to create the character, which are: the physical/physiological dimension, the social dimension, and the psychological dimension. These dimensions are general dimensions that the natural character and the dramatic character share and they are even closer to the natural character in reality, which makes them unsuitable for the dramatic character in puppet theatre. The character (puppet) is characterized by simplicity and non-exaggeration to highlight its dimensions. The character (puppet) is limited to defining its broad outlines, as its distinctive features are highlighted in a caricature form, without indulging into complexities that those dimensions address.

Therefore, in the current article, we indicate a new classification of the dimensions of the dramatic character in puppet theatre, which includes two basic dimensions that define its outward and inward features in a way that ensures that each character is made in an image that differs from the images of other characters, and they are as follows:

- **The physical dimension of the character:** This refers to the dimension that relates to the apparent (visible) characteristics of the character, i.e. it relates to the characteristics that are associated with the character’s appearance, such as: the character’s gender (type), age, features, clothing, hairstyle, and other things that are associated with the natural and social dimension of the theatrical character.

## • The intellectual (moral) dimension of the character:

This refers to the dimension related to the hidden (invisible) characteristics of the character, i.e. related to the characteristics associated with the character’s behavior and words. Aristotle distinguished between the character’s action and its characteristics and the connection between them, but he gave priority to the character’s action, which is an imitation of human action, and considered that identifying the character’s characteristics is done through its actions within the dramatic conflict situations in the play. Examples of these actions are: the character’s movements and the actions associated with it, which include the way it walks, its gestures, its involuntary reactions, the tone and intensity of its voice, the way it speaks, its profession, and its hobbies. All these behaviors contribute to revealing the intellectual (invisible) aspects of the character, such as its desires, motives, and simple moral and social standards that are easy for the recipient to perceive and distinguish within the events of the theatrical performance.

Considering the above, the dramatic character (puppet) in the puppet theatre directed at children must have the following features:

1. The character is characterized by clarity, being close to the reality and environment of the child, and simple, easy to recognize through its shape, behavior and dialogues by taking care to draw its external appearance, and making this appearance harmonious with its internal behavior, so that it is easy for the child to perceive it and achieve the goal and themes of the show.
2. It is characterized by having a simple sense of humor, as it brings joy to the heart of the child, and creates excitement, suspense and enjoyment within them.
3. It is characterized by persuasion and a distinct artistic presence, it has a specific function in the development of events and is not intrusive, so that the child can sympathize with it and feel its feelings and react to its conflict situations within the theatrical show.
4. It is characterized by stereotyping (typical) in relation to the behavior it represents, i.e. it is representative of the type, and not individual in its depiction.
5. It should not be deeply imaginative in a way that is difficult to believe, understand, recognize and integrate with.



6. The number of characters should be considerable, and each character should have a characteristic that distinguishes it from others, by taking care to select their names, characteristics and other characteristics according to their physical and intellectual dimensions, so that it is easy for the child -the receptor- to know and distinguish between them.

The dramatic character (puppet) in puppet theatre has several types, as these types are subject to several classifications, the most important of which are:

**First:** Types of character in terms of its area and the size of its dramatic action:

- 1. The hero character
- 2. The main character
- 3. The secondary character

**Second:** Types of character in terms of its moral and behavioral tendency:

- 1. The good character
- 2. The evil character
- 3. The changing character

**Third:** Types of character in terms of their dramatic nature:

- 1. The human character
- 2. The animal character
- 3. The plant character
- 4. The inanimate character
- 5. The fantasy character

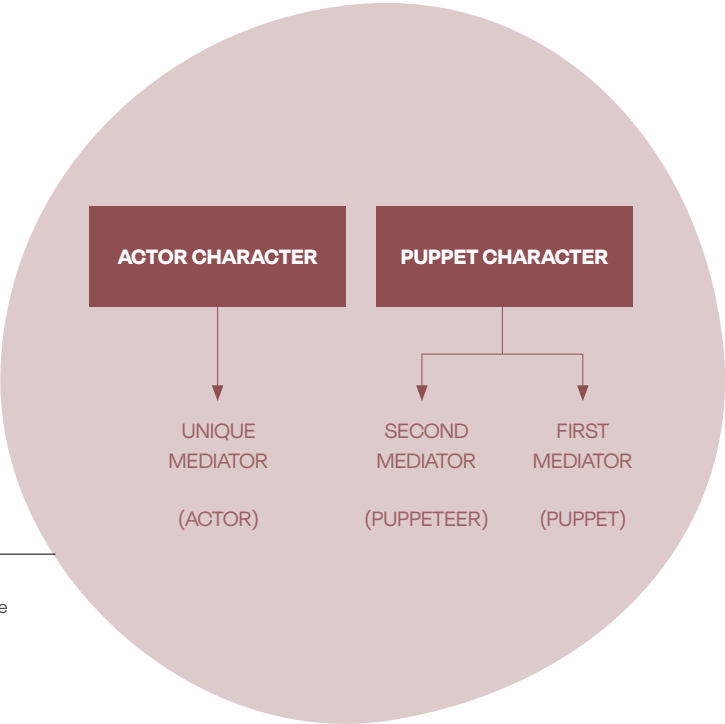
The process of embodying the different types of characters in puppet theatre is mostly unique to the puppet, but there are some shows in which the human actor participates with the puppets in embodying the events of the play. The possibility of the actor participating with the puppet in one theatrical show is an opinion confirmed by many specialists working in the field of puppet theatre globally, provided that the director of the show takes into account that the actor's participation with the puppet is a participation that contributes to highlighting its role, position and importance for the audience, while some believe that it is necessary to be aware of the importance of this method (the actor's participation with the puppet), as it increases the intellectual depth of the theatrical show and makes it more exciting and influential.

So, both the director and the author must be aware that the puppet on stage differs in its form and expressive capabilities from the human actor, as it cannot move and express itself in the same way that the actor moves and expresses himself, as its very limited movements prevent it from accurately representing the living being, and that the actor, on the other hand, does not possess some of the imaginary capabilities that the puppet can perform, such as flying, appearing or disappearing. Surprisingly, because it is further removed from imitating the movements of a live actor, it brings us further into the realm of the imaginary world. The puppet theatre by its nature is a world of broad horizons of freedom in the field of artistic creativity, unparalleled in human theatre.

Puppets achieve performances that human actors cannot perform on stage.

The relationship between the puppet and the actor in the joint show must take into account the nature of the show and the needs of each role, without the matter turning into a debate and competition in which of them excels in performance over the other; the puppet, at the very least, "does not represent the character it impersonates, but rather is the character itself".<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, to perform the dramatic action assigned to it, it (puppet) needs another mediator, represented by the puppeteer (actor). The puppet depends on the puppeteer; their commitment to the narrative of the show and in addition their vocal and physical attributes which determine how skillfully the puppeteer can breath life into the puppet, so that the puppet achieves the desired effect on the child. As for the actor, he does not need another mediator to perform his role on the stage, but rather expresses the role of the character assigned to him directly. Thus, the performance of the role of the character by the puppet requires two mediators (the puppet with the actor), while the performance of the role of the character by the human actor requires one mediator, which is the actor himself. This can be represented by the following diagram:



A diagram showing the relationship between the puppet and the actor.

“Is the acting performance in puppet theatre limited to the shows in which the actor participates with the puppets? Or is there an actor of another type?”  
- Zainab Abdul Amir Ahmed

There is also a debate about the performance in puppet theatre between those who consider it animation and those who consider it acting, Is there anyone who opposes or contradicts the idea of describing or classifying what is commonly called (puppeteer) as an actor? Is the acting performance in puppet theatre limited to the shows in which the actor participates with the puppets? Or is there an actor of another type? Many questions need answers, and the answers need evidence so that we do not underestimate this type of theatre. It is theatre, and theatre is an art based primarily on the art of acting. On the stage, the actor's focus is the practice that takes place on the stage. It is not the work of the writer or the director, but rather depends on the actor's performance as the only element that meets and confronts the audience throughout the show's duration. Yes, the actor is the master of the show, and his performance in puppet theatre has a specificity that distinguishes him from the conventional concept of the actor in other types of theatre.

The modern puppet performances emphasize the actor's appearance before the audience with the puppet through which he performs. This confirms the importance and specificity of the role he plays. He is the one who expresses his internal and external tools through the puppet to transfer them to the audience. Rather, he is the one who takes on the puppet (as a character) to make it come alive and convincing on the stage! Yes, the puppet is created as a character and nothing more, and the one who humanizes it and breathes life into it to perform the theatrical act is the actor himself through his imagination, memory, focus and thinking within the mental aspect of his internal tools, and through his feelings, emotions, passions and spiritual energy within the emotional aspect of his internal tools.

Both aspects are linked to what is called emotional memory in addition to his external tools through his voice and body as a whole or part of it, and here how can the actor who is able to employ all his tools efficiently through the puppet? The matter is not easy, and we cannot call

him a (puppeteer) as is commonly known. This is because movement is a purely physical process that approaches the mechanical concept devoid of feeling and emotion, on other meaning, it is devoid of the emotional aspect and, in the end, it is far from the meaning and purpose of art on the one hand.

The actor who plays the role of the puppet must undergo intensive exercises to have physical flexibility and for his body to be able to express and endure, and on the level of voice, his voice must be expressive, deep, strong, have a large range and be able to imitate other sounds such as the sounds of animals and others, and his voice must be diverse on the other hand. So, all these abilities and skills must be available to the one who performs acting through the puppet so that we can call him an actor and not a puppeteer.

The theatrical puppet has no limits to its expressive energies, and no limits to its creative processes, and whoever deals with it must be up to that, understanding its potential and dimensions as a character, aware of the spaces of its operational aesthetics, and without that it will be as if we are moving a piece of cloth, wood, cork, etc. to the right and left.

The performer in puppet theatre is an actor and possesses the actor's motor, emotional and vocal skills.

Therefore, I call, through this humble and honest article for change to give things their real names and the role they play; this is because the actor's performance through the puppet has foundations and rules that make it an art that is linked to the thought and goal that is intended to be embodied and presented on the stage within an enjoyable, aesthetic, artistic framework, which is the actor's performance, which is considered a basic element in his creation, and not just movements or signals to entertain the audience and make them laugh without intent or meaning.

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# MOMENTS THAT MAKE YOU STOP AND THINK

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By Silke Technau



©Silke Technau, Maschen 1989



Walter Büttner accompanied the eventful history of the 20th century with his puppets. In addition to his traditional heavy wooden heads, he also had lighter modern ones carved, for example Mephisto and Faust by Fritz Herbert Bross (1910-1976), one of the most famous German puppet sculptors of his time and teacher of Albrecht Roser. The intensity of Walter Büttner's rhythmic, powerful performance is extremely popular in professional circles. The vital rhythm and cheerful gestures, the theatrical power of the fairground puppet show. The traditional European hand puppet show has now been described and documented with video recordings, it can be taught and is gradually finding its place again in the theatre landscape.

The *Faust* play is underway. Mephisto wants to lure Faust to Parma, but still needs his signature in blood on the soul contract. Faust hesitates and procrastinates, and is highly suspicious. But Mephisto persuades him gently, urgently, pleadingly, whispering. Finally, he drives the hesitant man accelerating in a circle, Mephisto's voice reaching a

crescendo with the two words "Say Parma... say Parma!" repeated again and again in an imploring manner.

As a spectator, you sit there and think: No, no, Mephisto cannot succeed! But the procrastinator Faust is too weak. The player has been going round in circles faster and faster with the imperatives "Say Parma!". Faust can no longer get away. Mephisto almost has him. Then Walter Büttner pulls both figures downwards with a swing, stretches his spine and larynx at the same time and shouts his final cry: "Say Parmaaaaa!"

The stage is empty! For a few breaths it is simply empty!

At this moment, the play pauses and in this moment the audience realises on their own that the bloody pact has been made – they don't see it, they feel it – magically. When Walter Büttner has brought the pace of his breathing to a great calm and he very slowly pushes the two figures up again, allowing them to emerge for us, everyone knows: it has happened, the drama is now irrevocably taking its course.

I love traditional hand puppetry, I love the dancing, rhythmic, powerful gestures, I love this visual language that challenges the audience. The moment when the audience has to endure the empty stage and continue the story on their own (and thus making their own responsibility), is also the dramaturgical moment to pause for thought with no turning back.

Director Lambert Blum has incorporated one such moment in the opera production of *Rigoletto* with tabletop puppets. When Rigoletto discovers that his daughter Gilda has been kidnapped, there is nothing more to add to Verdi's music: Rigoletto is stunned with suffering and rage and has fallen from the stage (into his house), the stage is empty; the audience is left alone with the magnificent music and emotions. Only in the silence that follows does Rigoletto collapse in front of

his house, and the murderer Sparafucile can now come...

## YOUNG LOVE

**Der Schimmelreiter** (The Rider on the White Horse) based on the novel by Theodor Storm, KOBALT Figurentheater Lübeck

Hauke Haien wants to realise his design of a new dyke in his superstitious surroundings. However, the great storm surge of 1756 comes and claims its victims. Theodor Storm poetically interweaves a ghost story with the form of the realistic novel.

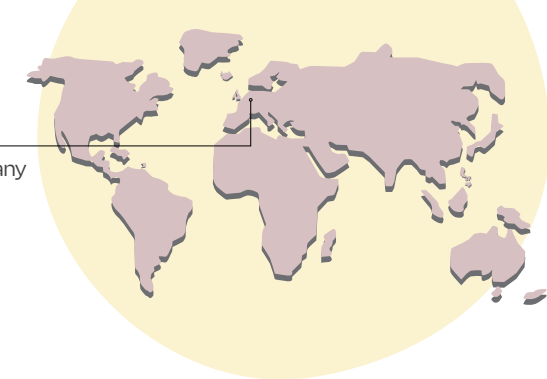
Hauke's human ingenuity and the inscrutability of natural events powerfully clash. Theodor Storm does not settle the battle, but rather leaves the reader pondering: how can one put the force of northern German nature on stage? How can one convey the complex mood of the prose? Projections offer themselves as a possibility: seasons can fade into each other, the vast expanse of a northern German winter landscape can be captured, the force of the churning sea, the catastrophic breach of the dyke with the water bursting over the people.

The projection surfaces are a large, loose, diagonal white cloth and a narrow, restless fringed curtain, upon which the actual forces of nature appear: the changing of the seasons, the sea and the passing of time in the image of the crown of the old Yggdrasil. In Nordic mythology, the great World-Tree Yggdrasil is the ash tree that carries the whole world; Theodor Storm always talks about this tree when archaic things are repeated: seasons, love, children's games.

Elke sits on the performer's lap and is knitting – a white stork is depicted on her knitting. In Germany, according to legend, the stork delivers babies – Theodor Storm's knowing wink through this image is clearly noticeable. Elke sits in the projection of the lush green ash crown, we, the performers, form the tree trunk and background for the figures, so to speak.

Walter Büttner (1907-1990), traditional fairground puppeteer, shows his dance performance for study purposes – without a hand puppet stage. Puppets: Mephisto, Faust by Fritz Herbert Bross.

Germany





My voice—I speak for both young characters—forms a ‘tree-trunk-like’ column of sound.

Hauke climbs through the top of the ash tree by pushing his figure over my shoulder. A flirtation ensues, which ends with Elke jumping up, losing her knitting and shyly fleeing. Hauke tries to put his intense confusion into words (in a Theodor Storm poem) and discovers the knitting. He takes it tenderly in his arms and pauses in a dreamy position. The large projection changes the green ash crown from summer to the bare, snow-covered winter crown, Hauke does not move and dreams.

For the viewer, the entire scenery changes, for me as the performer, nothing seems to change: the projections are not three-dimensional reconstructions, they take place in silence – at best accompanied by the sounds of nature. I find myself in a deliberately designed change of light: the knitting is initially a pledge of love, and during the change of projection, in the change of seasons, it becomes a blanket, warming protection, an image of the lovers getting closer and closer to each other.

The profound change in this atmosphere is always clearly communicated to me as a performer through the more intuitive perception of the audience – the audience members always maintain the ‘narrative’ tension in their imagination. And so, with Hauke Haien, I find a pause for thought that forms one of the emotional foundations of the entire theatrical narrative.

### ANIMATION AND CAUTION

***The Nightingale*** based on the story by H.C. Andersen, Theatre Miamou, Berlin

A large throne sitting in what is a library or castle park or hall at the same time. On the left of the throne, a pool of water – a castle pond, on the right a narrow branching tree that seems to be rooted in stones: Mirjam Hesse as narrator spans the Andersen fairy tale of the nightingale between these set pieces. In her calm narration, she trusts the power of Hans Christian Andersen’s language. Her concentrated, serious face, the scenes carefully constructed from objects and her precise play with the surprising characters fascinate the audience.

Then the nightingale comes into play! You could have seen it a long time ago. It has been part of the slender tree from the very beginning. But did anyone pay attention to it at the entrance, at the opening music, at the beginning of the story? The narrator holds an index finger to the bird’s chest. Now she manages to gently lift the nightingale from the branch, just as a person lures a tame canary from its perch with their index finger: the delicate sculpture, almost like an artist’s mannequin, is so carefully weighted.

Even this subtle gesture communicates itself to the viewer as a point of special focus. How would she animate the bird now, breathe life into it? Involuntarily, you breathe in carefully, as if you don’t want to disturb the bird, and hold your breath, and Mirjam Hesse does exactly the same, but then she breathes lightly on

the delicate bird. The nightingale begins to sway ever so slightly, and in the auditorium, it is as if you yourself have breathed life into the structure made of wire and paper. The experience of this subtle, intense moment carries us through the whole story, which is about the contrast between sensitive liveliness and automatons. This experience also means that audience members of all ages leave the theatre differently from when they arrived.

### HANDS

All our performing energy is in the hands of the performers who animate or let go. It can often be felt so clearly, regardless of whether it is a guide rod, a hand puppet or a puppetry cross that gets it flowing.

***Liebe und das ganze Theater*** (Love and the Whole Theatre) by Kristiane Balsevicius, Kobalt Figurentheater Berlin

The staging principle is simple and ingenious: a few accessories and small heads constantly create new characters from otherwise naked hands. The heads determine the movements of the hands, which are always different. Whole sociograms can be expressed with the naked hands: youth, age, inhibitions, fears, temperaments, joy of work, etc. A pair of lovers approach each other shyly and finally embrace: both palms are gently nestled together, fingers slowly intertwine, the two heads are touchingly close to each other – and then the performer can no longer get her hands apart. The symbiosis that has developed between the two characters cannot be dissolved if the performer respects both characters and their story.

The performer was suddenly captivated by her own figures and paused. She then acted out her own confusion and lack of understanding for the two of them by turning away, depriving us of the sight of these hands and thus irrevocably ending the scene for herself and us.



Der Schimmelreiter based on Theodor Storm.  
Direction: Dietmar Staskowiak.  
Marionettes: Antje Hohmuth.  
Play: Silke Technau, Stephan Schlafke, KOBALT  
Figurentheater Lübeck.

***Linie 1*** (Line 1) by Volker Ludwig, Kobalt Figurentheater Lübeck

The drug-addicted Lumpi, who doesn’t say a word in the play, is tripping at Schlesisches Tor station. The actress Franziska Technau holds onto the body of the puppet, swings her around and finally throws her onto the aluminium tube of the underground. When Lumpi’s hard head hits the aluminium tube, the movement stops and Franziska lets go of the puppet in fright. Lumpi gets stuck, the player looks questioningly at her own hands for a moment before the story continues at Schlesisches Tor station among the other young people. In this moment and in this gesture, Lumpi’s suicide, which then no longer needs to be shown, is foreshadowed.

### SELF-AWARENESS

Sometimes puppets themselves simply pause for a moment.

***Klickerdiklack – Glück ist im sack*** (Abracadabrac – What’s in the bag?), fabula theatre with puppets, Idstedt (around 1975)

Back in the days when Peter Rödgers wasn’t yet embodying Samson in *Sesamstraße* (the German co-production of Sesame Street), and long before he ran the Free Education Centre in Idstedt/Schleswig Holstein and enabled a whole generation of West German puppeteers to train and network, thereby

©Martin Buchh

welding us all together, he performed this delightful Kasper show (Kasper being a traditional German hand puppet) about a bag in which a treasure was assumed to be, which turned out to be just a balloon. Here are all the characters who played a role in the show: a Kasper who could never figure things out and therefore always asked and found out everything in really sophisticated conversations with the children; a dwarf who towered over everyone and was terribly ashamed and always hid in his costume; a witch whose loneliness was deeply engraved in her melancholy face; and a dragon who always devoured everything, as dragons have to do if they take their mouths and their role seriously. When everything is swallowed up, or at least the rescuer, then somehow the story just can’t go on, but the dragon, who knew that he couldn’t get out of his all-devouring skin, thankfully had a zip on the front of his belly, which he opened ashamedly, but willingly, so that the story could continue.

This Kasper story always paused when a character came to terms with their shortcomings and overcame them.

They all spoke to the children along the way – it wasn’t about undifferentiated cries of yes, but serious dramaturgical assistance. This created an enchanting, understanding social structure between them, which no longer really needed the actual treasure in the bag. The treasure turned out to be a rumour in the form of a nice big vulnerable balloon anyway.

The memory of this Kasper show from the end of the 70s has always reconciled me to Kasper, whom I otherwise viewed very sceptically.

***Ein Schaf für’s Leben*** (A Sheep for Life), Ginggaanz puppet theatre, Meensen

The sheep saved the life of the wolf, who was almost frozen to death. They lie snuggled up together in bed in the middle of winter; the sheep is asleep, the wolf is not! A nightmarish vision keeps him awake: his ravenous, hungry performer wants to eat the deliciously prepared sheep with a knife and fork – the wolf has to defend himself with all his might against his own performer, even though he is behaving ‘wolfishly’. The wolf rants and raves and finally manages to get the rapacious

performer to let go of the sheep, but of course he realises that he doesn’t exist without his performer. The desperate wolf draws the consequences, takes responsibility for his inexcusable performer and leaves the sheep with a heavy heart.

***Vollpfosten*** (Football Crazy), flunker productions, Wahlsdorf

A football team made up of cuddly toys and dolls, a World Cup story for children full of playfulness and humour; the two main characters, the boy Mütze and the girl Molle, playfully compete for the football cup and yet stick together to the end. In the middle of the story there is an accident that leaves the boy with a brain injury that changes everything. So there they both sit—the performer and his puppet—and know and feel that the agreement to tell this story presents an ‘unfair’ hurdle that they both have to overcome. The game pauses, there is a hesitation, then the performer almost asks Mütze to continue performing, and Mütze nods cautiously and resignedly at the same time. Maybe it is a little bit cool to be the star of a tragedy—but only a little, the accident nonetheless hurts. Like two old friends, they agree to get through the next scene this time too.

And so it is with every single performance.

The story also has its rules.

The tension is heightened enormously, a huge caesura is set: What horrible thing is going to happen? Yet Mütze and his performer simultaneously show that everything is “just” a game – a game that will hit you in the guts.

Whatever happens, Mütze remains the friend he was before for the audience. They understand his “different”, “strange” behaviour after this pause and can stand by him.

The fascinating, complex relationships between the three people involved in puppet theatre: audience member, performer and theatre character, seem to flash with particular crystal clarity in the moments of pause.



©Enno Podehl

Die Nachtigall (The Nightingale)  
based on H.C. Andersen.  
Direction: Enno Podehl.  
Puppets, Play: Mirjam Hesse.



# PUPPET AUDIENCES IN PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION

By Monica Berman

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©Compañía al pie de la cama

Studies linked to audiences of the performing arts are in a moment of boom. That is to say, they are legitimized, obtain financing, enable conferences, writings, discussions, reflections of different kinds; references to audience strategies add up points in the items that can be awarded<sup>1</sup>. The fact that little is written, that little is said, in the meetings and that the strategies of puppetry with respect to its audience are not exemplified, this does not mean in any way that those who practice the craft of puppetry do not operate/reflect/disseminate proposals on the issue of audiences.

Someone could say that “forgetting” what is linked to puppets/objects when reflecting on audience strategies is not very significant, but I believe it has concrete consequences, namely: the percentage of children who have attended a puppet play—for example, in school performances—implies a very high number, however, when audience studies track first performances, those puppet performances in schools are not registered and, therefore, do not operate as a beginning in the habit of being an audience member of the performing arts. That is to say, this incipient lineage is not concretely exploited. In addition, there seems to be a distance from puppetry for adults, almost as if the superficial recognition of the existence of puppetry for children would block the relationship with puppetry for adults<sup>2</sup>. Why do I say this? Because the association of puppetry to childhood and even, sometimes, an infantilized view of puppetry, inhibits the possibility for adult and autonomous audiences to choose the language of puppetry for a stage experience. It presupposes that if it is “puppetry”, it is not intended for adult audiences. Sometimes, even when it has been made clear many times that a play is not recommended for children, and adults ignore this suggestion, resulting in the little ones being confronted with something that in no way is intended for them.

Undoubtedly, when it comes to schools, puppets have a captive audience. At least in terms of presence. It is true that we do not have to go out to look for them, but we do have to go out to conquer those real spectators.

Before entering the specific universe of puppetry, and since the question of interest was the “role and point of view of the spectator” from my position as a semiologist, I must outline a series of questions: to work on the audience’s point of view, the real one, that is the empirical subject who is in front

of a puppet show, it is necessary to carry out field work. The work of recognition requires interviews, interaction with the spectators, the rest is speculation. The same happens in relation to its specific “role” and in a specific function.

However, there are, of course, analytical tools. Analogous to what Umberto Eco says about the *model reader*<sup>3</sup>, a model spectator can be proposed. In a text that has already been published for fourteen years:

*“Every play builds a spectator. A spectator who is implicit in the play, who is not the “flesh and blood” spectator who attends the theater but a presupposed one. And so, [...] by observing the staging one can see what are the characteristics of the spectator that is postulated there [...] It could be said that generating a staging means applying a strategy that includes the forecasts of the movement of the other; it could be said that there are stagings that appeal to the competences of the model spectator, and others that construct them. That is to say, there are stagings that “wait” for their model spectator and others that promote their existence through the most diverse resources.”<sup>A</sup>*

To give a very simple example, a play spoken in Spanish appeals to a Spanish-speaking spectator; if reference is made to the history of a country: July 9, 1816, which is the Independence Day of what is now Argentina, presupposes this knowledge. This is appealing to the competences of the model spectator. It may be that among the empirical spectators there are some who do not speak Spanish or do not know Argentine history, of course, but this is not “foreseen” by the staging. On the contrary, there are stagings that build competences: a puppet representing Zeus appears and somehow they explain that he is a Greek god. Among the real spectators there are those who know it and those who do not. The staging, however, does not presuppose that knowledge. The examples given here are very basic.

The percentage of puppetry proposals with a didactic imprint is wide, because if schools are possible sites for performances, the foresight of everything that can and cannot

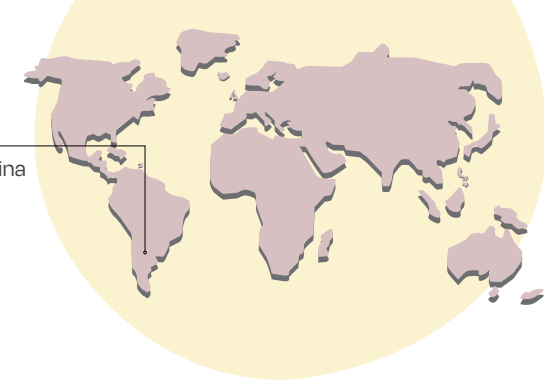
be said and done is fed by the perspective of the school institution’s gaze: Who will be the model spectator, the child or the school authorities? The question arises from the readings that analyze theater for children: “Under the premise of care and protection, is it really the control that operates with more strength and institutional support?” asks Cecilia Piccioni.<sup>B</sup>

The link between puppetry and childhood constantly borders on the questioning of what is possible and what is not, but it is the same language, the puppeteer who enables the blow, the violence, the bleeding without consequences, the supreme cruelty, celebrated, uninhibited, applauded, is it not a paradoxical place in which it is inscribed? The puppet is an object of control, of censorship, but at the same time, it is pure expressive material possibility, without limits. The head of a puppet can be dismantled in a square and in an auditorium. Rarely is it seen so effectively that it is not a question of language but of audience,<sup>4</sup> because language enables an endless number of possibilities that the making of a proposal inhibits in terms of the potential audience.

To end with this perspective that often restricts the possibilities of reading childhoods, let us quote Suzanne Lebeau: “Wouldn’t giving the spectator the right to resolve the situation and to elaborate a conclusion himself be giving him back his sovereignty?”<sup>C</sup> The interrogations about the ways in which language is enabled with infinite possibilities in the face of what is finally narrated, thematized, constructed in a perceptibly bounded way is something to, at least, reflect upon.

However, not everything is school and its varieties. *La Compañía al pie de la cama* (Company at the foot of the bed)<sup>5</sup> is a group that performs with puppets in hospitals. Their work takes place at the Prof. Dr. Juan P. Garrahan Hospital, a pediatric health center of excellence, and high complexity, public and free, located in the southern area of the city of Buenos Aires, founded in 1987. When the puppet company arrives, the first thing they do is ask the boys and girls if they want to see the puppet show. Since they are in a place where they could easily become a “captive

Argentina







© Compartir al pie de la cama

audience" and because of the characteristics of their hospital stay they have little chance to decide, asking them if they want to see the play or not is extremely important because it is an opportunity for them to choose. The *Compañía al pie de la cama* carries on its shoulders its works and an enormous resistance to frustration in order to be able to do its work, or is it easy to be told no? (I only mention this because the focus is the subject of the audience, not to mention that is involved in working with children in a hospital).

The name of the company, "al pie de la cama" (at the foot of the bed), thematizes both its objective and its function. It also inscribes other significant issues: what it means to attend as a spectator from the bed, how it works from the point of view of expectation, from the aesthetic construction of the proposal. It has to be deployed in a limited space, it is a work that seems to be enclosed in a room of a public institutional space—such as a children's hospital—in which the work is singular both for the type of performance in that space and for the construction of the space for the audience.

At the foot of the bed, because of the scale, only puppets are allowed to enter. Without this dimension—the reference being to size—it would be impossible to access individual patients who, due to their condition and circumstances, are recipients of a sentiment in the form of a puppet.<sup>6</sup>

To close, I would like to present another experience unrelated to children. I will take up, again, a work I carried out in a state of the art book on audiences, called *Pierre Project, Creating the Habit of Going to the Theater*. In the case in question, the objectives were political-partisan: the anarchist puppeteers

whose history was reconstructed by the great researcher, Carlos Fos.

Fos did not focus on audiences, but I am interested in pointing out something: on many occasions artists do not focus/think about the audience, nor do people who investigate different scenic phenomena, however, from their description the category of audience sneaks in without them registering it as such. It is quite common when they take the voice of certain protagonists and replicate it, there the audience appears.

Since the beginning of theatrical times, the audience has been taken as an object to be convinced of something. This quest for convincing includes everything from "teaching them to respect God (whatever form he may have)" to stressing the importance of "using a toothbrush". The audience is thought of as a "subject to be convinced". The puppets know this function well.<sup>7</sup>

I return to Carlos Fos who dealt, among other issues, with workers' theater, and in that context analyzed the case of anarchist puppeteers in Argentina. He resorted to interviews to give a voice to those who had been marginalized from official histories (and we could almost say twice: as anarchists and as puppeteers). Carlos Fos' research

describes the work they did, the dramaturgy, their paths. From these "anecdotes" it is possible to read how the interviewees conceived their audience, although neither they nor Fos mentioned it directly, from the ways they perform. They used to surprise walkers in the squares, in front of factories, on the side of the road or at the railroad station; that is to say, they approached the public, they went to look for them, and of course, they did not appear in the places intended for theatrical events. The fact that they were puppeteers obviously facilitated this flexibility with respect to locations.

Regarding the dramaturgy, Fos gathers testimonies from the anarchist-puppeteers, in which they affirm that they resorted to known texts, to texts from history, and that the writing was of the highest urgency. This is logical, if urgency takes precedence there is no possibility for constructing the argument, then one has to start from what is already known, so that one can be effectively convincing. As the audience of these puppeteers had no practice as spectators and did not know the theatrical conventions (this is confirmed both by themselves and by Fos), they worked with reiterations in the dramaturgy, with known themes.

From fragments of interviews, from the perception of the work of the puppeteers, plus the comments of Carlos Fos, I can arrive at a series of characteristics of their production: the didacticism, the adaptation to the environment in each performance, the presentation of schematic pieces, the creative nomadism and the urgency of the dramaturgy without previous outlines. In each and every one of these characteristics there is an awareness of the audience they were addressing.

If one reflects on the propagandistic force that the theater had according to the creation of the puppeteers, that is to say, with that objective of the theater: to be political propaganda, the consequence is the recognition of the public. If the public is unknown, there is no way to reach it. Now, this is not a simple expression of desire, they had

strategies to carry out their objective. In the interviews, resources such as the following can be found: making characters appear or replace them by including names from the places where they performed, incorporating agenda items of the place where they arrived (they settled down and recognized what was happening in the area and added it to the script), they resorted to improvisation according to the audience they had in front of them. Fos notes that he saw some scripts crossed out over and over again, with additions and modifications. In the interviews, it can also be gleaned that the audience ranged from working stiff to children. Mentions of their reactions, their faces, their comments, by way of anecdote, allow this conclusion. It is evident that the dramaturgy was adapted to the place they went to instead of being imposed. I do not want to fail to mention that they made puppet shows and that the direct and privileged addressees were adults and fundamentally, that they

made a contribution regarding the "study" of audiences that they did not systematize, but that they put into practice; that they did not theorize, but that clearly indicates that they knew how to try to access their audience. This "research" of practice was paradigmatic. Although the purpose of these proposals is linked to persuasion, their contributions far exceeded that objective since their search for knowledge of the territory and its empirical spectators (not potential, not hypothetical,

but the real ones who had listened to them) leave us with a series of useful and pertinent resources.

To close this article, it can be said that the number of cases mentioned is very small but its objective is to warn about the need to focus on this axis. Puppet audiences are varied and numerous and should be taken into account in discussions on audience management because they have a lot to contribute.

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#### References

**1** In our country there are some institutions such as the INT (National Theater Institute) that usually provide financial support for the production of plays. In the evaluation to grant or not these contributions, items related to strategies for audience management are included.

**2** In Argentina, a concrete exception to this is what happens in the festival of San Martín de los Andes. Review the state of the art of Proyecto Pierre, creating the habit of going to the theater mentioned in the bibliography.

**3** Umberto Eco in *Lector in fabula* states that a text is a chain of expressive artifices in whose surface there are blank spaces or interstices that demand or need a model reader so that, through his activity and cooperative movements, they can be completed. The model reader is a theoretical construct, it is the reader presupposed by that text.

**4** There are countless examples of what could be done with puppets/objects without ethical consequences (in fact, the puppets are burned), which is allowed by the puppetry language. Why are some things not done? Because they foresee a potential audience of children that they do not want to make uncomfortable, or because they do not want to make the adults responsible for those children uncomfortable?

**5** Technical sheet. Acting and manipulation: Leonardo Volpedo, Javier Swedzky, Laura Cardoso and Florencia Sartelli (in Argentina), Sophie Matel and Charlotte Pruneau (in France). Texts: Javier Swedzky and Kossi Efoui. Direction: Nicolás Saelens and Javier Swedzky. Booth design and technical equipment: Hervé Recorbet. Booth construction: Roberto Garita Oñandía. Construction of puppets and sets: Alejandra Farley, Juan Benbassat, Alfredo Iriarte, Silvina Vega, Silvia Lenardón, Guillermo Martínez, Leonardo Volpedo, Javier Swedzky and Laura Cardoso. Music: Karine Dumont

**6** I worked with this company as a function of the corpus of my research. In Argentina there was another puppet company that worked in hospitals, Los titiribióticos. I do not know if there are other puppet works in my country, but just as there are many hospital clown companies, it would not be strange if there were others.

**7** In Argentina, puppets are usually the favorite objects for any kind of persuasion: ecology nowadays, the importance of washing hands, care in the context of road safety education. In kindergartens, teachers use puppets as a resource for everything imaginable. And what have you.

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# ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK

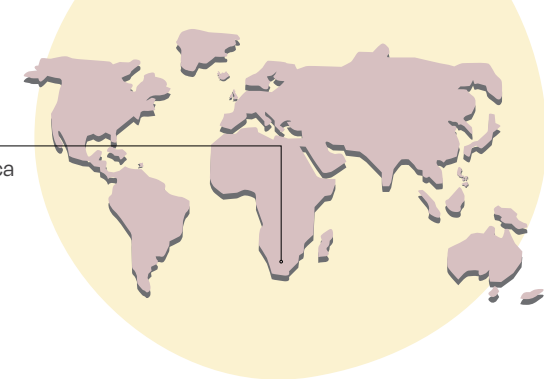
## ARTISTIC PRACTISE AS REVELATION OF THE INFINITE WITHIN THE FINITE

By Mongiwekhaya

Writer and artistic director of the Victoria Falls Theatre Company

*Faustus in Africa*, Handspring Puppet Company, Capetown Baxter Theater 2025 - Eben Genis (actor).

South Africa



### PART I: WOMAN WITH A BROKEN HEART, GROWS HER GARDEN

*"... grace arrives after knowledge has gone through the world of the infinite... in that structure that has no consciousness at all—or has infinite consciousness—that is, in the mechanical puppet, or in the God."*

— H. von Kleist (German Playwright, Poet, Novelist) 1810

Something happens to consciousness when it enters the unknown.

It starts with a Woman picking up her Boyfriend at O.R. Tambo Airport. She surprises him by being at the gates, holding a sign with his name on it.

She helps carry his bags onto the Gautrain, and as it tunnels through the city's entrails on softly screaming metal rails, she speaks of what Johannesburg feels like when he is not around. Exhausted by her, the Boyfriend tells her he is not coming home with her.

Shocked, she asks why and is given the facebook public announcement that this relationship isn't working:

"We are not compatible," he whispers, "We never were honey."

He reveals that her choice to leave Capetown and live with him in Johannesburg, to help him take care of his sick mother, to know his family and friends intimately and maintain hers distantly all so she could be with him, the silver lining on every hard pill she's had to swallow. He reveals that those choices were done with someone she apparently was incompatible with.

He gets off the train, and she never sees him again.

No one notices her riding the Gautrain for 12 days, watching people go home to their loved ones, all unable to see her growing roots that sink into the chair, unable to escape that moment.

Until the 13<sup>th</sup> day. A Child, angered because his Mother has said she will make beetroot for dinner, notices the flowers overflowing out of the Woman's rib cage. The Child points to the pretty flowers.

Mother notices the flowers are covered in blood. Mother notices the vines creeping out of the Woman's waterfall eyes and ears, wrapping themselves on the poles, growing along the floor, occupying other people's seats. Mother whispers to the child, with a look of disgust on her face:

"A woman should not grow her garden in public like that."

The woman, over hearing this, laughs and asks them:

"Do you know what betrayal tastes like?"

"Yes," the Child says, "It tastes like beetroot for dinner."

Perhaps you laughed just then. Perhaps you paused and found yourself in a state of revelation. This story of a woman growing her garden in public suddenly feels personal in a way you cannot explain. This story that makes no sense, somehow implies a connection to a state of being you have experienced. But you cannot easily explain why. This is what I, as a professional puppeteer, have sought in the practise of puppetry.

Puppetry has many secondary definitions: the keeper of traditions, the challenge to power, a child's plaything, and so much more. I will not be speaking on these aspects as they have been explored by others, rather I want to get at the heart of it all.

Puppetry is manipulation, an alchemical attempt to bring the immaterial to life. It

is the inanimate object through which a person willingly transfers their vital heat, the promethean fire of creation, and identity. The puppeteer dies moment by moment so the puppet can live, breathe and move, embodying the disembodied.

In return for this gift of life, the puppet offers us shamanic power: the ability to see what came before, what might come after, where I go when I dream, who I am when my heart is broken. We sacrifice our idealized self to find something whose existence cannot be known in advance. It must be experienced through a willing and active sacrifice counted in moments.

By doing so we reveal a way of exploring the pluralism of the unspeakable, rediscovering the deep realities of what is worthwhile, what is valuable, truthful, even beautiful. All this is done through the production of images in simplicity. Not an image of a simple world, but a simple image of a world of surpassing riches—like grief as a garden growing out of our ribcage. The pluralism of our experience, contained in the shape of a garden.

I have spent my career working in devising—that is starting with a question, some base materials and the willingness to dig deep. In that moment, when you are deeply concentrating on the puppet, on the pattern of movement, when your breath and the unknown come together, and the puppet says something terribly, wonderfully, beautiful... Do you ever ask yourself: who, or what, is this that is speaking?



*Faustus in Africa*, Handspring Puppet Company, Capetown Baxter Theater 2025.



## PART II: THE ETERNAL AND THE BECOMING

*"Everything must have a beginning... and that beginning must be linked to something that went before... Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself."*

– M. Shelley, Preface to Frankenstein

You may have noticed the dangerous dance this article is attempting: to be relevant in an academic space yet invoke emotional responses, revealing the shamanic power in action. Philosophy has always concerned itself with the act of thinking, half the human. Yet art is always concerned with feeling. "Sing, don't scream", declared the novelist D.H. Lawrence, showing us the scale between violence and art, a scale operated by a sensitivity to the immaterial.

All that is immaterial exists within, and the journey into the soul is not always about healing, but it is always about discovery. Your ancestral history resides within, alongside our memories, sacred first experiences, unfulfilled dreams, all our secrets. Carl Jung called it our spiritual heritage, this unconscious darkness within each of us, that holds the vastness of all human possibility. We are finite bodies, yet the greatest thinkers of history affirm the infinite exists within all of us.

To access this depth, an artist must push beyond the answers that come from society, giving up our sense of security to find dangerous questions.

This is not unusual. All humans regularly enter the dark, since society is only open between the hours of sunrise and sunset, and the night,

like the empty stage, produces a sense of vertigo as what is known dissolves into the chaotic. "Please leave your sense of self at the door," says the night, "and remember what you are."

Is art, not the daily practice of this state? We break away from our identity in an attempt to gain a new perspective of... something. An object always steps in to create that separation.

All objects are puppets because they are subject to manipulation. The extent of this manipulation varies; at a surface level objects fulfil everyday functions. However, the more personally significant an object is to someone, the deeper the manipulation becomes of dark, shapeless substance.

What is the object's role in this process? It is what philosopher Michel Foucault called, the flash of lightning in the night air; a spark of light which gives a dense and black intensity to the dark, lighting it up from within... yet it owes to the darkness its own visual presence.

The night and the spark are best known in the presence of each other. So too are the object and the human. The eternal and the becoming.

## PART III: MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM ET FASCINANS

*"What Paul says about Peter tells us more about Paul than about Peter."*

– Baruch Spinoza

We think we know why we think what we think. This is due to the value we place on the agreed upon answers of the society, which far outweighs the value of the dangerous personal question, the very best of them being unanswerable.

We began with a desire to understand why our heart is broken. Perhaps with the naïve belief that we can stand close to God and say, "I AM heartbroken" and pretend that that statement has captured the whole of our experience. But unlike God, who is eternal, we are finite and what we are in one moment is not who we are in the next. So, you take an object, say a smoking pipe, and fiddle with it in your hands for a while. But now wait a minute. Are you sure that's a pipe?

The Belgian mystic painter Magritte was once accused of revealing this truth through his treacherous artwork: this is not a pipe. The object is nothing, unless someone says it is something. So let us remove the word pipe from the object and all its rules of engagement. Now what is it? This is...

Do you feel the living question, the state of becoming located at the end of the sentence?

This is...

© Mongiwekhaya



That flash of inspiration your mind brought up, then instantly denied, because it is guarded by rules and expectations, by the externalised moral system you have chained yourself to in the hopes of being protected against suffering. That is the path to hidden parts of you, illuminated briefly by two words:

This is...

Two words that point us toward the unknown. A pipe is a pipe as long as someone says so, but if we, by deft hands and mindful heart, manipulate the object to produce individual actions that form a gesture, mimic breath; that seem to convey habitual personalities of the funny, the charming, the daring, the loving; patterns of behaviour that only the living can do, we will arrive to see the object stop and think. We see the emptiness think thoughts we did not know we had. The "I Am" of God is presented through the "This is" of the material.

To put it another way: What is movement, if not the shaping of stillness? What is sound,

if not the container of silence? What is the object, if not the revelation of the human soul? The object does not change, but in deep, repetitive engagement with it, we are revealed.

The Puppeteer enters a state of being and non-being to find out what it means to be human. It is hard, sometimes agonizing, to be a puppeteer. There is a heavy focus required of the mind, a physical strain of the body. One must ask: why suffer so much just to get that object to breathe?

There are 3 layers to master. The first is Technical. Breathing as the puppet, walking, talking, jumping, getting dressed, all these mundane details the director wants to see your puppet doing. Whether working alone or with a partner, to get those tasks right requires breaking down the actions into components and repeating them over and over, before finally combining them into one long sustained sequence.

The second layer is Mental. Like a living thing the puppet must exhibit wants and desires, have relationships, take action to cause change, and suffer the consequences. To do that, the puppeteer must transcend the mundane tasks they were asked to do and become the puppet. This is beyond the technical. This is being. One must enter a state of flow:

*"[T]he best moments in our lives [...] are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times—although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile"*

– Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience

It is a wonder to see a puppet think, breathe and feel. Yet still the... something eludes us.

Granted, the repetition and the questioning, we at first believe is about the puppeteer working on the puppet, but if one keeps pushing, they come to see the puppet working on the puppeteer. We enter into the third layer of the sacred dark substance, best described by Federico Garcia Lorca the Spanish poet and philosopher:

*Those dark sounds are the mystery, the roots that cling to the mire that we all know, that we all ignore, but from which comes the very substance of art. 'Black sounds' said the man of the Spanish people, agreeing with Goethe, who in speaking of the devil's violinist Paganini, hit on a definition of the black sounds: 'Duende. The mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained.'*

*"In all Arab music, dance, song or elegy, the arrival of black sounds is greeted with vigorous cries of 'Allah! Allah!' so close to the 'Olé!' of the bullfight, and who knows whether they are not the same? And in all art that contain the black is followed by sincere cries of joy, deep, human, tender cries of communication with God through the five senses, thanks to the black sounds that shake the voice and body of the performer; a real, poetic escape from this world, as pure as that achieved by the rarest poet of this age or any past."*

– Federico Garcia Lorca, Theory and Play Of The Duende

There we see it, through the suffering of the artist, through the manipulation of the object, when the sum of the parts manifest an unspeakable whole. A fearful fascinating mystery at the very heart of all people. From the dark we came, to the dark we do return. All we have created, all we fear, and all we desire come from that vast dark substance, the "I am" revealed by "This is". If you don't believe me, simply ask yourself one of these questions: What came before this? What comes after? Where do I go when I dream? Who am I when my heart is broken?

Mongiwekhaya is a writer and director hailing from South Africa. Currently, he serves as the Artistic Director of the Victoria Falls Theatre Company in Zimbabwe. With a passion for the performing arts, he travels the world as a professional actor and puppeteer, sharing his craft and creativity on international stages. In addition to his performances, Mongiwekhaya teaches acting online, inspiring the next generation of performers. You can connect with him on Instagram at @the\_afromystic.

Faustus in Africa,  
Handspring Puppet  
Company, Capetown  
Baxter Theater 2025 –  
Asanda Rilityana (actress).

*"A pipe is a pipe as long as someone says so, but if we, by deft hands and mindful heart, manipulate the object to produce individual actions that form a gesture, mimic breath; that seem to convey habitual personalities of the funny, the charming, the daring, the loving; patterns of behaviour that only the living can do, we will arrive to see the object stop and think."*

– Mongiwekhaya



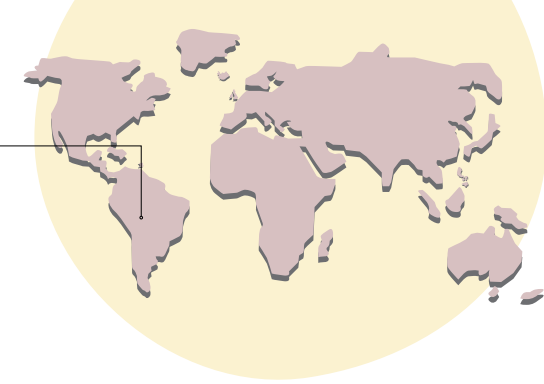
# ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A MAGAZINE CALLED

## “LA HOJA DEL TITIRITERO”

In the puppetry world the publication of magazines dedicated exclusively to puppets has been very scarce, even more so when they could only be published in print. The effort involved in their publication was and still is enormous: it was necessary to make the editorial idea concrete, to get articles, to design the magazine, to look for the economic means to print it and then to distribute it, all this demanded an immense work; nevertheless, there are brave people who still do it. The advent of the internet has made it possible to resume this work, now digitally, which greatly facilitates publication. Today we will tell a brief history of one such magazine: La Hoja del Titiritero (The independent puppeteer's sheet)

**La Hoja Titiritera**   
**n° 1 • May 2014**  
By Alejandro Jara  
Villaseñor

Latin America



### FIRST PERIOD (1977-1993)

It was 1977, and in the headquarters of the UMTAC, (Unión Mexicana de Titiriteros, A.C.)<sup>1</sup> several puppeteers, among them Roberto Lago Salcedo, took on the task of publishing a puppetry bulletin called DON FOLÍAS, which lasted for a few issues. Based on that experience and already independently, the master Lago decided to create in 1979 THE INDEPENDENT PUPPETEER'S SHEET, from the simplicity of his house in Saltillo Street #74-8 in Mexico City, accompanied by his daughter, Nena, and using a small manual typewriter.

Who would have imagined that on that table full of books, puppets, and illusions a tradition of puppetry communication would be born, a tradition that would remain present for 47 years during 4 different periods.

It was written on letter-sized sheets, folded in half most of the time, and had a content that ranged from 8 to 24 pages, with some exceptions. The master Lago was always aware of the weight of the document so as not to exceed a certain postal rate, he did not use an envelope and stuck the stamps on the back cover, writing by hand the name and address of the receivers. In this handmade way, the heroic publication that communicated the good news of puppetry everywhere was released to the world; evidently few copies were distributed, as only literary contributions sent by some colleagues inside and outside the country could be counted on.

For the cover of issue 12, celebrating the second official anniversary of the publication in 1981, a visionary Roberto Lago wrote: "...and we do not doubt that in the not too distant future [this sheet] will be or become the organ of greatest communication -communion- and the most listened to voice of the puppeteers of all the countries of our America...".

With the support from the beginning of master Gilberto Ramírez Alvarado, "Don Ferruco", and some occasional collaborators, master Lago, with exemplary discipline, edited and distributed until shortly before his death about 50 issues, which we hope will soon be digitized.

### SECOND PERIOD (2004-2015)

It took eleven years and some failed initiatives<sup>3</sup> to start a second stage of the publication. It was the Commission for Latin America of UNIMA, with Ana María Allendes (Chile) and Susanita Freire (Uruguay-Brazil) at the head, who would take over the puppetry adventure, and would constantly digitally publish The Puppeteer's Sheet without the word INDEPENDENT. They had the support of Fabrice

Guilliot (France) as editor, and the experience was joined by collaborators who allowed the magazine, first called "Bulletin", to be created. The 25 pages of the second issue grew to 137 pages in one of its last editions. This stage of the magazine lasted 12 years, from September 2004 to May 2015, until the Commission finished its cycle, which brings us to Susanita Friere and Ana María Allendes, and their enormous contribution to the Latin American puppetry movement.

In this second stage, 32 issues were published.<sup>4</sup> Ana María Allendes coordinated issues 1 to 12, and Susanita Freire coordinated issues 13 to 32, almost all the articles are published in Spanish and a select few in Portuguese.

Its motto from the very first issue was:

"If we sow, we reap.

If we walk together, we make the path as we go".

and well they did...

### THIRD PERIOD (2017-2020)

A year and a half later, with the creation of the UNIMA Three Americas Commission, the third stage of THE PUPPETEER'S SHEET began, now under the coordination of Manuel A. Morán (Puerto Rico-United States) and Rubén Darío Salazar (Cuba), with a new design and editorial concept.

They would publish 12 virtual issues, from January 2017 to December 2020, with different sections that would include a "selection of news and historical texts, critical and theoretical texts about events relating to the art of puppetry in our continent"<sup>5</sup>, as well as a section with articles about puppet theatre in a selected country of the continent; the list was long: Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Mexico, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Cuba, Argentina and the United States of America - bilingual edition. The magazine ranged in length from 27 to 56 pages, was edited throughout by Abdel de la Campa Escaig, and each issue had guest editors and writers.<sup>6</sup>

Our comrades and their work team carried out a truly commendable work that will also remain in the history of the Puppet Theatre of the American continent. We are left with a phrase that Rubén Darío expressed from its first issue: "Every struggle that is lost is the one that is abandoned..."<sup>5</sup> and The Puppeteer's Sheet was not abandoned.



#### FOURTH PERIOD (2024- )

Three years have passed, and today with this issue, the new Editorial Committee takes up the struggle and the baton of this new stage of the publication. There is so much to do, so much to investigate, so much to disseminate...

We wish the publication every success, and invite you, dear readers, to read it, comment on it, criticize it, and distribute it, in order to continue sharing the life together of this distinguished magazine, which began 47 years ago and is perhaps one of the oldest of its kind in the world of puppetry today.

Congratulations!

Tepeyácac, Mexico, January-February 2024

The Puppeteer's Sheet, issue cover 28.  
2<sup>nd</sup> period.

Retrieved from <http://www.hojacal.info/>

Susanita Freire kept the Facebook page  
La hoja del titiritero independiente  
active until her death.



#### References

- 1 The UNIMA-Mexico, was founded in Querétaro in 1981.
- 2 Photograph by Martín Molina Castillo (Peru), to whom we are grateful for his contribution.
- 3 Such as the one carried out by Guillermo Murray Prisant in Mexico.
- 4 <http://www.hojacal.info/hojalink.htm>
- 5 [https://www.unima.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/la\\_hoja\\_del\\_titiritero\\_01.pdf](https://www.unima.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/la_hoja_del_titiritero_01.pdf)
- 6 <https://www.unima.org/en/commission/three-americas/la-hoja-titiritera/>

Alejandro Jara Villaseñor founded the international puppet festivals of Tlaxcala (Mexico) and Aragua (Venezuela); he laid the foundations of the National Puppet Museum of Huamantla (Mexico). Puppeteer in 18 countries with his group Tiripitipis, founding member of UNIMA-Mexico and UNIMA-Venezuela. Researcher of the millenary puppets of America and of Titeroterapia, he has written for the four periods of The Independent Puppeteer's Sheet.



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# THOLPAAVAI KOOOTHU: TRADITIONAL SHADOW PUPPETRY IN TAMIL NADU ACROSS SEVENTEEN GENERATIONS

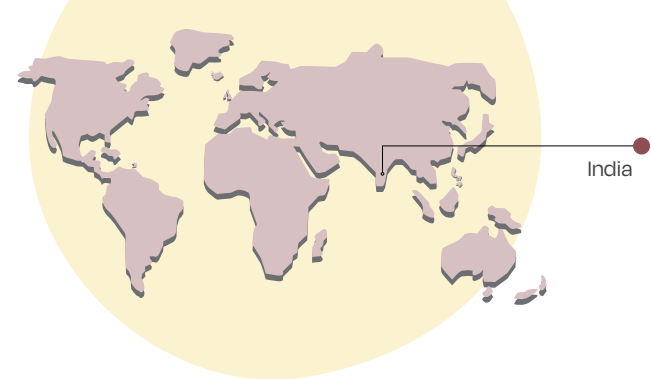
 Puthalika Patrika • May 2023

By Padmini Rangarajan Sterparo



Puppet on the left: Hanumar  
from the Ramayana  
Puppet on the right: Lakshman  
(depicting shooting of 4 arrows).





## LANGUAGES

Shadow puppetry, also known as *Tholpaavai Koothu* in Tamil Nadu, is a traditional art form that originated in the state during King Seforiji the second's reign. Shadow puppetry is first mentioned in the famous South Indian philosophy and belief system, written by the saint poet Manikavachagar during 8th–9th C.E. The poet compares his slothful life to a leather puppet with little meaning (Tiruvacagam, Anandamalai hymn 3). Kalaimamani Shri Muthu Chandran from Thirumalaipuram Village, Kanyakumari-Nagercoil, was informed about *Tholpaavai Koothu* in Tamil Nadu by his grandfather. Shadow puppeteers from the 'Mandikkar' caste have been practicing the art form for 17 generations. Following the rulers' deaths, they relocated to different parts of the province.

Prof A K Perumal, a scholar on the Shadow Puppeteers of South India, explains that the art form began as a court or king's art under the Maratha monarchs and flourished under their patronage. The *Mandikar*, a sub-division of the *Kannikar* caste, moved to the southern part of Tamil Nadu due to the popularity of folk performing forms like *Therukoothu* (street play) and *Bharathanatyam* (classical dance form of Tamil Nadu) in the northern districts. Recent research has revealed that stories from the *Ramayana* (an ancient Sanskrit epic) were enacted with shadow puppets in southern districts visited by members of the *Konar*, *Naidu*, and *Naicker* castes. The art form has been passed down through various generations, including Muthu Chandran, who has led a nomadic existence for the past nineteen years.

The traditional puppetry performance has undergone significant changes over time, including the use of petromax lights, halogen lights, and permanent settlement. Muthu Chandran uses various light sources, including castor oil lamps and LED lights, to create his performances.

In the past, the art form was performed using oil lamps, which were placed over the performer's head to keep it lit throughout the night. Today, the art form continues to thrive in various districts of Tamil Nadu.

In Tamil Nadu, the age-old practice of shadow puppetry involves the utilisation of animal skins, specifically from deer, goats, and sheep, as the fundamental material for crafting puppets. Nevertheless, contemporary puppeteers utilize leather sheets manufactured in factories, supplied by governmental sources. The skin undergoes a drying process under the sun for a duration of 2–3 days, subsequently being wrapped in straw and positioned within a mud pot. The hide undergoes a thorough cleansing in flowing water and is dried under the sun until it achieves a texture akin to parchment.

The figures engaged in conflict or dispute are crafted from goat hide, whereas Rama, Sita, and other more delicate characters are fashioned from sheep hide. The shadow puppet screen we observe in contemporary times was not present during the era of their forebears. The hues applied to shadow puppets are derived from *Olai Sayam* palm leaf paints, which are similarly utilised in the creation of traditional carpets known as *Pai*, often referred to as rugs or carpets.

The primary hues employed in folk art performances include black, white, red, yellow, and green (PanchaVarnam), complemented by additional shades such as orange and violet blue. At this juncture, chemical pigments acquired from nearby establishments are employed for the purpose of colouration, with black designated for delineating outlines and features.

The size of Tamil Nadu shadow puppets varies from 9x8 inches to 32 x 20 inches, with clown puppets being the largest. The main characters of *Ramayana* episodes are bigger in size, while demons and dancers are medium-sized puppets.

Historically, the musical instruments employed in *Tholpaavai Koothu* performances were derived from natural materials, including a bronze plate combined with wax and a stem from the night lily. Currently, the Harmonium, Mridangam, and Kinchara are in use. The *Kamba Ramayanam*, composed in Tamil, underpins the *Tholpaavakoothu* tradition observed in Kerala. In Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, shadow puppeteers adhere to scripts composed in Kannada and Telugu, but the Tamil Nadu shadow puppeteers, however, don't follow a script.

©Muthu Chandran



The performance is based on the oral text of *Sri Ranganatha Ramayana*, which is exclusively presented using shadow puppetry. The performance includes over one hundred songs and includes the story of Dasakanta Ravana, an adaptation from Telugu. Other performances include *Ashwamedha Yagam*, *Satya Harishchandra*—connected to the Ramayana, and other two from popular Tamil folk stories 'Nalla Tanga', and 'Gyana Sundari'.

*Tholpaavai Koothu* is a one-man performance by Muthu Chandran, his family supports him backstage with puppets and props. The main performer is considered the principal performer, capable of mimicking 14–15 different voices. The humour of Tamil Nadu's shadow performances sets them apart from other performances, as they cover people of all ages, particularly children. To lift the spirits of the audience, make-believe comic characters Uchi Kudumban and Uzhva Thalayan are introduced, and comedic situations are staged.

The origins of these characters in shadow puppetry are unknown, but researchers believe they likely originated from the Chola Kingdom. *Tholpaavai Koothu*, a traditional leather puppet performance, is performed by the Are-Marathi speaking Mandikar community in Tamil Nadu. Professor A.K. Perumal argues that the Marathas did not invent the art form, but it existed before they took over. He found that older artists claimed they were Tamil speakers or Tamilians. Stuart Black Burn's book 'Inside Drama House' supports this, identifying the Pulavars as Tamilian from the Chola kingdom. Muthu Chandran, a shadow puppeteer, shares his experiences with Prof. A.K. Perumal, who helps him develop the storyboard and script. He also shares his experiences with his younger brother, who is skilled in creating images for shadow puppets and playing the Mridamgam (percussion instrument).

Muthu Chandran observes that the present circumstances of the Tamil Nadu Shadow Puppeteers are lamentable, as numerous individuals are compelled to seek alternative employment to sustain their livelihoods. He posits that a significant number of troupes or families may have relinquished the art form in pursuit of financial stability. He observes that the puppets require considerable upkeep and that there is a lack of engagement among the populace regarding the preservation of this art form. All things considered, Muthu Chandran is committed to preserving the art form and teaching his children to carry on the tradition.

Muthuchandran has received various awards, including the *Kalaimamani* Award from the Hon'ble Chief Minister in 2018, the 'Acme Book of Awards -Ulaga Sadana' award from Loyola Groups Chennai, the "*Mannu Maravum*" award from the Governor of Telangana State and Puducherry, the "*Kalai Elaikiya*" award from the Hon'ble Member of Parliament, and the "*Maravu Kavalar*" award from legendary cine comedian Thiru Senthil.

## LANGUAGES

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Kalaimamani MuthuChandran performing-Visuals backstage.

### MUTHU CHANDRAN'S FAMILY TREE

Muthuchandran is the seventh generation to continue with this art form. Tracing the family history from Krishna Rao → Son Sami Rao → Son Krishna Rao → Son Gopal Rao → He had Five Sons- 1<sup>st</sup> son was Subba Rao -1900-2005 (He lived for 105 years) 2<sup>nd</sup> Son Ganapathi Rao- 3<sup>rd</sup> Son Ramchandran Rao , 4<sup>th</sup> Son Paramashiva Rao and 5<sup>th</sup> Son Kannan Rao.

Subba Rao's Son → Son Bal Krishna Rao (1920-1995), He has Three Sons-(not much is known about the third son) → Son Muthu Chandran (1975- ) and Muthu Murugan-his family continuing with art form.

Muthu Chandran has Four Sons → 1<sup>st</sup> son Muthu Balan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Son is Muthu Avinash –(a child living with a disability, 3<sup>rd</sup> Son is Muthu Magesh and 4<sup>th</sup> is Muthu Murthy.

His Younger brother Muthu Murugan has three children → 1<sup>st</sup> daughter Muthu Shanthi, 2<sup>nd</sup> Son-Muthu Kannan, and 3<sup>rd</sup> daughter Muthu Parvathi.



# THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF PUPPETRY



**Nukketeatteri-lehti • n° 40 • 2024**

Mervyn Millar

Interviewed by Erzsébet Tamás

As technology continues to advance, puppetry is no longer confined to traditional forms and materials. The use of animatronics, robotics, digital projections etc. has opened up new possibilities for puppeteers to create immersive and interactive performances. This shift has sparked debates about the authenticity and essence of puppetry in modern theatre, as well as the impact of technology on the art form's cultural significance.

*Circus 1903. Significant Object. Puppets were designed by Mervyn Millar and Tracy Waller, built by Significant Object.*

Mervyn Millar, a member of the original creative team for *War Horse* at the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, has an impressive portfolio of creative endeavours, including designing Newman, the robot for Sir Paul McCartney's single "Appreciate," and working on the ongoing production of *My Neighbour Totoro* at the Barbican. Additionally, he is actively engaged with the Puppet Centre, a London-based charity dedicated to the advancement of puppetry and object animation. Mervyn was chosen for the interview based on his active involvement in shaping our modern puppetry art. His work also underscores the important role that the audience plays in a performance, a concept that is truly captivating and integral to shaping his art. The audience's imagination and active engagement are crucial for a meaningful and impactful show.

I am convinced that delving into his artistic approach could offer us a deeper understanding of the art form's trajectory and current standing, advantages and challenges.

**Erzsébet Tamás: Theatre creators are increasingly embracing digital technology in their productions, possibly in response to the growing engagement with the digital world. I'm curious about your thoughts on puppetry's current state. Where do you think puppetry stands now?**

**Mervyn Millar:** I am excited about the advances in technology that are providing us with new tools. So, you find it won't be visible to the audience necessarily, but in the workshops, people are 3D printing mechanisms that mean people are able to draw up more precise little joints and things and that is great.

It's not a profound change actually, it's the normal kind of flow of technology moving forward. I'm quite old fashioned in my making, you know. I still draw on paper usually, but I do love new materials that we can work with.

However, I believe the digital aspect of it represents a significant change, doesn't it? I am particularly intrigued by virtual reality and augmented reality technologies. It is fascinating, everything within these digital realms is puppetry, and each avatar and animated character utilises techniques familiar to puppeteers.

The art of capturing movement and shaping figures has been mastered by puppeteers for centuries. Digital animators are now delving into this realm. When we talk about these processes, one common problem is the issue of liveness. Things in the digital world can feel pre-recorded or programmed. The ultimate goal is to infuse more life and authenticity into these creations.

But I also love the idea that there are lots of people doing puppetry in their own way - we shouldn't be gatekeepers of it.

**ET: When it comes to the manipulation, do you feel that, for example, the robot could play a bigger part in the future of puppetry?**

**MM:** The idea of robots is interesting, and I think AI is a bigger challenge that I haven't really given much thought to, but can an AI do puppetry? It's quite a good question. Yeah. Because, what's disappointing about robots is that fundamentally, you know that it always goes back to some kind of programming structure. There's some logical sequence of things.

So a simple robot like a door that opens on its own, if I stand on this, then the door will open. If I take my foot off, this door will close, and that's a robot. You know, then you add in more factors and you end up with a thing that looks like a person, but it still is really limited, the logic of it, the brain of it is not rewarding to interact with. So the liveness is... the liveness is weak and the connection with the audience member is weak.

**ET: Maybe integrating human expertise with robotics, rather than depending solely on mechanical control, could result in substantial progress in the field of puppetry.**

**MM:** Well, and I also think, like, we sort of implied about the virtual reality programmers, that the robot programmers could learn a lot from the puppeteers.

**ET: What is your opinion on the effectiveness of verbal versus nonverbal communication? Have you observed any distinctions between the two in your personal encounters? Perhaps utilizing nonverbal cues to establish mutual understanding could enhance outcomes?**

**MM:** I think, yes, because puppetry has historically had small audiences, it's always wanted to have international audiences and not being language based is a great way to be able to tour internationally. And there's an important thing, which is that the puppets foreground nonverbal communication in their performance style. It doesn't rely on the words; a good puppet, good puppetry, uses a lot of physical, non-verbal language.

I think there's a big difference between a show that has no language or a show in which no one speaks. I don't know if that makes sense to you. A character who doesn't use words but could use words feels more alive to me than a show that is completely wrapped in music where the possibility of speech is gone.



The breath is a crucial aspect of performance, as it directly impacts the expression of speech. When a performer is unable to speak, it can hinder their ability to breathe and consequently diminish the vitality of the puppet.

I love my puppets to be able to talk or to roar or to scream or to make noises. So, you can feel that they're alive, but they're not relying on a verbal language to communicate.

**ET: I recall reading your book on puppet manipulation. I recollect that it includes an exercise where puppeteers are encouraged to make noises. This exercise is quite beneficial as it helps individuals to separate the two elements.**

**MM:** Intellectually, they make a separation between the verbal and the physical. One of the problems with actors improvising is that they use their mouths a lot and they don't use their bodies enough, and one of the problems with puppeteers improvising is that they use their puppet body all the time, but their puppet rarely speaks, because it's difficult to do both things at the same time, because we separate them in our head. Actually, the puppet is much more alive when it can vocalize a little bit, and it's easier, probably, a good way in, I think, is mumbling or nonsense language or just making noise. And those shows I love, you know, when you see those internationally a lot, where they have an invented language or a nonsense language, and we understand a lot from that.

**ET: That's the signs of life. I bring this up deliberately as you have been conducting research on the signs of life. Am I correct that it is still an ongoing project? Are you continuing to collaborate with experts such as neurologists, neuroscientists, and psychologists?**

**MM:** It was a sort of discrete project where I went and interviewed a group of scientists - and I suppose it's still open in my head because I never turned it into an artistic output, although I think it affects everything that I do. But it was a question about - we've been talking about it all along, that I'd noticed that some puppeteers spoke very casually about brain science, as if they knew what they were talking about, and I thought, I don't know what I'm talking about, about brain science.

Why don't we find out what the brain scientists think about whether it's possible for the human to fall in love with a puppet or to feel the same as an object. And the brain scientists don't know because they've got more important things to think about. Okay. Then asking them that specific question. But it is interesting to read it if you like this sort of thing.

It's interesting to read about mirror neurons, to read about the way that we understand that something else is alive, the way that we can be tricked into thinking other things are alive, that there is a part of the brain that reacts immediately when it perceives something might be alive. It might be wired, some sort of unconscious survivor

instinct to recognize that. The brain lacks direct access to the external world, it is relying solely on restricted input from the eyes, ears, and other senses. It's inventing a lot of stuff and it's doing loads of things at the same time, so it's not a linear process. It appears that numerous processes are occurring simultaneously, and the brain is essentially making educated guesses, while your consciousness is not actively making decisions about what is happening.

It's a kind of constantly-refreshing estimate of where things are, of where you are, of who you are, of why things might be happening, what's alive and what's not alive. And so that's I find that very liberating in that, how flawed we all are and how creative we all are every second. And obviously, I like the things that feed into my theory, so I'm delighted that it helps me believe that the audience are easy, you know, they're just really experts at inventing worlds because they do it all day. All of us do it. From the moment we wake up and we have to decide whether we're the same person as we were.

Mervyn Millar's perspective on puppetry is admirable, highlighting the dedication and passion that puppeteers have for their craft. Mervyn believes that the attention to detail and care that we pour into our work truly enhances the enchanting nature of our performances. In a formal context, the term "care" may be deemed more suitable than "love," yet the sentiment remains the same. Demonstrating care in our work allows the true essence of the puppet to shine through and with his words: "This is when the puppet really, really, really kind of blossoms."

A mesmerizing moment from *Flying*, a production by Significant Object, where the boundaries between puppetry, movement, and visual poetry dissolve. The performance explores the essence of flight, gravity, and transformation through stunning visual storytelling. The Hatchling A groundbreaking outdoor event. Plymouth in 2021.



© Official Significant Object

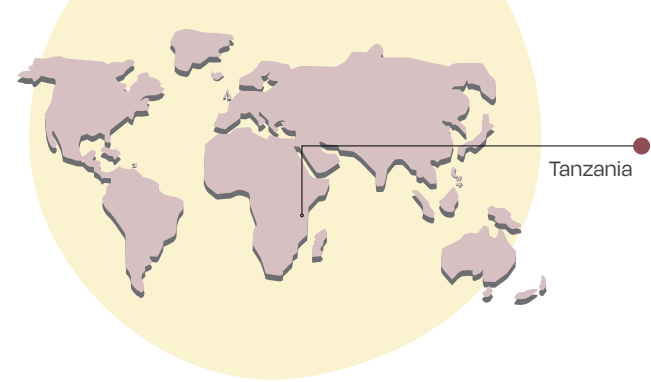
# THE DIGITAL AGE AND THE REBIRTH OF PUPPETRY ARTS IN TANZANIA

By Nkumi H. MTINGWA



A puppet on set on Katwe Corner season 2.





LANGUAGES

Puppetry in Tanzania currently has a good and promising future ahead as more artists, institutions and patrons emerge to support the art. Few years back it was considered as a forgotten art by many but its resurrection recently has brought awe and excitement to art lovers bringing back childhood memories, from shadow puppets, to cardboard manikins.

If we look back, the puppetry industry was not that well established, nor developed, as it was never regarded as a stand alone art, since it was mostly attached to cultural troupes and companies supporting performances.

After most cultural troupes phased out due to various reasons, including the government pulling out support in the cultural sector, puppetry disappeared on stage as well. A few performers took it to the streets with string puppets. They moved from one crowded area to another with their string puppets, offering performances for a small amount of money. They performed to a recorded song played through a speaker or radio cassette dancing to the music. By the mid 1990s these street performers also disappeared, one by one, as the years went by. Puppetry in Tanzania has never been well documented and archived, or considered as a proper art form, so it is a bit of a hustle to trace its history and pioneers.\*

There was a long pause in the industry of puppetry, which lasted for years, if not decades. It was so silent.

Later in the early 2010s during the digital revolution and technological advancement in media production, several new era pioneers started to emerge. The first digital puppet show on TV was *PikaBoom* in July 2012, produced

by Robert Mwampembwa. The show was a political satire and it used latex puppets sourced from Kenya. The show was a success and it aired on a mainstream television station for two seasons. After that, production halted and things went silent again.

Things started getting interesting again in 2016. It's this year that we could call a golden year for digital puppetry in Tanzania, since a handful of new puppeteers emerged. In February 2016 an NGO conducted a two week professional puppet training in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The training brought two professional puppeteers from the US down to Tanzania, namely Lisa Buckley and Ronald Binion, and they equipped the future puppeteers of Tanzania with the necessary skills to be professional puppeteers. The training focused on digital puppetry production using puppets made out of fabric. After the training, some of the puppeteers were selected to take part in the production of *Katwe Corner* puppet skit segments, which were part of the main television programme on youth and sexual education, called *Chicken and Chips*, for broadcast in Uganda.

They went on to produce two seasons of the show in 2016 and 2017 respectively. The show ended in 2017 after two successful seasons. Two of the prominent puppeteers who attended the training decided to dive into the digital puppetry world by starting their own shows. Abdalah Mambia went out and started *Kilinge*, a TV show in which puppets went through and read daily hot trending newspaper headlines. The show managed to air for several months. The other puppeteer Nkumi Mtingwa went and started a socio-political satire called *Ubandani Puppets*. The show is still ongoing, for the last 7 years it has been presented through different social media platforms, with a strong presence on Youtube and Facebook.

The audience reception proved that puppets were still relevant and needed in our society. Both these shows utilised various digital tools to produce and market their work. The digital technology and tools opened up an opportunity from the production side. They used digital tools like dslr cameras, and smartphones, which are a bit cheaper than traditional tools, in order to produce their work, while at the same time using digital platforms like Youtube, vimeo, Instagram, and WhatsApp to publish and share their content.

LANGUAGES

As digital tech becomes cheaper every year, there is a huge window of opportunity for artists, especially in puppetry arts, when it comes to using digital tools or technology in Tanzania. In the near future, we expect to see new emerging and established puppeteers producing and publishing their works to reach greater audiences. In addition, there are a lot of opportunities and collaborations that can be made possible through the use of digital tools.

To prove that digital tools are very important in pushing and promoting puppetry arts, the UNIMA International training commission designed and ran several training programs across Africa in 2023 that were all based both online and offline. The training workshops involved several centers in countries across Africa taking part at the same time, while interacting with their trainees. These historic workshops were only made possible by the use of digital tools. Assignments and various tips were shared between the participants digitally. At the end of the program, participants managed to produce several puppet performance pieces, which were later submitted to a festival. This all happened digitally without involving a high budget or travel.

With this era of digital tools and technology the element of collaboration among puppeteers and their companies has been solidified. Now it's possible for puppeteers living in different locations or countries to work on a project together virtually.

In some countries, digital tools have managed to bring puppeteers and their work out of the theatre, and allowed them to earn a living by monetizing their production, selling their merchandise (puppets, tshirts, mugs, mascots etc), and skills. With UNIMA's vast size and centers in over 30 regions, could the opening of the UNIMA Tanzania center in late 2023 mean something to puppeteers in Tanzania? Can UNIMA Tanzania spearhead and promote use of digital tools among its members so that they can enjoy the opportunities it brings? Well let us give them time.

Reference

\* Research is one of the most important element of UNIMA Tanzania.



Puppet trainees performing in front of a camera.



Trainees exploring a two way dialogue with puppets.



# DIGITTRY: ROMANCING REALITIES



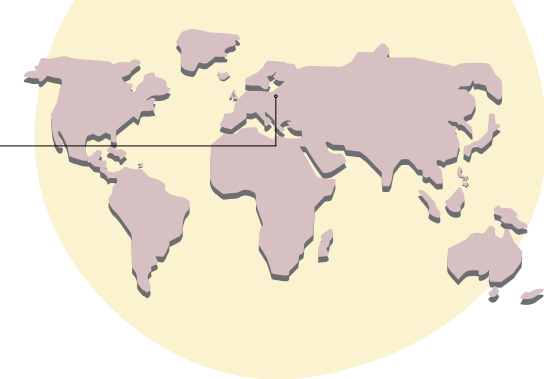
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By Aga Błaszczak

There is no doubt that we live in the digital era. Technology enters our daily lives at a dizzying pace. New structures and realities are born day by day. Puppetry is now starting to require a digital update in order to be able to keep up and to reflect humankind in the New Era.

Robotic Theater at Copernicus  
Science Centre in Warsaw.

Poland



What expressions that the “analog” puppet theatre could never offer, could possibly be brought by digital extensions? What will a robot with artificial intelligence express on stage that a live actor, wooden marionette, or rusty watering can cannot express?

As I begin my reflections on this topic I propose to introduce a new term to the theatre-performative nomenclature: digittry, created from a combination of digital and puppetry and referring to the multilevel fusion of the puppetry arts and digital media. The foundation of this concept is to create a bridge between the analogue and digital worlds in the context of performative arts. The phenomenon of digittry can occur with the joint participation of three elements: puppetry (e.g. as animation, concepts of motion, or mimetics), digital technology, and humans (artist, scientist, or spectator). These three realities are linked within the concept of digittry combined on many different levels – practical, metaphorical and metaphysical, thus forming an inseparable whole.

## PUPPET.(T)RY

The history and origin of puppet theater clearly indicates that from its very beginning puppetry was a heterogeneous and highly hybrid art form broadly influenced by other fields of art. More importantly, while taking a close look at the development of automaton theatre, we can clearly see how much room there is for science and technology alongside puppets. The second half of the 20th century brought radical changes and a total cultural fusion in both social life and art. This process did not bypass puppet theatre. We got rid of the traditional screen and a living person appeared alongside the puppet. A new context and a new language arose, and puppetry became an art containing every form and human, existing in the most various mutual configurations and relations. This state of things has not changed much, even though we have just entered the 2020s.

## DIGIT.AL(L)

Digital technology was born with the creation of the primitive abacus in ancient Mesopotamia, around 2,500 BC. The first calculating machines began to be used in the 15th and 16th centuries. In 1822 Charles

Babbage constructed a Difference Engine, and a year later Ada Lovelace formulated the very first idea of a computer program. It was not until the 1930s that a simple digital machine was created, capable of solving systems of equations. Elektro – the first simple humanoid robot that could walk – was introduced in the 1930s. Shortly after, the legendary science-fiction author Isaac Asimov used the word robotics for the very first time. A real breakthrough was the introduction of ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer, 1946), the first electronic computer weighing over 30 tons. In the 1960s, Intel patented their first microprocessors. In 1976, Steve Jobs founded Apple Inc. The end of the 1980s was a time of a rapid development of personal computers. In 1990, the Internet premiered in Poland, and a year later an SMS was sent for the first time. Google was launched in 1997, Facebook – in 2004, a year later – YouTube, and Instagram – in 2010.

Digital data processing and multimedia have initiated a revolution, which with time, like any other revolution, will replace existing beliefs and practices, make completely new inventions, and generate new needs. Today digitalism is the foundation of global economies and organizes the lives of billions of people. It is indispensable for the further development of many fields, including theatre art, and puppet theatre.

## ANIMATRONICS

Since ancient times artists and engineers have created mechanical figures whose motion could express precise, often very realistic, behaviour. When considering the possibility of using new technologies on stage it is worth taking a look at animatronics – mechatronic puppets, which evolved directly from automats, clock mechanisms, and robots. Widely used in the film industry and amusement parks, they use advanced robotic technologies to make it possible to animate figures remotely with the use of joysticks or other controllers. In the stage musical *King Kong* (2013), a 6-meter tall realistic puppet of a gorilla appeared on the stage and interacted with live actors. Creatures Technology Co., responsible for its construction, used a hybrid form of manipulation combining animatronic elements, automation and live actors. The basic movements and gestures

of the puppet were partly programmed by using an automatic rail system, while advanced gestures and facial expressions were controlled by 13 puppeteers: 10 people animating the puppet directly from the stage and three controlling the animatronics remotely. Another production for which Creatures Technology Co. designed the puppets was *How To Train Your Dragon: Live Spectacular* (2012), where as many as 23 animatronic dragons of various sizes appeared on the stage, including the largest which has a wingspan of over 14 meters. Manipulation, even remote, takes place in real time, which means that despite the high level of automation and mechanization the human animator is still of key importance.

Similar technology was used in *Colored Sculpture* (2016), an animatronic sculpture by Jordan Wolfson depicting a 2.5-meter tall puppet, stylistically referencing boy figures from American pop culture. The puppet is placed on a large cubic scaffold and is brutally lifted, pulled, and dropped on the floor by means of chains connected to an automated rail system. The puppet's eyes have built-in screens displaying an image of eyes and eyelids, and are equipped with sensors that make it possible to detect the location of people watching the installation, thanks to which, the puppet can “look” directly at the viewers. The installation is worked by operators controlling the puppet's movements through the use of joysticks. Thanks to the complex dramaturgy of the motion, audible text, sound, and music, as well as the truly piercing glances of the puppet the visitors can experience a semi-immersive theatre of cruelty. During exhibitions the puppet is subjected to such intense actions that its body parts have to be replaced regularly.

## HYBRIDS AND PROSTHESES

With the concept of hybrid puppetry as a point of departure, and combining it with digital technologies and the idea of prostheses, we are heading towards discovering innovative devices, which could be considered as extensions and supplements of the human body. This fusion grants the body new possibilities, especially within the range of expanding and transferring its motion.



Marco Donnarumma in the performance *Azathot* (2018) introduces a robotic prosthesis called Amygdala, intertwined between the bodies of two naked performers, thus creating a biomechanical hybrid. The vision of the future becomes reality on stage – man and robot are one. The prosthesis is a mechanism whose behaviour is driven by AI (artificial intelligence) algorithms, while the actors must take into account the unpredictable aspect of its behaviour. The whole time the prosthesis remains mounted on the face of a performer, who can be considered to be the animator of the device. However, this is indirect animation – the performer can decide in which direction Amygdala should be steered, but the movements of the prosthesis itself remain completely outside human decision. Due to its paradox of being a prosthesis that behaves independently from the person wearing it, Amygdala sheds a new light on the animator-animated relationship.

#### REALITIES?

The concept of immersive theatre (theatre of active participation) is based on the direct involvement of the viewer's decision-making in the action of the performance. Currently, immersive theatre is increasingly exploring issues related to virtual reality (VR), which it eagerly applies as a tool.

*Stage Your City*, an outdoor-immersive performance, was created as part of the *European Theater Lab: Drama Goes Digital* project conducted by the European Theatre Convention. The project contains elements of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality

(VR), 360 ° video, interactive games, and a city tour. Stage Your City is a utopian legend about a town ruled by artificial intelligence. With each staging the performance is adapted to the city in which it is actually shown. First, viewers are introduced into the story with the help of a holographic installation. Then they are divided into groups by an app that each of them must download on their smartphone before the show starts, and then under its guidance they set off on a journey. The soundtrack turns a real city into a dystopian space from the future. At the “stations”, where arranged scenes take place, viewers can watch live and virtual actors and perform tasks using their smartphones. At the end of the show, using VR sets, members of the audience watch the installation generated from the content that they shared rendered available. One of the most impressive ideas used in the performance is a combination of live and virtual actors. In some scenes, viewers witness a conversation involving a live actor sitting in real space with another person visible only on the smartphone screen, after pointing the latter in the right direction. This extension fascinates and frightens at the same time, clearly emphasizing the approaching end of reality as we know it.

#### I'LL BE BACK...

Being that they are artificial constructions, constituting an obvious image of man, the role of robots is unclear. They can interact with the environment, and actually alter it. In the theatre, robotics no longer exists only as an objective form, but also as a subjective form – robots have often stood on stage on par with living man, for example in Oriza

Hirata's performances. In *I, Work* (2008), two live actors and two Wakamaru robots appear together on stage. The performance tells a metaphorical story of a man trying to cope with mourning, and of one of his robots, which has lost all motivation to work. In *Sayonara* (2010) we follow the story of a terminally ill young woman who buys an android robot (a hyper realistic Gemini) to find comfort. Live and robotic actors co-exist on stage together, and create a new, shared reality. On the other hand, *Improbatics* (2018) by Piotr Mirowski and Kory Mathewson combines improvised theatre and artificial intelligence. This is a stand-up comedy of sorts in the form of a conversation between man and a chatbox based on a neural network personified in the body of a small humanoid robot. Improbatics is a fascinating example of how communication between man and machine could develop in the future.

#### CREATOR, IMPERSONATOR OR MEDIATOR?

The term digitry may be used to define not only a direct combination of puppetry and digital technologies, but also every performative action that uses digital technologies to turn the viewer into a puppet and make him an active element of the plot.

In contemporary performative arts, reflections on hybrid human nature expressed by a mixture of “bio” and “techno” aspects have been present for a long time. Marcelli Antúnez Roca, inspired by ritual sacrifices, created *Epizoo* (1994), in which he connected various parts of his body to current-carrying devices. A monitor with a digital image of the performer's body allowed

viewersto decide about the electrical impulses that the artist will receive. This way, by dealing with issues related to power, the relationship between the body and technology, and social responsibility Roca became a puppet in the hands of the audience. Those problems were previously explored by, i.a. Yoko Ono in *Cut Piece* (1966) and Marina Abramovic in her famous *Rhythm 0* (1974). In one of his most celebrated performances: *Ping Body* (1996), Stelarc used a wide spectrum of multimedia (including computers, cameras, video projections, the internet, and a robotic arm) to put himself in the hands of members of the audience, who via a website could impact his body with an electrical impulse, so that it performed movements independent of his will. Consequently, the artist became a robot controlled by users via the Internet. In *Propel* (2015), another of his plays, Stelarc connects man with an industrial machine by installing his body on a robotic boom rotating in all planes and levels. The extreme movements of the robot are barely endurable for a human being, but the physical position achieved by the body could not be achieved in any other way. This is definitely a radical, even brutal form of art, and, examining it in the context of puppeteering and manipulation, potentially approaches extremism. Nevertheless, despite the controversy, it must be kept in mind that the technology used by Stelarc and other artists creating within a similar theme can be still used as a foundation for conceiving a new, revolutionary manipulation technique.

#### .PL

Several interesting facets of puppetry art with digital technologies can be also found in Polish puppetry art. *Bajki Robotów* (Robot Fairy Tales, 2016), directed by Romuald Wicza-Pokojski at the Miniatura Theatre in Gdańsk, introduced robots steered by actors directly from the stage. In Teatr Robotyczny at the Copernicus Science Center in Warsaw, only robots perform on stage. High-tech anthropomorphic robots, RoboThespians, move with the assistance of compressed air, they are able to walk, nod, gesticulate, and express emotions through small screens replacing their eyes. Teatr Robotyczny can be considered a legacy of the automatic theatre – the robots are programmed in advance to recreate specific actions and the entire sound and visual setting is synchronized with them.

Another interesting example is the *Enter The Puppet – Golem 01* (2019) by Przemysław Żmiejko project, which uses a VR space in which the animator (in this case the audience) meets, controls, and interacts with a virtual puppet driven by an artificial neural network.



VR experience.

Adding a small update to this article in 2024, it is impossible not to mention the International Performative Conference LALKA NOVA, which has been held since 2021 at the Faculty of Puppetry of AST National Academy of Theatre Arts in Wrocław. It is an event that combines the format of a scientific conference, with a space presenting theatrical, performative, and visual arts, primarily focusing on modern puppetry. The term “lalka nova” (translated as: “new puppet”) initiated by ScD Ewelina Ciszewska, challenges the exploration of entirely new paths for the development of puppetry, and is becoming increasingly used, entering the lexicon of performative arts. As a co-curator of the Conference, I presented two of my works: *To Be(ep) or Not to Be(ep)?* (2021) and *Arm to Arm* (2023). The first work is a performance talk with the robot Eugenius, prepared in collaboration with General Robotics, in which the robot, operated by a human, reflects on the human-machine relationship. In the second work, three puppeteers animate a robotic industrial arm, and then, together with the robot, animate a classical puppet, building semantic bridges and connections between the biological and the mechanical, as well as between the analog and the digital.

The multitude and complexity of examples of works involved in the concept of digitry call for its recognition as an undoubtedly important trend in the development of the art of puppetry. They also make clear that no new

discoveries will take place without constant research, experiments, and combinations of various elements. The growing progress of artistic and technological experiments allows us to look into the future with unwavering curiosity. The idea of digitry also turns out to be particularly important in the moment of history which we find ourselves in today.

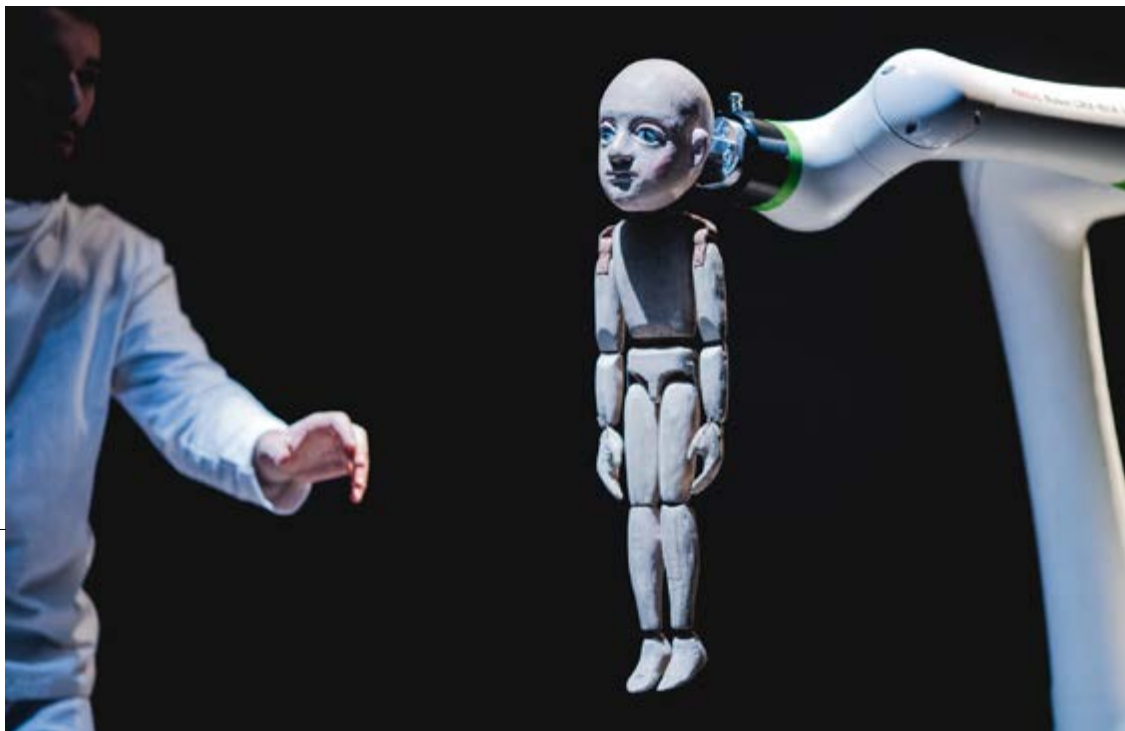
#### #MODERNTIMES

In the reality of the theatrical stage, it is not the meeting of the living with the living that always contains the greatest tension, but the meeting of the living with the non-living. The greatest and most difficult questions are born precisely in this encounter. Now, the digital has also appeared between the living and the non-living. What will be the consequence? What does this mean for theatrical narratives, especially for the narrative of the puppet theatre? Henryk Jurkowski, interviewed by Byrne Power, claimed: “In my opinion, the puppet is eternal. It is a human simulacrum. We have many puppets—sculptures, figures, machines, robots. We need our reflections, our mirrors. We cannot live without them. They shall always exist. We do not know whether they will be a puppet theatre or an android theatre. But they will certainly exist.”<sup>1</sup> And let us just stick to this.

#### Reference

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeRXIzqCh-4&t=> (access on: 24 April 2020).

Performance Arm to arm at Lalka Nova 2 International Performative Conference in Wrocław.



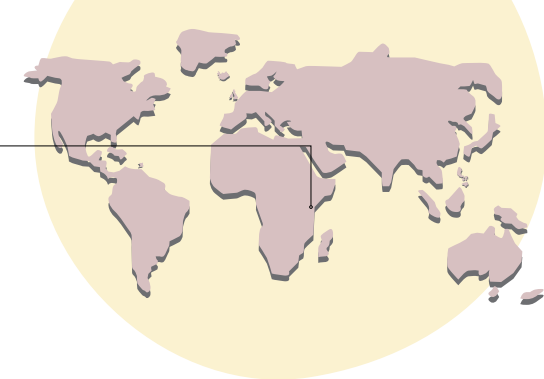


# THE ROLE OF DOLLS AND MASKS IN KENYAN CULTURE

By Fedelis Kyalo and  
Phylemon Odhiambo

UNIMA Kenya

Masks used by Krystal Puppet Theatre during the show *Tears by the river*, depicting the Akamba style of masks.



Dolls hold a special place in many cultures, and Kenya is no different. Researchers such as Esther A. Dagan, Zuzzana Glowacka, and Nigel Pavitt emphasize how dolls are tied to the traditions, rituals, and daily lives of Kenyan people. This essay will explore the significance of traditional dolls, especially among two communities: the Turkana and the Giriama. We will also look at the role of masks in various Kenyan cultures, showing how both dolls and masks serve important functions beyond just being toys or costumes.

## THE GROWING NEED OF USING MASKS

In 1994, Kenyan puppeteers began using puppets and masks as educational tools. They have implemented several educational programmes in Kenya and across the globe supported by different donors and supporters. However, there is a growing need to connect to the history of traditional dolls and masks in order to help us understand the roots of puppetry in Kenya. Masks have always been significant in cultures worldwide, functioning as symbols, expressions of identity, and essential tools in rituals. In Kenya, different ethnic groups have distinct uses and meanings for masks, which reflect their cultural values and beliefs as highlighted below.

## THE MAASAI COMMUNITY (SOUTHERN KENYA)

The Maasai are well-known for their vibrant beadwork and ceremonial clothing, which are integral parts of their cultural identity. However, they also incorporate masks in certain cultural ceremonies. While masks are not as prominent in Maasai traditions compared to other communities, they play a vital role during initiation rituals like the Enkilot ceremony. This event marks a boy's journey into manhood and involves masked performers who tell stories and dance. Through these performances, the values of bravery and strength that are essential in Maasai warrior culture are showcased. The masks often represent characters from their folklore, allowing the community to learn about and connect with their heritage..

## THE LUO COMMUNITY (WESTERN KENYA)

The Luo people are well-known for their vibrant music and dance, which often feature the use of masks. These masks are very important in traditional ceremonies, such as the Jaduong', where the community seeks blessings from their ancestors. During this ceremony, dancers wear masks that represent different spirits, allowing them to take on the characteristics of these figures and pay tribute to loved ones who have passed away.

In Luo culture, the link to the spiritual world is essential, reflecting their belief that ancestors provide guidance in everyday life. For example, the Krystal Puppet Theatre has incorporated some songs and dances from the Luo tribe into their folktale show called *Tears By The River*.

Masks are also used in many community events, helping people connect with the spiritual realm. This creates a feeling of unity and shared identity among the participants, strengthening their bonds as a community.

## THE AGIKUYU COMMUNITY (CENTRAL KENYA)

The Agikuyu, a subgroup of the Kikuyu community, have their own distinctive practices involving masks. These masks hold special significance during the Circumcision Ceremony, a critical rite of passage for boys transitioning into manhood. During this ceremony, boys wear masks that

symbolize protection of their ancestors, a sign of respect for the lineage they are part of. Additionally, masks that depict various spirits may be included in rituals designed to ward off evil and ensure the community's overall well-being. The inclusion of masks in such important ceremonies highlights the connection between cultural identity and spiritual beliefs in the Agikuyu community.

## THE AKAMBA COMMUNITY (EASTERN KENYA)

The Akamba tribe, also known as the Kamba, is a significant ethnic group in eastern Kenya, particularly noted for their traditional wood carving skills, especially in mask-making. Masks are not only artistic creations but also carry deep cultural, historical, and spiritual significance, reflecting the beliefs and values of the Akamba community. They are integral to ceremonies and rituals, serving as a means of connecting to the spiritual realm by embodying ancestral spirits. Rich in symbolism, these masks feature exaggerated facial traits and intricate designs that convey important cultural narratives.

In modern times, the Akamba wood carving tradition has changed to keep up with the global tourism market. Artisans now make masks for both local use and for tourists. While this creates new ways to earn money, it also risks losing the original meanings and cultural significance of the masks. To preserve this craft, there are educational programs aimed at teaching younger generations about the art of carving. Akamba masks represent the tribe's identity, creativity, and historical





© Museum of Kenya

The Kikuyu Masks.

## THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF PUPPETRY AND DOLLS

Even though modern influences have changed puppetry in Kenya, many puppeteers seem unaware of the rich traditions that are part of their craft. They often see puppet theater mainly as a way to teach and tackle social issues, rather than as a way to carry on important cultural practices that have been around for a long time. This point was highlighted at the 2002 International Festival of Puppetry in Nairobi, where some performers said that Kenya does not have a strong traditional puppet heritage documented. They believe that this history should be included in their performances. To address this, UNIMA-Kenya aims to take on the important role of preserving this valuable information and collection of traditional practices.

However, researcher Oleřka Darkowska-Nidzgorzski argues that the various names for dolls in different African languages reveal the cultural roots of these art forms across the continent. For instance, in Niger, the term “diyan dabo” means “magic children,” while in Mali, “man” translates to “little people.”

Dolls in Kenya are far more than simple toys; they are crucial elements of cultural identity and social structure. From promoting fertility among the Turkana to connecting with ancestors during Giriama funerals, dolls and masks play vital roles in various cultural practices. Understanding these rich traditions enhances our appreciation of the deep links between art, spirituality, and social order in Kenyan society. By recognizing the significance of these cultural artifacts, we can celebrate the vibrant tapestry of Kenyan traditions and the powerful stories they tell, ensuring that these important aspects of culture are maintained and appreciated for generations to come. Kenyan puppeteers are also starting programs to help ensure that these traditional carving skills are passed on. By collecting and showcasing these artifacts, they want to keep the importance of mask-making and its cultural heritage alive.

connections. They highlight the vital role of art in their culture, and initiatives like modern puppetry in Kenya are helping to keep this tradition alive, despite the challenges of modernization.

### DOLLS IN THE TURKANA COMMUNITY (NORTHERN KENYA)

In Northern Kenya, the Turkana people create dolls from clay and wood, dressing them in colorful outfits. These dolls are much more than mere toys for girls; they hold significant cultural and historical meanings. Traditionally, women would carry clay dolls as symbols to encourage fertility, while wooden dolls provided entertainment. According to researcher Nigel Pavitt, the Turkana still make special dolls called “ikideet” that represent fertility. A girl often receives one of these dolls from her mother, and she hangs it from her home’s ceiling every night. Each evening, she sings lullabies to it, hoping to be blessed with children in her future. This practice not only highlights the cultural importance of dolls but also the deep connection between women and their roles in family life.

### DOLLS IN THE GIRIAMA COMMUNITY (COASTAL KENYA)

The Giriama people of Kenya’s coastal region have their own unique traditions involving dolls, particularly during funerals. Their ceremonies can last for up to four days and feature various types of dolls, including Karuru, Kasinje, Kinyago, and Paramoto. The Karuru doll is especially important, symbolizing a mythical animal and representing the first



© Museum of Kenya

Luo tribes man with traditional ragalia used for dance.

# THE DRAMATIC CAPACITY OF IRANIAN ANCIENT STORIES

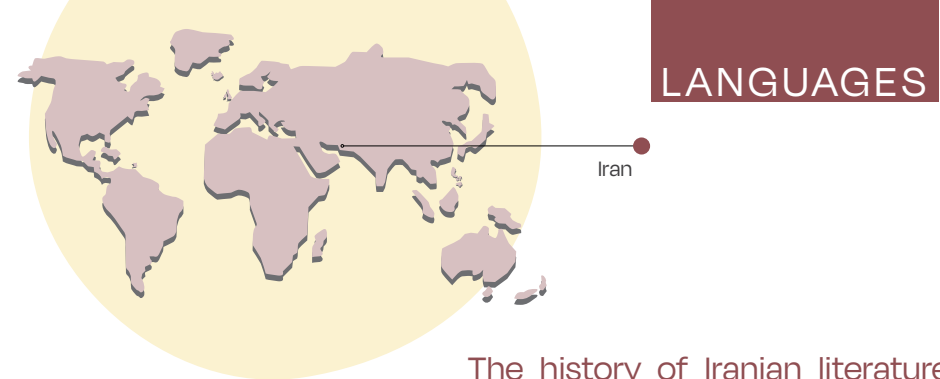
## (BEFORE THE ISLAMIC ERA) FOR CREATING NEW PUPPET SHOWS



By Maryam Iranmanesh and Mahnaz Khatib

The battle of Hormazd and the Devil.





## LANGUAGES

The history of Iranian literature can be divided into two general periods: pre-Islamic literature and post-Islamic literature. Post-Islamic literature, which has a history of about one thousand one hundred years, is itself divided into several periods, and the separate examination of each period can be defined in an independent research project. In this article, an attempt was made to provide readers with amazing stories and narratives by reading ancient texts before Islam, so that they can create new shows using them as inspiration.

Before the acceptance of Islam in Iran, the writing of literary and religious works was not very important, because, according to the religious belief of the people in this land, speech is more valuable. Therefore the works have been preserved orally for centuries and passed from one generation to another. After centuries *Avesta* (the religious book of Zoroastrianism), during the Sassanid era, was written down from oral tradition to be an answer to the objections of the divine religions and the rapid progress of Islam. It was also a warning for the religious to codify their religion. From this time onwards we have amazing legends, myths and stories that can inspire a dramatic work.

### DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

An examination of ancient Iranian stories with regard to the elements of drama, including the Protagonist and Antagonist character, Dramatic Action, Dialogue, Conflict, Resolution and Denouement.

### DRAKHT ASURIK (ASURIK TREE)

*The Asurik Tree* is a magnificent poem from the Parthian period that deals with the debate between the Asurik Tree (palm tree) and the goat. In the land of Saurastan, there was a tall tree with a dry trunk. It had green leaves and bore sweet fruits. One day, the tall tree argued with the goat and said, "I am superior to you because of the many benefits I have, including that when I bear the first fruits, the king eats from my fruits, ships are made from my wood, brooms are made from my leaves, ropes are made from me to tie you with, my shade is a canopy in the summer, I am the nest of birds... and if people need me, I will remain eternal and green until The Last Judgment." The goat replied, "Although it is a disgrace for me to answer your useless words, I am forced to speak. Your leaves are as long as the hair of the wicked divan who was the servant of the people at the beginning of the era of Jamshid (the first human). I am the one who can praise the religion of the Mazdas better

than anyone, because they use my milk in the worship of the gods. They make a belt with pearls from me, and they make Mashk (water storage bags) from my skin. They decorate the tables of the city with my flesh. They make aprons for the Kings from me. They write treaties on my skin. They make bowstrings from me. They make Barak (a type of woolen cloth) and Stirrups from me. I can travel from mountain to mountain in great countries and see people of other races. From my milk they make cheese, afrosheh (sweetmeat), yogurt, and curd. Even my price in the market is much higher than the price of your dates. Although my words to you are like pearls thrown before pigs, know that I graze in fragrant mountains, eat fresh herbs, and drink pure water from springs, while you are like a nail driven into the ground, unable to move."

"In this way, the goat left victorious and proud, and the date tree remained in disgrace. It may be said that the goat represents the Zoroastrian religion and the Asurik Tree is the religion of the various forms of worship of the Assyrians. In the religious ceremonies of the Assyrians, a dry tree was used, which was decorated with artificial gold and ornaments. The goat's recklessness and cruelty may also be due to the social superiority of the Mazda worshipers."<sup>1</sup>

### AVESTA

"Darayesh (Babble) of Ahriman with the Demons" is one of the most thought-provoking religious stories in the Pahlavi-Sassanian language. Every night, Ahriman said to the demons: "Go into the world. First, dry the seas, then dry the white Haoma trees, because by eating their leaves, people achieve eternal life in the resurrection (white Haoma: The Avestan Gaokerena tree, which eliminates death)," Ahriman created an antidote for it in the form of a toad in the deep water. Ormuzd entrusted its guard to ten bony-eared assfish that always circle around Haoma, with one of their heads is towards the toad, and they will be in conflict until the end of the world. Ahriman ordered the

## LANGUAGES



The last battle of Hormazd and Ahriman at the end of time.

demons to shake the mountains that are the decoration of the world, and then cut all the plants and kill all the living beings, and do good to the ignorant so that the wise will be in doubt and never look to "Hepto-Rang" (the Big Dopper the little dipper or the Daughters of the Dead, the Star of Saad) and "Venand" (the name of Star). They should not look at the stars until they become capable of working. So the demons went to the sea, but when they heard the whistle of Simurgh (a legendary bird with a peacock's tail, an eagle's body, a dog's head, and lion's paws, which is depicted in paintings and books and designs as birds of prey, and in Zoroastrian works, Simurgh's nest is on top of the Gaokerena tree in the middle of the Varukasha Sea), they lost their strength. So they went to the white Haoma (the medicinal herb Ephedra), and there, too, they lost their strength when they saw the bony-eared assfish in the water. The demons went to the mountain, where they lost their strength when they heard the whistle of the vulture (a bird that eats the bodies of the Zoroastrian dead on the tops of hills and mountains). In the plain, they also lost their strength when they heard the call of the Bahman bird (the patron of the creatures of the plain). When they went towards the houses of the people, a cry from the throne and the Amesha Spenta who came to the aid of the people made them weak. Also in Kangdez, the cry of Peshotan (the name of the eldest son of Ki-Gashtasb, the king of Kiani) stopped them from moving. And when they looked at the sky and saw the "Hepto-Rang" and "Venand", their strength was gone. After that, Soroush clapped his hands. The rooster (the sacred bird) heard its sound and cried out. Upon hearing the rooster's cry, the fire of Bahram, the fire that lights the house at midnight, the inner Menog-i (the spirit of the inner ceremony, the angel of the plant Haoma) and Soroush Haoma destroyed the demons."<sup>2</sup>

### BUNDAHISHN

The *Book of Bundahishn*, meaning the initial or fundamental creation, is information based on Zand or Zand-knowing, which is attributed to the late Sassanid period, although its final codification dates back to the third century AH. In the story of the battle of Ahriman, the creations of Hormuzd stood up to fight him, and Ahriman saw his end and wanted to flee, but the ten bright creatures stood up to prevail over him: The Menog-i Sky, like the army of Arvand, faced Ahriman, and Hormuzd built a wall harder than the sky around it and blocked the escape route for Ahriman. The battle that followed was of water. Tishtiariya (the rain god), with the help of Vohu Manah (meaning good thought, one of the Amesha Spenta who sits on the right side of Ahura Mazda), the god of Haoma, the god of Burz, and Ardāy Fravahr, brought rain. A rain so heavy that all the insects and harmful creatures were destroyed. The wind dispersed all that water, and a vast sea emerged from it. Those dead insects fell to the ground, and their poison and filth mixed with the earth. Tishtiariya entered the water in the form of a white horse to eliminate their poison. At the same time, the demon Apeus (the drought demon) came to fight him in the form of a black horse. Tishtiariya asked Hormuzd for help and he gave him the power of ten male horses, ten male camels, ten bulls, ten mountains and ten rivers, in this way Tishtiariya defeated the demon Apeus. After this battle, three large seas and thirty small seas and two spring-seas named Chichest (Lake Urmia) and Suvar emerged from the rain water. Two rivers Arvand Rud and

Ve Rud were also created. The third battle was about the earth. Ahriman attacked the earth and from this shaking mountains were created. The first of them was Alborz. The fourth battle was about the plant. Ahriman first attacked the plant and dried it. Amrodat (meaning immortality, one of the Amshaspands and a female symbol) softened the dry plant and mixed it with Tishtiariya's water. The water spread over the whole earth, and plants grew on the surface of the earth. After that, the first created cow (Gavaevodata) went to war with Ahriman, and Ahriman destroyed it, and after the cow's death, fifty-five types of grains and twelve types of medicinal plants grew from its organs. The cow's semen was given to the moon and with the help of the moonlight it was adorned, life was breathed into it, and from it a pair of bulls and a female came to earth, and other sheep and birds appeared after that. The sixth battle was with Keyumars (the first human being). Zurvan (the god of infinite time) had given Keyumars a life span of thirty years before Ahriman came. Ahriman first entered Keyumars' body through the little toe of his right foot. A feeling of hunger arose in Keyumars' heart. Hormuzd gave Keyumars meat and oil to confront Ahriman. Ahriman entered from Keyumars' chest to his shoulder and finally to his head. Light went out of Keyumars' body and from then on all humans would die in the same way. After Keyumars' death, due to his metallic nature, seven types of metals emerged from his body and since Keyumars fell on his left hand at the time of his death, his sperm fell on the ground. That sperm was purified by the light of the sun. Then Spenta Armaiti (the angel who protects the earth) accepted a part of Keyumars' sperm and Mashya and Mashyana, like a rhubarb, grew from the ground after forty years. The two were joined together and the soul was between them. When they came into human bodies, Hormuzd informed them that they were the father and mother of the world and that they should follow the law and good religion. At first, the two testified to the God of Hormuzd, but due to the deception of the demons, they fell into sin and considered Ahriman the creator. They offered sacrifices, made clothes, spun yarn, smelted iron, and made wooden utensils. Hormuzd



deprived them of their kingship for fifty years because of their disobedience. After that, they wanted children. Two pairs of children were born to them. Due to their excessive desire for children, one of them was eaten by the mother and the other by the father. Hormuzd removed the strong desire for children in them, and pairs of daughters and sons were born to them: six pairs. From these children all races of people emerged and by the command of Dadar (Hormuzd), each race lived in a different land and climate. The next battle was of that fire that stood against Spanjarush (the companion of Apeus). The fire of Vazishta (which is in the clouds) also made rain and Azar Faranbagh (the fire of the priests) and Azargoshasp (the fire of the soldiers) and Azar Burzen-Mihr (the fire of the farmers) protected the world and took care of the survival and growth plants, people and sheep. The eighth battle was started by the stars against the stars of Druj (creators of lies and deception). The ninth battle was the battle of the gods of Menog-i with Ahriman in which the demons were defeated and cast into hell. In this battle the gods were sleepless and thirstless for ninety days. The last battle was of those stars that were not mixed. They did not let the darkness and the demons beyond reach the place of Menog-i and Hormuzd. The religion of Mazdayasnā, like the belt of religious stars, was placed around the sky.

#### BOOK OF ARDA VIRAF

*Book of Arda Viraf* is the name of a book from the late Sassanid period, in the Pahlavi language, which was apparently written in the third century AH. This work deals with the posthumous beliefs of the Zoroastrians and tells the story of a priest named Viraf who, after the invasion of Alexander and the dispersion of Avesta and Zand and the spread of doubt among the people, gathered together and, in order to prove the truth of their religion, chose the purest priest (Viraf) from among them to go to the other world and reveal to him the results of what he sees. They gave Viraf a mixture of wine, mang, and Haoma to drink, and he goes to bed and sleeps, and his soul ascends to the next world. After seven days he returns and explains what he has seen to others. During this journey, he is greeted

by a beautiful woman named Dēn, who represents his faith and virtue. Crossing the Chinvat Bridge, he is then conducted by "Sraosha, the pious and Azar, the yazad" through the "star track", "moon track" and "sun track" – places outside of heaven reserved for the virtuous who have nevertheless failed to conform to Zoroastrian rules. He describes the story of the soul after death and its passage through the Chinvat Bridge, heaven, purgatory and hell, and explains the rewards for good souls and the punishments for bad souls. Each person is described living an idealised version of the life he or she lived on earth, as a warrior, agriculturalist, shepherd or other profession. With his guides he then descends into hell to be shown the sufferings of the wicked. He enumerates the sins of his religion and explains the punishment for each one. In heaven he goes to Ahura Mazda and is tasked with delivering his message to people, that the Zoroastrian faith is the only proper and true way of life, and that it should be preserved in both prosperity and adversity. Some researchers believe that Dante Alighieri wrote *Divine Comedy* taking inspiration from the *Book of Arda Viraf* and that it also influenced Risalat al-Ghufran (The Epistle of Forgiveness) which was written by Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri.

The oral tradition of narration in pre-Islamic literature in Iran limited the access to these sources, and we were limited to examining only those documents that were written down, although many of them were changed or lost after the Arab invasion. There were also other books such as *Sindbad-Nameh*, *Bakhtiar-Nameh*, *Barlaam and Josaphat*, *Kalila and Demna*, and *Tutinama* that were written in Pahlavi but were based on Indian stories, and for this reason we did not discuss them in this article. In the end, by citing this limited number, we hope that we have been able to take a small step towards introducing this great treasure to the world, and that we have introduced new stories into puppetry. We also hope that, continuing this long path, we will be able to introduce the next eras of Iranian literary history to everyone and open new doors for the production of creative puppet performances.

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“After this battle, three large seas and thirty small seas and two spring-seas named Chichest (Lake Urmia) and Suvar emerged from the rain water. Two rivers Arvand Rud and Ve Rud were also created.”  
– Maryam Iranmanesh and Mahnaz Khatib

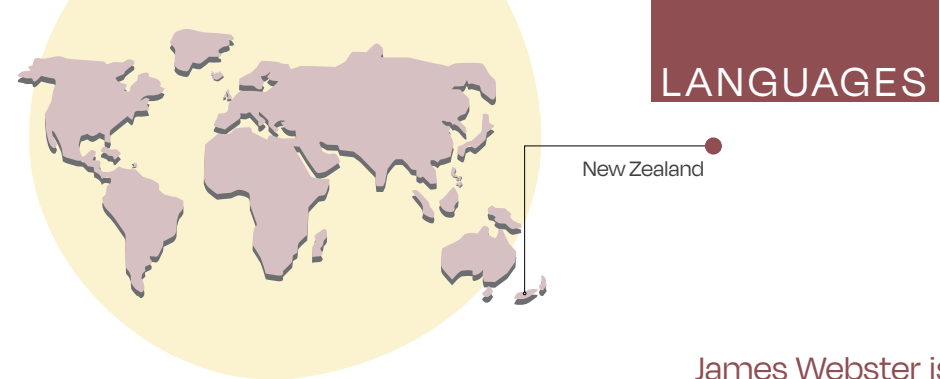
# JAMES WEBSTER AND THE ART OF KARETAO MĀORI

By Hinemoa Jones  
(Te Arawa, Tainui)



Rangi and Papa- Sky father and Earth Mother.  
Karetao made by James Webster.





James Webster is of New Zealand Māori and European descent with Tainui and Te Arawa tribal affiliations. Webster is renowned for his work with Karetao Māori (Māori Puppetry)- spearheading the revitalization movement of this ancient art form, he continues to be a major contributor in the reclamation of Māori knowledge systems, especially Karetao Māori, as a living, practicing art form.



Webster, having created his own form of karetao pūoro, began a project researching the history of karetao. It was clear that many fragments of how these puppets were traditionally used was missing and more research was required to help develop a new performance tradition for karetao pūoro. This research was important as a step toward the revival of the karetao art form from a living cultural perspective as opposed to a sleeping, housed in the back blocks of museums, mute one.

In the interests of research, in 2012 Webster and Jones attended their first international UNIMA congress in Chengdu, China where they found the shows that resonated with their own puppets and performance philosophy were those that had live music accompaniment. Following the visit to China, the pair started involving other taonga pūoro musicians to play alongside the karetao in performance, adding to the overall soundscape and layering a deeper resonance, enhancing and evoking a Māori world view through the indigenous genealogy of sound and karetao.

Over the years, Webster and Jones' practice and performance with karetao Māori has grown and evolved with new conversations being had about how these ancient treasures were used in the art of indigenous healing. As well as exploring the use of karetao in healing, these treasures have found themselves in a variety of other performance spaces including appearing in a music video by New Zealand famous music group, Trinity Roots. Webster and Jones have performed with karetao as a ritual practice in the harvesting of gourd (Hinepuppte-hue) crops. They have danced on stage with various Māori dance companies, notably with Atamira Dance Company. These treasures have travelled into other indigenous communities, making lasting connections with first nation tribes in both America and Canada.

Webster and Jones, along with their peers, continue to explore the uses of karetao Māori, drawing on the ancient blueprints passed down to them from their ancestors in order to create, innovate and explore how these ancient treasures may continue as conduits of emotion, of performance, of healing in this modern world.

"One of the greatest passions of the last 20 years of my artistic career has been the making and playing of Taonga Pūoro (Māori musical instruments) and the fusion into the birth of Kareato Māori (singing Māori puppets). Taonga Pūoro, like te reo (language) Māori, reflects the natural sounds and rhythms of nature and the environment. The instruments have whakapapa (genealogies) and pūrākau (origin stories) pertaining to the many families of instruments and the individual varieties of instruments associated with Taonga Pūoro. My passion for pūoro and Māori art has led me to create, elevate and continue to revitalize the art of Karetao Māori (Māori Puppetry)." James Webster

The *taonga pūoro* (Māori music and instruments) revival, spearheaded by Hirini Melbourne, Richard Nunns and Brian Flintoff captured Webster's fascination and heart in the 1990s.

Webster, inspired by Melbourne and taonga pūoro continued to explore indigenous art through whakairo (carving). Influenced by the teachings of Melbourne and others, combined with his own flare for art and music, it was inevitable that Webster came to combine his passions and created a family of Karetao Pūoro- Māori puppets with singing voices. In his research of karetao Māori, Webster notes:

As far as research, there is not a lot of documentation about the Karetao. However, during the revival of Taonga Pūoro, headed by the late Dr Hirini Melbourne, discussions were held about the use of Karetao and Taonga Pūoro together to enhance and embellish the performance and delivery of many elements of Māori culture- sound/music, spirit of the Karetao through puppetry and storytelling, audience participation as well as the wairua (spirit) that is created throughout the exchange.

During an artist residency at a local school in 2008 Webster began a journey that would lead him into the world of puppetry and ritualistic theatre. At this time Webster created two karetao, based on classical forms he had studied in several national museums. Those first two karetao were personifications of Ranginui (sky father) and Papatūānuku (earth mother) who, from a Māori world view, represent the beginning of creation. Webster's idea was that if he created the parents first, the other karetao/ children would follow.

In 2009-2010 he added Hine-pū-te-hue (goddess of the gourd and goddess of peace), Hine Raukatauri (guardian of Māori flute music), Tāwhirimātea (guardian of winds), Tangaroa (guardian of the ocean) and Tāne (guardian of forest/birds). The later five karetao have instruments, as represented by that guardian, imbued within the body of each puppet and when performed with these voices come alive, layering the inherent voice of each guardian. Webster named this collection 'Karetao Pūoro- Singing Puppets'. Karetao Pūoro have been exhibited in galleries in Aotearoa, New Zealand and performed with around the world.

Webster along with his wife, Hinemoa Jones and other performers have, as an indigenous creative collective, worked to revive karetao Māori as a contemporary performance art steeped in and guided by indigenous knowledge systems.

Notably, Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal and his drive to revive Te Whare Tapere ('house' of storytelling, dance, music, puppets, games and other entertainments) has aided and supported Webster and Jones in the work of reawakening the art of karetao performance.



Taowaru Karetao: Hinemoa Jones and James Webster- Karetao performance at Pakowhai Marae, Gisborne 2024.

© Tahu Hollis



## KARETAO MĀORI – MĀORI PUPPETS

Karetao is one of the Māori names used to describe the ancient artform of indigenous Māori puppetry. Other names include Korotao, Keretao, Kārari, Rapatāhuri, Repetāhuri, Tokoraurupe and Tokoraurape. These names are based on dialectal differences as well as coming from the indigenous genealogy stories of this Māori treasure. Examples of karetao can be found in museum collections in New Zealand and overseas. Although not all have been identified, several of the karetao in museum collections can be traced back to their tribal areas.

In its classic form, karetao presents as a carved wooden figurine with moveable arms attached to the body (shoulder area) with flax cord. The karetao is then activated by pulling the string from behind and moving the arms. There are, as described by several writers and historians, accounts of karetao used in traditional Māori society from giant figurines used by Māori warriors to dance in defiance, to a small handheld jumping jack used as a children's toy.

These wooden figurines were carved in the likeness of tūpuna Māori (ancestors) and were often intricately embellished with moko (traditional Māori tattoo) on the face and body. As noted by the late creative, incredible Rose Beauchamp,

Karetao were considered to be taonga – sacred objects – meriting great reverence and respect, as it was believed that they possessed the mauri – life force – of the ancestor, which manifested when handled by the operator. The operator held the figure by a handle carved below its legs and pulled flax strings from behind to animate the loosely jointed arms.

Following the arrival of Europeans to Aotearoa, New Zealand in the early 19th century, the artform and practice of karetao Māori was suppressed and made almost extinct due to the ongoing effects of colonization. Much of the information around karetao has been lost and buried with those who are no longer here to tell their stories. It is known that karetao were used in performance as they appear in traditional ancestral stories like that of 'Tinirau and Kae' as well as the mention of these ancient treasures in various karakia (Māori prayer), waiata, haka and mōteatea (ancient Māori songs/chants).

As with many things in Māori tradition, the practice of karetao operated in a paradigm of duality. As they were used in performing arts so too did they feature as a tool used by tohunga (healers, priests) in ritualistic practice, incantation and healing. Notably karetao feature as a tool used in the traditional houses of midwifery and childbirth. In this sense, karetao were used as a conduit between the tohunga and te ao wairua (spirit world).

Therefore, the combination of being revered in sacred knowledge reserved for only high priests, coupled with the demise of the Māori performing arts traditions due to colonization, meant karetao were set aside and much knowledge and practice was lost to history. This brings us to more modern times and the revitalization of karetao Māori in a contemporary world using the fragments left us from our ancestors' past.

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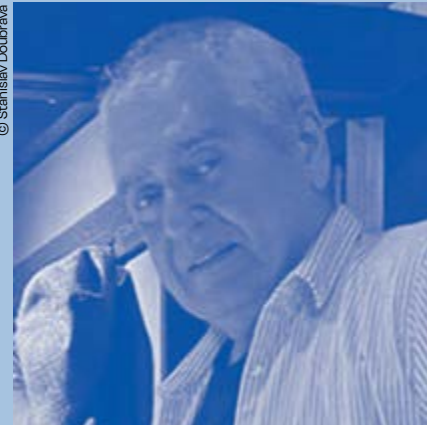
James Webster was born in 1966 in Auckland, New Zealand. He now lives in Coromandel, a small town in the north island of New Zealand, with his wife, Hinemoa and their two children Kokowai and Te Amokura. Webster has worked in the arts industry for over 20 years as a freelance multi-disciplined artist specializing in indigenous Māori art narrative and form. He is an accomplished and internationally celebrated sculptor, carver, performer, maker and player of traditional Māori instruments as well as being an expert indigenous Māori moko (tattoo) artist.

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# LIFE ON STRINGS

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STANISLAV DOUBRAVA, 1952

## CZECH REPUBLIC

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Czech puppeteer and director. Born in Chrudim, "the Mecca of Czech Amateur Puppetry", Stanislav Doubrava has been a member of UNIMA since the late 1980s. He currently serves as a Board member and councillor of UNIMA Czech Republic. His first professional puppetry experience was in the 1970s in Theatre DRÁK (Divadlo DRÁK) in Hradec Králové, under the direction of Jan Dvořák (UNIMA Member of Honour 1988) and distinguished director Josef Krofta. After graduating from the Film and Television Faculty in Prague, he became manager and artistic chief at the Alfa Children's Theatre (Divadlo Alfa) in Plzeň and the organiser of the SKUPOVA Plzeň festivals.

His longest theatre involvement was with the Naive Theatre (Naivní Divadlo) in Liberec, where he joined as manager in 1989, the year of the Velvet Revolution. In 1991, he was appointed by the Liberec City Council as its director and as the director of the Mateřinka festival, which over the course of 15 biennial seasons (1991-2019), developed into an internationally renowned European event focused on puppetry for preschool children.

Doubrava is the type of theatre director who envisions and shapes his theatre without

directly entering into the process as a director of performances, designer, playwright or music composer. As a result, he has been able to maintain an objective outlook and critical approach, while using all diplomatic means to ensure the smooth artistic development of his theatre. This has succeeded even during Czechia's turbulent transition from totalitarianism to democracy, when Naivní Divadlo Liberec proved that it belonged among the top European puppet companies. It has also been key to the development of the Mateřinka puppet festival and its contributions to international exchanges.

It was for these skills that he gained the necessary respect as a member of UNIMA Czech Republic, serving on its Board, and later in the international community as an active member of UNIMA International. At the UNIMA Congress in Magdeburg in 2000, he was elected president of the newly established International Festivals Commission, which he chaired for three terms (2000-2012). At the 2004 Rijeka and 2008 Perth congresses, he was elected a member of the UNIMA Executive, also serving as vice president of UNIMA International. In 2016-2018, he was re-elected as a member of the UNIMA Executive and as president of the Statutes Commission. Within UNIMA, he has been involved in the organization of festivals, conferences and exhibitions ("The Window to Czech Puppetry" in Tolosa, Spain, in collaboration with UNIMA general secretary Miguel Arreche), which promoted the exchange of experiences between puppeteers from different countries and allowed the presentation of new trends in puppet theatre.

He remains an active member of UNIMA's International Festivals Commission, vice-chair of the Government Cultural Fund Council and member of the ITI Council. As a founding member of the Association of Professional Theatres of the Czech Republic, Stanislav Doubrava has served on the board of this professional theatre organisation that advocates the needs and interests of Czech theatres.







**NINA MALÍKOVÁ, 1945**

## CZECH REPUBLIC

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Czech theatre historian, theoretician of Czech puppet theatre, author, translator, editor and professor. Nina Malíková graduated with an MA from Prague's Faculty of Philosophy, Univerzita Karlova (Charles University), where she specialized in the history and theory of theatre. After graduation, she was assistant artistic director and literary assistant in the theatres of Hradec Králové and Prague, where she met and worked with important personalities of Czech theatrical life, including director Miroslav Vildman who shaped the early years of Divadlo DRÁK (DRÁK Puppet Theatre) prior to Josef Krofta's long term as its artistic director. From 1998 to 2016, Malíková was a literary assistant at the Divadlo Lampion (Lampion Puppet Theatre) in Kladno, Central Bohemia.

Malíková taught at the DAMU School of Dramatic Arts in the department of puppet theatre and later in the department of alternative theatre and puppetry, Katedra alternativního a loutkového divadla, where she was a lecturer in the history of Czech and world puppet theatre. She has participated in many international workshops and seminars in Europe, Canada and South Korea.

In 1984, she joined the Prague Theatre Institute, Divadelní ústav, as a specialist in contemporary Czech puppet theatre, where she prepared publications on the nation's puppetry. Among her many publications is Plzeňské loutkářství (Pilsen Puppetry), co-authored with Pavel Vašíček (Divadlo Alfa, Pilsen, 2000). She is the principal author of articles representing Czech puppet theatre in *UNIMA's World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts* and was editor of the first edition of *Czech Puppet Theatre Yesterday and Today*. In 2019, she authored the book, *UNI...WHAT? UNIMA*, dedicated to the founding and subsequent history of UNIMA. Her many scholarly

contributions to theatre magazines continue to this day, both in the Czech Republic and abroad, including *Loutkář*, in which she served as editor in chief (1993-2015).

Malíková translates plays and professional literature from French into Czech. She created exhibitions of Czech puppet theatre, both at home and abroad, the most important being "Strings attached: the Living Tradition of Czech Puppets", which opened at the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio, USA, in 2013.

A long-time chairwoman of the Czech UNIMA centre and a member of UNIMA's Executive Committee (1988-2000), Nina Malíková continues the work of her father, Jan Malík, a former general secretary of UNIMA, whose own contribution to the field of puppet theatre is legendary. Nina Malíková's historical insight and ongoing contributions continue to shape Czech and world puppetry arts.



**MARIANNE VIBAEK, 1933**

## DENMARK

UNIMA Member of Honour 2008

Ethno-anthropologist and professor of Danish heritage, co-founder of the museum dedicated to the Sicilian Opera dei Pupi. Marianne Vibaek arrived in Palermo in 1957 at the invitation of Antonio Pasqualino, her future husband, who introduced her to the Opera dei Pupi, the traditional puppet theatre of Sicily. Her subsequent research as an ethno-anthropologist and professor of Anthropological Museography at the University of Palermo was shaped through her collaboration with a constellation of professionals, which included Antonio Pasqualino, Antonino Buttitta and Peppino Bonomo.

In 1965, Vibaek's research led to the founding of the Associazione per la conservazione delle tradizioni popolari (Association for the Preservation of Popular Traditions), which in turn founded, in 1975, the Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino (Antonio Pasqualino International Puppet Museum) in Palermo.

As general secretary of the Association (1973-1995), then president for twenty years (1995-2015), and director of the Museum for three decades (1975-2006), Vibaek implemented a safeguarding project that included research and the collecting, preservation and cataloguing of puppets, sets, backdrops, props and scenic objects in the museum's collection. She also instituted a programme of educational activities and scientific dissemination, which encouraged the gradual reintegration of Sicilian puppeteers with new audiences.

While initially viewed by some as an attempt to rescue this theatrical form from oblivion, the initiative obtained the support of the city of Palermo. As the relationship between the Opera dei Pupi and the public developed, Vibaek implemented a new strategy that, on the one hand, broadened the Museum's collections by acquiring examples of non-European traditions and, on the other hand, staged the revival of shows that had been absent from the Sicilian stage for years. These activities laid solid foundations for the revitalization of the Opera dei Pupi. Shows staging the ancient exploits of the valiant Paladins are performed not only at the Museum but in theatres throughout Sicily.

In May 2001, the Museum supported the candidature of the Sicilian pupi for nomination by UNESCO as a "masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity". That same year the Association received the Costantino-Nigra prize for museography.

Among her scholarly writings, Marianne Vibaek Pasqualino is co-author (with Piercarlo Grimaldi) of *Il patrimonio museale antropico: Itinerari nelle regioni italiane. Riflessioni e prospettive* (The Anthropological Museum Heritage: Itineraries in the Italian Regions. Reflections and Perspectives).

For more information about the association: [www.ich.unesco.org/fr/ong-accreditees/ong-accreditee-00991](http://www.ich.unesco.org/fr/ong-accreditees/ong-accreditee-00991) and the museum: [www.museodellemarionette.it/en](http://www.museodellemarionette.it/en) [www.museodellemarionette.it/en/il-museo-2/unesco-accreditation](http://www.museodellemarionette.it/en/il-museo-2/unesco-accreditation)



**HARRY GUSTAVSON, 1944**

## ESTONIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2021

Estonian actor, puppeteer, researcher, editor and teacher. Harry Gustavson studied puppetry at the Studio of the Estonian Theatre Union (1962-1966). He worked in the Estonian State Puppet Theatre for 37 years (1965-2002) as an actor, stage manager, head of sales and deputy managing director. *The Star Child* by Oscar Wilde was one of his most memorable characters.

In 1984, Gustavson founded his own puppet theatre. He uses a variety of puppets in his shows, but mostly classic glove and rod puppets. He believes that, despite the mutable nature of puppet, object and visual theatre, traditional puppet theatre must be preserved. He has taken part in many festivals, including "Theatre in a Suitcase" in Viljandi and the Tallinn Treff Visual Theatre Festival, has performed in puppet shows on Estonian television, and has voiced many cartoon characters.

As a researcher of puppet history, he served as editor of *65 Years of the Professional Puppet Theatre in Estonia. History and Chronicles* (2004, interactive CD) by Eike Värk. In 1999, Gustavson's article, "Puppet Theatre in Estonia. A Little Historical Survey", was published in the Norwegian puppetry magazine *Hand i Hanske*. He participates in international events, including "After Educational Courses for Young Puppeteers" (2003). From 2003 to 2023, he was a teacher, using puppets in his lessons for pre-school children and as a therapeutic aid for youth and adults with physical and mental disabilities. Since 2019, he has conducted the project, "Better Quality of Life for People with Special Needs through Puppet Theatre".

Gustavson has made an important contribution to puppetry by promoting UNIMA in Estonia and re-establishing international

relations with the UNIMA world. He founded UNIMA Estonia – UNIMA Eesti Keskus in 1997 (officially recognized in 1999). He served as its first president until 2003, then as vice president, a member of its Board and, since 2014, as secretary. As an elected councillor (1999-2012 and 2016-2025), he has attended UNIMA congresses in Magdeburg (2000), Rijeka (2004), Perth (2008), Tolosa (2016), the online Congress (2021) and the Bali Council (2023, online).

Harry Gustavson manages campaigns to promote UNIMA and to provide opportunities for Estonian puppet theatres to meet new audiences. From 1999 to 2003, he organized UNIMA Day in Tallinn, bringing together under UNIMA's vast umbrella people interested in puppets. The "Million Puppet Project" at the Perth Congress (2008) gave him the idea to organize the project, "Let's Make a Thousand Puppets". In 2009-2011, children all over Estonia made around 1600 puppets that were displayed in travelling exhibitions that toured Estonia.



**REIN AGUR, 1935**

## ESTONIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2008

Estonian director. Rein Agur was one of the leading personalities after World War II in the Estonian puppet theatre world. As a representative of the bourgeoisie (born into a family of teachers), in 1941-1946 and 1952-1954, Agur was exiled to Tomsk (Siberia). For political reasons unable to enter Tartu University, he studied at the Leningrad Institute of Theatre, Music, and Cinema under Mikhail Korolev, graduating in 1963 with a puppet theatre actor diploma. He was a tutor at two puppet theatre Studios (1963-1966, 1968-1971). From 1963, he worked at the Eesti Riiklik Nukuteater (Estonian State Puppet Theatre) as an assistant director, then

director (1966-1981 and 1992-1994) and, from 1981-1992, artistic director. Since 1994, Agur has worked freelance.

In his first production *Grebe, the Duckling* (1966), Agur mixed masks and mime with puppetry. He developed the visual potential of puppetry, not hesitating to break "realism's" laws of physics and scale. Using "live" actors and puppets together on stage, he played with potential meanings of such a combination, emphasizing the essential differences between the two performers (*A Fairy Tale About a Little Mouse*, 1970, *Tricky Ants and Old Devil*, 1971). His *Little Red Riding Hood* (1973) and *Muumi's Fairy Tale* (1974) brought revolutionary ideas to the Estonian puppet stage: actors did not dominate but rather served the puppets, both acting as elements of the stage design, the work of scenographer Jaak Vaus.

Agur was adept at giving new interpretations to a classical story, whether Estonian (*Little Illimar*, 1975, *The Flakes of the Cherry-Bird*, 1986) or international (*Gulliver and Gulliver*, 1987). He was an explorer of Shakespeare's works, which he regarded as further enriching the repertory of traditional puppet theatre. In the 1980s, he directed *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, twice in Estonia (1984, 1985) and abroad (*Romeo and Juliet in Vaasa*, Finland, 1983, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream in Chelyabinsk*, Russia, 1987). *Cymbeline* (1998) and *Henry V* (2000) followed, performed at the VAT-Theatre of Tallinn, where actors played with puppets made of vegetables and other such natural props. The Shakespeare cycle included *The Comedy of Errors* (1998) at Moscow's Sergei Obraztsov State Academic Central Puppet Theatre, designed by Elena Lutsenko.

He has worked in many countries, including Bulgaria, Finland, Germany and Russia, and has directed several theatre productions: *The Forest Song* by Lesya Ukrainka (1976) and *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw (1977) at the Estonian Youth Theatre; *Hercules and the Augean Stables* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1989) at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Rein Agur has been a member of the Board of UNIMA Estonia – UNIMA Eesti Keskus for decades and has organized festivals. In 2008, he was named an UNIMA Member of Honour.





MARJUT HELENA TAWAST, 1952

## FINLAND

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Finnish producer, researcher, lecturer, author. Marjut Tawast studied theatre research at the Helsinki University and worked in Finnish theatre since 1974. In 1981–2003, she worked at Helsinki’s Nukketeatteri Vihreä Omena (Green Apple Puppet Theatre) as a producer, secretary of national and international affairs, and since the 1980s, with the Theatre Academy of Finland, Nordic Dance and Theatre and other institutions. She is involved in projects developing vocational training for puppeteers in the Nordic countries and projects in the Baltic states. “Meeting Point Finland” was completed in 2021–2022, with participants from Nordic countries and Cuba.

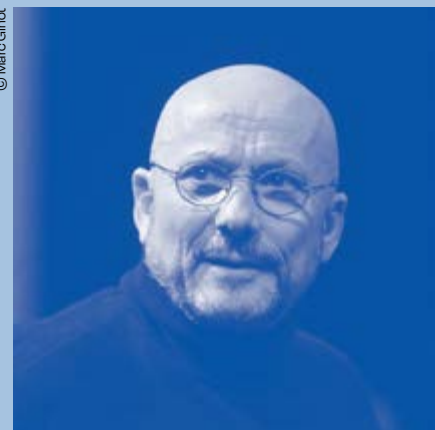
In 1991–1992, she was a member of the Commission for Planning of Vocational Training for Puppeteers in Finland, which led to Professional Puppetry Education at the Turku Arts Academy. In 2004–2008, she was a lecturer in the Puppetry Study Program at Adult College of Art and in 2012–2015 a lecturer of puppetry art and philosophy symposiums at the Theatre Academy. In 2013–2014, she was project leader and researcher of Nukketeatteri 2013 – mietintö, commissioned by Finland Ministry of Culture and Education, and was appointed member of the State Commission of Scenic Arts (2015–2016) for puppetry. Since 2017, she worked as a Senior Consultant in Puppetry. She participated in several scientific symposiums, and in 2022, for the international research day in collaboration with Theatre Research Society Finland, Tampere University and UNIMA Research Commission.

She served as secretary for UNIMA Finland (1989–1991), board member (1994–2004), president (2013–2014), vice president (2017–2019), mentor for the new Metropolitan Puppet organization (2018–2019), Board vice

president (2021–2022). She received the Award for Puppetry Activity of the Year 2013 from UNIMA Finland and was named Member of Honour.

She participated at UNIMA World Congresses and Festivals (1988–2002), was councillor for UNIMA Finland (1992–2002, 2020–2023) and secretary of UNIMA International president, Sirppa Sivori-Asp (1992–2000).

In 2006–2009, Tawast was a researcher, co-editor in chief of *Nukketeatteria suomalaisilla näyttämöillä* (History, Development and Present Status of Finnish Puppetry, 2009). Her publications include *Further Education Project for Puppeteers of Countries from around the Baltic Sea* (report 2003), *The Nordic Seminar of Puppeteers* (report 1984–1985), articles published in Nordic, British, Italian and Finnish puppetry publications, the *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre, vol.1: Puppetry in Finland* and co-authored entries on Finland puppetry for the WEPA.



PHILIPPE GENTY, 1938

## FRANCE

UNIMA Member of Honour 2016

French puppeteer. Originally trained as a graphic designer, Philippe Genty began his career with a trip during which he highlighted puppetry around the world. His film, *Le Tour du monde des marionnettes*, received the prize for originality at the 1965 Bucharest Festival. A creator of different manipulation techniques, Genty established his own company in 1968 with his wife, the dancer and choreographer Mary Underwood; they performed at the Bobino, Olympia, and Casino de Paris music halls with acts that have remained famous, such as *Pierrot* and *Les Autruches* (Ostriches). In the mid 1970s, he also became famous with the

television series, *Gertrude et Barnabé* (Gertrude and Barnabas). While his work was at first influenced by cabaret, it was already possible to see future forms, especially in the technique of black theatre where, by controlling the use of side beam lighting, the puppeteer gives the illusion that manipulated objects have a life of their own.

Since 1976, his regular creations for the Théâtre de la Ville (Paris) followed by highly successful world tours (“The World of Puppetry with Philippe Genty”, an episode in the television show, *Jim Henson Presents the World of Puppetry*, 1985), brought a new dimension to his artistic production. In *Rond comme un cube* (Round Like a Cube, 1980), *Désirs parades* (Parades of Desires, 1986) and *Dérives* (Drifts, 1989), the movements of materials and forms created fantastic illusions during performances in which theatrical elements had great flexibility. The puppet as object progressively expanded into a scenic object for which Genty used dancers and a choreographer (Mary Underwood) to put into motion. Genty continued to immerse himself into fantasy worlds with *Ne m’oublie pas* (Forget me not, 1992), *Voyageur immobile* (Motionless traveller, 1995), *Passagers clandestins* (Stowaways, 1996), up until the creation of *Dédale* (Maze), performed in the main courtyard of the Palais des Papes at the 1997 Avignon Festival. His fame brought him to undertake projects such as *Océans et Utopies* (Oceans and Utopias) for the Lisbon World Exposition in 1998, and *Le Concert incroyable* (The Incredible Concert, 2001) in Paris at the Grande Galerie de l’Évolution, the zoology museum at the National Museum of Natural History, in which the show was created from a dramatization of the space (filling the site with sound, light and projected images).

Philippe Genty rarely uses text in his productions (*Sigmund Follies*, a recreation in 2000 of the *Sigmund Follies* of 1983), confirming his penchant for journeys into individual psychoses and the subconscious. These preoccupations can again be found at the heart of *Lignes de fuite* (Vanishing Points, 2002), *Fin des terres* (End of lands, 2005) et *Boliboc* (2007), where the “puppet” language is based on a manipulation of space and its perception, as well as on anthropomorphic figures (doubling and mirror games), in a theatre of imagery and illusion.



RAINER REUSCH, 1939

## GERMANY

UNIMA Member of Honour 2016

German shadow artist, puppeteer and author, founder of shadow theatre festival, museum, and research centre in Schwäbisch Gmünd. Born in Neuenstadt, Germany, he founded the Gmünder Schatten-Trio in 1982 with his sons and jazz musician Dieter Seelow. Their first production, *Erschaffen und Erschöpft* (1982), gained national and international recognition for its innovative techniques and focus on environmental issues, a topic that received little attention at the time.

In 1988, Reusch founded the world’s first International Festival for Contemporary Shadow Theatre with the support of the town of Schwäbisch Gmünd in order to make puppet theatre better known locally and internationally. This gave shadow theatre artists from all over the world a forum every 3 years where they could get to know each other and forge international friendships.

In 1989, in collaboration with UNIMA, Reusch founded an international shadow theatre centre, Internationales Schattentheater Zentrum (ISZ), as a networking space and research institute for contemporary shadow puppeteers, which he ran for 25 years. He built up an archive of films, photos, correspondence, posters, programmes and shadow puppets. His books, starting with *Die Wiedergeburt der Schatten* (1991), are regarded as essential works in shadow theater.

His collection includes 500 modern shadow puppets showcasing the evolution of contemporary shadow theatre, along with a private collection of 700 traditional shadow puppets from across Asia and Europe. Some of these are displayed in the world’s only contemporary shadow theater museum, opened in 2022.

Due to the festival, the museum and the research centre, Schwäbisch Gmünd is regarded as the “world capital of contemporary shadow theatre”.

Reusch has been awarded numerous honours, including: Honoured by the Schwäbisch Gmünd Culture Working Group (1992), Civic Medal of the City of Schwäbisch Gmünd (2013), UNIMA Member of Honour (2016) and Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande (2021).

Rainer Reusch’s services to contemporary shadow theatre cannot be adequately expressed in words or awards. Due to his extensive life’s work, born from his curiosity, his inexhaustible enthusiasm and his foresight for this genre, he has created an incomparable, lively place of encounter and exchange for shadow theatre in Schwäbisch Gmünd, which has inspired many, many people, both locally and internationally.



RANJANA PANDEY, 1949

## INDIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Indian puppeteer, playwright, storyteller, director, educator, editor and publisher. Ranjana Pandey graduated in English Literature from Delhi University with an MA in Mass Communication and a Diploma in Journalism. She trained in puppetry in Belgium with Theatre Toone, Tilapin and Royal du Peruchet. She is one of the pioneers in India to explore puppetry as a medium in education, development and therapy. She lobbies for the rights and dignity of the marginalized and the abused. She trained many young people in puppetry as well as in social awareness theatre and collaborated with puppeteers like Anurupa Roy and kathputli master Puran Bhatt. Her shows perform in schools, slums and villages in the Greater Delhi and Haryana region. Her work improves the lives

of the disabled and marginalized, with special attention to girls and women.

In 1982, Pandey co-founded Jan Madhyam, a community-based educational puppet company, creating shows for people with special needs and the regular public on themes such as the value of a child with disability, literacy, generating income, hygiene, sanitation, ecology, sexual abuse and violence against women.

Director of Jan Madhyam, she created a puppetry-based series of shows, *Chowkoo-Pili* (1984–1990), for Delhi’s differently-abled youth, which taught basic concepts: colours, shapes, numbers, counting, seasons, and developed social skills and values. All episodes incorporated visual and spatial recognition and memory exercises through games, music, songs and dance.

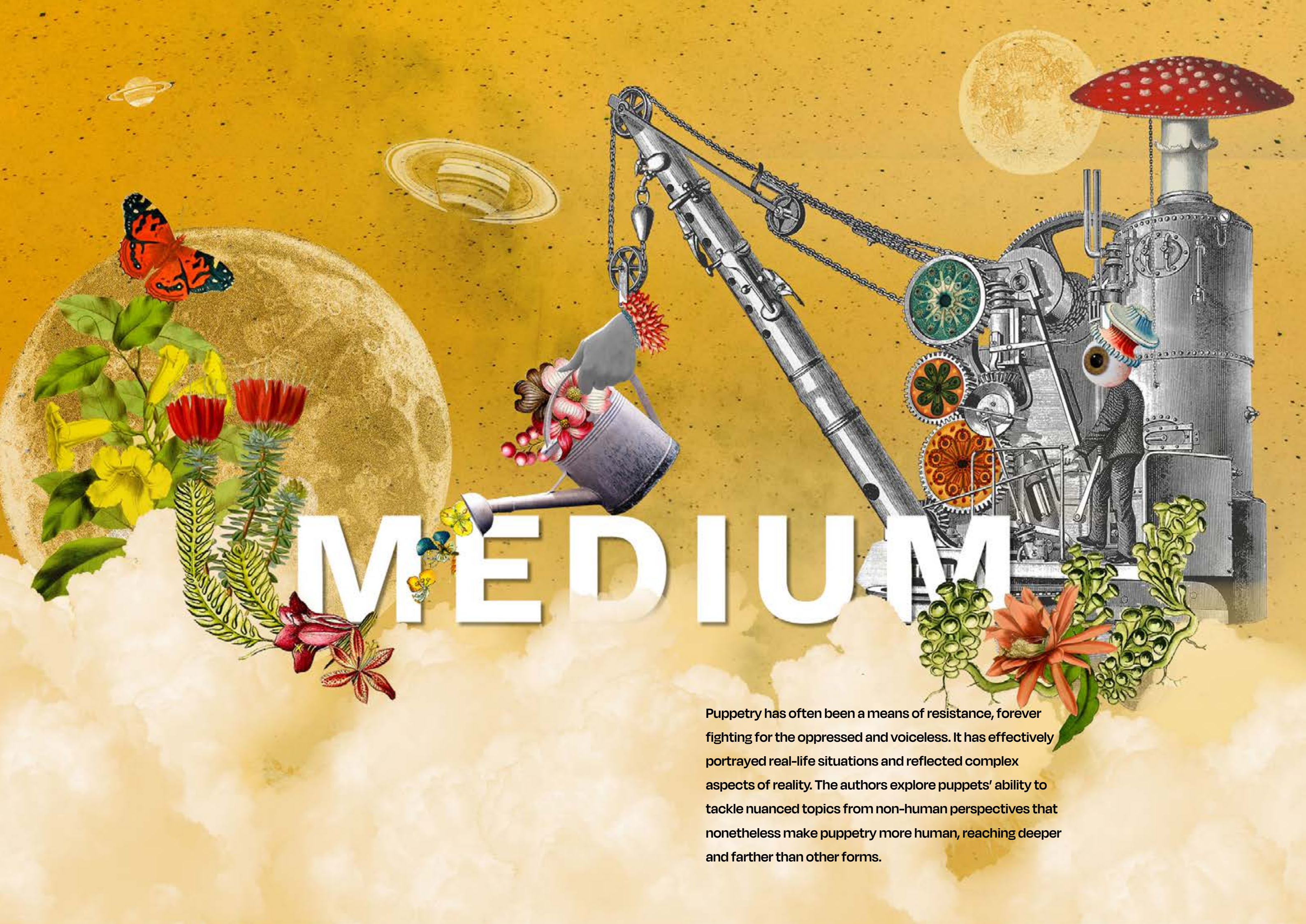
Jan Madhyam participated in the “Violence Against Women” national project (1986–1988) conducted by the Central Social Welfare Board of India. Pandey developed four scripts: exploitation of women in the unorganized work sector; illiteracy and its negative impacts on women; three sample crimes against women and their legal consequences; the negative social impacts women face as victims of violence. The shows were performed at the CSWB, South-Asian government and NGOs, social workers, women activists, psychiatrists and policy makers. The company trained the participants to perform the scripts with puppets.

In 2000–2002, Pandey created *Khullam Khulla*, the first Indian puppetry television series for children, which was telecast by India’s national broadcasting corporation, Doordarshan. She co-creates residential master classes for Indian puppeteers to study with traditional Indian and Western puppetry masters and the intensive Foundation Course in puppetry. She is on the faculty of teacher training and mass communication colleges at Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi and she also gives workshops in puppetry in education, therapy and development.

Member of UNIMA India (1980), Pandey was its secretary, president, councillor and founder-editor of *Sutradhar puppetry* magazine. She served on UNIMA International commissions: Asia-Pacific, Professional Training, Publication, Heritage, Education, Development and Therapy.







# MEDIUM

Puppetry has often been a means of resistance, forever fighting for the oppressed and voiceless. It has effectively portrayed real-life situations and reflected complex aspects of reality. The authors explore puppets' ability to tackle nuanced topics from non-human perspectives that nonetheless make puppetry more human, reaching deeper and farther than other forms.



# A FLOODED WOMAN FLOATS IN THE AIR

## PUPPETS AND TRAUMATIC SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

By Javier Swedzky

In this article we'll talk about two shows created from testimonies of traumatic social situations and about the way in which puppet and object theater is used to address the subject, transmit testimonies and pose questions to our community.

Argentina



*Aquí hay leones.*

The first show we will discuss is *Aquí hay leones*<sup>1</sup> (Here be lions), premiered in 2018 and inspired by the 2001 economic crisis in Argentina, and which inspired the process of the second project *Flota, Rapsodia Santafesina*<sup>2</sup> (Float, a Santa Fe Rhapsody), which premiered in 2024. The starting point of *Flota* is the huge flood in the city of Santa Fe in 2003.

I have been doing documentary theater since the 1980s with Graciela Ferrari, who was part of the *Libre Teatro Libre* (Free Theater) group, also known as the LTL group. The LTL group was one of the most important of its kind in Latin America in the 1970s for its way of approaching collective creation from documented reality, initially political, but later also from personal perspectives. With Graciela Ferrari I learned how the personal could become universal, how to consider the public as peers and the performances as moments of exercising citizenship and of coming together as a community. Also, with her, I began to work with objects as a tool for storytelling.

Since then, in my shows, people, puppets and objects coexist and start from a real situation. Sometimes it was a personal situation, like my mother's illness in *Mis Cosas Favoritas* (My Favorite Things) (2003), or the economic collapse of 2008 in *4 Temporadas* (4 Seasons) (2010). In recent times, these aspects are articulated in order to, on one hand, flesh out the collective experience, and on the other hand, give context to intimate experiences.

Some questions that guide my creations are: How can one deal with a painful subject without being obscene, miserabilist, or piteous? What words should be used? What images can describe an experience? How can one be emotional, delicate, affectionate, respectful, and at the same time not be solemn or lose one's sense of humor?

### AQUÍ HAY LEONES (HERE BE LIONS)

The play focuses on personal experiences of the 2001 economic crisis and does not attempt to make a historical reconstruction. It is based on the testimonies and the personal experiences of the members of the company, which were used as inspiration for the set design, puppets, props, and the collection of objects from that time period. The set consists of a tower of mattresses that constantly crumbles and rebuilds itself. The puppets are the only ones who give first-person testimonies to the audience and are visually marked by some kind of traumatic event: their clothes were luxurious, but are now in ruins, or their body is flat because it was crushed by the mattresses, or they have lost half of something, such as their body or a sword, in an unknown location. The objects have different symbolic meanings: they are objects from a time of catastrophe that equate the evidences of catastrophe on the objects with the state of the human<sup>3</sup> (travel souvenirs in a ruinous state, objects chained to one another) or they are objects from the period (things that people had used in order to barter for money or clothes, regional banknotes that replaced the national currency), objects that represent the fragility and urgency of everyday in Argentina, as inspired by Ernesto Oroza's analysis of similar items as they relate to the crisis in Cuba during this period<sup>4</sup> (chairs made from pieces of other chairs, wine glasses made from cut-up plastic bottles, etc.) and automats (a happiness machine, a consolation machine, a torch that projects ghosts). There are also prototypes of machines that can solve personal problems: understand what is happening outside or react to one's inactivity or uneasiness.

All this material reality not only reflects the themes of the work, but also takes on an informative and argumentative responsibility

on stage, supporting the playwriting, the puppets, and taking on the informative function that is generally assigned to the text. Much of the real storytelling-informative load is in the design and in the materialities that make up an image, which has a symbolic significance that just by being shown or put into action, becomes the main argument of the play. In the work it is not necessary to make reference through words to instability, anxiety, precariousness, uncertainty. All this is "said" by the objects and their effect on the puppet's bodies. It is not necessary to say that the economic crisis has destroyed people. The bodies of the puppets already give an account of this. The text is liberated, and the word is lighter and more playful.

The puppets have particular and distinct bodies that impose a distance on us, they prevent us from identification, or Aristotelian mimesis, as Paska rightly says<sup>5</sup>, but it is precisely this distance that allows a traumatic story to be told on stage in a way that is not unbearable. In our experience, the poetic dimension of the puppets, the strangeness of their physical conformation and their materials, the irreality of their movements and of their speech<sup>6</sup>, are precisely the scenic elements that allow us to relay a testimony that otherwise, because of its crudeness, pain or tragic dimension, would provoke rejection.

In the play, sound was also manipulated. All the sound of the play comes from outside the theater, as if an annoying neighbor was playing party music during the performance, which creates a coexistence of multiple spaces (often ridiculous) that reinforce the strangeness of the scene.

The Argentine audience's understanding of the lived experiences of the characters in the play gives a social dimension and generates a context that colors all actions, spoken words or images. The community's understanding



of the show is immediate. Now, how to articulate this for performances of the play in other communities? Does a show have to be completely universal? Specifically when *Aquí hay leones* was presented in Europe to an international audience, we saw that those who came from countries that went through an economic crisis saw one show, and those who didn't, saw a completely different one. It was a challenge to find a balance between those who have information and those who don't, and to create a world that presents the problem in a universal light and challenges all audiences. The remarkable thing about the play is that we are still presenting it after six years, and the audience keeps finding it significant.

Many of these principles were taken up in *Flota, rapsodia Santafesina*.

#### FLOTA, RAPSDODIA SANTAFESINA - 2024 (FLOAT, A SANTA FE RHAPSODY)

In *Flota, rapsodia Santafesina*, the theme is the huge flood that hit the city in 2003, in which, apart from material losses, there were deaths; in which property and memories were lost, only two years after the economic crisis of 2001. The *Hasta las Manos* puppet group called me to make a collective creation and address this collective traumatic event that people were mostly silent about. The Universidad Nacional del Litoral awarded the project with the honour of being presented in their forum, which we knew would give it a lot of visibility.

The flood is profusely documented and there is a lot of material written about it, and it was eventually approached from the theater, but never from the perspective of puppets and theater of objects. The group made a selection of texts, recorded testimonies, and images. We wanted to focus on the physical sensations and emotions experienced, while also accounting for the social experience. We worked from chaos; we did not seek uniformity, unity or coherence. This seemed, in fact, to be the most faithful way for us to think about what happened; we created a rhapsody, this musical form in which each part has stylistic independence, in accordance with that absolutely strange and unusual historical moment.

We had several challenges to solve: there was a particular interest to investigate collectively what form a political theater can possibly have today, a political theater of puppets and objects and, more broadly, a theater of images. Contemporary and also political.

Our play had to open up questions, highlight aspects that had been held back or silenced, address uncomfortable issues but, above all, it had to be fun, bearable and exciting. We wanted to explore dark, corrosive humor and irreverence. All at the same time.

We return to the idea of the lack of immediate mimesis of the puppets. In the performance, the bodies of people are not present, but their allusions, representations, simulacra, and evocations. We knew that the haphazard bodies of the puppets, between living and dead, between real and fantastic, between a memory of flesh and blood and the discarded bags they were made of, would be the best way to give voice to the testimonies.

The puppets were made into bags. Not "of" or "with", but bag-characters. "Estar hecho bolsa" (to be bagged up) is an Argentinian expression used to describe someone exhausted, destroyed, dejected, beaten up. Taking this literally allowed us to turn phrases and words into scenic images.

Some of the materials present in the flood - plastic, cardboard, mud, and a few other things - constituted a powerful metaphor on stage: a poor, ephemeral world, the vestiges of the catastrophe. The objects also served as testimonies with enormous force, to show

and expose its destruction. The contact with the objects was a powerful experience that we wanted to share with the audience.

The objects and materials seen in the work fulfill two simultaneous roles: on the one hand, they evoke the object landscape and the historical moment, and on the other, they expose the vulnerability, fragility and poverty of available resources, both in the flood and in the assembly process. In this way, they also speak of our theatrical present.

These "low objects", silent and discreet, functional and without dignity, are capable of carrying a great poetic charge. In this sense, we took up the idea of the "low object" from Kantor's theater<sup>7</sup>. The fact that, by seeing the characters, the bags could be recognized, allowed us to work with something that interested us: that the objects could be identified and not be lost in the character, and therefore, in the metaphor<sup>8</sup>. We wanted them to be seen and recognized as such, that is, to resist the metaphor, so that the material reality of the flood would be present throughout the work.

From the subject of playwriting for puppets and objects, we take the ideas of scale, which allows us to introduce and think generalities - models - in space; the idea of the puppets'

bodies as a revelation; and, finally, working with unstable bodies and materials to show live metamorphoses, strengthening the sensation of an intense scenic present.

The puppets in the play refer to people in a kind of non-time; they are phantasmatic presences that come to tell what happened at a precise moment. They are ironic and ridiculous puppets, who show with their bodies a reality that was as marvelous as it was monstrous. Some play symbolic and ephemeral roles<sup>9</sup>, or give body to something that has none. Puppets do not have a single role, nor a single manipulation technique. With an amusing and sometimes naive air, they narrate atrocious, absurd and terrifying testimonies.

The objects in the work are displayed in a space that allows a storytelling to emerge from what is being shown (for example, a wet book that hangs and drips). At one point in the work, we felt it was important for the public to touch the material objects of the flood, and that idea guided the scene that reconstructs the functions of an evacuee center. All the actions that the audience performs involve direct contact with objects: clothes, mattresses, cardboard, sweets, a ball, a list of evacuees, a megaphone, etc. Thus, we directly delegate the narrative construction to the relationship between audience and objects.

In this work we were interested in constructing non-animated objects as characters. We would not dare say that a waterlogged family photograph or a document with deformations and cracks lacks psychological charge; what it does not have is an interior life as understood in classical theater. We discover that an everyday action - such as folding clothes - can, in the context of theater, become an act of almost uncontainable emotionality.

We also work with the knowledge of the community: one automaton alludes to the city's central square and another synthesizes the struggles between the victims' families and the police as they place or remove crosses as a tribute. With a simple movement, the police approach and the crosses come down; the demonstration approaches and the crosses go up. The movement, which begins smoothly, accelerates and becomes frenetic: the image tells it all.

The materials are real: mud that dries, plastic that gets wet and dry, protects from water, reflects light and looks like a river without ever ceasing to be plastic. These materials bring to the scene the physical experience of that

moment without explicitly mentioning the word "flood", and discreetly exposing it in a constant way.

The sound in the work, composed of music with an ironic touch, period testimonies selected by the group, and concrete sounds, invades the space intermittently, like a ghostly presence.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

These shows have a great impact on the audience. The experience is physical, emotional; it is an experience that can invite reflection and communal dialogue as we imagine what the role of puppet and object theater, and theater in general, should be. While neither of the plays is naturalistic, many people in the audience have told us in both shows, "It was exactly like that." In this way, puppet theater raises the issue of what is real and what is plausible on stage, a discussion that runs through the entire history of theater, especially in the contemporary sphere.

I believe that these shows open a new path because they expose reality<sup>10</sup> and, at the same time, unveil a hidden reality: they establish a materiality and summon something that does not have a body.

After the performances, in both plays the "talking machine" is set in motion, and the audience spontaneously tells each other about their experiences. The play is at the same time an exercise of memory, a possibility to verbalize what has been silenced, to see under other perspectives what has happened. This is, in its modest dimension, a healing act, which is no small thing.

On the one hand, working with any of these themes on stage always requires distance and, therefore, a bit of failure. But, at the same time, the power of the poetic universes that can be created, the distance that puppets offer with respect to human bodies and the multiplicity of resonances that these objects and figures evoke constitute a powerful theatrical argument and open possibilities and paths, of discourses and dialogues joining two dimensions that interest me/us: the artistic and communitarian. It is worth exploring further.

#### References

- 1 Performers: Florencia Sartelli (understudy Carolina Tejeda), and Leonardo Volpedo. Prop and Puppet builders and designers: Laura Cardoso, Román Lamas, Ivo Siffredi, Javier Swedzky. Automatons: Hernán Lira. Lighting technician: Nicolás Botte. Costume Consultant: Valentina Bari. Lighting Designer: Ricardo Sica. Assistant Director: Laura Cardoso Plawright and Director: Javier Swedzky. A co-production with Trabajo a Reglamento and Vera Vera Teatro. With the support of Proteatro GCBA
- 2 Collective creation of the company Hasta Las Manos, Performers: Mónica Alvarez, Juan Venturini and Manuel Venturini. Music and sound design: Franco Bongioanni. Art direction, puppet design: Jaqueline Molina. Producers: Jaqueline Molina, and Matías Bonfigliom. Assistant Producers: Mercedes Fernández and Abril Peretti. Set Elements: Raúl Scotto Lavina. Lighting: Ariel Theuler. Production: Florencia Russo Figueroa. Co-Direction: Sebastián Santa Cruz. General Direction: Javier Swedzky. A production of Dirección de Cultura de la Universidad Nacional de Litoral, in co-production with Hasta Las Manos. With the support of INT
- 3 The idea of objects as bearers of catastrophe in Western theater, and the equating of the ruinous state of an object with that of people is developed by **Larios Shaday** in his lucid essay *Escenarios Post Catástrofe. Filosofía Escénica del desastre* in Premio Internacional de Ensayo Teatral 2010, Bilbao: Artezblai y Paso de Gato, 2011. Page 44.
- 4 This objectual universe is brilliantly analyzed in **De Bozzi, Pénélope and Oroza Ernesto. Objets Réinventés, la création populaire à Cuba**, Éditions Alternatives, Athens, 2002 and in Oroza, Ernesto. Rikimbli. Une étude sur la débobéissance technologique et quelques formes de réinvention. Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, Saint-Étienne, 2008.
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- 6 In the same writing Paska argues that puppets do not speak and that it is a convention accepted by the public, so the most natural means of expression for an actress or an actor becomes unnatural in puppet theater. Paska, 1995, p.63
- 7 This is seen in particular in the manifesto "Embalajes" **Kantor, Tadeusz** (1977), *El teatro de la muerte*. Ediciones de la Flor, Buenos Aires, 1984. p. 62- 63.
- 8 The idea of "resistance to metaphor" is developed by Jean-Luc Mattéoli as one of the bases of the poetics of object theater. **Mattéoli, Jean-Luc, L'objet pauvre. Mémoire et quotidien sur les scènes contemporaines françaises**. Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2011. . p. 90- 91
- 9 "Our creatures... It will be by a gesture or by a word that we will undertake the action of summoning them to life just for an instant... **Schulz Bruno, Tratado de los maniqués o segundo génesis in Las tiendas de color canela**, Dobra Robota Editora, Buenos Aires, 2015 (1934), 59.
- 10 The relationship between theater and the real and its history on stage are extensively developed by **José A. Sánchez** in *Prácticas de lo real en la escena contemporánea*, Paso de Gato, México, 2013.

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Flota, Rapsodia Santafesina.



MEDIUM

# PATHS AND DISCOVERIES IN CIA LUMIATO'S CREATIVE PROCESSES

By Soledad García

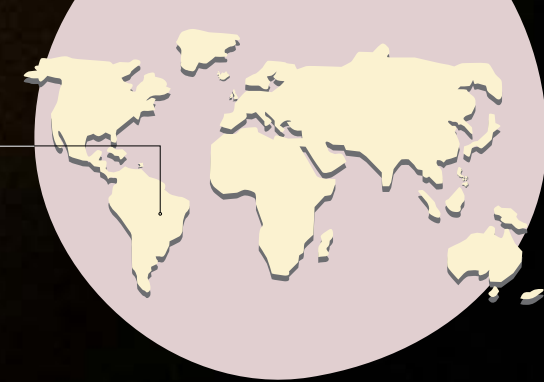
2 WORLDS Show. June 2021.

MEDIUM

“The effect produced by shadows and lights opens a channel for the mind to access abstractions and this, when understood, experienced, worked on and controlled by the *sombrista*, acquires great expressive potential, capable of promoting intensification of the aesthetic, symbolic and formal qualities of images, breaking with conventions more traditional and technical protocols already known in shadow theater.”

- Alexandre Favero \*

Brazil



Whenever we start thinking about creating a shadow theater show, we have many questions, curiosities and uncertainties, but first of all, the first question we ask ourselves, the one that comes to us at the start of this process, is about the story we want to tell, the themes we're going to tackle. At the same time, another question appears like a ghost that reveals itself to us: Could any story be told using shadow theater? This can probably only be answered by the process itself. It seems that the answer depends very much on how we approach that story in order to transform it into a theatrical scene. In this first encounter with the questions that the language brings us, new questions always open up, which expand and multiply as we enter the process.

I'm writing here from my own life experience. From the encounters in which I have had the opportunity to establish contact with various forms of art. Ever since I was a child, there have been many crossings between the plastic arts and my most basic explorations. My father's plans and sketches on a drawing board. My first art teacher's lessons on playing with plaster, woodcuts, ceramics and paint. The books on humanity's ancient civilizations on my mother's shelf. Hitchcock marathons on Sundays at the neighborhood cinema with my brother. The forms of expression in my memory start with drawing, painting, sculpture and then theater, photography and cinema.

In order to think about the initial ideas for a production, symbolic references are linked to these universes. To compose a scene for shadow theater is to think about the possibilities we have of mixing various languages. Someone who saw *Lara, o encanto das águas* (Lara, the charm of the waters), our first shadow theater show, once said that what we were doing looked like painting-in-motion. I think this idea as an interpretative possibility is very present in our way of creating and developing language, in this encounter between the visual arts and the performing arts. Hybridity characterizes our creative process, where the playwright is actor, illuminator and builder, becoming completely immersed in so many different roles in order to think about each of the small parts that make up the work. Thus, life and art intersect and intertwine, generating the perception of the work as a part

of us, a part that has come out and become independent of us, taking on new dimensions, spaces and horizons, leading us to travel new paths and start other processes.

Usually, when we haven't finished a creative process, we already find new questions that potentially lead to the start of new research. Our company has the characteristic of being a family at the same time, further deepening the relationship between art and life. The questionings are always based on some social issue, some situation that we think is important to be made visible, questioned, presented, in order to touch the senses of the spectator. The history of each of us, artists-creators, but first and foremost people, colonizers-colonized, migrants from the world, inserted in a capitalist patriarchal society, leads us to ask these first questions. Questions that bring new ones, in order to present a story that brings the viewer closer to the awakening of those same questions. It is increasingly important to talk about the issues that run through us, our lived experiences, the memories we have as peoples, inhabiting a city, a country, a continent, as part of the world. The choice of theme then becomes a fundamental part of the process of becoming an artist, of what we want to convey and question. Finding a way to put this context, this personal mark, even in productions where we approach texts that are not our own, is part of our way of expressing how we live and think about the world.

During the first approach to the theme, references are our starting point: cinema, photography, painting, literature. In the process of transforming questions into scenes, they guide us to find symbols that convey what we feel. Only after entering into a relationship and soaking up all these references did we start writing, thinking of scenes to be conveyed primarily through images and actions. Then we included all the components that make it up as a unit: sound, music, verbal. Each of the elements that make up the scene has a function, conveys part of a meaning and is interwoven with others that, together or presented later, complement the meaning and understanding of the work as a whole.

To get into the aesthetic possibilities that make up each scene, a fundamental component in the construction



of shadow theater that we need to consider is light. The choice of light source defines the different ways in which we can present a scene. The needs of the scene will determine the choices of appropriate light technology to allow us to tell the story in the way we imagine. Light enables a composition of shots and editing methods that we use to generate the dynamics of each scene. This world of possibilities can show us the ways to think about what and how we need to build according to it. But these certainties are fragile, often leading us to reformulate the use of scenic and plastic resources, and even to discard and reconstruct materials. In the intensities, filters and temperatures, we find other important variables to be able to generate the climates of the show, enhancing the different atmospheres that we need to imprint at each moment. The complementation to illuminate the scene outside the space of the projections needs to be well delimited and equalized, highlighting their aesthetic beauty and taking into account the levels of dimness and darkness necessary for their appreciation.

The development of the aesthetic universe in our research for a shadow theater show has an essential place. Each of the choices we make has an impact on the spectator's imagination, on the symbolic references present in their life experiences and in relation to other previous artistic knowledge. Our collective memories, both as spectators and as artists, always run through the experience of perceiving and composing a show, a work. In this sense, when we take these shared references into account, the aesthetic choice also constitutes the creation of dramaturgy. These choices are intended to help communicate countless meanings. Within the design or construction of the characters, we can include information that generates identification or rejection on the part of the spectator. The colors and geometric shapes that make up the scene set the mood by bringing out many of the feelings that we need to convey in it. Often these choices can be intuitive, since they are present in our unconscious, but by consciously using this knowledge to our advantage in the construction of imagery-dramaturgy, we enhance the creation of these symbolic universes.

In our productions, putting all these elements in motion requires an artistically high quality of presence as actor-shadow puppeteer. In the possibilities of the body's presence on stage, we encounter very different challenges. The greater the number of variables in which we interfere as manipulators: moving the light, controlling its potential, manipulating silhouettes, objects and projection surfaces, within the mechanics of the scene during a given time period, we require greater dedication and concentration. This manipulation can take place behind the projection surface or in front of it, or a combination of both. When the presence of the body and the manipulation takes place throughout the show in front of the audience, it requires a much greater level of concentration and presence of the body. Each movement communicates and can be used to complement and add meaning and emotion to the scene. The stage presence of the body requires special care in the actor's bodily and emotional preparation before entering the scene. The more we become aware of our body and its involvement, the more emotional depth we will achieve in the theatrical encounter.

In this text, an essay intended to bring the reader closer to the company's creative process, we present some of the concerns that drive us in the ways we conceive and think about it. Choosing to talk about some of these issues and not others is only because they affect us the most as creators. We are always present in them, involved, frustrated, discovering new opportunities to inquire about shadow theater and ourselves. In these pages, I'm sharing some of what we, as shadow puppeteer, have learned in practice over these nine years of dedication to researching the language of shadow theater. In the first shows, our director, Alexandre Favero, guided the processes and developments in this language, unveiling a world of possibilities and enchantments. In recent years, we've been staging our audiovisual productions with shadow theater and carrying out the research for our next theatrical production. The road ahead is just beginning, we still have a lot to discover in this universe that offers us such a powerful and mobilizing language.

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✦ **Alexandre Favero. *Dramaturgies of shadows*.** Moin-Moin magazine issue 9, page 154.



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#### Soledad Garcia

Actress, artist and graduate in puppetry and object theater from the University of San Martin in Argentina, she is the founder and sombrista of Cia. Lumiato Teatro de Formas Animadas (2008). One of her main objectives as founder of the Lumiato company is to broaden the research focus of this language, generating new possibilities for knowledge and exchange, expanding the references of this little-developed art in the country.

Development of stage material,  
April 2017.

# THERAPEUTIC PURPOSES OF MATERIAL THEATRE

## SOME EXPERIENCES



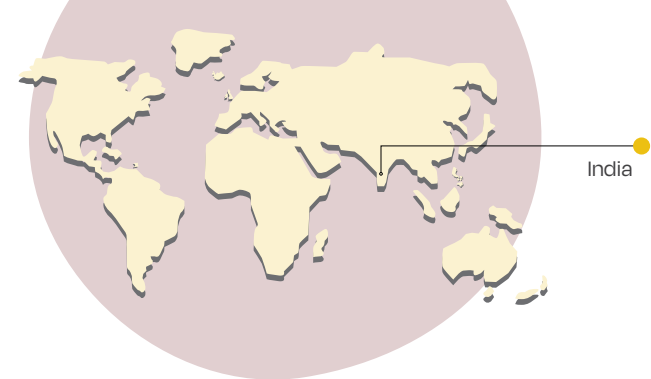
**Sutradhar • May 2023**

By Vikramjeet Sinha

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MEDIUM

© Vikramjeet Sinha



All the images in this article:  
Building stories for healing  
during the Kashmir project.

Stories and their dramatization through play are the core of human happiness and the continuing development of children, young people, and adults. Indeed they are universally important for the welfare of all children. It's a connection to a vital source of pleasure, transformation, and a revitalisation of energy. Material theatre, or playing with objects, or creating story maps with installations of polystyrene, figurines made of newspapers, simple puppets, creates new pathways and new ideas, which are generated as I continuously work as an arts based therapist with children and adults within various institutions .

In this article we will explore how the play space and creative group work becomes a powerful empowering space for children and adults alike, giving them a voice to express themselves, especially when they start working with tactile materials which give shape to the stories they carry in their inner world.

The arts, with their skill building, generate imagination and the will to deal with the outside world. It brings values in narratives that provide an antidote to the suffering and dissatisfaction that follows all human beings, especially when they live in a total institution. Here they are just another number and therefore have no personal identity except of being a part of a collective identity. The work is about wrestling personal stories or the collective voice out of the totalising identities generated by the institution.

The clients/participants can see their own reflection in the sculptures they create, like the reflection of their desires, their anger, their pain, their joy. They get a chance to have an artistic distance and the ability to witness their lives. The artistic expressions of the participants first creates a landscape of their wounded metaphors, and then the safe space or the "container" facilitates the metaphor and its movement, which works as an antidote to the wounded metaphors. This kind of process is different from any other art or puppetry workshop. There is a therapeutic purpose.

Let us further unpack the word "therapeutic purpose", it's the intentionality behind the work which is about creating spaces of safety, where the stories of a person's own life can come out in a safe manner and be held by the "container". The container is a facilitated space of emotional safety where the embodied stories made by tactile materials (be it paper theatre, newspaper sculptures, puppets, or objects), all bring up a "narrative capability". The therapeutic value is in the performance of the narrative and how the community of participants view this performance .

#### THE KASHMIR PROJECT

In conflict areas, violence works at many levels, not only at the state level, but also at the personal level. Here the use of materials, formed or unformed, in role play brings out the unsaid and allows the communities to act and to reflect on the stories created.

Sometimes formed material like a puppet becomes a perfect vehicle to talk of taboo topics like death, violence or sex. In the militarised zones of Kashmir a teacher had lost a son at a young age through sudden illness. It had been seven years and she had not been able to grieve completely. In a workshop called the "inner child", two small bunraku puppets were used, one elderly male puppet and another young boy puppet. All they had to do in groups of three was to use the puppets, to move them from one end to another, and get the two to meet each other. When the aforementioned teacher moved the young boy puppet and made it sit on her lap and made him move, it invoked the memory of her long gone son. She felt he was there with her and that he had never left her . She mentioned later that she felt him saying (in her mind): "I have never left you". This brought deep acceptance. It brought a completion of her grieving process.

In the same exercise with another group, a young male teacher was working with the elderly looking puppet, and

was playing it as a father to the child puppet. At first we see the elderly looking puppet offering namaz (prayer) and then as soon as that is over, the man slaps the child puppet without any reason. This expressed the violence the teacher had gone through as a child. It is clearly reflected in his little improvisation. It brought up a facilitative space for discussion on how teachers often indulge in corporal punishment as they believe that nothing works other than beating a child and how violence against children is actually a transmission of trauma from one generation to another.

On the outskirts of Srinagar (Kashmir) on a cold January afternoon, many teenagers, and social workers had gathered in a rough looking house with minimal furnishing. One of the teenagers' faces was injured by an exploding tear gas shell. When we worked with paper—that is telling stories using paper—he built baskets, flowers and protest banners out of two sheets of paper. He said this was a representation of his journey of protests, his story, with a self-conscious smile, because his teeth were wired together because of the effect of the tear gas shell. What he loved was working with his hands. The world of material and tactile intelligence speaks of interconnections between varied objects which weave a story, bringing self-expression, empowerment, and finally a voice and visibility making communities living on the margins visible.

Skills and vulnerability work together to bring about a transformation of belief systems that, often because of discipline and punishment in militarised zones, rob

communities of a voice. This in turn brings about a dark future, futile and foreboding.

It's either through skills or through vulnerability that we enter the inner world and project that world through puppets or paper, or any other material, to bring about a story that could not be told, but now can be shown. The stories can be seen even in an unfriendly place, even where the barbed wires (in Kashmir with its vigilante culture) have turned an entire state into a juvenile home. This visibility of the individual and the collective brings about a joy within, and it is as if the inner doors of creativity open up.

It is with therapeutic intentionality that the "container" holds difficult emotions and allows us to reflect on it . It's this reflection that leads people living on the margins to have a macro view and to have collective self-reflection within their situation. The self-reflection helps further in preparing the children for a larger world , and takes them out of the eye of collective trauma, to a larger view. Storytelling, story building using material, objects and puppets has a strong role to play.

Vikram is an arts based therapist and a theatre director. He uses puppetry and material and objects frequently in his work. In the last few decades he has worked in conflict militarised zones and 26 years in the development sector and juvenile institutions.

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# TALES, IN WORKSHOPS ON TALES AND PUPPETS



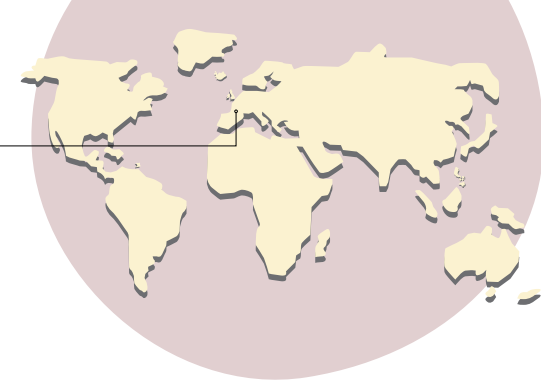
Marionnette et Thérapie • n° 2 • 2021

By Edith Lombardi

Clinical psychologist and storyteller



France



During this article, for convenience, I might sometimes use the word “tale” to talk about the great narratives of orature<sup>1</sup>, that is to say to talk about what is “told” whether they are tales, myths or legends.

All these stories deal with everything that has to do with our human lives: our traumas, our most archaic experiences, our efforts, our affections, joys, dreams, hopes... or the world in which we live, what there was before our birth, the approach to our death, or what is beyond our death...

With my colleagues, in the tales and puppets workshops that I led at the IME– acronym after the French name of the Medical-Educational Institute, which provides care for children living with cognitive impairments—for teenagers suffering greatly on a psychological level, we told all kinds of tales. The tales were chosen according to what we perceived in the group, in order to feed their spirits, to offer them images and narrative schemas that they could use as they wished, when it felt right for them. And they did use them. We then invited them to create their own puppets and to play with them freely.<sup>2</sup>

My colleagues and I have always been traditional storytellers, performing live, orally, and adjusting to our audience as we go.

## STATUE OF WOOD OR HEAD OF CLAY

Tales, among other things, tell us about puppets that we can use to ward off misfortune, by placing them away from us, at a distance, or even by destroying them. These stories have served us many times to introduce a puppet activity. One of these tales has been adapted by Gilbert Meyer, who illustrates it with narration boards: small wooden or cardboard plates that serve as storytelling boards, where he engraves or draws the significant elements of the story, which he then animates by making them move (if he sets the story in Mongolia, the box then becomes a yurt). The tale is *Krutongo and the Misfortune*, a tale that originated in Sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>3</sup> and that I will tell here in a few words.

Krutongo was a young hunter, he and his wife were very happy, and were expecting a child. Once the child was born, he breathed only for a few seconds before his tiny life ended. The following year they again had a child who died immediately, and again the third year. Krutongo then said to his wife: “This country is not good for us, let’s leave.”

They took their belongings and walked until they found a beautiful plain where they decided to settle.

The young woman was expecting again. Krutongo went hunting to bring her good nourishment. He left for several days; he left for a long time.

The hour had come, the woman groaned in pain and could not give birth on her own. Then a hideous being arrived, a demon. Unhappiness incarnate, which pursued them, had found them again. He helped the woman bring her child into the world, then started a fire, cooked and said: “I will give you food if you give me your son.” She refused. For several days she didn’t eat or drink, holding her baby in her arms, refusing to give him to the demon. When her husband returned, the demon went away.

But the demon did not release them. He destroyed their crops, transformed their fields into weeds. Krutongo then went to ask Lady Spider for advice, the wise spirit that travels from the earth to the sky. Lady Spider told him: “This demon wants your wife. Take a beautiful piece of wood, carve a woman who looks like your wife. Give it the roundness of her shoulders, of her breasts, of her hips. Display this statue in your field and coat it with tree sap that sticks so strongly that everything that sticks to it cannot be unglued!”

And so it was done. Krutongo carved a statue in the image of his wife, installed it in plain sight on his field, covered it with sticky sap, and waited.

That evening, the demon, believing that he had found the woman, rushed towards the statue, and seized it passionately, holding it tight in his arms... and found himself stuck, trapped.

Gilbert Meyer's storyboards showing the monster attacking Krutongo and his family.

© Gilbert Meyer





Seeing that the demon was struggling and begging to be let go, Krutongo started to laugh: "And that puppet thought it could frighten us."

With no hesitation, he killed Unhappiness.

It is said that from that moment on, Krutongo and his wife lived peacefully. Children were born, girls and boys, who, in turn, when the time came, had a house, had a family.

Many other tales deal with difficult situations, disturbingly dangerous, from which the heroes and heroines emerge matured, thanks to the removal of misfortune through a decoy. In the tales of Bluebeard, the trapped girl escapes several times by leaving behind a figurine in her image. The enemy, deceived, lets her go, even carrying her himself, believing that his prey is trapped in the house.

A Chinese tale, *The Two Monks*,<sup>4</sup> tells us this: because of an imprudent word, a monk named Nalai will have his head burst into seven pieces, if he allows the sun to rise. So Nalai kept the sun below the horizon; cold and darkness reigned over the land. Everybody was going to die. The sun must rise, but Nalai didn't want his head to burst into seven pieces. Suddenly, he had an idea! He took a ball of clay, kneaded it in the shape of a human head, stuck it on a stick and declared: "This is Nalai!" Then he added: "May the sun rise!" At this moment the sky became pink, then the sun emerged to the East, and BANG! The mud head broke into seven pieces. It is said that Nalai, intact, laughed with joy, the clay debris scattered at his feet.

We can remove or outwit bad luck by representing it; these tales tell us. Tales serve us as a support in many situations. *The Boy with the Suitcase*,<sup>5</sup> is about a young boy, alone on the dangerous migration routes, supported at every trial by the stories his parents told him. In danger of drowning in the Mediterranean, he remembers Sinbad the sailor, who survived by clinging to a plank, so he grabbed a piece of wood and avoided drowning. The animated film *Parvana* tells us about an Afghan girl in a country dominated by the Taliban. This little girl, Parvana, is nurtured by the great traditional stories of the Afghan people. These stories strengthen her courage and her intelligence, allowing her to envision a possible path despite a context of extreme harshness.

#### OEDIPUS AT THE IME

Our group, at a certain moment during a workshop, had the strong impression that several of the participants were experiencing incest. For one group, throughout two years we told tales dealing with this issue. The legend of Oedipus was the culminating point of this work. I told it once a week, every week, for two months. Telling this long and complex story required me to cleanse it, simplify it, and add to it as it felt right to me.

Oedipus, as you know, without wanting to or knowing it, married his mother. The first time I spoke about this terrible union, it aroused in some of the participants

a wild joy, which spread through the whole group, joy manifested by loud laughter, animal cries, gesticulations, all difficult to calm down. The following week, I spoke of the transgression in all of its gravity, telling this part of the story in a deaden voice, then expanding on the sadness and death which spread throughout the country.

We then went on a long journey with Oedipus. One of the boys in the group was able to confide to his teacher that he and his sister had been raped by an uncle. A meeting was set with his parents. A complaint was filed. Another, 14 years old, chased his father out of the marital bed, to sleep with his mother when he came home from boarding school on weekends. We were able to meet with the parents and start a process with the help of the boarding school's social worker. Another boy, slowly, was able to accept that his sister would get married.

Based on the support that Oedipus brought to them, each in their own way, were all able to create and animate the characters they needed to become the narrators of their own existence. The puppets "mixed well" with the tale throughout this work.

During the year, although we had moved on to other tales, they asked us for the legend of Oedipus several times: "You know, the story of the king who became a vagrant..."

So, over months and years, with different groups, tales, and puppets, there were well-tuned mediations, which each teenager seized in their own time and in their own way.

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- 1 The word orature is ancient, it predates the invention of writing and precedes that of literature, it designates the set of genres whose mode of expression is oral, and which is stored in the memory of both the narrators and the listeners.
- 2 I talked about this experience in *Contes et éveil psychique*, éd. L'Harmattan.
- 3 Henri Gougaud gives us a version of it in his book *Contes d'amour et de Sagesse*, éd Seuil, coll. Points.
- 4 Bulletin 2012/1, article from: *Des marionnettes au cœur de la clinique*, Edith Lombardi.
- 5 *The Boy with the Suitcase* by Compagnie de Louise, text by Mike Kenny. Published by Actes-sud-papiers.

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Many publications are freely available on the Puppet and Therapy website <https://marionnettetherapie.fr>

# THE PUPPET, A TOOL FOR LINKING COMMUNITIES

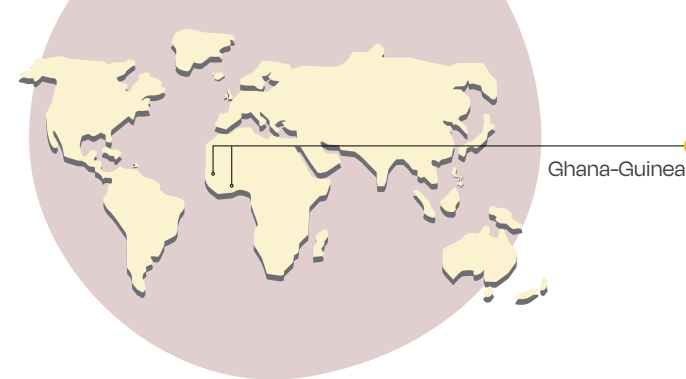
Elijah Cunnison and Iry Armand Gogbé

Interviewed by Emmanuelle Castang



Show in school in Ghana.





MEDIUM

In June 2025 an international magazine dedicated to puppetry arts will be published by UNIMA. To date, more than 40 articles have been received from Africa, America, Asia-Pacific and Europe. As an appetizer and to echo the major inter-African seminar held in Cape Town, South Africa, in November 2024, Manip asked Iry Armand Gogbé and Elijah Cunnison, heads of young UNIMA National Centres in Guinea and Ghana, to open the doors to their countries for us.

**Manip: In a few words, can you introduce yourselves?**

**Elijah Cunnison:** I'm General Secretary of UNIMA Ghana. I used to be a puppeteer. I'm now in charge of organizing workshops for UNIMA Ghana and liaising with UNIMA International, particularly for projects in Africa.

**Iry Armand Gogbé:** I'm a representative of UNIMA Guinea Conakry. I used to be an actor, during which time I worked with puppet companies as a sound technician. After a meeting in Ouagadougou with Soro Badrissa and Gilbert Agdevide they encouraged me to set up a UNIMA National Centre in Guinea Conakry.

**M: What is the place of the puppet in Guinea and Ghana today?**

**IAG:** The public is attracted to the giants. They are visible, they create curiosity. As far as UNIMA Guinea is concerned, we're trying to open to other techniques, such as rod puppetry. We offer training courses for children and adults. We want to reach a wider audience.

**EC:** In the early 90s, when puppetry was introduced as a craft, a lot of children were trained in it and a lot of people became interested. It was based on the work of a man who accomplished many things, Dr. Mohammed Ibn Abdallah. The energy died down a little when he retired. The COVID period motivated artists to start using puppets again to educate audiences. We're still small but, if we're lucky, we'll grow!

**M: What is the tradition of puppetry in your countries?**

**IAG:** This art form has been practiced for a very long time. Puppets had several functions. Over time, artists began to appropriate this knowledge. Today, it's no longer a cultural activity, it's evolving. We're trying to see how we can move from tradition to modernity to reach a wider and more diverse audience.

**EC:** We come from the great history of Mali, Niger, Lesotho... but also from South Africa with the practice of marionettes with a cross control bar. There was a time when people also used masks.

**M: Are puppets sometimes associated with rites or spiritual festivities?**

**IAG:** Yes, of course. We see this in every region. There are ceremonies in certain villages with costume puppets. The children born are presented to these puppets, which are seen as family heirlooms. The puppets come in all shapes and sizes, from the most beautiful to the ugliest. When the ugliest puppets come out, people run in all directions! It's very popular.

**EC:** In the past, people used masks, particularly those from Niger or Benin, to perform sacred dances wearing raffia skirts. Kakamotobi was there to frighten children by telling them that he was going to come if they didn't behave. Today, the music and rhythm are still there. For certain festivals, such as Christmas, the Anchors come and walk through the streets, scaring the children. During festivals, some puppets or masks represent humanity, others nature. The lion mask, for example, represents a mystical being.

**M: Do puppets play a role in conveying political or social messages?**

**EC:** They are mainly used for entertainment purposes or to educate communities. Companies can create shows to raise awareness about social issues such as domestic violence or - during COVID - about washing one's hands, for example. It's true that they are often used for getting a message across.

**IAG:** Puppets have a role to play in raising awareness of social issues, but they are also there to entertain, to tell the truth, to denounce vices, so that people see their behaviour in them. It's about educating through entertainment, having fun in order to build and develop.

**M: If they deal mainly with local issues, I imagine that the companies don't leave the country very much?**

**IAG:** That's true. Very few companies go outside the country. We're trying to look at subjects that might be of interest beyond Guinea. We also want to professionalize the manipulators and the companies, and work on ways of writing.

© Elijah Vandeputte Cunnison



Performance during the GAWBOFEST in Ghana.

**M: Does the audience have a special place in your shows? What form does the interaction take?**

**IAG:** The forms of interaction are different. Puppet shows are often quite complete, inviting singing, music and dance. So, the audience is quite naturally included. When it's time to dance, everyone dances, and the same goes for the singing. It's a communion that's created.

**EC:** We also use music, dance and theatre. People are included, they sing, they dance. Particularly at the beginning of the show, when the artists use singing to draw people in and then go on to deal with the subject of the show. Some also use animation, like the company Paraboles, which creates animals to involve children.

**M: How do you become a puppeteer? Is it reserved for a particular category of people?**

**IAG:** Anyone can become a puppeteer, it's a question of passion, not caste. When people see shows, they're curious, they want to touch them, see how they're handled and how they're made. The practice is passed on to other puppeteers, in the family, in the neighborhood and to teachers in schools.

**EC:** In Ghana, it's not just for a certain type of person or class. It's through seeing shows that people want to learn. If you're interested in puppetry, UNIMA Ghana can help

MEDIUM

on the organisation of events such as Puppet Day, the first puppet arts festival in Guinea.

**M: Are there collaborations with neighbouring countries?**

**IAG:** There is collaboration between neighbouring countries such as Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and others. This is done through training workshops, interviews and exchanges by email and on social networks. We receive advice from the National Centres, which have more experience than us in the field.

**EC:** A few years ago there were collaborations with neighboring countries who are mainly francophone. Togo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast used to have training workshops with puppeteers in Ghana by attending events such as FESPACO, FITMO and MASA. The challenges of funding mobility and these workshops have not been favorable to these countries, so these collaborations have stalled for a while. However, we are looking forward to reigniting such connections since UNIMA International and UNIMA African Commission are always willing to facilitate such connections through their various approaches.

Translation of Elijah Cunnison during the interview:  
Marie Gabrielle Phillips.

An event from UNIMA Guinea Conakry.

© Iry Armand Gogbé et ONUCCO





# MOVING TOWARDS AN AFRICAN DYNAMIC IN PUPPETRY: REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

By Gilbert Agbevide

Administrator, cultural promoter, consultant and trainer,  
coordinator of the African Network MA RUE

The universe of the puppet in Africa is in full effervescence, carried by dynamic exchanges and initiatives for structuring. In November 2024, an inter-African seminar - Pro-Vocation: Roots & Wings - was held in Cape Town, South Africa, with the ambition of looking 10 years ahead to the development that the continent could dream of for the puppetry arts. More than twenty participants from ten countries (north, south, east, west) reflected together on their desires and a realistic work plan.

Several areas of development emerged, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for puppetry on the continent.

## A STRUCTURED ORGANISATION FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

The discussions revealed the need for a well-defined framework to structure actions around training, communication, events, resources and heritage. Several professionals worked together, each focusing on a key theme:

**Training:** Structuring a coherent and accessible form of long-term training for all puppeteers on the continent by collecting and centralising documents and teaching aids digitally.

**Communication:** Elaboration of internal and external strategies of communication, aimed at ensuring that everyone is informed of what is being done, and at the same time is visible to their colleagues and more widely through social networks and digital platforms.

**Events:** Development of partnerships between project leaders in the sector and other existing African festivals in order to integrate puppetry more fully.

**Resources:** Creation of a digital documentation and archiving space.

**Heritage:** Inventory and promotion of African puppetry traditions.

These projects require a pragmatic approach, including the creation of models and prototypes of digital platforms to facilitate access to information.

## A SENSE OF BELONGING AND PRIDE

The participants' testimonials illustrate a strong sense of commitment and belonging to a continental community. Some, like Sam, discovered the wealth of puppetry networks through UNIMA. Others, like Peter, found a 'continental tribe' driven by a shared passion.

The discussions also highlighted the need to pool resources and explore transnational collaborations. Yacouba reminds us that while Africa does not yet have its own puppetry 'World Cup', it does have its own artistic identity to celebrate and promote.

## CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME, DREAMS TO REALISE

The initiative does not lack ambition, but it also comes up against certain challenges. One of them is not to remain confined to a single artistic approach, but to open puppetry up to influences from other disciplines. Another major challenge is to ensure the long-term viability of our actions through funding and a solid organisation.

Through this dynamic, African puppetry will find new impetus. Structuring, documenting, sharing and collaborating: these are the key words of this new puppetry era in Africa.

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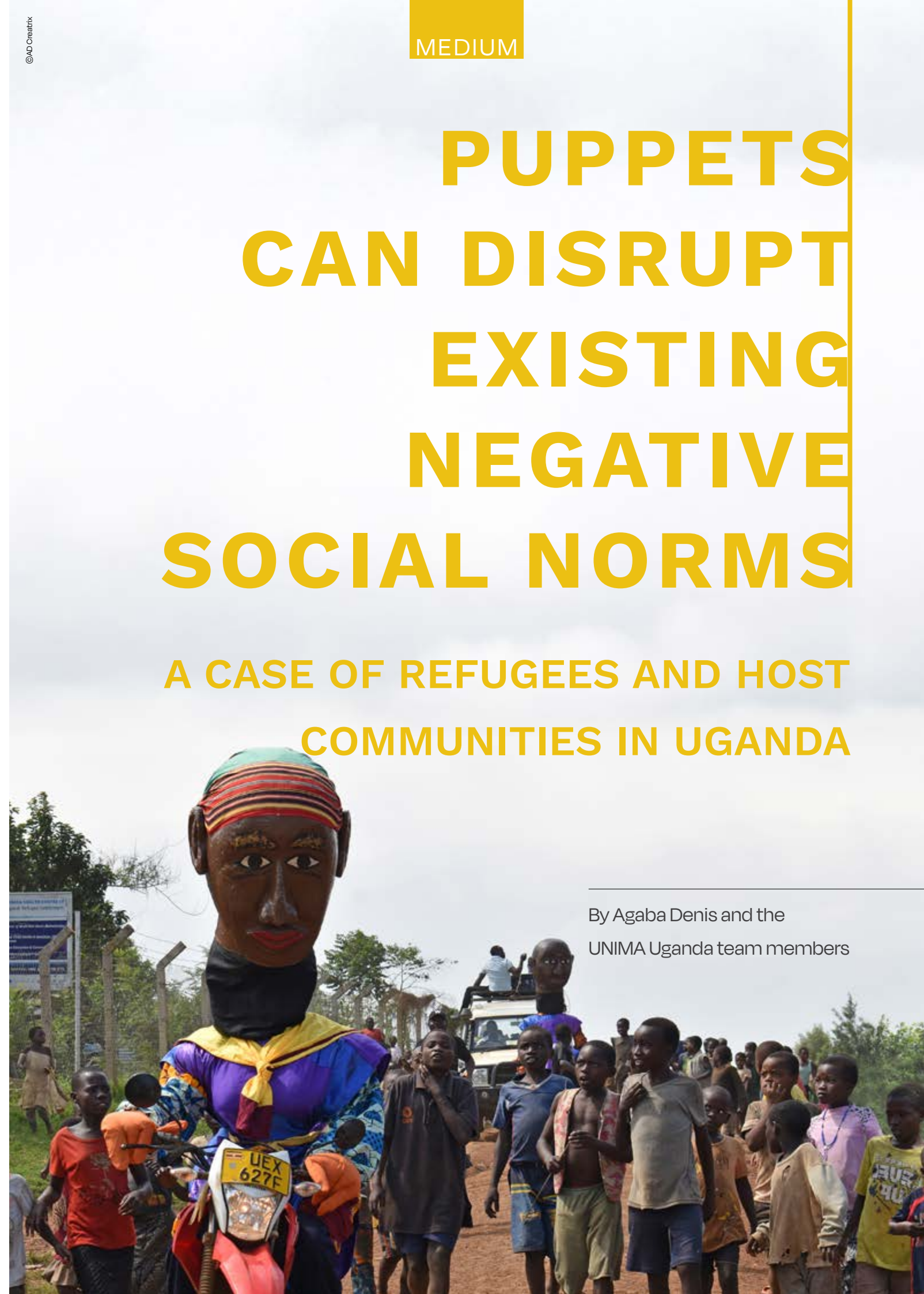
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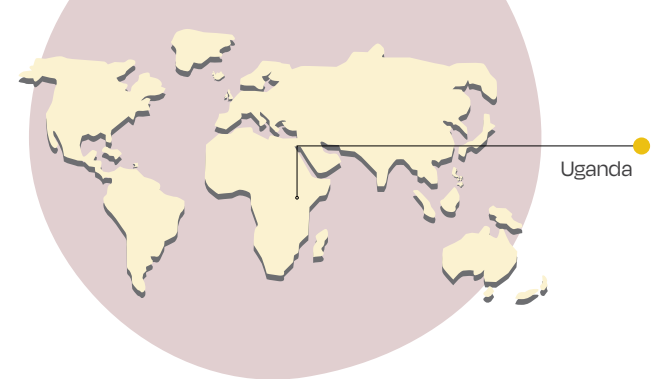
# PUPPETS CAN DISRUPT EXISTING NEGATIVE SOCIAL NORMS

## A CASE OF REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA

By Agaba Denis and the  
UNIMA Uganda team members







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Uganda is home to 1.74 million refugees and asylum-seekers as of September 2024, according to the UNHRC website. Most refugees come from South Sudan (55%), followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (31%), Somalia (3%), Sudan (3%), Burundi (2%) and other nationalities (6%). Refugees primarily live in settlements within 12 districts, alongside host communities, resulting in economic, social and environmental challenges. An additional eight per cent of refugees reside in Kampala City.

The 2020 Vulnerability and Essential Needs Assessment (VENA) led by REACH, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) presents that there have been reductions in food assistance, elevated rates of anaemia, stunting, malnutrition, gender-based violence, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and suicide. These issues have exacerbated challenges faced by the refugee population and host communities in Uganda, requiring urgent interventions to change the status quo.

Among others factors, social norms dominate as a critical barrier to solving the above challenges among refugees and host communities in Uganda. Scholars define social norms as the perceived informal, mostly unwritten, rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community, thus guiding human behaviour. They are deeply ingrained in the lifestyle of a people to the extent that any new contesting ideas are considered alien therefore should be rejected. For example, child marriages and teenage pregnancies are exacerbated by traditional social norms among some tribes in Uganda and South Sudan, who believe that a girl child who has experienced their first menstruation period, no matter the age, is ready for marriage. Similarly, in some communities, people still hold beliefs that make violence against women tolerable. For example, a number of researches conducted in Uganda indicate that it is a common view that “Men need to use violence to discipline their wives,” and “A man beating his wife is a sign that he loves her”.

In some cases, social norms reinforce behaviours that are harmful to individuals or society, such as smoking, excessive drinking, or unhealthy eating. These norms make it difficult to promote healthier alternatives because they normalize these behaviours. The widespread acceptance of these behaviours can create a cycle of negative reinforcement.

Also, social norms often create a sense of inertia, where people continue with some behaviours simply because they are the “usual” or “accepted” ways, even if they are not ideal. Overcoming this inertia can be difficult, as it requires not only a change in individual behaviour but also in the larger social context.

©ADCreatrix



Cover image: A giant puppet mobilising refugees for a puppet show in Parolinya Refugee Settlement in Obongi District Uganda in September 2023.  
Image above: Refugees watching a puppet show in the community in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Kikuube District December 2024.

©AD Creatrix



Giant puppets on a mobilization drive for a puppet show in Bulambuli District Uganda.

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To change such traditional beliefs and attitudes requires innovative communication approaches to ignite a process of change in attitude and behaviour. In this regard, puppets have been very instrumental in disrupting these social norms to contribute towards the reductions in the high rates of child marriages, teenage pregnancies, domestic violence and other social and health related challenges within the refugee settlements and host communities in Uganda.

Trained by the Kenya Institute of Puppet Theatre, Ugandan puppeteers have used puppet theatre as a platform to address these social norms in refugee settlements and host communities since 2018. Raising awareness about the negative consequences of certain behaviours and demonstrating the benefits of alternatives can help individuals to challenge the prevailing norms. A number of individuals and communities are benefiting from puppetry performances in Palabek, Palorinya, Pagirinya and Kyangwali refugee settlements and host communities in Northern and Western Uganda.

Puppets have a unique ability to disrupt social norms by using humour, exaggeration, and symbolism to challenge conventional ideas and behaviours. Through their distinct form of communication and presentation, they can raise questions, critique societal values, and subvert expectations in ways that are often engaging, disarming, and thought-provoking.

The performance of *The Unknown Witch*, a puppetry play about anaemia by AD Creatrix Puppeteers in partnership with The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Uganda, has demystified the myth in most communities that children with anaemia symptoms are considered bewitched. It is believed that the solution for such children has been to take them to a witch doctor for spiritual intervention, rather than to the health facility for medical treatment. During the audience engagement session of the performance, audience members were engaged in a heated debate over the issue. “We are here laughing at Joshua and Maria in the play, but don’t we know some people in our community

who still take anaemic children to witch doctors just like them? Let’s agree that most times we are misled. That is why some of the children have died yet we can just save them by taking them to a health centre. I think we can do it, now that we know the symptoms of Anaemia, which most of us didn’t know until today,” stated an audience member at a puppetry performance in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Kikuube District, Uganda.

To disrupt such negative social norms, the process starts with the script preparation. The writers obtain data from research reports provided by their partner organisations. From the reports, they craft messages in a dramatic form. These drama scripts are subjected to a rigorous review process by government agencies and partner organisations. The purpose is to ensure that the scripts are authentic and tailor-made for the targeted audiences, leaving no room for miscommunication. The plays are pre-recorded in audio form by a technical team and produced in the native language of the target audiences. This is deliberately done to ensure consistency in the messaging and also to reach out to every community in their native language. The puppeteers undergo a rigorous rehearsal process to be able to perform the audio plays to a live audience using puppets. The performances are enhanced by costumes, props and set for a visually appealing puppetry performance. In addition, an integration of traditional dances, poetry and songs spices up the performances and enhances participation of the target audiences.

The puppetry plays are purposely written and performed to make the audience laugh or like or love or hate what they see on stage; yet the action is simply a reflection of what they themselves do in real life. This satirical approach enables puppeteers to treat serious issues in a lighter way. They are able to cross and contest cultural boundaries without attracting criticism or condemnation through this dynamic, discursive mode of performance using puppets.

During the performance of *The Dilemma*, a puppetry performance by AD Creatrix Puppeteers about teenage mothers, society is challenged about the plight of teenage mothers. The question of contention raised by puppets is; should the teenage mothers abandon school and get married to their “baby daddies” or be readmitted into school? In the play Ntoki, the father of a teenage mother is faced with such a dilemma and this provokes divergent views from the audience. “I think Ntoki is just being guided by the traditional norm that when girls get pregnant, they cease to belong to their parents’ home. Yes, his teenage daughter staying at his home with a baby may be having serious economic implications on him as a family head, but forcing her back to the baby daddy, who is also not ready for marriage, is an injustice to the girl. In this case, I propose that he keeps her at his home, and when the baby is about one year old, the teenage daughter can be readmitted into school to enable her to chase her dream. She may have made mistakes, but it shouldn’t be the end for her,” said an audience member in Kyangwali Refugee settlement in the Kikuube District, Uganda. In this submission, it’s evident that society is prompted by the puppets to re-think certain social norms and instead adopt alternative solutions to the problems at hand.



Puppets can give a voice to marginalized or silenced communities, such as teenage mothers. Through puppets, community members who are typically excluded from traditional forms of media can express themselves and challenge social norms that perpetuate inequality. Puppetry can transcend barriers of language, race, and class, offering a platform for non-dominant viewpoints. For example, in the same play, *Peace*, the teenage mother, is able to utter statements that society may consider outrageous or taboo as evidenced in the following excerpt from *The Dilemma*:

*Ntoki: I wish I hadn't paid your school fees in full!*

*Peace: (Dejectedly) Oh! My God, why me? Why? Where can I find some peace? Where should I go?*

*Ntoki: to the father of your child... You are a woman now!*

*Peace: Father, I am still too young to get married! I am not yet eighteen.*

*Ntoki: Eighteen or not, you are a mother. Does it still matter?*

*Peace: It does, father. Look, I'm yet to learn how to look after the baby... look at him, look at me... Are you proud of how we look?*

In real African culture, a daughter cannot hold such a conversation with her father whether in public or even in private. For example, *Peace* saying to the father: “Are you proud of how I look?” can be considered a sign of disrespect and can have dire consequences. In most cultures, the father's word is final and undisputed. This is where a puppet character comes in handy. In such a case, a puppet becomes the mouthpiece of community members who are entangled in such a puzzle. Through the puppet, the voice of teenage mothers is amplified without disrupting societal harmony. Society cannot “punish” a puppet. Can they? That way, puppetry enables the message to be encoded and decoded successfully without any semantics.

During discussion sessions of the puppetry performances, audience members often refer to puppets as “those things”, meaning that they look at them as “non-living things”. However, “those things” raise very pertinent issues of concern that are a true reflection of the current status in their society, hence igniting a discussion amongst “humans” and about the issues affecting them. Audience members tend to open up more during audience engagement sessions in a puppet show compared to when the characters on stage are “Humans” or real actors. A puppet has the power to ignite a meaningful discussion on pertinent issues affecting society and that is the magic that it possesses in tackling social norms.

Social norms are often linked to culture and tradition, which can make behaviour change difficult. In Africa and even other parts of the world, people hold their culture so dearly that challenging these norms can lead to backlash. Among the refugees and host communities in Uganda, some cultures still strongly believe that it is a taboo for women to eat certain foods such as chicken and other

foods related to special diets. These “special diets” are spared for “the men” to gain energy and strength to work hard and support the family. However, this traditionally inclined norm deprives women, especially expectant and breastfeeding mothers, of a vital balanced diet. This also partly accounts for the elevated anaemia rates in refugee settlements and host communities in Uganda.

During one of the discussion sessions in a puppetry performance, a female audience member in Morobi Zone II, Parolinya Refugee Settlement in Obongi District, Uganda, had this to say; “We should all understand that breastfeeding a child depends on the food the mother eats and what she drinks. If we [mothers] are denied some foods by our culture, where will the breast milk come from? If we starve, the babies will also starve”. The comedic or exaggerated nature of puppets has made taboo subjects among refugees and host communities more accessible, prompting reflection on these issues without causing offense. By discussing topics that are typically avoided in polite society, puppets have been able to disrupt social taboos and encourage more open discourse.

The Puppetry approach utilised in Uganda for the promotion of behavioural change has also introduced new cultural perspectives by blending or transforming traditional forms of storytelling. When puppets are used to express different cultural stories or values, they can create dialogue that challenges ethnocentric norms or biases. By presenting diverse experiences by refugees and host communities through puppetry performances, it shifts their understanding of what is considered “normal” or “acceptable.” For example, the puppeteers have managed to expose refugees to the laws of the land. The refugees need to distinguish that what is considered normal in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia or elsewhere, may be unlawful or taboo in Uganda. By living in Uganda, it is obligatory for them to adhere to the laws of the land in order to stay in line. Puppets have opened the eyes of refugees to the fact that that however normal issues, such as child marriage, may be to them back home, they are illegal in Uganda and perpetrators can easily be apprehended. Such very sensitive issues, if not handled with caution, can raise diplomatic tensions. However, using puppets in adult comedy and satire to broach sensitive topics such as the aforementioned political issues, and religion, while remaining playful and non-threatening, has played a big role in establishing and promoting social and economic transformation among refugees and host communities in Uganda.

In summary, while social norms can act as powerful forces that influence behaviour, they can also be significant barriers to change. By addressing these norms using innovative community engagement and awareness raising interventions, such as puppet theatre, it is possible to encourage individuals and societies to adopt more positive and sustainable behaviours. Through satire, humour, and symbolism, puppets can ignite conversations on sensitive topics, question authority, deconstruct gender roles, challenge taboos, and provide a voice for marginalized perspectives, all while engaging audiences in a way that encourages critical reflection and change.

# MR. SPEAKER AND ME



**Dokument • n° 2 • 2024**

By Margareta Sörenson

With Jenny Bjärkstedt

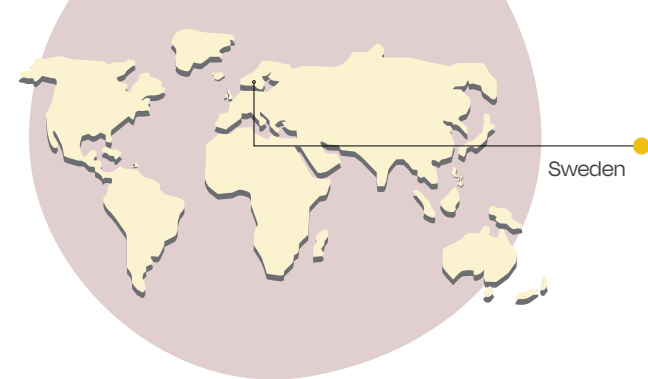
Puppet designer artist



Puppet artist Jenny Bjärkstedt in her workshop of the production *Mr. Speaker*.  
A musical instant satire, weekly produced commenting on domestic Swedish politics.







## MEDIUM

Satire, irony and laughter has ever been in the DNA of puppetry. A puppet is in itself a metaphor, an image, close to a caricature. Realism, as we know it from the stage, is impossible in the art form of puppetry; the illusion is too obvious – after all puppets are wood, textiles, foam rubber, objects produced as images supporting the story line presented on stage.

Among Swedish puppet lovers Jenny Bjärkstedt is a well known profile, renowned for her subtle, fine and poetic puppets in a long row of productions for the puppet theatre stages. To take one example: the sensitive and a much loved full size puppet-dog, Bodri, in the play about Holocaust, *The Story of Bodri*. Based on the autobiographical children's story, Bodri is left alone when "his" girl is forcibly deported. Still, the memory of the dog always follows the girl, Hedi Fried, writer and psychologist, through her long life. The dog's fur, its attentive ears, the shiny eyes expressed all the sorrows in this world, but also love and togetherness. Jenny was equally praised for her *Matrix* in a regional theatre, and *Oxytocin* produced in Gothenburg, Backa theatre, with its life-like teenager puppets played by visible actor-puppeteers. Perfectionism and a sensitive low-key expression is one of Jenny's best known styles.

However, the rough, cartoon-like and somewhat ugly puppets in the TV-show *Mr. Speaker* are something totally different. Now, *Mr. Speaker* and his colleagues have landed in the Swedish political debate, and it seems that everyone loves this brutally funny satire. Humour is a delicate matter, satire even more so. To hit the right note for this satire of today's Swedish political situation, within and outside the parliament, was not easy – it was quite a process, explains Jenny Bjärkstedt, puppet designer:

The prototype puppets for this production for SVT, the national television company, turned out to be much too monster-like. If they are also supposed to pronounce horrible opinions and crazy ideas, it was just too much. So gradually, we made them less grotesque, a little more nice and cute, colorful and likeable – and this way, they were free to say just anything. Now, with their round heads they look more like naughty kids, disobedient but a little innocent looking. Even if they are terrible.

Jenny has some twenty years in the profession, after being a student around the turn of the millennium at what is today Stockholm Uniart, in what was then a three year long training course, directed by Michael Meschke. She was looking for a theatre school, but did not want to leave her passion for working with her hands, sewing, carpeting, sculpting. So she found the puppet training course and it suited her perfectly!

“Monday – what do we have? The sketches and script are written during the weekend, and now quick decisions have to be made: Could this extra puppet “become” the politician who recently said something stupid, illogical, revealing? Funny!”  
– Jenny Bjärkstedt



## MEDIUM

The production *Mr. Speaker* (as in Parliament) was a weekly music TV-show, broadcast in 2022 and 2024, with plans to come back in 2025 with a new edition. The working schedule for the team is intense, with a new show every week commenting on fresh news from Swedish politics and debates. All the leading politician puppets are prepared and ready to be used, and then there are around ten extras, puppets who can relatively easily be transformed into characters needed for different sketches.

Jenny explains the process:

So: Monday – what do we have? The sketches and script are written during the weekend, and now quick decisions have to be made: Could this extra puppet “become” the politician who recently said something stupid, illogical, revealing? Funny!

The ten extras all have clean and even faces, but they are possible to transform and update with “new” eyebrows, wigs, glasses, bags under the eyes... We have bought quite a number of caps, hats, glasses, fake-fur, and then I cut and glue, working out new looks. The heads are the same size as for a grown up person, the bodies are children's size around 160 cm.

The puppeteers place their right hand in the puppet's head and the left hand in the puppets sleeve or hand – a simplified cartoon adaptation of bunraku. The puppet has a body with arms but no legs, and in the puppet's elbow there is a hole in the costume where the puppeteer may introduce their arm or a hand, as with a glove.

Not very ergonomic or human-friendly to work with, says Jenny. The puppeteer has four fingers in the upper lip of the puppet and a thumb in the puppet's chin. It is a rather tiresome position for the player, but I have made the puppets light and soft, all made of textile, cotton and foam rubber.

The script is a team work under Michael Lindgren, well known from the theatre group, Grottesco. He also directs most of the scenes, and produces. Normally, four puppeteers/actors/voice-impersonators are acting in front of the cameras with a backdrop of authentic photos or film clips from “real life”. Sometimes Jenny also joins the acting, and at times she is coaching the directing as well. And for “mass scenes” everyone in the crew helps out by acting.

The schedule for production is a horror! From Monday to Thursday everything should be ready for a new show, which is then edited on the Friday until the very last minute before broadcasting, Friday night, 21.30. All the music – there is a lot of singing, is composed and arranged on the Tuesday.

Ugly and funny! Great fun and very liberating to work with something so naive, yet challenging. Even so, it is hard to create the puppets as good caricature portraits. I am searching photos all the time to compare and to have everything in place....teeth, for instance. Most of the puppets do not have teeth, but for one former minister

of culture, teeth were absolutely necessary to make the puppet look like the “real” minister...who has teeth, indeed!

Right wing or left wing, everyone seems to love *Mr. Speaker*. The national broadcasting company is satisfied, and the politicians portrayed, of all political colors, have a good laugh and are flattered to be in the show. But so far, which one of the puppets is a favorite to Jenny herself?

The wolf! A wolf in one of Stockholm's public parks! Jenny laughs. Saving an endangered species or allowing the hunting of wolves is a hot issue in Sweden, and we made a sketch with a wild wolf in the park, attacking and eating a somewhat dreamy minister of environment, one of the many defenders of the wolves and their right to exist.

It took me half the night before filming and recording to be satisfied with my wolf...I cut, I moved pattern pieces, I trimmed the ears – finally I was pleased. I played the wolf-puppet myself, and also danced to the song of the wolf... I must admit, I am particularly fond of my wolf!

©Johan Taxin



Right-wing populists and green-party idealists waiting shoulder to shoulder in the cupboard of Jenny. Main characters are true portraits, a number of extras can easily be adopted for new political persons in the cast.



# WAKKA WAKKA

## CLIMATE ACTIVISTS AND FORMIDABLE PUPPETEERS



**And i hanske**

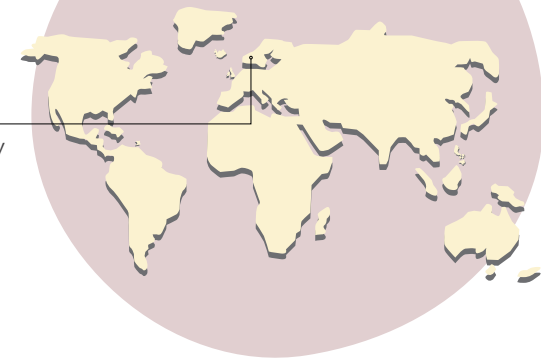
By Elin Lindberg

Editor of *And i hanske*

animal  
R.I.O.T.  
bio-centrism!



Norway



The Norwegian-American puppet theatre company Wakka Wakka shows that puppets can be an important tool, a weapon, to fight crucial problems of our time, like the extinction of species and consumerism. Through creativity and fantasy Wakka Wakka give life to non-human creatures that speak of humanity so humans can understand.

**W**akka Wakka has been creating shows and touring internationally for a number of years. Now they have completed their *Animal R.I.O.T.* trilogy with the play *Dead as a Dodo* at the Norwegian puppetry festival Go Figure!

Getting to grips with what Wakka Wakka is about as impossible as stalking a fox. It slips away and has dens with exits where you wouldn't think it was possible to make an exit. The two founders of Wakka Wakka are Gwendolyn Warnock and Kirjan Waage. Wakka Wakka is based both in New York and in Norway. Many of their performances have been created at Nordland Visual Theatre in Stamsund, Northern Norway. In the *Animal R.I.O.T.* project, Kirjan Waage walks around in a fox costume - completely in line with the group's dramaturgy. The stories they tell in their performances also have this fox dramaturgy - they go in directions you certainly wouldn't expect. Critics get frustrated and say there are too many twists and turns, but everyone is fascinated, excited and impressed. Wakka Wakka's performances have an edge, a political edge that criticises both social structures and social development.

### SATIRICAL DISASTER DESCRIPTIONS

Wakka Wakka's performances are always socially engaged, topical and critical. In *Saga*, they told the story of the financial crisis in Iceland that arose due to the greed of individuals. Their starting point was a crisis that left many Icelanders with deep and serious debt problems. The theatre critic in the Norwegian puppetry magazine *And i hanske* wrote that it was so consistently well-made that it took the breath away from a collective body of critics on both sides of the Atlantic. In *Made in China*, they reflected on the West's relationship with China and poked fun at people's self-centred shopping habits and human rights violations. This too was consistently

received by audiences and critics with its profound and wild reflection. And in the *Animal R.I.O.T.* project, the focus is on humanity's destruction of the Earth itself. Yes, because even with a confusing fox dramaturgy, the focus of Wakka Wakka's performances is clear and apt. And there is an impressive amount of background material on which the performances are based. There's no doubt that Wakka Wakka know what they're talking about. There is seriousness and something that can be perceived as moral rage due to human folly and greed behind their projects. The main weapons they use in their activism are imagination and humour - and not least their impressive puppetry skills.

### ANIMAL R.I.O.T.

In an interview with *And i hanske* a couple of years ago (2019), Kirjan Waage says that the motto of the project is: "To work for the conservation and protection of the Earth's animal kingdom". "Mammals, for example, are now going extinct at a rate of two species per decade, compared to one species per millennium previously," Waage says in the interview. "Millions of species will probably disappear without us even realising it", he says.

No, Wakka Wakka has no faith in man. They take the side of the animals, but with their activist commitment and their captivating and human cultural expression of such high quality, they also bring hope. A hope that humans, with imagination and understanding, can do something to save the diversity of species with which we share our planet. The *Animal R.I.O.T.* project has its own website at <https://www.animalriot.org/> where the appeal is: "join us, or die out!" In connection with performances, they have their own merch where you can buy *Animal R.I.O.T.* products to support the project. For the record, *Animal R.I.O.T.* stands for "Animal Resurgence In Our Time". The Fantastic Mr.



Fox (Kirjan Waage) is the founder and leader of *Animal R.I.O.T.* On the website, Wakka Wakka presents the project as follows:

Bio-eccentrism, consciousness, anthropomorphism, mimesis and metamorphosis are central to the project. Through puppetry, song, dance and communication exercises and animal perspectives workshops The Fantastic Mr. Fox hopes to help improve contact with other living organisms.

#### DEAD AS A DODO

No, the belief that humans can clean up after themselves is not the starting point for Wakka Wakka's *Animal R.I.O.T.* project. In the latest performance in the trilogy *Dead as a Dodo*, the extinct bird, the dodo, is the main character, as well as a Neanderthal, which we also know is extinct, and we bow down to the art of puppet theatre! When it comes to telling this wild story, puppet theatre works best! At the beginning of the play, the two characters are just bones, they are skeletons, beautifully and precisely performed by the puppeteers. The Neanderthal is missing a leg bone, and this is what the two friends are digging for, in the underground world we first meet. The puppeteers are dressed in black shiny suits. They become part of the earth and rock, glistening with moisture and stones. It's an

elegant move, because in this type of theatre where you often need a black background that doesn't highlight the puppeteers but the characters, it can sometimes get so dark for the audience that they can go into sleep mode. Here there is no problem staying awake. The story spins here and there. One of my favourite characters is Kharon, who rows the dead over to the underworld - and some back again. There is also a kind of faith in science here, but according to Wakka Wakka, are humans doomed to become "dead as a dodo"?

#### THERE IS A FUTURE

The very first performance I saw by Wakka Wakka was *Baby Universe*, which they showed in 2011 at Bærum Kulturhus outside Oslo. This performance is thematically related to the later performances. It was also dystopian and full of popular culture quotes - which the *Animal R.I.O.T.* trilogy is also full of. *Baby Universe* starts with the apocalypse radio announcing that we are in the last days. The sun has become a red giant and is about to die. Humans have taken refuge in skyscraper-like bunkers and their only option is to find a new habitable planet. To find such a planet, they attempt to cultivate a new universe - a *Baby Universe*. This is how the charming, odd character named 7001 is created. It is created through a Big Bang - a bright light that blinds the audience. At first it

The Neanderthal boy, Dodo and a shovel from Wakka Wakka's latest performance.



©Richard Termline

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In *Made in China*, Wakka Wakka reflected on the West's relationship with China.

is a crawling cockroach-like creature before it gradually grows to astronomical proportions. It is a kind of primeval mother who is responsible for producing the baby, with the assistance of a hierarchically organised group of scientists. "I'm not alone, I have a mum who can sing to me," says the baby. "Save us," says the mum.

#### THE ONE

In many, perhaps most, science fiction stories, the protagonist is a hero who saves the world from destruction. Someone everyone puts their faith in. A saviour, a messiah. In *the Matrix* films, he is called "The One". The character is often an immaculate young man. That's what he is in Wakka Wakka. Here he is the child born to save the world, which is also a well-known motif elsewhere in world literature, for example in both the Bible and Ibsen's works. The sun will not become a red dwarf for a while, about five million years, but scientists such as the popular Stephen Hawking began reporting in his final days that we need to find another habitable planet to save humanity. "In other words, we must put our trust in future generations, in our children," he said.

#### IT'S A FUTURE 2

Wakka Wakka's performances and projects consistently have a dystopian flavour and lack confidence in man's ability to manage his own world. But is this only apparent? Yes, there are animals and extraterrestrial creatures that are supposed to save both us and the earth in Wakka Wakka's stories, but - and it's a big BUT - it's human creativity that remains the real saviour. It is through its somewhat confusing "fox dramaturgy" that Wakka Wakka presents us with a solution - or many possible solutions. It is through imagination, creativity, proper craftsmanship, and not least through the deeply human humour that we can find the power to do something about the worldwide challenges Wakka Wakka points out to us. We should take their call seriously: "Join us, or die out!"

“There is seriousness and something that can be perceived as moral rage due to human folly and greed behind their projects.”  
- Elin Lindberg



# THE POLITICAL AND RADICAL THROUGH THE EYES OF A PUPPET

Lutka Magazine • n° 61 • 2022

By Benjamin Zajc

Puppetry is an art that explores politics in public space in one way or another. A puppet, as part of the material culture of society, is thus shaped by the political dimensions of the historical moment in which it was created, not only by what it says, but (above all) by how it says it. Moreover, in a more direct sense, puppetry is imbued with the political, for it has been a symbolic vehicle for protests in various springtimes of nations and in anti-

authoritarian campaigns. However, the fact that puppetry has become one of the most important political forms of media could also be due to the supposed triviality with which the puppet is viewed. This has repeatedly enabled it to convey subversive and explicit political thought. It has proven to be crucial, especially at the moments when it was most political, which was at times when other arts have been restricted or censored.

One must be careful, however, when referring to works of art as "political." We can quickly fall for the idea that all art is *a priori* and *de facto* political. This may be true in a very loose sense since art (except in pure cases of 'art for art's sake') is in one way or another bound to its time and context. Therefore, when we come across the term 'political theatre', it is crucial to define it. Otherwise, our reviews and analyses may end up encompassing the entire history of theatre. Therefore, in this review of the main political traditions of puppet theatre, I consider only those puppet shows, phenomena, and manifestations that actively engage with political concepts, because they seek either to support, or attack them. In short, it is about events that explicitly address political issues of their time, or as political theatre has been defined by Michael Kirby in his article "On Political Theatre": "it is a performance that is intentionally concerned with government, that is intentionally engaged in or consciously takes sides in politics"<sup>1</sup>. It should be emphasised here that my article deliberately focuses on political puppetry in the service of resistance to existing conventions and systems. I will therefore include examples that serve as protest rather than propaganda, although these too can be considered part of political puppetry.

We can speak of the beginnings of political puppetry in the modern sense only from the 1960s, however, let us first mention some older examples of the puppet's political involvement, as crucial reference points for future political puppetry. The political role of puppets originated in revolutionary England of the 17th century with its most famous puppet character, Punch. He was a variation of the character Pulcinella from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* and was considered the king of puppets in 17th and 18th century England. Punch's performances emphasised vulgar jokes, satirised local events, spread rumours, and acted as a message service for the people. Punch is a hero of the common man, who breaks all the rules with the help of satire, at a time when conformism was enforced in all spheres of life. According to Henryk Jurkowski in his *History of European Puppetry*, Punch was "an anarchist who killed the rulers and representatives of social institutions. In this way, he enabled a means of catharsis for all unhappy people living under the oppressive regime of the Victorian era."<sup>2</sup> In the 17th century, Punch became a political puppet hero of the anthology. This was largely due to the fact that when theatres were banned, puppetry was often disregarded because it seemed insignificant to the authorities (e.g., the ban on London theatres

in 1642). The puppet *Gayant* (meaning giant) from the city of Douai developed in a similar way. He first appeared in 1530, when the then Spanish city of Douai held a festival to celebrate the defeat of the French troops. Several guilds of the time made a giant willow puppet representing the guardian of the city. When Douai was annexed by France in 1667, the festival was banned. Until the end of World War II, *Gayant* and his puppet family were repeatedly restored and banned; the Nazis even burned the puppets. However, they were later permanently restored and are now symbols of the city. Although not a political example in the contemporary anti-authoritarian sense, this supporter of the guilds signalled the rise of the new "middle" class, and thus a robust political campaign at the time of the redefinition of social structures.

In this context, mention should be made of the legendary 18th-century Polish beggar Barani Kożuszek, who was a regular political player on the streets of Warsaw with his hard-hitting puppet campaigns. He achieved the greatest fame with his *Kożuszek Uprising* (1794) miniatures, in which puppets representing the Quislings were beheaded by means of a small guillotine. Although this is a simple example, it perhaps most clearly



demonstrates the fundamental political characteristic of a puppet, namely its ability to replace the unattainable body of a public figure with its material appearance.

Speaking of key examples of the political tradition of the puppet, one must mention the undisputed leaders of puppetry in Europe: the Czechs. The role of the puppet in the springtime of the Czech Nation is particularly evident in the 1800s and 1900s, when the Czechs tried to establish themselves as an autonomous nation freed from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This is where the puppet shows came in, which had always been performed by itinerant groups of puppeteers in their mother tongue. Like Punch and Judy in England, the Czech puppet Kašpárek could say in his own language what others dared not, and could call for revolution and uprising. The puppeteers thus became representatives of the springtime of the Czech nation, cultural icons, and an essential part of Czech heritage. After the founding of the first republic in 1918, puppetry experienced a great boom and became an important pillar of Czech culture. One such example was the founding of the Říše Loutek Puppet Theatre in Prague in 1920, which was based on the principle that children should be educated *with* puppets rather than turned *into* puppets<sup>3</sup>. Among the most influential puppeteers of the time was Josef Skupa, the founder of one of the most famous Czech puppet theatres, Divadlo Spejbl a Hurvínek in Prague. Skupa turned out to be a very politically engaged puppeteer during World War II. He began to incorporate subtle satire and criticism of the Nazi regime into his shows, which he performed throughout occupied Czechoslovakia. It is clear that the Nazis were aware of the power of traditional culture to bring people together in times of crisis and therefore strained all their nerves to crush it relentlessly.

Almost simultaneously, the Partisan Puppet Theatre was created by the puppeteer and sculptor Lojze Lavrič in 1944 in the liberated area of Bela Krajina in Slovenia. The first puppet show, *Jurček and the Three Bandits*, was performed on New Year's Eve 1944, and the puppets were made from materials available during the war. With its performances, the theatre satirised the enemy and encouraged its own population. It toured the entire liberated territory, clearly showing the positions they aspired to as fighters for the nation.

During and after the war, puppetry was further politicised by economics and global politics. New theatre movements were inspired by the sense that theatre was a contemporary art full of activist zeal inspired by Marxist ideas, and not just a means of entertainment. In this

zeal, puppets and processional figures played an important role in the public expression of left wing political positions. However, the need for economic survival after World War II and the general atmosphere of the Cold War silenced the political expression of the puppets for a while. In the 1940s and 1950s, puppet theatre moved towards the path of children's theatre and entertainment until the social upheavals of the 1960s brought it back to life. This was the beginning of the political puppetry movement as we know it, when Peter Schumann, the most important representative of radical and political puppetry, also emerged. Schumann, who was of German descent, moved to the US in 1961 and founded the ground-breaking Bread and Puppet Theater in 1963 on the Lower East Side, New York. Initially, the theatre dealt with issues of police control and rising rents. They took their shows to the streets of New York to raise awareness of the problem among the local population. Schumann designed his first shows with the simplest means, allowing everyone to participate regardless of their abilities. In this way, he made sensitive issues attractive to audiences, who in turn listened to them. As Holland Cotter wrote in the *New York Times*, Schumann created a theatre that continues to "live an ideal of art as collective enterprise, a free or low-cost alternative voice outside the profit system"<sup>4</sup>. The central works of this theatre are the anti-war shows with which they protested the Vietnam War, such as the 1968 show *Fire*. The shows, which could be described as pure protest campaigns, put Bread and Puppet Theater on the global cultural map. In 1975, the group moved to a farm in Vermont, where they are still active.

Similarly, the San Francisco Mime Troupe emerged on the West Coast of the USA, ushering in the beginnings of so-called

guerrilla theatre. It was founded in 1959 by Ronald G. Davis, and it began performing street theatre plays modelled on commedia dell'arte in 1961, in response to searing political oppression, the American civil rights movement, and military and clandestine interventions abroad. Between the 1960s and 1990s, a veritable movement of political puppet groups developed along the lines of Schumann and Davis, of which In the Heart of the Beast, Arm-of-the-Sea and Wise Fool Puppet are the most striking. Still in existence, these theatre companies actively address local and global issues.

Similarly, in 1981, South African puppeteer Gary Friedman created a finger puppet show, *Puns en Doedie* (Gary Friedman Productions), a socio-political satire on apartheid. In addition to the protagonists, the titular Puns and Doedie, puppets portraying President P. W. Botha, Desmond Tutu, Ronald Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher appeared in several performances. In 1987, he helped found the African Research and Educational Puppetry Programme (AREPP), which used street art with puppets as a non-threatening medium to address sensitive issues. On World AIDS Day in 1988, they staged the travelling exhibition *Puppets Against AIDS* to raise awareness of the disease.

A new turning point for political and protest puppetry followed in the late 20th century, during the 1999 protests in Seattle. This was a carnival of revolt, full of puppets, masks, dancers, creative street barricades, banners, and music. Members of the groups Art & Revolution, Bread and Puppet Theater, Wise Fool Puppet and many others gathered to participate in the protests with their giant puppets. Participation in the protests formed the basis for the term and the movement *puppetista* (composed of the English word

"puppet" and Zapatista). The neologism refers to puppets and puppetry groups that focus on protests and demonstrations. The group Itinerant Garbage Theatre for Cultural Insurrection writes in the *Puppetista Manifesto*:

*By rescuing puppet theater from the shiny black boxes, by returning it to its roots as a theater of action, we are able to reimagine the possibility of life instead of mere survival inside of the system. The authorities of the media/cop state have been uncharacteristically correct in their portrayal of the puppet as a weapon, for the puppet is indeed a powerful tool to reshape individual minds, and by extension, an entire society.*<sup>5</sup>

This event could be seen as a kind of foundation of protest puppetry as a genre in puppetry art. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, puppeteers followed the example of Bread and Puppet Theater, but they remained in their place within certain theatrical conventions. The protest puppets of the 21st century, however, clearly focused on political expression in the streets. The street is transformed into a playground where puppets and puppeteers take control for a moment while spectators gather and watch the action. In this simple but effective way, a puppet show interrupts the constraints of the sanctioned march and creates tensions between what is allowed (by the police, local authorities, and social conventions) and what exceeds expectations. In Slovenia, the medium of the puppet is used in this way by the puppeteer Brane Solce, who brings giant puppets to almost all protests in Ljubljana.

At the beginning of the last decade, there was an upsurge in the development of puppet shows that focused on the artist's own war

experiences. One such example is *And Here I am* (directed by Zoe Lafferty, 2017), a co-production between British Developing Artists and Palestinian Freedom Theatre. Palestinian actor Ahmed Tobasi illustrates his story, written for the stage by Iraqi-British writer Hassan Abdulrazzak, with various objects on stage. The story focuses on Tobasi's transformation from an Islamic jihadist to an actor. A painful autobiographical experience becomes political in an educational sense, as contemplation of the consequences of war becomes the leitmotif. Similar considerations underlie the performance *Smooth Life* (Snadný život), which the Palestinian artist Husam Abed created for the Czech DAMU in 2015. This is a documentary puppet show about growing up in a Jordanian refugee camp, which presents the political events of the last 30 years in Jordan in a larger context.

Another important and quite recent example of such puppet engagement is *The Walk* (2021), produced by The Walk Productions, Handspring Puppet Company, and Good Chance. With this political performance, three animators took the almost four-metre-tall puppet named Little Amal on a five-month journey across Europe from the Syrian-Turkish border to the UK to highlight the problem of human migration. During the extended odyssey, covering over 8000 kilometres, they urged people on the streets to support them and ask their countries to help with the growing refugee crisis.

Finally, what needs to be mentioned is the political puppet satire, examples of which can be seen regularly on TV. The *XYZ Show* is a Kenyan satirical puppet show created in 2009 by Godfrey Mwampembwa, modelled on a similar French show, *Les Guignols de l'Info* (The News Puppets). The weekly satirical show is presented by latex puppets who use sharp humour to discuss burning political issues ranging from poverty to politicians being indicted by the International Criminal Court. Almost simultaneously South Africa produced *Zanews*, a satirical chronicle of everyday South African politics featuring puppets of some of the country's most prominent figures (Nelson Mandela's puppet was the first to appear in the show). Such puppet shows are an important outlet for people to express their anger and collective trauma in a satirical and grotesque, but peaceful way. Almost a decade later, *Bisha* TV emerged in Sudan. Based on outdoor and recorded puppet shows, it satirised, mocked, and criticised the country's leading political parties. *Bisha* TV was much more radical, pervasive, and direct, as its "protagonists" included the then ruling Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir and his accomplices. During his presidency, action such as this was an important act of revolt against censorship and

Ilya Kaminsky,  
Deaf Republic,  
Maribor  
Puppet Theatre.



the violation of human rights. It disseminated information that otherwise would not have made it out of Sudan and gave local citizens the opportunity to engage artistically against the regime. The anarchic connotation of such shows is the deepest level of regaining one's freedom.

The history of political puppetry proves that this field of art is rich and varied, and that it became so because it was not considered a serious form of art for a long time. Thus, throughout its history, it has been able to follow social changes, to provide people with the knowledge of current events and to participate in the struggle for a better society. In essence, puppetry became a symbol of solidarity between performers and puppets, and thus of solidarity with the puppetry audience. Puppets became a means to experience collectivism and social change, and therefore a mechanism for people to participate in achieving a common goal. It must be emphasised that the humorous aspect of the puppet cuts into the dead carcass of social discourse. Humour as a bodily sensation has the power to directly activate the body politic, which is particularly evident in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as irony and artistic expression are common companions of the bourgeois revolt against the unimagined structures of globalisation.

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Slovenia

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Partisan Puppet  
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# LIFE ON STRINGS



**DADI PUDUMJEE, 1951**

## INDIA

UNIMA President 2021

Indian puppeteer, puppet theatre and festival director. Graduating from Wadia College, Pune University (BA, 1971), Dadi Pudumjee studied Visual Communication at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad (1971-1975) and trained in puppetry under Meher Rustom Contractor at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts. Performing at the 1972 Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes in Charleville-Mézières on the occasion of the 11<sup>th</sup> UNIMA Congress, he saw the diversity and resolved on a career in puppetry. In 1976-1977, he studied at the Marionette Theatre Institute in Stockholm under Michael Meschke, where also took a bunraku workshop. In 1979, at Puppentheater, Berlin, he directed, designed and adapted *The Double Shadow*, based on a Rajasthani folk tale. He worked at Stockholm's Vår Theater directed by Gunter Wetzel.

In 1980, he was founding artistic director of India's first modern puppet repertory theatre, Sutradhar Puppet Theatre (later, Shri Ram Centre Puppet Repertory) which included Rajasthani kathputli puppeteers, bhopa story singers and university-educated actors. In 1980-1986, Pudumjee and New Delhi's Sutradhar established puppetry as a dynamic theatrical art for both children and adults, with new works, including *Ramayana*, *Motu ki Moonch*, *Ek tha Joota*, *Rangila Rakshasa*,

*Dhola Maru*, *Circus, Circus*, *Utsav*, *Pakhandi Sher* and *The Little Mermaid*, the last one directed by guest Gunter Wetzel.

In 1986, Pudumjee founded Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust; its productions combined dance-movement, puppetry, object theatre, projections and music: *Kalpataru* (shadows and multi-screen projections), *Genesis*, *Heer ke Waris*, *Simple Dreams* (with objects), *Transposition*, *Journeys*, *Images of Truth* (on the life and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi), *Allegory*, *Anoke Vastra* (with large masks). He created giant puppets for festivals. Ishara has toured Europe, Asia-Pacific nations, Uzbekistan, Iran, Denmark, Canada, the United States, Brazil, Mexico. In 2001, he established the annual Ishara International Puppet Festival.

In collaboration with UNESCO's non-formal education section, Ishara trained young people from Salaam Baalak Trust, a New Delhi-based NGO working with street children and impoverished youth, creating shows on HIV/AIDS awareness, substance abuse and socially relevant issues.

Pudumjee curated puppet exhibits for the Festival of India in Russia, 1987-1988; IGNC, 1998; "Putul Yatra" exhibit of 300 puppets from Sangeet Natak Akademi, 2004-2005; puppets and masks for "Aakhyat: Masks, Puppets and Picture Showmen – Traditions of India", IGNC, 2010.

Dadi Pudumjee served as president of UNIMA India, president of UNIMA's Asia-Pacific Commission, coordinator of Asia-Pacific Commission meetings (Iida, Japan, 1992; Chennai, India, 2002), vice president and president of UNIMA International (2008-2021) and coordinator of UNIMA executive committee meetings (New Delhi, 2003 and 2015). His work has been acknowledged with many awards, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1992) and one of the highest national recognitions in India, the Padmashree (2011).

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**ZAHRA KHYALI SABRI, 1967**

## IRAN

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Iranian theatre director, set designer, scriptwriter, and puppeteer. The daughter of Ali Akbar Khyali Sabri, a director of *Ta'ziye*, an Iranian ritual drama that combines religion and theater, dating back to pre-Islamic times and recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Accompanying her father to a *Ta'ziye* ceremony, she became fascinated by this unique form of theater. From then on, she dedicated herself to this artistic discipline. In 1990, she founded the Yase Taman company. In 2000, she received a BA in set design from the Islamic Azad University.

Sabri has contributed to the creation of modern puppet theatre in Iran with her distinctive theatrical language and a clear pacifist philosophy inspired by Persian poetry, eschewing spoken words when expressing her anti-militaristic stance; instead, the silent actions of her performers and music carry the drama. She presents a refined, poetic and evolving exploration of forms and themes. Her individual theatrical style risks the transition from traditional Persian theatre to a very contemporary theatre.

Content-wise, her productions can be divided into three categories. Productions based upon ancient Persian literature: *Zamin va Charkh* (The Earth and the Universe) and *Tooti Par* (Parrot Fly), both based upon poems by 13th-century Iranian poet Rumi; *Dokhtar-e-Anar* (Pomegranate Girl), based on an ancient Iranian folk tale; *Ta Yek Beshmar* (Count to One, 2012), based upon poems by 12th-century Iranian poet Omar Khayyam, in which her performers experimented with clay, moulding and animating it live on stage. Productions Sabri adapted from the world's great plays: *Nane Delavar* (Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children); *Khane Bernarda Alba* (Lorca's The House of Bernarda Alba);

*Khak va Taj* (The Soil and the Crown), based upon plays of Shakespeare; *Hasht Lahzeh* (Eight Moments), adapted from eight short stories by eight anonymous writers from around the world. And productions from original texts, such as *Mano Nemibare* (It Won't Take Me).

Sabri doesn't believe in a boundary between the puppet theatre and the actors' theatre. In her productions are puppets, actors and performers; she combines different puppet forms, techniques and performing objects. The chosen puppet techniques precisely relate to the content and text of each show.

Zahra Khyali Sabri teaches puppet directing at Pars University in Tehran. She has held many puppetry workshops around the country and has served on Iranian theatre festival juries. She is well-known internationally as a theatre artist, having toured the world with her shows (Iran, France, Poland, Germany, Tunisia, Lebanon, Russia, India, Sweden, Spain, Kazakhstan), winning premiere puppet theatre awards, including for *The Earth and the Universe* (2008), *Count to One* (2010), *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* (2010), *Mother Courage* (2014). In 2019, she generously designed the poster for World Puppetry Day.

[www.zahrasabri.com/puppet-theaters/](http://www.zahrasabri.com/puppet-theaters/)  
[www.animatazine.org/due-terra/zahra-sabri](http://www.animatazine.org/due-terra/zahra-sabri)



**MARIANO DOLCI, 1937**

## ITALY

UNIMA Member of Honour 2012

Italian puppeteer. With his glove, string and shadow puppets, Mariano Dolci worked in three areas: theatre, education, the care and social work sectors. His theatre career began in the 1960s, when he joined the Rome-based Teatro Sperimentale Burattini e Marionette of Otello Sarzi making shows on texts by Aristophanes, Brecht, Mayakovsky, Arrabal, Wilde, Beckett, among others. In 1970, he worked for the Municipality of Reggio Emilia

contributing his knowledge to the educational potential of puppets in preschools and kindergartens. In 1971, in Santiago de Chile, he collaborated on puppet shows for the Chilean television "Canal 7" (Childhood Service of the Government). In 1978, he worked with Teatro Gioco Vita on *Il Barone di Münchhausen*. Other productions include *Galileo and his daughter*, *Il mio Boccherini*, *I giochi di Virginia* and *Africa nera, marmo bianco*.

In the field of "puppetry as mediation", he explored ways of making and animating puppets, masks and shadows to develop expressive means for non-theatrical contexts. A co-founder of the Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia (National Group for Nursery Schools and Infancy), his pedagogical contributions include collaborations with Loris Malaguzzi and the pedagogical team of Reggio Emilia in the experimentation and affirmation of the pedagogical concepts known as the "Reggio Emilia approach", a student-centred educational philosophy that focuses on preschool and primary school. He conducted courses at the Summer School of the Free University of Barcelona, courses for educators in Europe and the Americas. Since 2003, he collaborated with the "Theatre animation course" at the University of Urbino and taught "Glove puppets and marionettes in education and social issues". In Florence, he collaborated with Museo dei Ragazzi" designing activities for children. In 2007, with Lara Albanese, he created shadow silhouettes for short animations, *I cieli del mondo*, inside an inflatable planetarium for the Science Week in Genoa.

As a founding member of the French Association "Marionnettes et Thérapie" (1976), Dolci's work includes activities with adult patients to verify the therapeutic implications of constructing and animating puppets at the San Lazzaro Psychiatric Hospital, Reggio Emilia, 1973-1986. Since 2005, with the Teatro Aenigma of the University of Urbino, he worked with the inmates of the Pesaro Prison on shows by Jarry, Garcia Lorca, Kafka and others. In 2007, in Burkina Faso, he participated in an HIV-AIDS-prevention project. In 2008, with Prof. Vito Minoia, he founded the "Scuola Sperimentale di Teatro di Social Animation".

His writings include pedagogical and therapeutic aspects of puppets, published in international magazines. His awards include: La sirena d'oro (Italy, 1995), the "Catarsi" Teatri delle Diversità award (2010) and Marta Mata Award for Pedagogy (2017).

In 2021, UNIMA Italy, of which he is a founding member, held the meeting "Homage to Mariano Dolci".





**YAYA COULIBALY, 1959**

## MALI

UNIMA Heritage awardee 2018

Malian puppeteer, storyteller, magician and musician. Yaya Coulibaly was born on 26 April 1959. The day of his birth was a special day because it marked the Jo ceremony. The power of the ancestors was transmitted to him although he was not the eldest to deserve it as tradition requires. A direct descendant of Biton Coulibaly, King of Ségou, he was initiated into mystical knowledge, inherited from his father, and teaching concerning the puppet theatre, which occupies a preponderant place in the initiation rites of secret societies.

Coulibaly joined the National Institute of Arts (INA) in Bamako for basic classical training. Afterwards, he studied in France, at the International Institute of Puppetry (IIM) and at the National School of the Arts of Puppetry (ESNAM) in Charleville-Mézières. During his stay in Europe, he participated in the construction of Western knowledge on traditional West African societies and the objects they use.

Heir to a very old collection of puppets, he is a fervent guardian of the Bamanan tradition, one of the oldest and richest in Africa. His collection is close to 25,000 puppets.

In 1980, Coulibaly founded the Sogolon troupe, whose name is a reference to the mother of Emperor Soundiata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire. The first of its kind in Mali, the company works to promote theatre creation with Bamanan, Somono and Bozo influences.

It creates shows, participates in major festivals and trains Malian, African, European, American and Asian performers, whether they are artists or academics.

In 2006, his collection was exhibited at the African Gold Museum in Cape Town, South Africa. The same year, he participated with Handspring Puppet Company in the exhibition "At Arm's Length: The Art of African Puppetry" at the Africa Center in New York. There are many other prestigious events and places, such as the Echomusée in Paris, the Halles Schaerbeek in Brussels, Documenta in Germany, the Galerie Le Manège Dakar, the Galerie La Rotonde des Arts and the MASA in Abidjan, the MAPAS in Spain, the Carthage Theater Days, etc.

Yaya Coulibaly highlights the values that are dear to him: courage, love and prosperity. A great defender of individual and collective freedom, he never ceases to condemn war and extremism, which he calls "the contemporary gangrene". He grants a thousand and one caps to puppeteers: scientists, historians, therapists, geomancers, sorcerers, healers, trainers, teachers of life in the service of life.

Yaya Coulibaly has set up an annual festival in the service of the art of puppetry, the Sogobô International Festival of Bamako, the first edition of which was held 20-26 May 2024.



**DAMIET VAN DALSUM, 1943**

## NETHERLANDS

UNIMA Member of Honour 2021

Dutch puppeteer and director. Based in Dordrecht, Damiet van Dalsum has directed many shows. She creates her puppets from objects and fabric, imbuing them with a "poetic", fantastic style. After studying theatre in Maastricht, in 1966 she started her own puppet theatre using glove puppets and rod puppets, and later string puppets (*Lord Wanhoop*, 1983), shadows (*Kleine Frederik*, 1992) and paper figures (*Bubbelbabbelbos*, 2003). The majority of her productions are for child audiences,

in which she juxtaposes children's values with the hyper-rationality of the adult world. In 1989, she made the marionette show *Hollebollebeer*, about a child who is neither boy nor girl, is bullied and lonely, who flies to the sun where he changes into a hundred thousand dust particles, thus no longer feeling alone. This show was performed internationally at the Jim Henson festival and at festivals in Charleville-Mézières, Jerusalem, Russia, Japan and Taiwan. Other shows designed for children include *Blauwbard* (2002), *Het tinnen soldaatje* (2004), *The Christmas Story* (2006), *Circuskind* (2010), *Kleine Pastorale* (2011), *The Rainbird* (2013). In 1998, Taipei's Shiny Shoes Children's Theatre adapted her *Kleine Frederik*. She designed, made the puppets and directed the show. In 2025, the Taiwanese Flying Group Theatre plans to remount *Kleine Frederik*.

Her work has affinities with surrealism, evident in her first show for adults, *Op het oog* (In the Eye, 1983), in which she began to use objects and perform live on stage. In 1985, she made *Dagdromen* (Daydreaming) and, in 1986, as part of an international project, she co-created *Notta Erotica*. She created *Kleur* (Colour) in 1988 as an experimental program featuring movement, music, light and puppets. In 1994, she collaborated on a three-nation theatre project for adult audiences with Belarusian artists Alexei Leliavski and Aleksandr Vakhrameyeh, and Austrian artist Christoph Bochdansky, which resulted in *The Day After*. In 1995, Poppentheater Damiet van Dalsum collaborated with Magdeburger Puppentheater on a show for adults, *Te gekke dromen* (Too Mad Dreams).

From 1996 to 2001, she was artistic director of Magdeburger Puppentheater. She worked with the hosts preparing the 2000 UNIMA Congress in Magdeburg. From 1985 to 2010, she was director of the International Puppet Festival in Dordrecht. In 2010, she coordinated the UNIMA Council and, from 2015 to 2024, she organized the International Micro Festival, both in Dordrecht. She has given masterclasses on "The Economy of Movement and Material" in Taiwan, Germany, Greece, and mounted several exhibitions, including in Dordrecht, Zwijndrecht, Tolosa, Magdeburg, Mistelbach.

Damiet van Dalsum has been an active member of UNIMA Netherlands since 1970. She has attended UNIMA Congresses in Moscow (1976), Washington, DC (1980), Dresden (1984), Japan (1988), Ljubljana (1992), Budapest (1996), Magdeburg (2000), Rijeka (2004), Perth (2008) and the Dordrecht Council (2010).



**MAREK WASZKIEL, 1954**

## POLAND

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Polish puppet theatre historian, consultant, critic, author and professor. Marek Waszkiel received his Doctorate (PhD) in Theatre History (1989) at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. Puppet theatre is his profession and his passion. He has served as the Polish representative at international forums, he is a long-time researcher at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, editor of *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, a theatre history quarterly, the Polish-English magazine, *Teatr Lalek*, and a member of editorial committees of many international puppet magazines.

Since 1977, Waszkiel has been a staff member of the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok and, since 2016, of the Department of Theatre Studies at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, conducting classes on the history of puppet theatre and on contemporary theatre. From 1999 to 2005, he served as Vice-Rector of the Puppet Theatre Art Department of the Warsaw Academy's Branch Campus in Białystok. During his two terms as head of the Białystok Department, he contributed to its internationalization by organizing numerous workshops with outstanding puppeteers from around the world and establishing cooperation with other international puppet centres through students' participation in theatre festivals, joint projects and personal exchanges. In Białystok, he launched art internships for young puppeteers and organized International Summer Master Workshops in which young artists from all over the world would participate.

In 2002, he initiated and ran two editions of the International Festival of Puppetry Schools,

"Puppet-no-Puppet" (Międzynarodowy Festiwal Szkół Lalkarskich "Lalkanielalka"), organized every two years by the Puppet Theatre Art Department of Białystok. The festival is the most important meeting of puppet youth in recent years as well as a strong puppet and theatre accent in the city.

Waszkiel has served as head of two Polish puppet theatres: the Białystok Puppet Theatre (2005-2012) and the Animation Theater in Poznań (2014-2017). During his term, the latter became one of the premier puppet theatres in Europe, thanks to the artists who staged their performances there (Eric Bass, Duda Paiva, Neville Tranter, Fabrizio Montecchi, Frank Soehnle, among others). For five years, Waszkiel was the artistic consultant responsible for the repertoire programme at the Amber Theatre in Shenzhen (China).

Waszkiel has been an active member of UNIMA International, as a member of the Executive Committee (1996-2012), where he was president of several commissions: Research, Publication and Communication, and Professional Training (of the last, he remains a member).

Today, Marek Waszkiel focuses on teaching, research, writing, journalistic and consulting work. He speaks several languages, including English, French, Russian. He runs his own blog devoted to puppetry issues: [www.marekwaszkiel.pl/category/blog](http://www.marekwaszkiel.pl/category/blog).



**VALERY SHADSKY, 1949**

## RUSSIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2016

Russian director, actor and teacher. Valery Shadsky is an honoured art worker of the Russian Federation, artistic director of Ryazansky Oblastnoi

Teatr Kukol (Ryazan Puppet Theatre) and artistic director of the Ryazan Puppet Theatre Festival "Ryazanskie Smotriny". He received his professional education at the Leningrad State Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography (today, the Russian State Institute of Performing Arts in Saint Petersburg).

From 1966 to 1971, Shadsky served as an actor at the Vologodsky Oblastnoi Teatr Kukol (Vologda Puppet Theatre). From 1976 to 1979, he was the principal director of the Arkhangelsky Oblastnoi Teatr Kukol (Arkhangelsk Puppet Theatre). Since 1979, he has worked at the Ryazan Puppet Theatre, serving as its artistic director since 1999. To date, he has staged more than 80 shows for children and adults in Russia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland and Norway. He is an author of original plays and staged versions of novels.

Among his most significant productions as stage director are: *Malenky prints* (The Little Prince, 1986) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (designer: Anatoly Losev); *Master i Margarita* (The Master and Margarita, 1995) by Mikhail Bulgakov (designer: Vladimir Kostamov); *Hamlet* (1999) by William Shakespeare (designer: Natalia Kuznetsova); *Brat Chichikov* (Brother Chichikov, 2002), based on Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* (designer: Yulia Ksenzova); *Volshbnoye koltso* (The Magic Ring, 2015, designer: Anastasia Eroshkina); *Zolushka* (Cinderella, 2016, designer: Zakhar Davydov); *Lev Tolstoy i deti. Skazki* (Leo Tolstoy and the children. Fairy Tales, 2024, designer: Zakhar Davydov).

Valery Shadsky's productions for adult audiences are known for their use of metaphor, symbols, multidimensional nature of images and depth of feelings. His productions for children reflect a high moral principle that appeals to traditional spiritual values. For almost half a century, Valery Shadsky has created a vibrant theatre in the world of puppetry.

From 2002 to 2011, Valery Shadsky was the president of UNIMA Russia.





**AGATA FREYER, 1945**

## SLOVENIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Slovenian academic painter, puppet designer and scenographer. Agata Freyer graduated in 1970 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana. She designed her first puppets in 1969 and has since dedicated her art to creating puppets for the theatre, which she recognized as an ideal arena for testing and implementing her visual ideas. In her work, Freyer creates a bridge between the traditional and the contemporary styles. Her puppets, their costumes and the staging for both puppets and actors are aesthetically distinctive, reflecting her unique signature. Her technical team contributes to bringing her ideas to life on stage.

From 1972 to 2018, Freyer designed puppets and created the scenography for puppet theatres in Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. Many of the productions featuring her puppets and stage designs toured the most important international puppet festivals, including Charleville-Mézieres' Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes. The most important productions include *Martin Krpan* (1976) for the Pozorište lutaka Mostar (Puppet Theatre Mostar), *Trnuljčica* (Sleeping Beauty, 1991) and *Osel nazarenski* (The Donkey of Nazareth, 1996), both for the Freyer Teater in Ljubljana.

Many of the productions designed by Freyer, the majority of which were directed by Edi Majaron, received recognition from critics and audiences alike for their artistic quality. She received prestigious awards at international festivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia, including the Klemenčič Award, the highest recognition in the art of puppetry in Slovenia.

In collaboration with her husband Edi Majaron, Freyer created the visual component of several puppet series for Slovenian television.

Productions with her puppets have travelled the world and contributed to the reputation of Slovenian puppetry art. Twenty solo exhibitions of her puppets, with sketches and photographs from the shows, have been presented in theatres from Tolosa to Brighton, Zadar to Zagreb. Her outstanding contribution to the promotion and recognition of Slovenian puppetry in the world was the UNIMA-Slovenia exhibition in 2014. For this exhibition, which marked the 100th anniversary of Slovenian puppet theatre, she selected more than 200 puppets created by the most important Slovenian puppet makers. The exhibition travelled from Ljubljana to five European nations.

Agata Freyer's creative output is one of the most valuable contributions to puppet theatre during the past fifty years.



**EDVARD (EDI) MAJARON, 1940**

## SLOVENIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2008

Slovenian director, musician and teacher. Edi Majaron studied music and puppetry at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana and at AMU (Akademie Múzických Umění) in Prague. He began his career as a cellist. He participated in productions of Slovenian director Jože Pengov at the Lutkovo gledališče Ljubljana (Ljubljana Puppet Theatre (1955-1964) where he later became artistic director (1979-1984). In 1991, he founded, with his wife, painter Agata Freyer, the puppet company Freyer Teater, active till 1997. He

continued as a freelance director in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Poland, Italy and Belarus. Many of his productions have performed at festivals in Europe, including Charleville-Mézieres, the United States, South Korea and Japan.

Majaron directed over ninety shows. Among the most popular are: *Ptice* (The Birds, 1980) and *Lizistrata* (Lysistrata, 1987) by Aristophanes; *Ogovaranja* (Gossiping, 1988) after Theophrastus; *Bura* (The Tempest, 1989 and 1996) based on William Shakespeare; *Trnuljčica* (Sleeping Beauty, 1992) by Tchaikovsky; the opera *La Cechina* (2000) by Niccolò Piccinni; *Velika skupnjava sv. Antona* (The Great Temptation of St Anthony, 2008) by Michel de Ghelderode; *Slike s izložbe* (Pictures at an Exhibition, 1998) by Mussorgsky and Gogol; *Sve o Žaklinama* (All about Jacqueline, 2004) by Magdalena Lupi, based upon tales of Eugène Ionesco; *Osel nazarenski* (The Donkey of Nazareth, 1996) by Robert Walti; *Zlatorog* (The Golden Horn, 1986) by Zdravko Ostojič. He used live music in all of his productions. Agata Freyer designed the puppets for many of his shows. With Freyer, he recorded popular puppet and music serials for Slovenian television.

Majaron received one of Slovenia's major cultural awards, the Small Prešeren Prize, in 1988 as well as many international awards recognizing his professional contribution to the art of puppetry. In 1984, he initiated the international festival, Lutke, in Ljubljana.

Edi Majaron's international work has been allied with that of UNIMA. He was a member of the Executive Committee (1980-2000) and a member of three UNIMA commissions: Professional Training, Research, and Puppetry in Education. In 2008, he was named an UNIMA Member of Honour. From 1991 to 2020, Majaron taught in the Education Faculty of Ljubljana University, supporting the use of puppetry in education. His workshops on "Puppets in Curriculum" for schoolteachers were held in Slovenia, Croatia and Italy. In 2004, he prepared the curriculum for puppetry studies in the Department of Theatre Arts at the Academy of Arts and Culture (then called Academy of Arts) in Osijek, Croatia, where he lectured until 2010 on subjects relating to puppet animation. His articles on puppet dramaturgy, direction and puppet history appear in his book, *Vera u lutku* (Faith in the Puppet, 2014 and 2017). His essays on puppetry in education are printed in *The Puppet-What a Miracle!* (2002) and *The Power of the Puppet* (2012), both published by UNIMA.



**KIM OCK-RANG, 1945**

## SOUTH KOREA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2016

Proponent of traditional kkokdu (aka kokdu) figures and Korean aesthetics, puppeteer and museum director. Kim Ock-rang is the director of the Seoul-based Kokdu Museum, head of the Dongsung Art Center and chairperson of the Ock-Rang Cultural Foundation. Although it may have foreign linguistic connections, kkokdu is an indigenous Korean term for "puppets" in general. Kim primarily uses the term to refer to traditional wooden puppets that adorn funeral biers or are placed inside tombs.

Kim recounts, "Antique shops in Seoul [in the 1970s] sold old cultural artifacts and relics. I was immersed in the hobby of collecting antique stone sculptures, wooden crafts, and old books and paintings, so I often visited Cheonggyecheon." In these shops she was captivated by the mysterious, rustic and sometimes humorous expressions of the wooden kkokdu puppets. She started acquiring them at an inexpensive cost or for free. When viewing her collection, she felt a comforting sense of protection and became completely immersed in their atmosphere. She notes that this feeling was something she could not experience with "sophisticated" modern Western sculptures.

Inspired by the traditional Korean puppet play, kkokdugaksi noreum, Kim wanted to find a way to make these traditional funeral figures come to life. She worked with folklorist Lee Du-hyun, who found that the etymological origin for the Korean word for puppet is "kkokdu" from *Seokbosangjeol*, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Korean-language biography of Buddha. In 1984, she founded the puppet theatre troupe "Nanglang" and published the quarterly puppet theatre magazine *Kkokdugeuk*. In her troupe, she incorporated wooden puppets

as important motifs to create a distinctly Korean theatrical style. Her encounter with the wooden kkokdu also led her to establish the Dongsung Art Center in 1989 and to found the Ock-rang Cultural Foundation in 1992. These efforts sought to promote artistic works that contemporized traditional Korean aesthetics. Over the years, Ock-rang Kim has collected over 300 kkokdu figures. In 2010, she opened the Kokdu Museum displaying these puppets. From December 2024-March 2025, her collection is showcased in a special exhibition, titled "Kokdu," at the National Folk Museum of Korea.

Kim managed the art film theatre Dongsoong Cinematheque and served as vice president of the National Folk Museum Society. She has recently been appointed the new chairperson of the Seoul Performing Arts Company; her term ends in July 2026.

Given her passion for traditional Korean funeral puppets, she describes herself as "Kkokdu Mom." For her contributions, she has received a Dong-A Theater Award in 1990 and an award from the Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in 2009.



**IDOYA OTEGUI, 1960**

## SPAIN

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Spanish cultural manager specializing in puppet theatre. Idoya Otegui is the co-founder (2009) of TOPIC. Comprising 3,600 m2, the centre is dedicated to puppetry. TOPIC has two theatres, a creation space, an artists' residence, two workshop spaces (one on-site, the other online), a digitized documentation centre, a museum and two temporary exhibition halls. Otegui co-directed TOPIC with Miguel Arreche (1945-2013), and then on her own until 2022

when due to health reasons she had to retire. She co-directed the Tolosa International Puppet Festival, TITERIJAI (founded in 1983), until 2012, and solo until 2022.

She presented two important Spanish puppetry exhibitions in New Delhi and Seoul, sponsored by SEACEX (State Society for Foreign Cultural Action). In 2014, she presented a puppet exhibition in the European Parliament. Puppets have featured in the Spanish stands at the Universal Expo in Shanghai and Dubai and at the Universal Expo in Osaka in 2025. In 2013, Otegui reached an agreement with Spain's National Dramatic Centre of the Ministry of Culture to support a regular programme of puppet theatre held at the Centre, selected and coordinated by TOPIC.

Otegui is a member of UNIMA since 1986. As a member of UNIMA Federación España (UFE), she has served as its general secretary (1992-1996) and president (2008-2015). She more than doubled the subsidies of UFE received from the state, facilitated UFE gaining a seat on the State Council of Performing Arts and Music, and obtained an agreement and the financing from Spanish institutions to present the candidacy of Spain (Tolosa-Donostia) to host the 2016 UNIMA Congress and Festival, which Otegui organized and coordinated.

She has served as an international councillor representing her national centre, president of the Elections Committee of UNIMA International, member of UNIMA's Finance Commission and Publication and Communication Commission, member of the Executive Committee (2016-2025) and president of the Heritage, Museums and Documentation Centres Commission (2021-2025).

As general secretary of UNIMA International (2016-2021), Otegui is the first woman to date to hold this position in its 96-year history. During her mandate, with her team, she accomplished the following: UNIMA's African national centres began to work and carry out collaborative projects and Latin American national centres met annually for the first time. New impetus was given to World Puppetry Day; the day itself, 21 March, began to be celebrated annually in Charleville-Mézieres; a commemorative poster for WPD was created; and short videos were made by UNIMA national centres, launched online to promote greater awareness of the event, UNIMA and puppet theatre. During Idoya Otegui's term as general secretary, the relationship between UNIMA and UNESCO was significantly strengthened.







# TERRITORIES

Culturally specific, yet universal, puppetry expresses local identities while creating transnational connections. Addressing how puppet theater successfully transcends traditions, geographical borders, and time, these articles provide examples of puppetry communicating across cultures and fostering international collaborations to emphasize our common humanity.



# CHUNCHEON

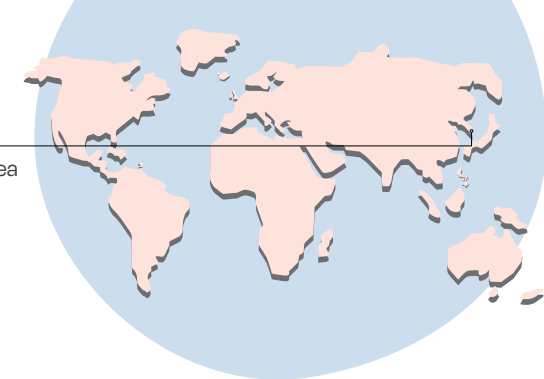
## THE HEART OF PUPPET THEATRE IN SOUTH KOREA

By Kyumi Ko

Interviewed by Yejin Choi



Republic of Korea



In 2025, on the occasion of the 24<sup>th</sup> UNIMA Congress and the Chuncheon International Puppet Festival, puppeteers from all over the world will take an interest in Chuncheon.

The city is pleased to have a growing reputation as the centre of South Korean puppetry, thanks to the Chuncheon Puppet Festival (the largest puppet theatre festival in Korea), the Chuncheon Puppet Theater Company, and the Hybrid Arts Business Center.

Here we will show how the lakeside town of Chuncheon became the centre of Korean puppetry.

We'll also take the opportunity to present Chuncheon's vision of how it can contribute to the development of Asian puppetry, by looking at the world puppetry scene and by communicating with it.

Finally, we will share with you Chuncheon's ambition to contribute to the development of Asian puppetry and to grow in relation to today's global puppetry scene.

### CHUNCHEON, KOREA'S PUPPET CITY

In South Korea in the 1960s, children's television series featuring puppets began to appear. This led to the creation of several puppet theatre companies, laying the foundations for the art of modern Korean puppetry.

In the 1980s, Seoul's main regional theatres began to programme permanent puppet shows for children. This contributed to the revitalisation of this art form, and accelerated the creation of other puppet companies.

This interest in puppetry as a performing art has led to a number of attempts to restore traditional Korean puppetry, which until now had been forgotten. This new enthusiasm for puppetry made it necessary to establish a network of puppeteers: thus, the Korea Puppet Theatre Association was born.

The 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul gave the country the economic strength to host cultural exchanges. This also encouraged the private sector to organise international puppet festivals. 1989 saw the birth of the first puppet festival in South Korea in Chuncheon, Gangwon province. It was the first time that puppet theatre companies and puppeteers from all over the country had come together. The festival presented a wide variety of shows, developed programmes to encourage and support amateur puppet troupes and university puppet clubs, and included a parade with the citizens of Chuncheon. It continues to this day to be the biggest puppet festival in South Korea.

In 1995, the festival became so popular that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism chose Chuncheon to be the



city of culture. The reputation of puppetry and the festival continued to grow, and in 2001 the city built the Chuncheon Puppet Theatre. It is the only permanent puppet theatre in Korea. Today, the Chuncheon Festival is proud to be celebrating its 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Korea enjoyed worldwide popularity in the 2010s. Chuncheon is riding this wave and hopes to establish itself definitively as a puppet city, both nationally and internationally.

In 2020, a new symbolic step was taken with the creation of the Chuncheon City Puppet Theatre Company. This latest achievement will establish Chuncheon as THE puppet city in South Korea.

In addition, in 2023, the Chuncheon Hybrid Arts Business Center was created. The centre's mission is to help young artists create multicultural shows by providing them with production assistance. This innovation encouraged a large number of artists to come to Chuncheon and incorporate puppetry into their creations.

In a bid to expand internationally, Chuncheon's puppet theatre will host the UNIMA congress in 2025. On this occasion, the Chuncheon company and puppeteers from all over the world will work hand in hand to continue to develop the world of puppetry.



**CHUNCHEON CITY PUPPET THEATER, STRONG LOCAL PRESENCE**

Yoo Sung-gyun, artistic director of the Chuncheon City Puppet Theatre Company is particularly interested in the local aspect of his work. He believes it is important for the company to re-establish its artistic role as a regional public puppet theatre company. He defends the social function of the puppet arts. The company also runs cultural initiatives in schools, in the form of artistic workshops and school performances. As part of its commitment to the local area of Chuncheon, it has begun work on community theatre, taking over areas of the city that are not dedicated to the performing arts.

This local work is not in contradiction with his desire to set up exchanges and partnerships between different Asian countries. Indeed, in his view, the stronger the local links, the more willing they will be to welcome and share their knowledge with other Asian countries.

**THE ASIAN INFLUENCE ON KOREAN PUPPETRY**

"Asia has a deep tradition of puppet theatre in every country and ethnic group, and figuring out how to meet modern audiences is a major challenge for puppeteers today," says Choe Junho, president of UNIMA Korea.

Contemporary Korean puppetry has been directly and indirectly influenced by Asian traditions and diverse Asian puppetry cultures. These exchanges, particularly in the 1990s, have contributed to the current state of Korean puppetry.

**HOW IS CHUNCHEON PROGRESSING IN THE INTERNATIONAL PUPPET WORLD?**

Traditional puppet theatre can seem difficult to access for today's young generation, who are evolving at a frenetic pace. Faced with this challenge, Choe Junho tells us about one of Korea's key assets: the world of Korean puppetry is mainly run by the younger generation. According to him, young Korean puppeteers have a sense of execution and momentum thanks to active communication. "Korean artists are very good at combining traditional and contemporary performing arts to create something new, and I think that this adaptability, combined with the ability to communicate actively, will enable Korea to contribute to the development of puppetry in Asia and play a central role in cultural communication".

Simultaneously, Cho Hyun-san, president of the Chuncheon Puppet Festival, is moving in the same direction of opening up and teaching the younger generation, saying: "We plan to refine these efforts and create an institution for education and research in the field of puppetry".

Choe Junho points out: "We had two very important objectives in mind when we planned the Chuncheon International Puppet Festival 2025. The first is to introduce the puppetry genre to people all over the country in order to make them want to watch puppet shows more often. The second is to create an opportunity for numerous guests, including international artists and participants in

the UNIMA General Assembly, to come to Korea and leave with a good impression of Korean puppetry. This will also encourage them to interact with each other. It's important for artists and puppeteers to see how people live in Korea, in what kind of natural environment and in what way, but also to see how the audience itself evolves through the puppet festival in a small town like Chuncheon".

"The various problems that arise in today's world are often caused by conflicts and barriers that result from a lack of communication," says Cho Hyun-san, adding that "Chuncheon intends to create various channels of communication with the global puppet theatre community, but also to establish a way of communicating with puppeteers all around the world in order to reflect together on the evolution of this art through our times".

In conclusion, Chuncheon has consistently demonstrated its commitment to promoting the art of puppetry for over 35 years. The next edition of the festival will be another milestone in building its reputation as a puppet city, but this time on a global scale.

“...the world of Korean puppetry is mainly run by the younger generation.”  
– Choe Junho



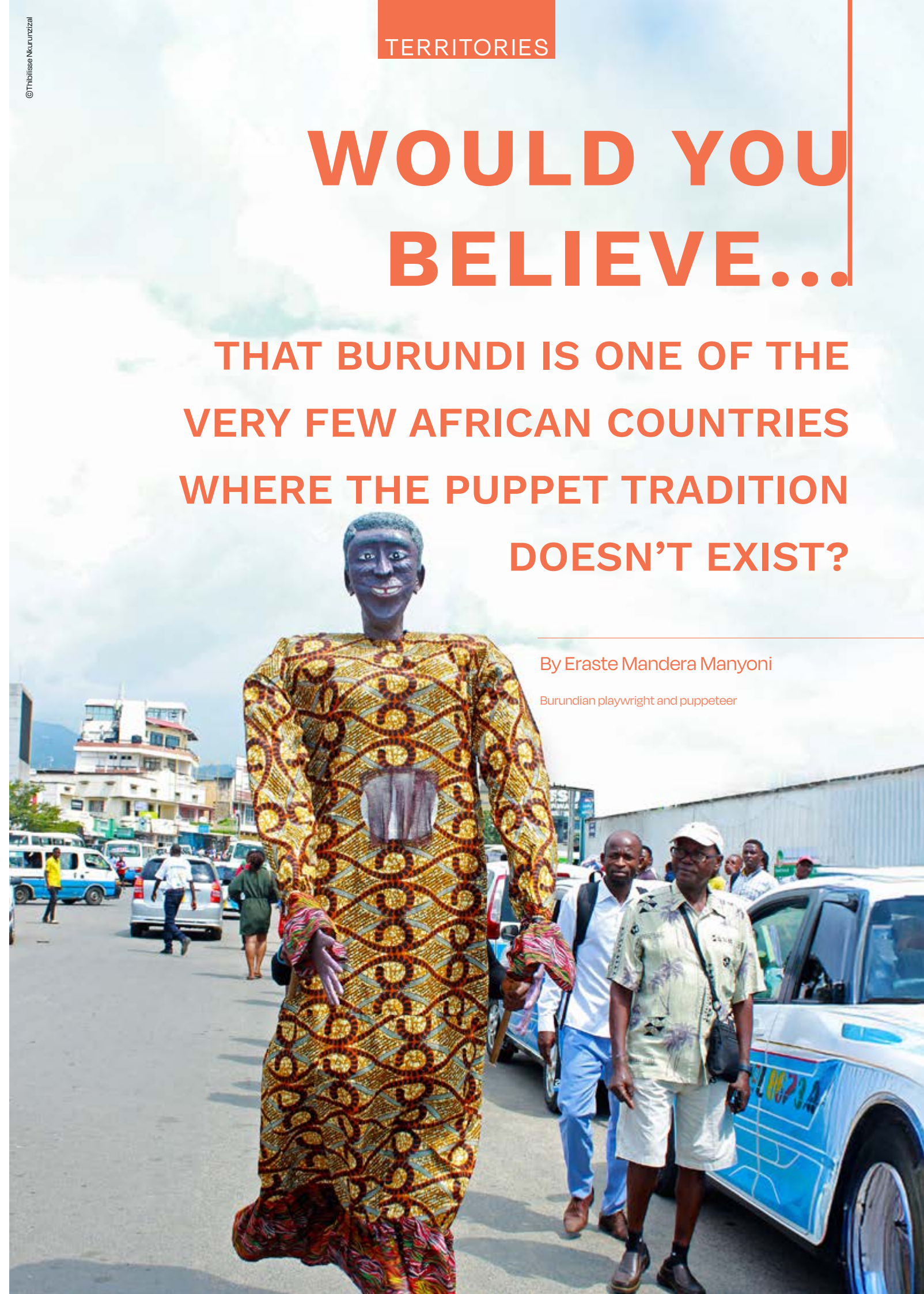
© Chuncheon Puppet Theater Company, Hwang Seok-yong, Lee De-jeong

# WOULD YOU BELIEVE...

## THAT BURUNDI IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW AFRICAN COUNTRIES WHERE THE PUPPET TRADITION DOESN'T EXIST?

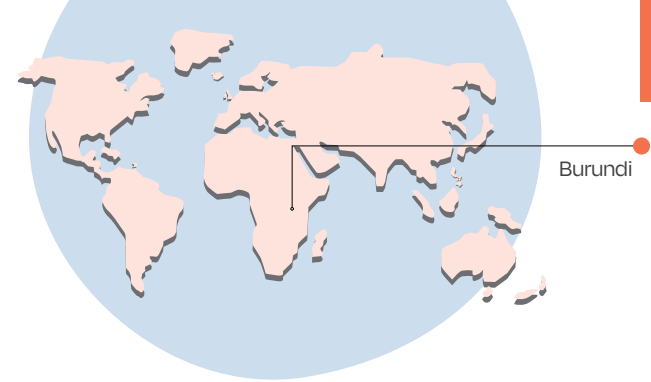
By Eraste Mandera Manyoni

Burundian playwright and puppeteer



©Thibaut Neurazai





## TERRITORIES

Burundi, nestled in East Africa, is a country rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty. Its people are renowned for their resilience and warmth, qualities shaped by decades of socio-political challenges. The nation's unified culture is reflected in Kirundi, the singular national language spoken by all, symbolizing a shared set of beliefs and traditions that bind its people together.

Visitors to Burundi often remark on the genuine hospitality of its inhabitants. Everywhere you go, the smiles of Burundians—from children to elders—create an atmosphere of generosity and humanity. This welcoming spirit is a testament to the country's deep-rooted values of community and solidarity.

The cultural identity of Burundi is deeply intertwined with its artistic traditions. From the iconic *Intore Warrior Dance*, to the royal drums of *Umurisho w'I Ngoma*, and the pastoral poetry rich in symbolic gestures, Burundi's heritage is a treasure trove of artistic expression. However, this rich culture has faced significant challenges. The colonial period disrupted many traditional practices, erasing rituals like *Kubandwa*, an ancestral spiritual practice, and national celebrations such as *Umuganuro*. Today, Burundian culture grapples with the dual pressures of global influence and local neglect, threatening its continuity.

Despite these difficulties, the arts remain a vital part of Burundian society. Artists, though underfunded and often overlooked, work tirelessly to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. Events like the *Buja Sans Tabou* festival in Bujumbura offer platforms for emerging theater troupes, showcasing the resilience and creativity of Burundian artists.

Interestingly, Burundi is one of the few African countries without a historical puppetry tradition. In contrast, nations like Mali have long embraced puppetry as a tool for storytelling, cultural preservation, and communal bonding. Puppetry in Mali blends theater, music, dance, and poetry to create a powerful medium of expression, addressing social issues and fostering unity.



September 2024 - Time for construction of the giant puppets of *Le Père et la Mère* by the association ABASAMANDARI, in collaboration with the UNIMA centre in Burundi.  
Credit photography for all images: Thibilisse Nkurunziza.

In recent years, efforts have been made to introduce puppetry to Burundi. These initiatives recognize its potential not only as an art form but also as a tool for reconciliation in a society still healing from a history of ethnic conflict. The establishment of UNIMA Burundi in April 2023 marked a significant milestone in these efforts. Supported by UNIMA International and UNESCO, the training program *Marionnette de Demain en Afrique* in May 2023 brought essential skills to local artists under the guidance of experienced puppeteers like Alessandra Amicarelli and Athanase Kabré.

Since its inception, UNIMA Burundi has made notable progress. Projects like the creation of giant puppets, *The Father* and *The Mother*, aim to preserve and celebrate Burundian traditions. International recognition is also growing, with a Burundian artist participating in the prestigious ESNAM entrance audition in France in 2024 and being awarded an AVIAMA grant to support the research and artistic creation of a project.

“Today, puppetry represents a new hope for Burundi. It can not only contribute to preserving the endangered Burundian culture, but it can also serve as a tool for reconciliation...”  
- Eraste Manderu Manyoni

## TERRITORIES

Collaboration has been key to this success. Partnerships with organizations like UNIMA Italy have helped UNIMA Burundi to structure its activities and provide training to its members, while local institutions such as the Institut Français du Burundi have offered resources and venues to support the development of puppetry. The ABASAMANDARI association has also played a crucial role, supporting artist training and ensuring the wider dissemination of this emerging art form.

Puppetry in Burundi holds immense promise. Beyond its artistic value, it serves as a medium for storytelling, education, and reconciliation. As Burundian artists continue to embrace this art form, with the support of both local and international partners, puppetry has the potential to enrich the nation's cultural landscape and contribute to its social and cultural renewal.

Today, puppetry represents a new hope for Burundi. It can not only contribute to preserving the endangered Burundian culture, but it can also serve as a tool for reconciliation and raising awareness in a society still scarred by wounds from the past, where people walk voiceless, carrying a truly bitter silence inherited from previous conflicts.

With the commitment of artists and the support of local and international partners, the future of puppetry in Burundi is assured. It is also essential to highlight the pivotal role of Eraste Manderu Manyoni, president of the UNIMA Burundi center. Through his dedication and vision, Eraste Manderu Manyoni has successfully mobilized efforts and structured the necessary initiatives to introduce and sustainably develop the art of puppetry in the country.

Under his leadership, ambitious initiatives have emerged, such as the creation of the giant puppets “*The Father*” and “*The Mother*”, symbols of Burundian cultural memory. His involvement has also facilitated fruitful partnerships with organizations like UNIMA International, AVIAMA, and local associations such as ABASAMANDARI, helping to structure and strengthen the skills of Burundian artists.

Thus, puppetry becomes not only a vehicle for cultural preservation but also a means of showcasing Burundian identity on the international stage, paving the way for a future where art and culture will play a central role in the reconstruction of Burundi's social fabric.

Kids from very deprived district in the city of Bujumbura, Burundi.





# THE PUPPET

## UNIVERSAL TOOL OF CULTURAL CONNECTION

Ousmanou Sali

Interviewed by Nkuissi Florence Nadège

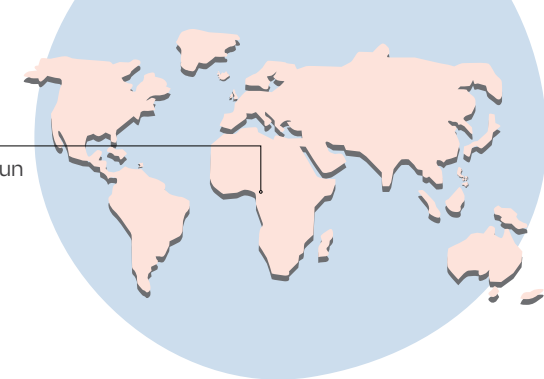
General Secretary of UNIMA Cameroon



© Touroukou Yedji Hamadjam Emmanuel

In a world in search of intercultural dialogue and meaningful exchange, the puppet emerges as a unique medium. An instrument for storytelling and encounters, it crosses linguistic and cultural boundaries, embodying emotions that build bridges between people. To better understand this universal art form, we met Ousmanou Sali, puppeteer, actor, director and promoter of the International Festival 'Les REPARES'. In this interview, he shares his experience and his vision of the many dimensions of puppetry as a tool for cultural connection.

Cameroon



© Touroukou Yedji Hamadjam Emmanuel



Image on article cover and image on the left: Workshop on the creation and manipulation of giant puppets led by Ousmanou Sali, from 19th June to 7th July 2024, in Douala Bonendalé.

**Nkuissi Florence Nadège: Why do you see puppetry as a powerful tool for connecting cultures?**

**Ousmanou Sali:** The puppet, by its very nature, embodies the universal. It can take the form of a glove puppet in Asia, a rod puppet in Africa, or a marionette in Europe, for example. These different styles, though regionally specific, speak a universal language: that of human emotions. For example, a puppet show can tell a local legend while incorporating visual or musical elements from another culture. This ability to translate local stories into universal experiences is invaluable in a world where we are seeking to understand each other better.

**NFN: Do you have any concrete examples of international collaborations that illustrate this potential?**

**OS:** Absolutely. One of the most striking collaborations is the SAKALA project, between the Cameroonian team Le Groupe des Géants du MBOA and Les Plasticiens Volants, a French troupe. This project focused on the representation of different Cameroonian cultural areas. Our partners contributed their techniques and aesthetics, while the Cameroonian team shared their stories and symbols. The final show was a harmonious fusion of styles and cultures. At the first performance, it was fascinating to see spectators from different backgrounds finding their own personal resonance. This experience illustrates how puppetry creates a space where differences become a shared richness. The important thing in these processes is to respect the roots of each tradition, while experimenting together to develop something new. This shows the extent to which puppetry can become a field for creative experimentation, where different cultures come together to coexist and feed off each other.

**NFN: How do you manage the cultural tensions that can arise during such collaborations?**

**OS:** Cultural clashes are inevitable, but they are often learning opportunities. During the SAKALA project, misunderstandings arose over aesthetic choices or the messages to be conveyed. For example, an insignificant symbol for Les Plasticiens Volants could have a profound meaning for Cameroonian puppeteers. However, by approaching these differences with curiosity and respect, we have enriched the creative process. These confrontations made it possible to create a show that truly reflected our diversities, giving rise to a unique and authentic experience.

**NFN: What role do festivals play in these cultural exchanges?**

**OS:** Festivals play a crucial role. They provide a physical and symbolic space where artists can meet and exchange ideas. During holiday festivities in 2024 organised by the traditional Banendalé chief, in coastal Cameroon, workshops enabled participants to discover new ways of handling and designing giant puppets. These technical and cultural exchanges enrich everyone. What's more, these encounters often don't stop at the festival: they lead to long-term collaborations, or even cultural partnerships between companies or institutions.

**NFN: How can puppetry respond to contemporary issues while preserving its roots?**

**OS:** Puppetry can incorporate digital elements without losing its traditional crafting methods. It can also tackle contemporary themes such as climate change or migration, while continuing to tell universal human stories.





© Touroukou Yedji Hamadjam Emmanuel



© Touroukou Yedji Hamadjam Emmanuel

Image on the left and right:  
Workshop on the creation and  
manipulation of giant puppets  
led by Ousmanou Sali, from  
19th June to 7th July 2024, in  
Douala Bonendalé.

**NFN: What advice would you give to young artists who want to use puppetry for intercultural dialogue?**

**OS:** I would always start by listening and observing. Understanding the stories and symbols of other cultures is essential. Then you have to dare to experiment. Puppetry is a flexible tool that allows you to explore new frontiers, whether technical or thematic. Finally, collaborations are essential: they open up unexpected perspectives and enrich the artistic language.

**NFN: As a puppeteer, how do you perceive the impact of puppetry on audiences? Does this medium have a particular power to touch the emotions and sensibilities of audiences?**

**OS:** The puppet has a unique power: it allows audiences to suspend their beliefs and let themselves be carried away by the story. Unlike a human actor, the puppet, with its sometimes offbeat form, generates a distance that makes the emotion more accessible. It is a mirror in which everyone can project themselves. Audiences, often captivated by the puppet's movement and expression, identify with the situations it embodies, whether joyful, dramatic or comic. In this way, it touches the senses and emotions more deeply.

**NFN: How can puppetry help to raise public awareness of social and political issues while preserving its artistic and entertaining character?**

**OS:** Puppetry has the ability to make serious subjects accessible without losing its playful and aesthetic side. Take, for example, shows that tackle themes such as migration, climate change or social conflict. The simplified and sometimes symbolic nature of puppetry means that these issues can be handled with great emotional force, while at the same time creating a moment of entertainment. It's a way of getting important messages across while engaging the audience in a non-didactic way.

**NFN: Have you observed any changes in the way puppetry is perceived around the world, particularly in Western societies compared to African or Asian societies?**

**OS:** Yes, the perception of the puppet varies enormously from one culture to another. In Africa, it is often perceived as a traditional, ritual and mystical art, a form of ancestral storytelling that is still very much part of community life. In Europe and North America, puppetry has gone through a 'revival' phase where it has become more avant-garde, notably with more experimental forms of theatre. What's fascinating is that even in these modern contexts, puppetry retains this power to evoke deep emotions and transcend cultural boundaries.

“Cultural clashes are  
inevitable, but they are often  
learning opportunities.”  
– Ousmanou Sali

**NFN: What role does puppetry play in arts education, particularly in schools and with younger generations? Can it play a role in transmitting traditional knowledge while being used in a contemporary context?**

**OS:** Puppetry is an excellent teaching tool. In schools, it not only awakens children's creativity but also teaches them about teamwork, staging, and storytelling. In a more traditional context, it becomes a means of transmitting legends, popular stories and cultural values. In a contemporary setting, it can tackle modern subjects and adapt to new technological tools, while retaining its artisanal origins.

**NFN: Can puppetry, as a mediation tool, be used to tackle taboo subjects or sensitive issues such as war, poverty or inequality? If so, how can this be done while respecting the cultures involved?**

**OS:** Yes, puppetry is a wonderful tool for tackling sensitive subjects, because it allows complex issues to be dealt with indirectly. For example, puppets can represent symbolic figures to deal with war or inequality, enabling audiences to confront these realities without feeling directly attacked. The key is to respect cultural sensitivities and present these subjects in a thoughtful way, taking into account local perceptions and experiences.

**NFN: Do you think that puppetry can go beyond the theatre and be integrated into other fields, such as cinema, television or even new technologies (virtual reality, holograms)?**

**OS:** Absolutely. Puppets have a great capacity to adapt. Today, we see puppets used in film and television productions where digital techniques enhance the experience. For example, CGI-animated puppets or puppet holograms allow us to explore new dimensions while preserving the essence of the craft. This crossover with new technologies opens up immense horizons where puppetry can express itself in innovative ways while remaining true to its roots.

**NFN: Can puppetry be an effective tool in the process of reconciliation in conflict or post-conflict contexts, by enabling individuals to reappropriate their histories and their collective memory?**

**OS:** Yes, puppetry can play a restorative role in conflict situations. It enables people to tell and share traumatic stories in a less direct but just as powerful way. In a context of reconciliation, it offers an opportunity for non-judgemental expression and helps people to free themselves from their suffering. By reinventing narratives or reconstructing collective histories, puppetry enables the community to reclaim its past while facilitating openness towards the future.

**NFN: What are the current challenges for puppeteers wishing to work on intercultural projects? Are there any technical, financial or logistical obstacles to the expansion of this art form as a tool for dialogue between cultures?**

**OS:** The main challenges are often logistical and financial. Producing puppets, especially on an international scale, requires considerable resources, both in terms of materials and travel. What's more, the fusion of different traditions can generate aesthetic and cultural tensions that require a delicate balance. Finally, there is the question of institutional recognition and support for these intercultural projects, which sometimes remains limited. Yet these obstacles are also opportunities to build bridges and strengthen collaborations between artists, which in itself is a fine challenge.

**NFN: To conclude, how do you see the future of puppetry in this role of cultural mediator?**

**OS:** I'm very optimistic. Puppetry has immense potential, especially in a world where we need more dialogue and mutual understanding. By encouraging encounters, hybridisations and joint creations, it can continue to play a central role in building a more harmonious future.

The flexibility, poetry and universality of puppetry make it an essential mediator between cultures. As Ousmanou Sali points out, it builds bridges, deconstructs stereotypes and opens up new perspectives. Intercultural dialogue through puppetry is a rich resource to be explored, not only by artists but also by audiences. In the face of contemporary challenges, this ancestral art continues to evolve and bring people together, reminding us that, despite our differences, we share a common humanity.

© Touroukou Yedji Hamadjam Emmanuel



National Tour of Les Géants  
du Mboa in Awaé, Yaoundé.



# AT THE CROSSROADS: PUPPETRY

Passing it on



By Brunella Eruli

(1943-2012) Editor-in-chief of The Puck magazine -  
La marionnette et les autres arts



Object score: Workshop led by Duda Paiva, with  
students from the 13th promotion of ESNAM.  
Charleville-Mézières: Pôle International de la  
Marionnette - Jacques Felix, 2023.

Puppetry no longer is what it once was. Some mourn this fact, but if, as Duchamp declared, the audience creates the work, we do have to take into account the fact that audiences' perception of puppetry has changed. Puppetry itself did not wait for this new perspective before venturing on to paths that brought it out of the puppet booth. For a good twenty years it had been turning towards visual arts, theatre, dance, virtual imagery, animated film, contemporary music, and everything that has experimental research connotations.

Puppetry wished to shed the stereotypes that had been clinging to it for far too long. They were becoming more and more restrictive, as the desire to transform alongside contemporary theatre and to prove puppetry's capacity for adapting to the most varied theatrical contexts, and situations irresistibly asserted itself.

The queen of children's theatre, the peculiar object in folk art collections, the image of childish candor or romantic pathos suffered from being never—or practically never—considered for its aesthetic qualities or for the artistic quality of its theatrical creations.

The first meetings between theatrical forms separated by the invisible thread of prejudice had been prepared for by bridges created at the beginning of the century by avant-garde visual artists; over these bridges rushed creatures venturing forth onto a necessarily solitary path, at the junction of visual arts and theatre.

In the eyes of those accompanying the puppet on its new course, puppetry tradition retained all of its charm and the historical value of its past remained intact, but it had from then on become obvious that upholding tradition, or its idealised myth, did not amount to getting stuck in unalterable and repetitive codes, which indeed averted risks, but forestalled opportunities for discovery and innovation as well.

Through its new creations, puppetry discarded its best-known and most reliable identity, which in certain respects had been limiting its expressive possibilities: puppetry

abandoned its language, its context, its territory and even its audiences in order to launch into an undeniably magnificent adventure; it was nevertheless not devoid of dangers. Would puppetry be recognisable and able to recover its identity in a new image?

In order just to participate in theatrical life, puppetry had to leave a comfortable and secure framework and find travelling companions that would help it to cross the boundaries drawn between different artistic genres, forms and language. The meeting with several great twentieth century artists (the name Kantor could synthesize them all), showed that it was possible to defy conventional codes and invent one's own language.

"Intermediaries" and collaborators were already under way and waiting on the path, where puppetry, a bit intimidated at first and still hesitant, had committed itself to casting away the labels that had confined puppetry arts for far too long. Solitary researchers were demonstrating that it was possible to find signs necessary for the survival of the puppet's identity in different forms.

From then on, a new generation of stage directors, writers and choreographers looked at puppetry with eyes free of prejudice as they examined its traditional codes from every angle : this theatrical object's laconic grammar injected actors' theatre with a different way of seeing not only objects and materials, but also acting and the presence of the living body of the actor on stage. The body of the puppet—not easily bound to Earth, floating at once in a concrete and imaginary space, where inside and outside, material and emotional, alternate and intersect—raises questions about the borderline between living and inert, and between life and death. Fundamental questions for which even capital "T" theatre was unable to give definitive answers.

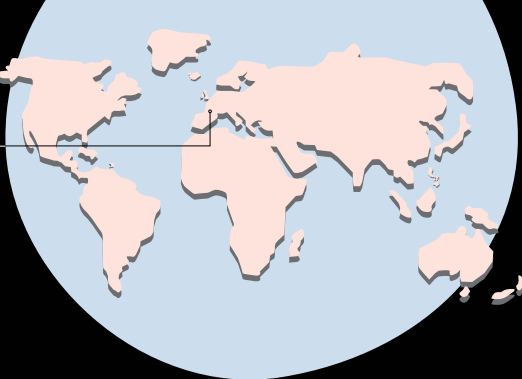
Moreover, the differences between inert materials and the human body have lessened ever since the latter began conserving certain of its characteristics with the help of mechanical prostheses, transplants, artificial organs, implants, electronic chips and a whole

aftermath of chemical products (whether they be legal or illicit) that regulate moods, libido, sleep, action, feelings, and even aspects of our vital equilibrium such as blood pressure, blood sugar, and hormone levels. Our lives are "manipulated" with our consent, and that is without taking into account the conditioning exerted on us by advertisements and media.

Now, a puppet, as soon as it enters on stage, even when it remains motionless, speaks above all about manipulation, that is, of relationships of strength and power. It brings up questions that go beyond the long training and virtuosities - sterile at times - that this technique requires of the puppeteer. In Heiner Muller's *Hamletmachine*, when the actor-manipulators of the company El Periférico grab hold of the scalp-less doll heads, one easily understands the violence and implications of the simple act of "manipulating", whether it is a doll, a puppet, or a living being.

We are now living in a time where virtual images, special effects and simulations destroy the borderline between real and virtual, where reality clashes with the reality show and where war can be converted into an image possible to manipulate. Where is the difference between the living and the inanimate? Who manipulates whom? In another of El Periférico's images, for *The Combat of Tancredi* and *Clorinda* by Monteverdi, we see the dimension of change that has come about in the puppetry world and in the shifting of boundaries between the living and inanimate. On stage we find singers, actors, and puppets; some of the puppets move due to mechanisms allowing for manipulation at a distance, thus reinforcing the puppet's autonomy. In the foreground there are projections of the surgical operation on a puppet taking place on stage. The combat has become a surgical operation, and a living heart is extracted from the body of the puppet. EL Periférico's idea was to perform a dissection of reality, all the while emphasizing that every one of us is a mutant.

Without a doubt, meetings with artists with puppetry experience and who knew how to integrate it into their performances or their writing (from Vitez, to Kantor, to







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Comment Gargantua  
naquit d'une bien étrange  
façon (How Gargantua  
Was Born in a Very Strange  
Way): Précipité by Pedro  
Hermelin-Vélez (13th  
promotion of ESNAM).  
Charleville-Mézières:  
Pôle International de la  
Marionnette - Jacques  
Felix, 2022.

Maguy Marin, to Benno Besson, to Gabily, to Novarina) has helped puppetry find its way; for its part, puppetry has also contributed to widening and deepening the language of traditional theatre.

Visual theatre, utilising an imagery based and three-dimensional language close to that of puppetry, recognized common elements of an expressive grammar whose strength is a new use for the actor: he or she is no longer on stage to represent reality according to a psychological or narrative continuity, but rather to suggest ruptures, discontinuities and obscurities in the reality surrounding us and in which we carry on, like overstuffed puppets stiffly moving along, looking for a point of uncertain balance but not really knowing where to step. Puppets offered the flesh and blood actor a model for showing, without words and thus without falling into traps created by language, the fundamental aspects of all reality, living or inanimate. This brings to mind the text by Schultz on the suffering of models.

After having considered the puppet as an incomplete actor, like a mute performer whose voice is turned off—given that it cannot speak by itself—and which derives vibrations for its presence from another body and another material, the flesh and blood actor has finally understood the importance

of voice manipulation, has learned to play with distortion and with recorded voice to make images hidden in the shadow of words stand out.

After having considered the puppet as an incomplete dancer—given that it cannot move by itself, contemporary dance today exhibits bodies expressing themselves sometimes with stylised gestures and sometimes with mechanical and repeated gestures, gestures which, like those of the puppet, unveil the body's inaptitude for adapting to the codes of "real life".

Is it possible to speak about puppets without closely looking at their companion and their master, their victim and their executioner: the puppeteer?

Whether they wanted to or not, puppeteers accompanied the puppet's evolution, compelled as they were to meet with the mutations imposed on their profession by the economic and cultural changes of society as a whole. Budgetary and administrative constraints contributed to putting the age-old organisation of the profession in a state of crisis. The traditional family or solitary trade was based upon the multiple and varied capacities of the puppeteer, a veritable one-man orchestra: writer, stage designer, constructor, sculptor, manipulator,

technical engineer, musician, administrator, diplomat, politician. However, times are changing and theatre troupes must leave the coin-collecting hat in the attic; they have to meet with regional and national authorities, must present projects and defend them before committees. In a word, the one-man orchestra troupe is becoming a business and the puppeteer, with his or her know-how, becomes just one of the gears coming into play within the enormous machine where artistic creation today wavers.

On another front, in order to guarantee their theatre's survival, troupes had to resolve the problem of training: training on the job and within the family was proving to be impossible now: younger generations were not very inclined to take up a trade having difficult economic prospects, and this lack of interest perpetuated neither the profession nor the transmission of traditional knowledge.

In this crisis context, marked also with the desire for change, renewal, and resistance, the International Puppet Institute, in accordance with other institutions, played an essential role in helping and backing the project for puppet theatre's integration into contemporary theatrical and artistic life. Organized by strong personalities, in spite of its minimal structure, the Institute has become the driving force and essential support on an international level for

initiatives to decompartmentalize the puppet and thus free it from its ghetto, and to open it up to visual languages and contemporary writings. The Institute's involvement has a broad scope: professional training, a school, publications, documentation, the creation of events and reaching out to increasingly wide audiences.

From this perspective, the creation of the National School for Higher Education in Puppetry Arts has lived up to the expectations of a profession trying to compensate for the generation gap puppetry was beginning to suffer from.

Confronting the issue of training, in no matter what domain or in what context, means entering an area where programs must constantly tackle the uncertainties and doubts brought on by changes in cultural sensitivity, and also changes in the economic framework, which does not spare cultural life.

Training an engineer, or a clown, an acrobat, or a puppeteer implies a project responding to formidable questions: training for what purpose, for whom, for what prospects? In a word: why a school? In order to accumulate techniques and knowledge or to create an "attitude" that allows students to evolve as artists and individuals towards a future whose broad outlines offer us but a fleeting glimpse?

The National School opened its enrolment to young artists lacking training, or a specific practice in the sphere of puppet manipulation; through an experimental curriculum impregnated with strong creative requirements, the sought-for objective aimed at both a general and specific training program, placing in the foreground the dawning of individual artistic talent and its capacity for continuing its development in rather broad contexts, and not devoted exclusively to puppetry. It was necessary to find a reasonable compromise between

general training, theatrical training and physical training, between apprenticeship and specialised techniques; special attention had to be given to content, to the students' capacity to utilise materials, construct scenic space, and create visually complex images. For the transmission of traditional knowledge, the participation of significant artistic personalities as teachers incorporated the practice of apprenticeship to the life of the school, but it also bridged the gap between the school, and the current theatrical situation. This contact gave the hoped for results, as a good number of students from the different three-year classes have formed their own companies, or have found their path in the heart of theatrical companies around the world.

So, mission accomplished: puppetry is indeed alive in theatre. Even so, the questioning is not yet over: is the puppet in danger of losing its identity? As are we all.

Writing with hand-held puppets: Workshop led by Virginie Schell and Gabriel Hermand-Priquet, with students from the 13th promotion of ESNAM. Charleville-Mézières: Pôle International de la Marionnette - Jacques Felix, 2023.



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# FROM HANDS TO HEARTS:

## THE CROSS-CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF PUPPETRY

Puppetry International Magazine



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By Ana Lorite



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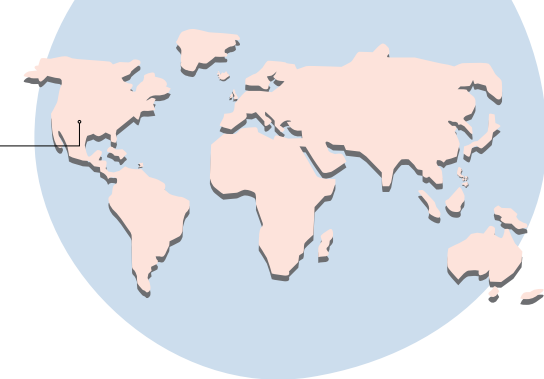
Quanzhou, China, 2019.



© James Krogmann

Cairns, Australia, 2017.

U.S.A



In September 2017, together with my husband and artistic partner, Sergio Aguilar, I embarked on a journey around the world for the purpose of exploring the motivational aspects of puppets in education settings and the communicative power of puppetry through wordless performances in some of the most remote corners of the planet. We called it "Puppetry and circus: a trip around the world's schools". What began as a dream to circumnavigate the globe turned into a nearly three year long voyage, during which we visited twenty-one schools and interviewed fifty-five puppeteers and thirty-five teachers from fourteen countries, across four continents. Eventually, the journey transitioned from an exploration of puppetry to a life-changing experience, leading us to leave behind our home in Spain and settle permanently in the Antipodes of New Zealand. Throughout our journey, I also discovered puppetry's unparalleled ability to forge human connections by transcending language barriers and communicating in a way that only the visual language of puppetry can express.

As we immersed ourselves in different cultures, we noticed that puppetry had a distinctive way of bringing people together. In Chiang Rai, Thailand, we found ourselves performing for a group of children and adults of the *Akha* people—an ethnic group who live in small villages at high elevations in the mountains of Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Yunnan Province in China—who had never seen a puppet show before. At first, they appeared hesitant and reserved, unsure of what to make of these peculiar animated characters. However, as the show unfolded, their eyes widened with curiosity, and soon, they were engrossed in the enchanting world of the puppets. After the performance, the children and adults approached us with wide smiles, their shyness replaced by a newfound excitement. They were eager to touch the puppets, to feel the floating balls that were suspended in the air with an illusion trick, and to understand how the puppets came to life. Despite the language barrier, we connected with the entire group through the shared wonder and fascination that puppetry had kindled in their hearts.

In contrast, we performed in the rehearsal quarters of the acclaimed show "Bali Agung" in Indonesia while over 150 performers were still removing their make-up after their performance. We were understandably quite nervous as we were about to perform our humble little puppet and circus show to a community of actors and puppeteers with hundreds of years of tradition and technique behind them. To our surprise, they all stayed in the big hall watching our performance, after what was a very long day for them, and they clapped with enthusiasm for every juggling trick and subtle movement of my marionette. At the end of the show, we communicated with them, sharing our tricks and our passion for puppetry, while they shared some of their unique puppets from their stage show. We felt connected in a way that transcends any common spoken language not only because of our mutual passion for puppet theater but also because of the unique connections that happen among performers who share a love of their craft and between performers and audience members while watching a puppet show.

Whereas in rural villages of Bolivia and Peru, we encountered elders who spoke ancient dialects

passed down through generations. We couldn't even communicate in our mother tongue (Spanish), because they spoke Quechua and Aymara. At first, we were concerned that our wordless puppetry might not resonate with them, given its stark contrast to their rich oral storytelling traditions. Yet, to our surprise, they embraced the puppet performances with open arms, recognizing in them a different yet complementary form of storytelling. The puppet characters' expressive gestures and movements became a mutually understood language that created a profound sense of unity between young and old. The elders would nod with approval, acknowledging the universality of human emotions conveyed by the puppets. In those moments, we realized that puppetry had the power to bridge not only linguistic gaps but also the gaps between generations, forging new connections that reach across time itself.

In the bustling cities such as Madrid, Sydney, and Wellington, to name a few, we found ourselves performing amidst the fast-paced rhythms of modern life. Surrounded by a sea of people, each one immersed in their daily routines, we wondered if puppetry could break through the barriers of anonymity that urban life often fosters. The answer came with an unexpected encounter. After a performance in a public square in Dunedin, New Zealand, a young woman approached us, her eyes moist with tears. She explained that she and her mother watched our show the day before, and that her mother, who suffered from severe Alzheimer's, woke up the next day asking if she could take her again to see the puppet show from the day before. We happily greeted her mother and thanked her daughter for coming back to see our show for a second time. Puppetry had touched her mother's heart and memory in a way that she couldn't put into words. In that fleeting moment, we shared an intimate connection with a stranger through the silent language of puppetry.

When on the road, I always travel with a small foam puppet in my bag named Franky. He has saved us countless times with his charming personality and has even gotten me selected in a job interview. One time when we were lost in a remote rural town in South East China, Frankie was able to connect with an elderly woman, who was opening shells in the street, and ask for assistance. She not only

“At first, we were concerned that our wordless puppetry might not resonate with them, given its stark contrast to their rich oral storytelling traditions.”  
– Ana Lorite



helped us to understand a map in Mandarin (a language neither I nor my partner speak), but also invited us for tea at her humble oyster-shell house.

In 2019, we were fortunate to further develop our project during a one-week residency with Rohingya refugee school in Malaysia that concluded with a performance. The Rohingya are the world's largest stateless population and have, for decades, been the victims of significant human rights abuses. The trauma and terrible circumstances that the children had overcome were indescribable. We didn't speak Bahasa Malaysian or Rohingya, the two languages spoken at the school. Nevertheless, during a week at the school, we were able to communicate with the children through our puppets, and they were motivated to learn English and express themselves in a different way. Even the shyest children dared to express themselves through a very simple lip-sync puppet, saying a few words in English, and they continued using their puppets during break times having conversations among themselves. After our final performance, which happened on our last day at the center, one of the teachers pointed out that the class was filled with laughter and joy. We could also feel the beautiful energy that was created through the puppets' ability to bring joy and clarity to one of the darkest places and experiences.

As a teacher, I often reflect on the importance of relationships between teachers and students. That sense of belonging, and the willingness to attend class and be curious about learning is rare without building a relationship first. I use puppets for teaching as a motivational tool and a channel for communication, by making use of their ability to foster human connection. Throughout my career as an educator, I have witnessed the healing power of puppetry too. In Australia, in a class with children with special needs, there was a child with autism who had not spoken in five years. When he placed his hand inside the puppet, he was able to express himself in ways his teacher had not seen before this moment. The teacher, moved to tears, later shared with me how I had inspired her to use this medium to connect with those children who needed a different pathway to communication.

In a 2018 interview conducted with the puppeteer Gonzalo Guevara from Buenos Aires, Argentina, we learnt about the importance of puppet theater as a celebration of democracy. A group of neighbors and professional puppet theater performers gathered together, after thirty-five long years of dictatorship, to create an intergenerational community of students and performers to enhance the art of puppet theater. Today, El Galpón de Catalinas has over 500 practitioners. The show that we watched that night had three generations on stage that connected with each other and with the audience through the puppets' performance.

While visiting Piripiri Museum in La Paz, Bolivia, we met with the puppeteer Sergio Ríos Hennings, who founded the performance company Uma Jalsu in collaboration with Isabel del Granado, and is an active member of the Bolivian cultural movement. He explained that the museum hosted visiting puppet artists and their own puppet productions once a week. The museum's puppet theater was also used as a storytelling space, and the

Aymara and Quechua people would also gather in this space to celebrate their indigenous roots and similarities while watching puppet theater.

These encounters, among many others, affirmed for us that puppetry possesses a unique power to transcend the boundaries that separate us as human beings. It reaches beyond the spoken word and delves into the realm of raw emotions and shared experiences. Whether in the depths of the Andes or in the heart of a bustling city, puppetry weaves a tapestry of human connection that unites us all.

As we settled in the Antipodes of New Zealand, we carried with us a treasure trove of memories and lessons from our puppetry odyssey. The journey had transformed us, not only as artists but as human beings. We realized that puppetry is not just an art form; it is a language of compassion, empathy and understanding. It showed us that the most profound connections can be forged without a single spoken word, that the essence of human communication lies not in vocabulary but in the expression of the soul. The stage might have been our platform, but the real magic was the invisible thread that connected us all as one global community.

Looking back, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to have explored the world through the eyes of puppetry. It taught me that no matter our background or language, we are all part of a shared human tapestry, intricately woven together. Puppetry served as a reminder that, despite our differences, we are bound by the threads of emotions that make us human. In celebration of the profound human connections we forged, I continue to breathe life into my puppets, knowing that their silent language bridges the gaps that words alone never fill.

As I continue my journey, I carry the stories and experiences of those we encountered, and am inspired to use this powerful art form to foster empathy, connection and understanding in an ever-diverse and interconnected world. Puppetry is my vehicle for celebrating the beauty of human connection, and I am determined to share its profound message with the world, one puppet show at a time.



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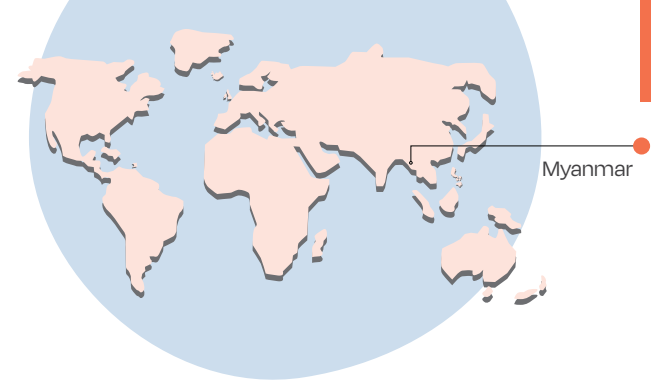
Chiang Rai, Thailand, 2019.

# PULLING AT THE STRINGS OF TRADITION

By Victoria Hart

U Htwe with his finished puppet.





## TERRITORIES

Known locally in Myanmar as Yoke thé, meaning 'small people', marionette puppetry is said to have originated over 600 years ago, reaching the peak of its popularity in the time of Third Burmese Empire (1752-1885).

In ancient times the marionette stage was a means of communicating the happenings in the Capital to rural villages, educating the masses on history, literature, and religion. Since the appearance of cinema and television, and with traditionalists not being willing to evolve the artform, it lost popularity. Now it is predominantly used as a tourist attraction, telling stories of the previous lives of the Buddha, known as the Jataka Tales.

U Htwe had set up his own marionette theatre, The Htwe Oo Myanmar marionette troupe, in an effort to revive the art. He had a vision to reignite audience interest by taking the art back to its origins to educate and inspire imagination through time-relevant plays.

Quite untouched by the fast pace of modern times, Myanmar blends tradition with modernity, with horse-drawn carts sharing the roads alongside cars, bikes, and motorcycles; fast food chains barely litter the streets, as traditional ways of producing food and homeware are still very much part of daily life. Equally, the people of Myanmar are peaceful, welcoming, warm and friendly; eager to share their culture and ways of life, where the presence of Buddhism remains strong with frequent visits to temples, the largest in Yangon being the Golden Temple, along with their adoration of political leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar marionettes are very detailed and the puppeteers need to have special hand skills, as each puppet is mastered by only one puppeteer using up to 16 strings. A visit to meet famous puppeteer, Saya Chan of the Nyein Chan Shwe Pyi puppet theatre, gave us the opportunity to see his vast collection of puppets. Traditionally puppet shows have 28 main characters, portraying gods, royals, animals, etc. and each has its own particular dance movements unique to the character. The collection is now in the care of U Htwe and his marionette troupe. Puppets are carved from teak wood and composed of 17 to 19 pieces. Storylines are usually plotted from ancient histories, legends, and community stories passed down the generations. They often reflected the current affairs, representing its people's lifestyles and concerns. In the Burmese ancient days, puppeteers were asked by the king to play the show as an indirect way of warning the

court and royal family members about their misbehaviors, cleverly using a storyline of a similar situation.

Over the past few decades, Myanmar marionette puppetry had almost disappeared due to the diverse modern forms of entertainment, lack of encouragement, and very few skilled artists remaining. These days, professional artists; such as those performing with U Htwe, are trying to revive this impressive piece of cultural heritage to give foreign explorers and new generations a sense of Burmese culture through their performance.

After the troupe participated in the 2011 World Puppet Theatre Festival in Charleville-Mezieres, the Htwe Oo Myanmar team joined a 3-week puppetry workshop named "HOME" which took place in Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar, and was conducted by Alliance-Francaise and German Cultural Centre. Puppeteers from Germany, France, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar participated in exchanges and collaborative performances, spending a week in Chiang Mai, a week in Phnom Penh and a week in Yangon.

Puppet painting.

©Andrew Hart



Myanmar string marionettes.

©Andrew Hart

## TERRITORIES

Sadly one of their puppet masters suddenly died after a performance in 2013, and the eldest one is now unable to perform. Therefore U Htwe's daughter and son are now involved, developing their skills in puppetry in response to the lack of puppeteers. They have participated in many Puppet Festivals around the world and won awards, such as the "Golden Prize" for individual puppetry by his daughter and son, and the "Silver Prize" for the troupe in the Marionette Festival in Hanoi, Vietnam. They are also featured in the Thai movie From Bangkok to Mandalay and the Myanmar movie Mudra's Calling.

They are not only doing puppetry shows at their home, but also puppetry talks and demonstrations in schools, colleges, and Universities.

U Htwe is the first of his kind willing to make the changes necessary to keep the art alive by incorporating modern themes and modern technology. He dreams of reviving

this ancient art and running workshops to create new time-relevant plays to both promote community education and cultural exchange.

In 2011, Victoria Hart produced a short documentary, Master of Puppets, addressing the challenges U Htwe faces. The film gives an insight into Myanmar culture and traditional Myanmar marionette theatre, introducing some great masters, along with the skills of the puppet maker and commentary from Ma Thanegi, Author of Myanmar Marionettes (March 2008) and former assistant to politician Aung San Suu Kyi. Watch Master of Puppets today:

[www.hartinmedia.com/work/documentaries](http://www.hartinmedia.com/work/documentaries)



# FROM CRISIS TO CREATION

## THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN PUPPET THEATER IN EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY JAPAN

By Yoko Yamaguchi

A Brief History of Western Puppet Theater from the November 1907 issue to the March 1909 issue", page from The International Graphic (Taishō 13 New Year's Issue, 1923, published by Kokusai Jōhōsha).



The marionette production of *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, staged in Tokyo in 1923 and widely regarded as marking the start of modern Japanese puppet theater, was featured in a graphic magazine under the headline "The New Puppet Theater" (fig. 1). What was "new" about it? One aspect was that it was the first Japanese puppet play to imitate Western puppet theater. The play featured a Western script, puppets and background art styled after Western puppet theater, and puppeteers dressed in Western clothing. This was a departure from traditional Japanese puppet theater like *Bunraku* or *Edo Marionette* performances that were being staged at the time. However, there seems to be another "new" aspect: the enthusiasm of these young people for Western puppet theater and the earnest recognition by those around them that it was a new form of art. When the British marionette troupe D'Arc visited Japan in 1894 and performed at the amusement park *Hanayashiki*, their act was perceived more as acrobatics than as a theatrical performance and was regarded merely as a spectacle. In contrast, in 1923, the photo magazine lauded *Aglavaine et Sélysette* as "puppet art" with "great prospects," despite it being a group of teenagers and young adults with no prior puppet theater experience who had created and performed a Western-style marionette show for the first time, similar in style to D'Arc's performance. This perspective of Western puppet theater as something cultural, sophisticated, and a form of "art" began to take shape in Japan for the first time in the 1910s. In this paper, I will explore the background of the Japanese modern puppet theatre that was born in 1923 by tracing the discourse on Western puppet theater that can be found in domestic magazine articles from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1900S: THE GRADUAL DECLINE AND NEAR DISAPPEARANCE OF PUPPET THEATER

Since the arrival of the D'Arc troupe, there have been no records of European puppet theaters performing in Japan until the 1920s, when Western-style puppet theater emerged in Japan. However, during this period, information about Western puppet theater was conveyed in fragments through travel writings by Japanese students studying abroad and through the studies of scholars of German, English, and French literature. Examining the prominent theater magazine of the time, *Kabuki*, reveals that during the 1900s, there were articles about Western puppet theater in a total of nine issues. These include the article "Puppet Theater in Europe" in the January 1905 issue (fig. 2), and a series titled "A Brief History of Western Puppet Theater" from the November 1907 issue to the March 1909 issue (Fig. 3). The former was an anonymous article, and the latter was written by Hakko Yoshida (1881-1981), a scholar of German literature known for introducing Wagner to Japan.

The proliferation of articles concerning Western puppet theater during this period can be attributed to the decline of traditional Japanese puppet theater. As the *Bunraku*-

za theater experienced a significant drop in audience attendance, puppet theater was increasingly perceived as incongruous with the values of a rapidly Westernizing and modernizing society. For instance, a theater review in the October 1909 issue of *Engei-Gaho* reflects this sentiment, stating, "In a rapidly advancing world... puppet theater seems old-fashioned indeed." The reviewer further notes, "It is rather peculiar that in the year 1909, at the heart of the Imperial Capital's entertainment world, puppet theater continues to be present."

At a time when puppet theater was being pushed out of modern Japan as something outdated, the aforementioned contributors to *Kabuki* sought to halt this trend by referencing the Western puppet theater. The anonymous author argued in the article "Puppet Theater in Europe": "Puppet theater has its own charm and should not be discarded... I advocate for the preservation of puppet theater." Similarly, Hakko Yoshida lamented, "It is regrettable that puppet theater, which has a long history both in the East and the West, is gradually declining and nearing extinction." These assertions also opened up a perspective of comparing Eastern and Western puppet theater.

However, it is incorrect to describe Western puppet theater as "declining and nearing extinction" in this context. At that time, influential theater theorists such as Gordon Craig and Bernard Shaw were discussing puppet theater; playwrights like Maeterlinck and Schnitzler were writing puppet theater scripts, and academically trained artists and sculptors—many from institutions like the Munich Academy—were creating puppet art, indicating that the proponents of puppet theater were becoming increasingly elite. By the 1910s, new trends in European puppet theater began to be known in Japan, leading to a growing interest in Western puppet theater.

### AROUND 1910: KAORU OSANAI AND WESTERN PUPPET THEATER

In 1910, Kaoru Osanai (1881-1928), who would soon become a leading figure in the *Shingeki* (new theater) movement, introduced a puppet play based on a script by Arthur Schnitzler in the magazine *Shin Shichō*. Schnitzler had published a trilogy titled *Marionetten* (Puppets) in 1906, and Ōgai Mori (1862-1922), the foremost figure in Japanese literature of his time, had translated one of its plays, *Der tapfere Cassian* (Gallant Cassian), into Japanese in 1908 for the magazine *Kabuki*. Osanai commented on this translated script, noting that the play was specifically



written as a puppet play. He also included photographs of the puppet production of *Der tapfere Cassian* staged by the Munich Artists' Puppet Theater. Thanks to Mori Ōgai's introduction, Schnitzler had already attracted the interest of the Japanese theater world. However, by reintroducing Schnitzler specifically as a writer of puppet plays, Osanai played a crucial role in encouraging young cultural figures to take the subject of puppet theater seriously and pursue it. Indeed, poet Kōnosuke Hinatsu (1890-1971) later reflected on this impact.

The example of modern European theater presented by Mori Ōgai in *Ichimaku Mono* (One-Act Plays) served as the foundation for the development of Japanese modern theater. Despite the fact that plays like *Der tapfere Cassian* [...] were originally designed for puppets rather than human actors, their influence did not fully materialize in Japanese theater, which was regrettable. Among those with similar interests, there was a strong enthusiasm for importing Western puppet theater.

As Hinatsu described, the fact that a “model of modern European theater” such as *Der tapfere Cassian* was performed with puppets rather than human actors likely provided a surprise to contemporary cultural figures. The desire to import Western puppet theater was not limited to Hinatsu's circle but extended beyond, eventually leading to the birth of modern puppet theater in 1923.

#### 1910S: EXPANSION OF KNOWLEDGE AND REAPPRAISAL OF TRADITIONAL JAPANESE PUPPET THEATER

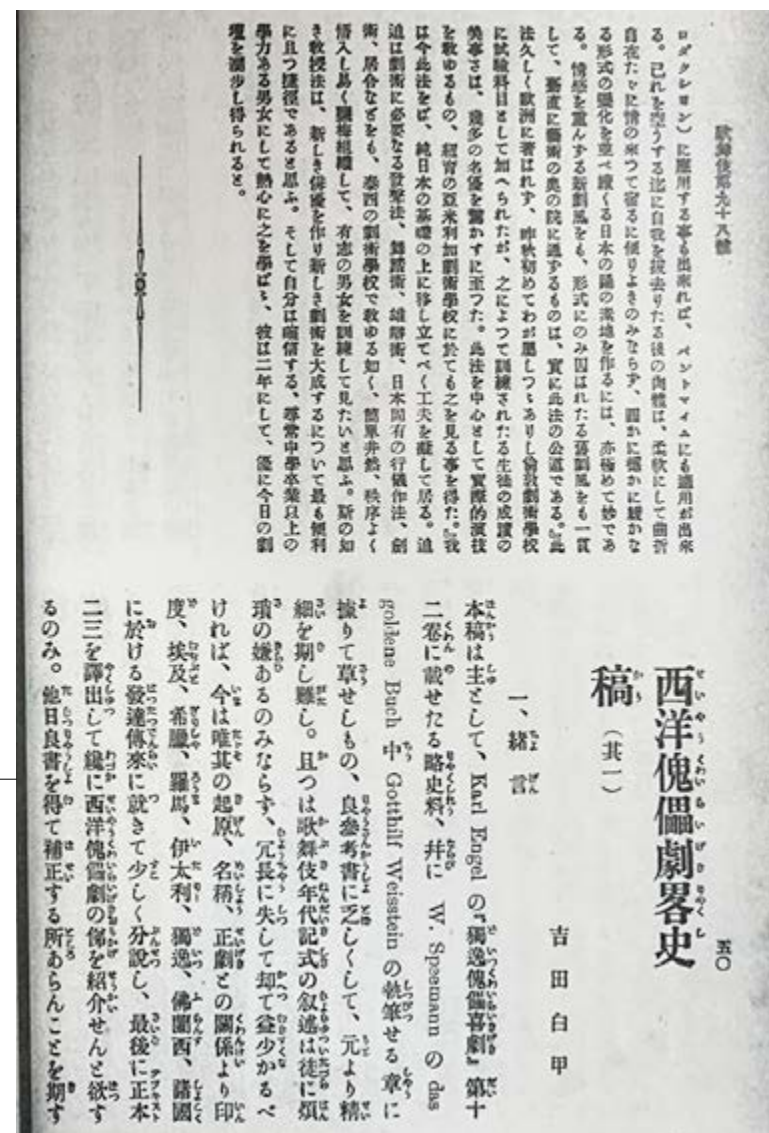
In the Taisho era, there was a significant increase in articles about Western puppet theater. In 1913, detailed articles on the “Munich Artists' Puppet Theater” appeared in both the magazines *Shibai* and *Waseda Bungaku*. The article in *Shibai* was written by theater researcher Tamizo Shimamura (1888-1970) and included stage photographs of the troupe. The article in *Waseda Bungaku* (Figure 3) was written by Toyokichi Hata (1892-1956), who later became the president of Takarazuka Theater and the Imperial Theater. Hata praised the theater's direction, noting that “the direction was skillfully done, incorporating and blending every possible element of puppet theater aesthetics.”

Theater researcher Yoshikuni Ozawa (1887-1978) wrote over ten articles on Western puppet theater in the 1910s alone. In 1913, he published *Anatole France's Puppet Theater Theory* and *Arthur William Symons' Puppet Theater Theory* in *Mita Bungaku*, translating and introducing their views on puppet theater. The following year, in a serialized feature in *Engei Gaho*, he discussed the

reappraisal of Bernard Shaw's puppet plays. Introducing the puppet theater theories of influential figures like Shaw, Symons, and France, who held great sway over young Japanese literary scholars at the time, likely heightened their awareness of Western puppet theater as a significant subject.

Furthermore, starting in 1917 (Taisho 6), Shoyo Tsubouchi began comparing Eastern and Western puppet theaters, advocating the superiority of Japanese puppet theater. He argued that even marionettes praised by figures like Goethe, George Sand, and Maeterlinck were “simple” and “childish” in terms of manipulation when compared to the three-person Bunraku puppetry. After the influx of information about Western puppet theater during the 1900s and 1910s, this comparison revealed that Japanese puppet theater was not something to be discarded, as previously suggested, but rather something to be proud of.

The above is a glimpse into the prelude leading up to the birth of the “new puppet theater” in 1923. What I wanted to emphasize in this article is the existence of enthusiasts who steadily introduced Western puppet theater and continued to advocate for the value of puppet plays. The credit for the founding of modern puppet theater should be attributed not only to the puppeteers, but also to these well-known, and unknown enthusiasts. In a time when the distinction between East and West is no longer as clear-cut as it used to be, it's possible that a completely new kind of “puppet theater” could emerge from Japan. As an enthusiast myself, I look forward to that day.



# ELI AND THE GOLEM



Scene from the production  
Eli and the Golem.



#### Puppet Notebook - n° 32 - 2024

By Russell Dean

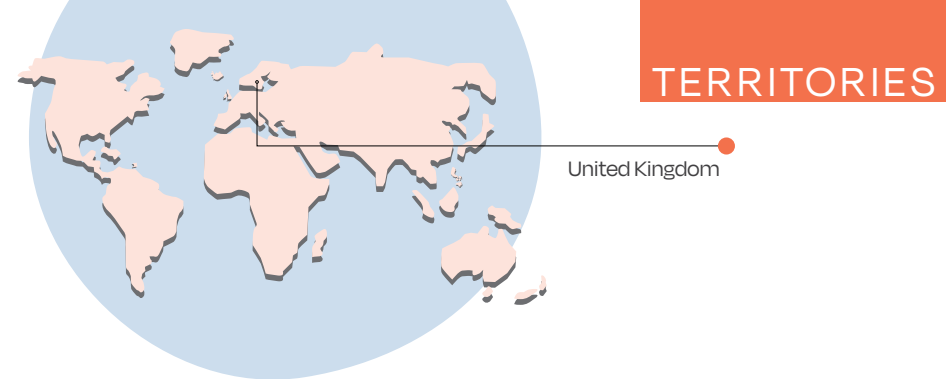
Artistic director of Strangeface

and Mia Gordon

Playwright and Joint Course Leader Hereford College of Arts

A Brief History of Western Puppet Theater  
from the November 1907 issue to the  
March 1909 issue\*, pages from Kabuki  
(November 1907 issue, published by  
Kabuki Hakkōsho), pp. 50–51.





United Kingdom

When Russell Dean first approached the theater company Good Chance with the offer of support for *The Walk*, its director Amir Nizar Zuabi suggested an “intervention” in the form of a fifteen minute interaction between a puppet from Strangeface Theatre Company and the 3.5m tall Little Amal. The intervention would take place in Dover Market Square during Little Amal's procession to Dover Castle accompanied by the spectacle of a lantern parade. Dean's initial thoughts were to create a puppet of a similar stature to Little Amal, perhaps representing a volunteer from one of the myriad organisations devoted to helping refugees. However, in the end, Strangeface settled on something a little more unexpected.

The intervention was to be from a Jewish refugee awaiting his daughter's arrival on a kindertransport in 1939 at Liverpool Street Station, and Strangeface's bunraku style puppet was to be a mere 0.75m high. Born on a trolley of suitcases, Eli Edelman's story was initially inspired by that of Lord Alf Dubs, distinguished campaigner for child refugees, whose father fled Prague and was reunited with his son at Liverpool Street station. Though this was the starting point, Eli's story incorporated aspects of many other testimonies of Jewish refugees provided by Mia Gordon who wrote the initial “script” which eventually became distilled in a collaborative process by all involved into a one act puppet play (performed at Trinity in Tunbridge Wells and JW3 in London).

The intervention (and the final play) started with Eli mistaking Little Amal for his own daughter amongst the throng on the station platform. This juxtaposition of size served to open an imaginative door to entertain other contrasts and commonalities.

Strangeface's intention was to highlight the universality of the refugee's plight – the loss of home, disintegration of family, and dislocation of culture. By having a Jewish father address a Muslim child, the focus could be on common factors across time and faith. Though World War II is only just within living memory, it remains a powerful influence on the British psyche. However, as political rhetoric illustrates, myth and reality are often

at odds. By bringing a Jewish refugee to life, Strangeface were able to examine the fables that have arisen about British treatment of refugees by pressing them up against real testimony. It was important to reiterate the many acts of kindness shown to those arriving (which are often forgotten), the willingness of the town of Sandwich to integrate with the some 4000 Jewish refugees housed at the Kitchener camp, and the extreme trauma and effect on mental health (fatal to some) that accompanies fleeing for one's life. It was also necessary to look at the disproportionately loud voice (compared to the numbers of refugees) of the British Union of Fascists, as well as to hint at contemporary parallels, as a subsequent tweet following the Dover intervention indicated: “The Amal walk and the events at Folkestone and Dover have been great, but Amal meeting Eli was so powerful. Eli's character, handlers and great narration were all brilliant. Such a resonant & powerful story for today's Britain.”

So why should puppets be an effective tool in addressing the refugee crisis? According to Dean, audiences appreciate a puppet through different cognitive paths. Ultimately, they are more complicit in the illusion of a puppet's life by engaging their imagination, which creates a more immediate and necessary empathy. Moreover, there is a fragility to this illusion of life that lends itself to the subject matter of the refugee. The following conversation explores Dean's theories of how puppetry can activate audiences' imagination and marshal their empathy.

**Mia Gordon: I've always been intrigued by what took you into puppetry. Was there a moment?**

**Russell Dean:** I was designing and making masks for *Bitter Fruit*, a show by Trestle Theatre with City of Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. I was thrown in the deep end with a request to additionally make some puppets. I began to realise that, rather than being at the periphery of theatre, puppetry (and mask) can be at the very centre, because it reveals how we function as human beings. Audiences work cognitively in a hugely different way to bring a puppet to life compared to watching a live actor. We collaborate with the puppeteers in giving life to what is obviously a dead object.

As spectators, we have this incredible urge to believe the puppet is “real” and enter its story. Having read Leon Festinger, I was interested in cognitive dissonance—that unpleasant feeling which emerges from the clash of incongruous perceptions. However, I wanted to generate a “pleasant” dissonance by exploiting the idea that the spectator knows that the puppet is a lie, an inanimate object, and yet wants to give it life. This was the starting point of Strangeface's 2018 show, *The Hit*. I wanted to explore the two decision making processes in our brains: the neocortex, the seat of rational decision-making, which enables us to decipher, in the case of *The Hit*, that a bunraku puppet is a construction moved around by three people; and our survival or lizard brain (adrenalin-fueled and closely related with our amygdala), which judges whether something is a threat and reacts in the moment. Puppetry hijacks this process by giving the audience clues that the puppet is alive, for instance, breath, balance, movement. When you first see a puppet, your lizard brain is engaged and your response is fight or flight, faced with what you initially perceive to be a living creature and consequently a potential threat. Your lizard brain processes rapid fire responses, such as do I run away from the puppet, do I hit it, or do I possibly eat it? And then your rational brain catches up and you realise you are safe. This interested me because this process has connections with all sorts of other things. If you look at advertising, political speeches and soundbites, for example, they hard-sell you a narrative by engaging your lizard brain by playing on your stronger emotions such as fear and anger, rather than selling you the dry facts, and this, ironically, is how puppetry works: it sells a narrative stronger than the fact of watching three people manipulate an object. We enjoy watching puppetry because we experience what's in front of us by oscillating between the two brains: our rational apprehension of what's actually going on, and our emotional response. As human beings we quite enjoy that process of having our cognitive processes revealed to us. Our next journey as a species is that we have to become aware of our own cognitive abilities, so that we are not quite so swayed when our lizard brain is hijacked by others.

**MG: That's a really interesting observation – the deliberately simplistic messages in social media tend to condition people to solely engage with the world through their lizard brain - and you can see those online interactions entering face-to-face communications and exchanges. You could say, we are being groomed to live in our lizard brains.**

**RD:** Exactly – there was a book by Nir Eyal called *Hooked: How to Build Habit Forming Products*, which was a basic admission that we are now in a world of addicting people and creating passive consumers. Puppetry can disrupt that conditioning by activating the imagination, critical thinking processes, and empathy. For instance, the spectators' role in *War Horse* was to co-create the puppets by engaging their imagination to fill the gaps and allowing the puppets to live. The horses only “lived” in the audience's imagination.

**MG: There's also something interesting about seeing the commonplace delivered in innovative ways. There's a moment of making the familiar seem strange which, far from alienating, is emotionally engaging. So for me, watching *War Horse*, it was the ingenuity of the puppets and the art of the puppeteers that activated my curiosity as well as my emotional belief in the fiction. As you say, the oscillation between the two brains spark against each other.**

**RD:** Yes and you can't work both at the same time; it's like a seesaw. But your point about strangeness is interesting because when you are initially faced with the puppet and your lizard brain kicks in, it's a very similar reaction to the way in which we decide whether a new person is in our “tribe”. There's a very definite cognitive connection between the way we perceive the otherness of immigrants or asylum seekers and puppets.

**MG: With performance, do you think part of our willingness to empathise with a puppet is that when we watch a live actor, we engage with the character via the ego of the actor, whereas the puppet is a blank canvas made live through the collaborative processes of the puppeteers and, of course, the audience? I remember Alfred Larry's preference for puppets as conduits for the auteur to connect directly with the spectator without going through the filter of a performer.**

**RD:** Audiences will give more of themselves to puppets than human actors. In Strangeface's production of *A Christmas Carol*, our Tiny Tim puppet elicited more emotion than the actors on stage with him. A puppet carries no baggage, unlike the actor. To engage with

a human performer we have to block out their previous roles, and our speculation about their off-stage life. Moreover, we sit back and say, “Come on, entertain me.” But with puppets it's a completely different relationship because we project so much onto them through our imaginations and our brain's ability for predictive coding: when we encounter something new (like a puppet) our brain speeds up from 24 frames a second to a 100 to process and store multiple shots and possibilities. When the brain slows back down, it starts to project the stored images back onto the puppet-filling in the gaps, and far from sitting back, the audience actually leans forward to engage. I really love empowering an audience with what they naturally have—imagination—because in our present society imagination is discouraged; if you don't have an imagination it means you have to buy something to make up for it, be that a material object or a narrative. There are all sorts of ways puppetry activates the imagination.

**MG: Such as how the puppet inhabits space and time?**

**RD:** Yes. When the puppet is initially introduced on stage, its fixed point is with its feet on the ground, giving a sense of rootedness in the world, but then you can introduce invisible fixed points, which is where the puppet suddenly takes off and starts to walk in space. Now the spectator has a choice: either to destroy the illusion, because walking in the air is a ridiculous proposition, or they can let their imagination soar, and start creating an invisible set around the puppet—and that for me is magic. By stimulating their imagination, you can move an audience through time and space differently. Time becomes much looser—it can be sped up, slowed down or you can create jump-cuts. The use of sound also augments changes in space and time. In our predominantly visual culture, we are constantly censoring a stream of images, whereas sound goes straight to our lizard brain, unfiltered. Sound is much more evocative than image and, again, it activates our imagination and emotions.

**MG: That's why you asked me to storytell in the present?**

**RD:** Yes, the audience can only feel empathy with a puppet if they embody themselves in that puppet through micro-movements. The mirror neurons which are tied up with our empathetic processes make us physically mirror the puppet in almost imperceptible movements. We do it in everyday life, especially our facial expressions. If a puppet is manipulated and supported well, the audience will embody that puppet. One of the ways to encourage that is for the audience to

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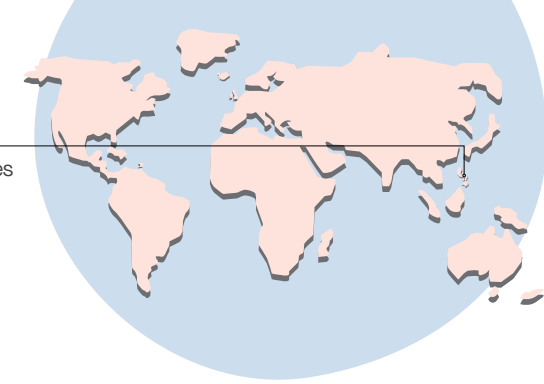
Eli meeting Little Amal in Dover.

stay in the present. We mirror the puppet's movements in their present. It makes what they are experiencing immediate to us.

**MG: Are there any other techniques that are key to eliciting the audience's empathy and imagination?**

**RD:** Yes, what the puppet says must always be supported by movement. *The Hit* had some lovely physical set pieces where Mikey, the hitman, was on a trampoline, or he was driving a car. But in Eli, the dialogue and the physical were more integrated, and the result was more cohesive. We are trying to create our next show (working title *Palaeomythia*) without any words, so in a way Eli has been a stepping stone. Again we are exploring cognitive dissonance and the state of being a refugee. It's about a hunter gatherer at the dawn of the last Ice Age who gets caught in the ice and wakes up in Elon Musk's 21st century. As humans we have only evolved to be where we were 10,000 years ago, but modern society has completely jumbled up all the heuristics and urges that we have, so there's this constant balancing act between wanting to be the caveman, and trying to live in today's society, and, of course, the caveman himself is a refugee. The themes of displacement, and the struggles in psychological and physical relocation are timeless. All the developments in my dramaturgical ideas are to provoke the audience's empathy and activate their imaginations. We need our imaginations and empathy much more than ever. If you take the present situation with the refugee crisis, we are, in fact, in a battle to show that we need to have more empathy and imagination to create solutions which are better than the answers that are currently being generated.





# CONTEMPORARY PUPPETRY IN THE PHILIPPINES

By Amihan Bonifacio-Ramolete



© Puppet Theater Manila collection

The carabao puppet is featured in the touring show *Where Now Carabao?*

Contemporary puppetry in the Philippines reflects a fusion of traditional and modern puppetry techniques, with stories addressing a wide range of social, political, and cultural issues. This article explores the development of contemporary puppetry and the contributions of puppet artists in the Philippines. It also highlights the diversity, innovation, and relevance of puppetry to Filipino society today.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the late 19th century, there were shadow play performances in small carts called *carrillo*. Philippine hero, Dr. Jose Rizal, was said to have made a *carrillo* performance of the story *The Monkey and the Turtle*.

In Angono, Rizal the *higantes*, or giant puppets, lead the procession during the Gigantes Festival, also known as the Feast of San Clemente, which is celebrated every November 23. San Clemente is the patron saint of fishermen. Leading the procession are three *higantes*—father, mother, and child—with bodies made from bamboo, and heads from papier-mâché. The costumes are bright and colorful, and the hands are always on the waist. Each *higante* is controlled by one person who is inside the body of the *higante*.

In the late 1930s, film actor-director Manuel Conde introduced ventriloquism through his puppet Kiko. He passed on Kiko to his son, Jun Urbano, who eventually became a ventriloquist, actor, and a film director.

The introduction of Jim Henson's *Sesame Street* in Philippine television in the 1970s spurred the interest in puppetry. Groups inspired by the muppets were the Alsa Balutan Puppet Group Inc. (founded by Tessie Ordoña, 1976), and the National Media Production Center (headed by Lolit Aquino, 1978) which later became the Black Theater of Manila and now known as the PIA (Philippine Information Agency) Puppet Theater.

*Sesame Street* became a popular show for Filipino kids. In 1983, *Sesame!* was aired. It followed *Sesame Street*'s format but used both English and Filipino languages and featured two muppet-style characters, Pong

Pagong (Pong the Turtle) and Kiko Matsing (Kiko the Monkey). The monkey and the turtle characters came from the popular Filipino fable, *The Monkey and the Turtle*. In 1985, *Sesame!* was replaced by *Batibot* which was done entirely in Filipino featuring Filipino stories and culture. Pong Pagong and Kiko Matsing continued to appear in *Batibot* with permission from the Children's Television Workshop.

## CONTEMPORARY PUPPETRY: A FUSION OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN TECHNIQUES

Puppetry is an important form of entertainment and education for children. Folktales and legends are a favorite source material for puppet plays. Puppet shows often teach moral values, historical lessons, essential life skills, and basic educational content. Aside from performances, puppets have been used to make learning in schools more interactive. The conduct of puppet workshops in communities allowed the participants, kids and adults alike, to explore the art of puppetry and express themselves creatively. At times, puppet shows have been performed in celebration of children's birthdays or company events.

Filipino puppet artists draw inspiration from traditional puppet forms (such as the Indonesian *wayang golek* and *wayang kulit*, Japanese *bunraku*, marionettes, and ventriloquism) and modern techniques (such as muppets and animatronics) to create innovative works that appeal to diverse audiences. A key feature of contemporary puppetry in the Philippines is the incorporation of various forms of media and technology such as digital projections, video animation, and animatronics, alongside traditional

puppet manipulation. Puppet makers and directors also experiment with different materials, ranging from fabric, foam, rattan, and wood to plastic, metal, and recycled items, reflecting the resourcefulness and creativity of Filipino artists.

The late National Artist for Theater Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio was a pioneer in the writing of puppet plays for children and in the creation of puppets inspired by the Indonesian *wayang golek* and *wayang kulit*, and the Japanese *bunraku*. She founded *Teatrang Mulat ng Pilipinas* (MULAT Theater). "Mulat" means to open, awaken; hence a theater to awaken children to the beauty and richness of Philippine culture and still unfamiliar Asian cultures. MULAT has pioneered in the creation of a Philippine puppet. It has presented children's plays based on Philippine and Asian folktales. The popular ones include *Abadeja: Ang Ating Sinderela* (Abadeja: Our Cinderella, premiered in 1977), *Ang Paghuhukom* (The Trial, 1980), *Papet Pasyon* (The Passion of Jesus Christ in Puppetry, 1985), *Dalawang Bayani* (Two Heroes, 1996), *Ang Pagong at ang Tsonggo* (The Turtle and the Monkey, 1977), and *Sita & Rama: Papet Ramayana* (Sita & Rama: Puppet Ramayana, 2004). Its most recent puppet production, *Prinsipe Bahaghari*, a Filipino adaptation of *The Little Prince* by Vladimeir Gonzales and directed by Aina Ramolete, was recognized in the Good Theatre Festival for Young Audiences 2022 as the Best Production, Best Director (Joint Winner, Aina Ramolete), Best Script (Honorable Mention, Vladimeir Gonzales), and Best Production Design (Teatrang Mulat ng Pilipinas). In 2006 the Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio Teatro Papet Museo, the 1st puppet theater-museum in the country, was established with assistance from former Presidents Fidel V. Ramos and Joseph Estrada.



Another group that practices the art of *bunraku* is the University of the Philippines Center for International Studies (UPCIS) Bunraku Ensemble (2012) led by Dr. Jina Umali. Members of the ensemble are given the opportunity to undergo intensive training with the women puppeteers of the Naoshima Onna Bunraku in Naoshima, Japan. UPCIS Bunraku Ensemble performs traditional *Bunraku* dance pieces and playlets such as *Sanbaso* (Samba), *Dango Uri* (Dumpling Seller), and *Ebisu Mai* (Ubisu Rice). They have also created Filipinized *Bunraku*, short protest dance pieces such as *Alay kay Kristel* (Offering to Kristel), *Base Militar* (Military Base), *Tanggol Lumad* (Defend the Lumad), *Pag-ibig sa Tinubuang Lupa* (Love for the Native Land), and *Noong Unang Panahon* (Once Upon a Time). Carlito Camahalan Amalla, a former member of MULAT and UPCIS Bunraku Ensemble, has created puppets to tell the tales of the Agusan Manobo and promote its art and culture. During the pandemic, he ventured into ventriloquism and created his puppet, Mugna, meaning 'to create'. Recently, he carved his own bunraku puppet named Baylan. He uses his puppets for storytelling and entertaining the young ones and the young at heart.

The Anino Shadowplay Collective (ANINO) was founded in 1996 by a group of multimedia artists committed to promoting the art of shadowplay. Aside from live performances, they also conduct puppet making workshops and exhibitions. The core of ANINO's narratives is rooted in Philippine traditional art and literature, socio-political history, and contemporary culture. Their creations are drawn from a diverse range of influences, blending local and global elements of art. Teta Tulay, a member of ANINO since 2002, is a multidisciplinary artist, cultural worker and educator who has received recognition from the Gawad CCP Para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video (Gawad Alternatibo), the Animation Council of the Philippines, Inc. (Animahenasyon), and the Philippine Board on Books for Young People (Alcala Prize) for some of her collaborative and solo endeavors in animation and illustration. ANINO's explorations always hope to exemplify shadowplay as a medium that is not only excellent theatre for young audiences, but also one that transcends disciplines and can be utilized as a possible tool for social change.

Like ANINO, theater creator *s i g l o* uses shadowplay as both a medium of creative expression and a form of solidarity with social movements and advocacies. He has participated in various puppetry and mixed-media performances, employing shadowplay as a tool for collaborative creation. Currently, *s i g l o* is rediscovering and relearning the

practice of MULAT puppetry, where the traditional Folk Filipino Santo wood carving from Paete, Laguna intersects with the art of *wayang golek* of the Javanese people.

Kayla Teodoro is a puppet designer and maker, as well as the co-founder of Puppet Theater Manila (PTM). She holds a master's degree in puppet design and Construction from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Teodoro has contributed to puppet creation for both film and theater, including works such as stage adaptations of Studio Ghibli's *My Neighbour Totoro* and Disney's *The Lion King*. Along with PTM, Teodoro has been exploring the integration of Filipino indigenous materials into their puppet work. A notable example is their carabao, or Philippine water buffalo, puppet, crafted from rattan, pinya (cloth made from pineapple fibres), and abaca, or Manila hemp, which is featured in the touring show *Where Now Carabao?*, engaging audiences across various regions of the Philippines.

Ventriloquism, or the art of 'throwing one's voice', has been made popular by the ventriloquists Ony Carcamo Wanlu, Arnold Allanigui, Sam Fuentes, Ernie Sarangaya, and Arnold Comejo, among others. They perform with their puppets, or what is known as a dummy. Aside from ventriloquism, Wanlu and Sarangaya are also puppeteers, Fuentes is a puppet maker and mascot maker, while Allanigui and Comejo are professional

© Teatrang Mulat Collection



Amelia Lapena-Bonifacio founded Teatrang Mulat ng Pilipinas in 1977.

© Siglo Pecho collection



Siglo's shadowplay as a tool for collaborative creation.

magicians. Sarangaya is also the owner of Puppet House, an Interactive Puppet Museum in Palawan, the Philippines. It houses the tallest Pinocchio marionette in the world and a wide variety of puppets.

Puppet organizations in the Philippines include the Philippine Center of the UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette), an international puppet organization, Papetirs Club International Philippines and International Ventriloquist Society Philippines. These organizations aim to promote and popularize the art of puppetry in the Philippines.

#### CHALLENGES IN PHILIPPINE PUPPETRY

Puppetry in the Philippines is a dynamic and evolving art form. While it has a rich and young tradition, it faces several challenges that impact its growth, visibility, and sustainability.

Puppetry is still a relatively niche form of entertainment in the Philippines. Public awareness of its artistic and educational value remains limited, with many people associating it more with children's entertainment than as a serious form of art.

The lack of substantial institutional support from the government, funding agencies, and mainstream media makes it difficult for puppetry groups to sustain long-term projects, create new works, or tour performances.

Puppetry is a specialized craft, requiring knowledge in design, manipulation, performance, and storytelling. There are limited formal training programs or workshops dedicated to puppetry, which means aspiring puppeteers often have to learn informally or abroad.

Philippine puppetry faces the challenge of maintaining its cultural relevance in the face of global influences and technological advances.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Increasing investment in puppetry education—through formal workshops, community-based programs, and partnerships with schools—can help cultivate a new generation of puppeteers and foster a deeper appreciation for the craft. International collaborations or training exchanges could expose Filipino puppeteers to new techniques, encouraging innovation and artistic growth.

Puppetry could be used as a powerful medium for raising awareness about important issues such as children's rights, environmental protection, and social justice. Puppetry could effectively engage the public in discussions about critical issues.

Puppetry has the potential to build local culture and foster social bonds. By organizing community puppet-making workshops or performances, puppetry can become a

“A key feature of contemporary puppetry in the Philippines is the incorporation of various forms of media and technology such as digital projections, video animation, and animatronics, alongside traditional puppet manipulation.”  
– Amihan Bonifacio-Ramolete

form of collective storytelling, where people share their personal narratives and cultural experiences. This can lead to a revival of regional puppet traditions and an increased sense of local identity.

The future of Philippine puppetry holds great potential for innovation and growth. While challenges like limited funding, lack of training, and competition from other media persist, the possibilities for revitalization are vast. By embracing interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating modern technologies, and fostering a deeper connection between puppetry and social issues, Philippine puppetry can both preserve its cultural heritage and evolve into a vibrant and relevant art form for future generations.

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# DISMANTLING THE 'DOLL'S HOUSE'

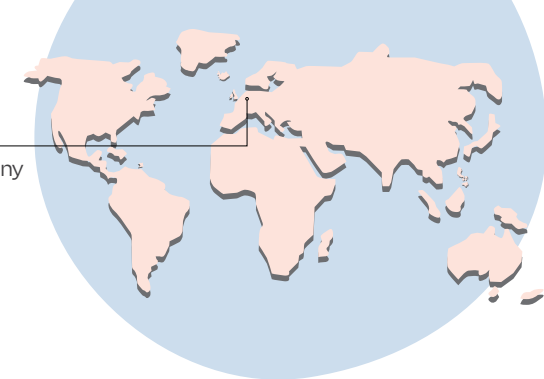
## EXPERIENCES FROM THE RACISM-CRITICAL WORKSHOP WEEKEND IN MUNICH

Double - Magazin für Puppen,  
Figuren und Objekttheater  
n°47 • 2023  
By Meike Wagner

Chair of Theatre Studies, LMU Munich, Secretary  
General of the International Federation for Theatre  
Research Lehrstuhl Theaterwissenschaftl



Germany



Racism is everywhere. In our thinking, in our memories, in our representations, in the objects of art, in everyday life. In preparation for the exhibition *(K)ein Puppenheim. Alte Rollenspiele und neue Menschenbilder* -(Not) A Doll's House. Traditional Social Roles and New Images of Man-<sup>\*</sup> from April 21, 2023 to January 6, 2024, Mascha Erbelding, Head of the Puppentheater/Schaustellerei Collection at the Münchner Stadtmuseum, and Prof. Dr. Meike Wagner invited international artists, activists and academics to a racism-critical workshop weekend entitled *Demontage des Puppenheims* (Dismantling the Doll's House) to discussed discriminating representations of puppets of color in the theatrical and museum context.

The conference *Demontage des Puppenheims*, curated and organized by Mascha Erbelding and myself with the support of the author and sociologist Tunay Önder, was an attempt to bring together international colleagues who are confronted with these racist representations and objects in their work in museums, on theater stages and at art organizations, and to engage in a critical exchange about collections, practices and appropriate communication. Dr. Lisa Skwirblies and Dr. Azadeh Sharifi opened the event by revealing some of the critical perspectives of theater studies. Institutional racism is still deeply embedded in the ways of thinking, methodological approaches, but also in the recruitment processes of academic staff in theater studies. The conditions of thinking must be shifted, perspectives corrected and broadened so that stereotypes as such can be precisely named and undermined.

### ARTISTS AS DECOLONIZERS

This is exactly what the curator/activist team (Dr Eva Bahl, Modupe Laja, Dr Martin W. Rühlemann) of *Decolonize München* achieved by presenting their strategies of remembrance and visualization in a panel discussion. They showed how the legacy of colonialism, which is still present in the city through street names, monuments and exhibits, can be clearly named and how it must be recoded and corrected through artistic and activist strategies. Only in this way can decolonizing healing processes be set in motion. A hopeful, but also arduous undertaking. The artistic practices of Traummaschine Inc (Judith Huber, Gladys Mwachiti, Christoph Theussl), Atif Mohammed Nour Hussein, Laia Ribera Cañénguez and Antonio Cerezo, Ludomir Franczak, Florian Feisel and Tobi Poster-Su, which were presented and discussed on the following days, follow precisely this path and are a valuable contribution to critical artistic decolonization.

### ACTIVE RE-CODING OF STEREOTYPES

We were able to experience these rewritings and performative deconstructions for ourselves in the participatory performance/installation *The Puppet is present* by Sarah Bergh, Claude Jansen and Fabrice Mazliah, who placed puppets from the collection of the

Münchner Stadtmuseum on chairs in an empty room and provided them with an envelope. The participants were able to spread out freely in the room, join a puppet and make contact via the greeting cards. It said something like: "Hello, how are you? I am very lonely. Can you please stay with me for as long as possible?" This empathetic address from the puppet object challenged me quite a bit. I looked at the little body for a long time, was inwardly very uncomfortable with its - again stereotypical - physical attributes and yet tried to create an energy between myself and the lonely puppet. A kind of consolation was meant to emerge. A consolation against the fact that the puppet maker had portrayed the puppet in such a pathetically clichéd way, a gesture against loneliness, against the impossibility of communication through the plastic bag put on by a restorer who rather cared for the longevity of the materials than the emotional well-being of the puppet. This way, we confronted ourselves with the puppets, with their stereotype representations, but also with their performative potential. And with a possible creative and efficient re-writing of what these objects initially represented.

### CRITICAL CURATING

Mascha Erbelding and I have repeatedly come into contact with issues of racism and discourses critical of racism in our respective work at the museum and at the university, but without having the opportunity to acquire in-depth expertise. We were therefore both very happy that not only the puppet theater and performance artists were happy to present their projects and give us critical questions, but also that the invited museum curators and theater scholars were willing to share their thoughts, curatorial practices and critical perspectives with us. The curatorial concepts presented by Dr. Antonia Napp and Mascha Eckert clearly showed that it is artistic interventions that offer a key to a critical approach to controversial representations. The planned Munich exhibition also follows this path: both in the collaboration with the Sammlung Goetz and with the art project by Florian Freier, which works with image recognition software and critically examines its racist algorithms. The workshop weekend raised many important questions and showed many possibilities for rethinking and acting - let's deconstruct the Doll's House!

### Reference

<sup>\*</sup> The exhibition presents and discusses both racial and repressive stereotypes of play dolls and theatre puppets. The title is a reference to Henrik Ibsen's famous play *Nora*. Ein Puppenheim (*Nora*. A Doll's House). The German word 'puppet' refers to both, the toy and the theatre object.



# OUT IN THE COLD: PUPPETRY AS AN IMMIGRANT ART FORM IN ICELAND

By Greta Clough

Artistic Director Handbendí Brúðuleikhús/  
President of Unima Iceland

Heimferð by Handbendí Brúðuleikhús.

As of January 1, 2024, immigrants made up 18.2% of Iceland's population, totalling 69,691 individuals. This marks a steady rise from the previous year when immigrants constituted 16.7% of the population (62,821). Over the past decade, the proportion of immigrants in Iceland has grown significantly, rising from just 7.4% in 2012.

Historically, Iceland has welcomed foreigners in small numbers, but 2015 marked a turning point with an unprecedented influx of people fleeing war-torn regions, mirroring trends across the Nordic countries. While asylum applications have decreased in neighbouring nations in recent years, Iceland has experienced continued growth. In this context it is also important to note that Iceland's economy has been growing at a much faster rate than the Eurozone, and that immigration by people seeking better opportunities massively outpaces that of asylum seekers.

This shifting demographic landscape is reflected in Iceland's small but dynamic puppetry scene, currently dominated by artists of foreign origin. Many of these artists bring with them diverse cultural traditions and experiences, where artists are tackling themes that resonate far beyond the island's shores. Migration, belonging, and cultural exchange take centre stage in productions, shaped by both personal and collective experiences, exploring what it means to move, adapt, and find a sense of place in a rapidly changing world. It could be said that puppetry in Iceland is an immigrant's art form.

Historically, Iceland has been known for its literary heritage—sagas, poetry, and storytelling passed through generations. Though relatively new, puppetry has flourished within this tradition, fostering experimentation and innovation. At the same time, Iceland's global artistic connections blend traditional techniques with contemporary ideas, leading one to feel that we are on the verge of creating a hybrid style that is uniquely Icelandic.

Icelandic puppetry emerged in the 20th century, gaining momentum through pioneers like Kurt Zier, Helga Steffensen, Jón E. Guðmundsson, and Messíana Tómasdóttir. Among these figures is Bernd Ogrodnik, an immigrant artist whose intricate craftsmanship and evocative performances have been pivotal in shaping the art form in Iceland. As the artistic director of *Worlds of Puppets*, Bernd has pushed the boundaries of what puppetry can achieve. His flagship show *Metamorphosis* is ultimately about transformation – metaphorical, physical, and personal.

In a crowded, but immaculate, workshop in downtown Reykjavík Bernd sips a fresh cup of tea and reminisces about past productions. Our conversation covers personal experiences, the ups and downs of life, and the position of puppetry in Iceland.

"It has always had ebbs and flows. We go up and down here, it is just part of the reality of it" Bernd says of the puppetry scene. And it is true. We are so few and spread out through much of the country. The creative work, like everything here, seems to bend with the seasons, bouncing between hibernation and an almost manic vibrancy. It would be impossible to consistently have an output of creative and artistic work to compare to larger nations (let's remember Iceland's population is less than 400 000) with such few artists, but puppeteers and those incorporating puppetry arts are always working on something, just the same. Sometimes it's almost imperceptible. Sometimes it is an explosion onto the larger performing arts scene.

What strikes me is the personal nature of much of the puppetry work in recent years, as Iceland's puppetry scene is currently dominated by artists of foreign origin, the work being created often carries a dual perspective—rooted both in the experiences of migration and adaptation, and in the rich cultural and environmental context of Iceland itself.

The personal narratives woven into these works often challenge societal norms, inviting audiences to engage with questions of identity and cultural exchange in ways that feel immediate and heartfelt. Puppetry, in this sense, becomes a bridge—connecting audiences to the intimate stories of others while fostering empathy and understanding in an increasingly globalized, yet fragmented, world.

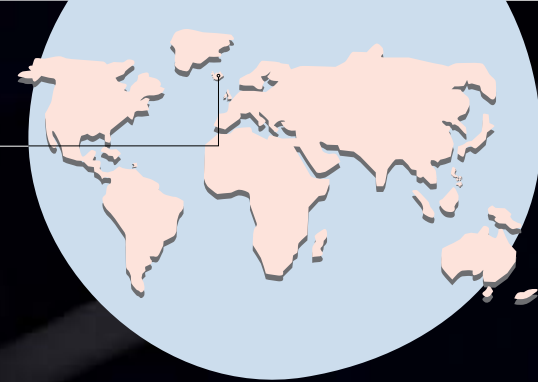
In our conversation, Bernd frequently emphasises the personal act of service that encapsulates the artists' life. This emphasis on service resonates deeply within Iceland's puppetry scene, where the work often stems from personal experiences and a desire to engage with audiences on a meaningful level. Bernd highlights the artist's role as a provider of balance in a chaotic world, underscoring the importance of energy and intention in the act of creation.

"Can you be a balance to the crazy world?" he asks, reflecting on the profound responsibility of artists. "It is the energy that you put out into the world that is most important. For me, it is always a base of service. Puppetry is a service. Puppets are made for an audience. If you are a performer, you are a service provider. How can you serve your audience?"

This philosophy aligns with the deeply personal nature of much of Iceland's puppetry. As many of its practitioners grapple with themes of migration, identity, and belonging, they embody this ethos of service—not only as performers but as storytellers and bridge-builders between cultures. Bernd reminds his students and colleagues of the transformative power of art, urging them to nurture their creativity and use it as a tool for positive change.

"As artists, we can change the world. We need to hold on to that and nurture it," he says.

Through his work, Bernd can convey his experiences and empathy to his audiences. His show *The Icelandic Elephant* is a highly political piece for young audiences, created at





the beginning of Syrian immigration to Iceland. At the time, there was limited understanding of Syrian culture, and the country exhibited a certain degree of ignorance and closed-mindedness regarding the situation.

It tackles the concept of cultural misunderstanding and the fear of the “other,” using puppetry to foster empathy and provoke thought about inclusion and diversity. The production encourages young audiences to question stereotypes and reflect on the humanity of those fleeing unimaginable circumstances. By creating a narrative that bridges cultural divides, *The Icelandic Elephant* challenges societal prejudices while providing a platform for dialogue about acceptance, belonging, and shared humanity.

Bernd's words highlight the importance of community and personal conviction in tackling complex issues through art: “We have a lot to do. That is what I keep telling my students. Make the change you want to see. We have to keep on working on that... by connecting to people. I think we need to really nurture each other.”

In a world which is more and more fractured it certainly does feel like it's the small, intimate, and personal interactions that make the biggest difference.

In small societies like rural Iceland, the interdependence among members creates a unique dynamic where cultural cohesion becomes essential for survival and harmony. This reliance on one another fosters a strong sense of community but also creates an unspoken pressure to blend in, to be accepted, and to avoid disrupting the delicate balance of the group. For someone like me, an immigrant and artistic director of Handbendi Brúðuleikhús, this cultural imperative to

conform is a lived reality that deeply informs both my personal life and my art.

Since establishing Handbendi in 2017, my work has consistently revolved around themes of belonging and identity. As an immigrant, I often find myself navigating the tension between being distinctly foreign, and seeking acceptance in a society that values uniformity. The experience of being an outsider—at once devastating and inspiring—shapes not only my daily life but also the stories I tell through puppetry. While I chose to come to Iceland, rather than being forced from my home, the complexities of migration remain central to my creative practice.

This interplay between personal experience and artistic expression reflects the broader dynamics of small societies. The need to fit in often collides with the desire to express individuality, and this tension becomes a rich source of storytelling. Through my work with Handbendi, I hope to bridge the gap between feeling out of place and finding connection, creating art that resonates with the shared human experience of belonging.

There is one production that exemplifies this approach for me: *Heimferð*. The production explores the concept of home, questioning whether we can carry our sense of home with us and what it means to be forced away from it. Audiences are invited into a traveling theatre caravan—described as a “home away from home”—to experience unique performances that blend animation, music, theatre, puppetry, and object theatre. The whole thing functions as a sort of giant lambe-lambe inspired immersive experience. The caravan is a modern-day Baba Yaga house—but instead of chicken legs the house moves on wheels. Inside it are housed any number of objects and boxes as collected

and preserved memories. There is seating (and tea) for 8 audience members at a time. The story centres on a young girl who arrives at the caravan after the show has begun. Guðrún. She is lost and needs help finding where she should be. The actors and audience must guide Guðrún through a series of ‘memory boxes’—functioning a lot like lambe-lambe, but positioned for 8 viewers—to reveal her memories. These are memories tied to home—the smell of grandmother's toast, the feel of grass around the summer house, mothers love of books, a toy dog. Through a non-linear storytelling experience we slowly realise that Guðrún is a displaced child, and her home, and family, no longer exist. Ultimately we realise we are all guests in Baba Yaga's house, in the midst of our own journeys. *Heimferð* performed over 130 times in Iceland, reaching audiences of all ages, at a time when deportation of unaccompanied child asylum seekers was a very real situation in Iceland.

Through *Heimferð*, we challenge cultural norms and provoke thought, using the intimate and immersive setting of the caravan to engage audiences in a dialogue about displacement, identity, and the essence of home.

Handbendi's next piece, *Rót/Rooted*, which will premiere in 2026, is also centred on a tale of immigration and transformation. This time from the perspective of a young Icelandic boy, who, with his multinational family, moves from Iceland to South America. This production is a collaboration of many artists of foreign origin, with cast and creatives originating from the USA, Slovakia, Paraguay, the UK, Iceland, and Japan.

An Experience in the Forest by  
Tess Rivarola.

The collaborations between artists from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds further enriches the art form of puppetry in Iceland. Tess Rivarola, a Paraguayan puppeteer who moved to Iceland in 2019, exemplifies this creative synergy. As the co-founder of *Kunu'u Títeres* and a resident of Seyðisfjörður, Tess blends South American storytelling traditions with Nordic themes, crafting unique narratives that explore migration, identity, and adaptation. Her work incorporates movement, music, and community storytelling, delving into the emotional landscapes of those who navigate between cultures. Puppets, in her hands, become vessels for expressing the complexities of these experiences.

“Historically, for the productions of Kunu'u Títeres, we have been inspired by stories about identities of diverse communities—indigenous people, women from neighbourhoods and the countryside, and young people from vulnerable areas. We have also taken stories written by us as inspiration in the construction of puppet shows. The moment of constructing and embodying puppet characters is usually very coloured by our personal memories: the way of speaking of an aunt, the laughter of my grandmother, the eagle nose of my father. These biographical details are put into the personalities of the puppets,” Tess explains.

In *Kunu'u Títeres'* most recent production, *Secrets of ñandutí*, the woven material called ñandutí—symbolic of spider webs and ancestry—takes centre stage. Stories from Paraguayan weavers are interwoven with personal tales from women in Iceland and South America of relationships with grandmothers, creating a narrative tapestry rich with personal and cultural history.

Transformation and migration are not always about the physical movement of people. They can also encompass the transformation of the self, or the environment. “In the case of the creation of my two lambe-lambe theatre shows, I believe they reflect two well-defined moments in my personal history, where the nature that surrounded me at each moment is the stage, and much of what happens is a fractal of my unconscious,” Tess shares.

A land shaped by raw, untamed nature, Iceland's rapidly transforming landscapes—melting glaciers, shifting coastlines—call out for their stories to be told. Puppetry, with its ability to bridge the tangible and the intangible, offers a powerful medium to do so.

Tess says “My second lambe-lambe box was inspired by how I was affected by arriving in Iceland the year the Okjökull glacier was

dying out. Being in this part of the planet raises awareness of climate change. The new lambe-lambe, called Jökull, is absolutely inspired by my living where glaciers breathe.”

Through the artistry of puppeteers like Tess, the glacial retreat becomes more than a scientific phenomenon; it transforms into a poetic exploration of loss and renewal. Puppets can embody the spirits of glaciers, animals, or even the land itself, giving audiences an intimate, almost sacred connection to these elements. In Iceland, where folklore and myth are steeped in the land's elemental forces, puppetry has the capacity to weave traditional narratives with urgent contemporary issues.

Puppet theatre invites audiences to imagine futures shaped by resilience and to reflect on their own place within the natural world. In this way, puppetry in Iceland becomes not just an art form but also a vital cultural response to the transformations that are reshaping the environment and, ultimately, the identity of the nation.

So much of Icelandic folklore is based on the tension between the natural and the man made, the old and the new, the wild and the controlled, the id and the superego. I think this is why these stories lend themselves so well to exploring themes of a changing world.

Pilkington Props is another puppetry company working on the opposite end of the spectrum. Where Tess works with the small and intimate, Pilkington Props specialise in spectacle—giant sea monsters, massive trolls, and all sorts of bizarre creatures take to the streets under their direction, but even this spectacle is grounded in the personal.

Artistic Director Daniel Pilkington says: “For our work, especially with the trolls, a big theme is that they are outsiders to the human world, and exploring it with cautious excitement and curiosity, but also very much belonging to this

©Kate Harrison



Tufti Troll by Pilkington Props.

landscape and place. We explored a similar theme in the sea monsters project - these creatures that are from here, from Icelandic legend and folklore, but always hidden, and how they might interact with the human world, or be threatened by it.”

Daniel continues, “Our team represents a range of migration experiences—one of us is a first-generation immigrant, another is second-generation, and one has deep Icelandic roots. This diversity shapes how we approach storytelling, often focusing on characters that exist between worlds, like trolls or sea monsters. We also integrate techniques from global puppetry traditions into Icelandic folklore, blending cultures in a way that feels natural to us. This approach mirrors the broader Icelandic puppetry scene, which thrives on adapting outside influences while grounding them in local storytelling.”

The security and future of the Arctic region, of which Iceland is a part, has perhaps never been as contested as it is today. An art form of immigrants teaches us to not only look inwards for answers and alliances, but outwards, to our Nordic neighbours and beyond. Icelandic puppetry, shaped by migration, folklore, and the ever-changing landscape, has evolved into a deeply personal and transformative art form. Whether through the intimate storytelling of lambe-lambe theatre, the grandeur of street performances, or the immersive experiences of traveling productions, puppetry in Iceland reflects a nation in motion—adapting, redefining, and embracing new perspectives. As artists navigate themes of belonging, displacement, and environmental change, they weave a rich cultural tapestry that is both uniquely Icelandic and profoundly universal. In a world increasingly defined by division, this small but vibrant puppetry scene reminds us that storytelling remains one of our most powerful tools for connection, understanding, and change.





# LIFE ON STRINGS



**MICHAEL MESCHKE, 1931**

## SWEDEN

UNIMA Member of Honour 1996

Puppeteer of German origin with Swedish and French nationalities. Born in the then Free-town Danzig, today Polish Gdansk, Michael Meschke emigrated with his Lutheran family to Sweden in 1939. During World War II, he went to school at the radical and inspiring Viggbyholmskolan where he produced his first string-puppet play, *La Farce de maître Pierre Patelin*. After graduation in 1951, he studied puppetry with Harro Siegel in post-war Germany and mime with Étienne Decroux in Paris.

In 1954, Meschke debuted in Stockholm with *L'Histoire du soldat* (Stravinsky/Ramuz). On 25 September 1958, he opened the Marionetteatern, the first permanent professional and subsidized puppet theatre in Sweden, offering a repertory for children and another for adult audiences. He remained the director of Marionetteatern for forty years. Meschke trained the company members, chose, adapted and directed most of the dramatic repertory. He designed and built the puppets, seeing them as personal interpretations of roles: for example, *Baptiste*, the white string puppet, an homage to French mime art; *Benjamin*, the theatre's compère for generations of children. Many of Meschke's puppets are now in museums in Lyon, Munich and other cities.

As a director placing form at the service of content, Meschke challenged existing manipulation techniques and created new combinations, often inspired by Asian cultures such as bunraku for *Antigone* (1977), kuruma ningyo for *Don Quixote* (1988). Best known is his *Ubu Roi* (1964), Alfred Jarry's absurd play designed by Franciszka Themerson and directed by Meschke, which toured the world for 24 years. Further artistic creativity of Meschke includes film making, directing actors of Sweden's National Theatre and singers at the Royal Opera for *Le Grand Macabre* (Ligeti/Meschke). Much of his writing (fiction, poetry, pantomimes) appears in articles and books in several languages.

Strongly committed to the principles of UNIMA, Meschke served as vice president of the organization and as president of the Statutes and the Third World commissions, initiating the UNIMA national centres of Sweden, Greece, India, Iceland, Thailand and Mexico. He taught at the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières, France, as well as at numerous universities and established and led puppetry schools.

In 1973, Meschke opened the Marionettmuseet, showcasing unique collections with treasures such as the puppets Faust and Mephisto by Harro Siegel, bunraku puppets and scripts, Harry Kramer's post-war mechanical puppets, the props of Themerson's Ubu and Meschke's puppets for Himlaspelet that inaugurated the Marionetteatern. In 2011, the museum was donated to the Swedish state at the Museum of Performing Arts.

In 2006, Meschke created the "Prix Michael Meschke", an international prize to encourage the preservation and renewal of puppet theatre arts, now administrated by Elisabeth Beijer Meschke.

[www.michaelmeschke.com](http://www.michaelmeschke.com)



**KANLANFEÏ DANAYE, 1949**

## TOGO

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

Togolese puppeteer, storyteller, actor, percussionist, director and teacher. Kanlanfeï Danaye is much more than just a puppeteer; he is the guardian of an art form that blends tradition, innovation and the sacred. As a child, following his mother's death, he was immersed in a mystical world under the care of his uncle, a traditional healer, who introduced him to the carving of tchitchili, sacred figures steeped in history and power. This marked the beginning of his artistic journey. Fascinated by puppetry after attending a workshop led by the Pomme Verte team in Lomé, Danaye decided to combine the theatrical magic of puppetry with his cultural roots. His ambition however was not without challenges: accused of desecrating sacred objects, he was forced to undergo an exorcism to pursue his dream. This trial only strengthened his conviction: puppetry would become his language, his fight and his legacy.

In 1976, he founded the Compagnie Danaye, a creative hub where he sculpted unique puppets using wood, gourds, wire and recycled materials. Recruited by the National Theatre of Togo, he became a key figure in the cultural scene and, in 1996, established Ciciï Naag, the Puppet House in Adidogomé. This space, which functions as a workshop, living museum and training centre, became a meeting point for artists and enthusiasts alike. Over the decades, Danaye has emerged as an ambassador of African puppetry. His work goes beyond simple entertainment: his performances tackle educational and societal themes such as AIDS awareness, literacy and rural migration. In collaboration with the Ephata School for the Deaf in Lomé, he has demonstrated that art can overcome all barriers, even those of silence.

Internationally recognized, he has performed on prestigious stages around the world, from

the Charleville-Mézières festival to museums like the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, where his works are preserved as treasures. His iconic character, Zando, inspired a children's book and continues to feature in regular tours across Europe and Africa. Danaye is also a passionate educator. At the University of Lomé, he trains new generations in the art of puppetry, nurturing dozens of puppeteers and supporting the creation of independent troupes. Despite the lack of government funding, he has succeeded in shining a spotlight on Togo and its traditions worldwide.

Kanlanfeï Danaye's puppets have been integrated into the collections of several museums around the globe, including the Musée de l'Homme (Paris), Bibliothèque Nationale's Performing Arts Department (Paris), Panstwowe Museum Etnograficzne (Warsaw), Marionettmuseet (Stockholm), Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam) and the Puppet Museum (Washington, DC). At 75, this pioneer embodies a legendary figure. His puppets, witnesses of universal stories, continue to cross borders, proving that in his hands, they are far more than mere objects—they are the living soul of a people.



**RAY DASILVA, 1933**

## UNITED KINGDOM

UNIMA Member of Honour 2004

British puppeteer (maker and performer), director, producer, puppet book dealer. The DaSilva Puppet Company was founded in 1962 by Ray and Joan DaSilva Palmer following several years of semi-professional activity in England and Canada. They began by performing around the UK in working men's clubs, holiday camps and in a portable theatre at Morecambe.

From 1967 to 1978, the DaSilva company made a unique contribution to national puppetry by becoming the largest and most successful unsubsidized puppet company in Britain, DaSilva himself following the English tradition of touring theatrical actor-managers. Three or more teams performed in different locations simultaneously; large venues including a theatre in London's West End, smaller theatres, arts centres and schools. Each team performed for thirty-five weeks a year and together played to an annual audience of around 250,000. With up to nineteen staff members the company pioneered new technology for performance and created new audiences; it also acted as a training ground for many subsequently successful puppeteers. The large-scale productions featured popular stories including *Treasure Island* (1971), *Pinocchio* (1973), *Hansel and Gretel* (1974), and *Alice in Wonderland* (1982), all of which involved a variety of types and sizes of puppet and several scenographic styles.

The company toured in Europe, Canada, the United States, Japan, and New Zealand with smaller-scale productions. These included *Peter and the Wolf* (1971), *Paper Tiger*, produced in 1978, using Japanese dialogue and innovations in tabletop puppetry techniques, and *The Cat that Walked by Himself* (1989).

The company moved from its base in Cambridgeshire to Norwich and oversaw the transformation of a medieval church into the Norwich Puppet Theatre, which opened in 1980.

In 1986, Ray DaSilva left the Norwich Puppet Theatre to focus on a valuable service to the profession, the buying and selling of books, DaSilva Puppet Books, a mail-order enterprise selling new and second-hand publications, with the occasional publication of its own titles. His private library, accessible to researchers, was unequalled. At the time of writing, he is in semi-retirement and is selling his books.

Ray DaSilva has always taken an active role in British puppetry organizations: for example, he was a founder member and Vice-Chair of the Puppet Centre Trust, Chair of British UNIMA, and co-founder of Puppeteers East, organizing Puppeteers' Weekends in Norfolk. DaSilva has organized several auctions in aid of these societies. He also initiated a forum for representatives from all of these which developed into the association Puppeteers UK (PUK) in 1999. In 2003, Ray DaSilva was made a Member of Honour of UNIMA's international body.



**VINCENT ANTHONY, 1943****U.S.A**

UNIMA Member of Honour 2010

American puppeteer, director, producer of puppetry events and puppet enthusiast. Vincent Anthony is the Founder of the Center for Puppetry Arts, the largest nonprofit organization in the United States solely dedicated to the art of puppet theatre. He served as the organization's Executive Director from 1978–2019. He has served as the General Secretary for UNIMA-USA since 1992 and has also served as Executive Committee Member (1996–2004) and Vice President (2000–2004) of UNIMA International. As President of the Puppeteers of America from 1978–1981, his leadership and expertise helped prepare and realize the 1980 UNIMA Congress and World Puppetry Festival held in Washington, DC. In 2010, he was designated a Member of Honour of UNIMA.

Under Anthony's leadership, the Center for Puppetry Arts has received a record 12 Citations of Excellence from UNIMA-USA, the US division of Union Internationale de la Marionnette. Anthony has also received a personal Citation of Excellence from UNIMA-USA. Among other awards, he received the Governor's Award in the Arts from the state of Georgia (1982), a Distinguished Service Award from Emory University Theatre (1980), the President's Award from Puppeteers of America, the national puppetry association (1989), the Lexus Leader of the Arts Award (2001), the Georgia Arts & Entertainment Legacy Award (GAELA Award, 2007), the ArtsATL Luminary Award (2019), and a special award for his contributions to the field from the International Puppet Fringe Festival (2021).

Through his tenure in the arts community, Vincent Anthony has served on several review panels for the National Endowment for the Arts, Georgia Council for the Arts and

Theatre Communications Group and is a past president of Puppeteers of America. He also served on the Steering Committee for the City of Atlanta Community Cultural Plan and has served as a member of the Delta Airlines Global Diversity Alliance since 2007 and member of the White House Disability Group since 2009. In addition, he has served on the Board of Directors of many arts groups, including the Arts Festival of Atlanta, the Arts Advisory Board for Region Four of the General Service Administration and the Advisory Council for the Cultural Olympiad of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG).

**KATHY FOLEY, 1947****U.S.A**

UNIMA Member of Honour 2025

American dalang, director and educator. Mary Kathleen (Kathy) Foley attended Rosemont College (PA, BA, 1969), Bochum and Freiburg Universities (Germany, 1971), Yale School of Drama, UMASS-Amherst (MA, 1975), and University of Hawaii (PhD, 1979). Inspired by a 1972 workshop with Jacques Lecoq, she led a commedia group in Massachusetts (1973–1975).

Trained at the Center for World Music (CWM) in Berkeley, California (1974), Foley performed Balinese wayang, billed as the "first Balinese female dalang" by teacher I Nyoman Sumandhi, who soon trained Balinese women. At CWM, she also studied Sundanese wayang golek with Dalang Rutjita Suhayaputra and American composer Lou Harrison.

In 1977, Foley performed Chinese shadows with Calvin Tamura, trained by students of Pauline Benton. Then Foley collaborated with composer Lou Harrison (*Hamlet and Faustus at Wittenberg*, 1985), Benton's musician. Foley studied in Bandung, West Java, with

Dalang Asep Sunarya (wayang golek purwa), and Dalang Otong Rasta (wayang cepak), debuting in 1978 with *Dalang Otong's Amir Hamzah* tales.

Foley taught at University of California Santa Cruz (1980–2019), giving hundreds of performances of wayang golek in schools, universities, museums, parks. In 1988, she was among the first international dalangs presenting at Pekan Wayang (National Wayang Festival) with major troupes from throughout Indonesia. She has played wayang in Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, the US and Indonesia.

In directing, Foley used masks, puppets and object theatre for an adaptation of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1997), portraying the WWII internment of Japanese in the US. She used Larry Reed's wayang listrik (electric wayang) shadow technique in *Baba, Flight of the Monkey King* (2001), based on Chinese-American Belle Yang's family biography. With Chan Park (pansori singer), Foley's china-headed dolls shared the tale of Western missionaries and Queen Min founding women's education in Korea (*Fox Hunts and Freedom Fighters*, 2009).

Her scholarship focuses on puppet and mask theatre. She has curated puppet-mask exhibits for the East West Center (Honolulu, Hawaii), National Geographic Society, Center for Puppetry Arts (Atlanta, Georgia), etc. She has been Board member and president of UNIMA-USA, served on UNIMA-International's Research Commission, Publication Commission and Heritage Commission. She wrote and translated for *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts* and edited *Asian Theatre Journal* (2005–2018). She guest edited the first issue of *Puppetry International Research* (2023). Her research has been supported by Fulbright, East-West Center, Asian Cultural Council, Yale Institute of Sacred Music, and UC's Dickson Emeriti Award. Kathy Foley's international students include Patricia O'Donovan of Israel's Train Theatre and I Nyoman Sedana of Indonesia Institute of the Arts–Denpasar, Bali, among others.

**NANCY LOHMAN STAUB, 1933****U.S.A**

UNIMA Member of Honour 1988

American puppeteer, producer, consultant, collector and author. Raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, Nancy Lohman Staub performed her first puppet shows at age 16. After high school, she apprenticed at the Cleveland Playhouse and studied acting in New York, Paris and London where a performance by Sergei Obraztsov's Central State Puppet Theatre kindled her interest in puppetry. In 1954, she returned home and apprenticed with artist Sydney Kittinger's Pixie Platers. While raising four children, she attended classes at Tulane University, receiving a BA. At age 57, she received an MA from the University of Hawaii.

In 1969, after performing shows in local theatres, public libraries, school and playgrounds, she established the New Orleans Puppet Playhouse. She created productions for the New Orleans Symphony including *Babar the Elephant* and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. She later presented them at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, where she served as an associate producer in the Department of Theater for Young Audiences and as a site evaluator for the National Endowment for the Arts.

As director of the 1974 Puppeteers of America Festival in New Orleans, she became acquainted with Jim Henson, President of UNIMA-USA. He proposed the 1980 UNIMA 13th Congress and World Puppetry Festival be held in Washington, DC and appointed her as Executive Director. 1,400 registrants from 48 nations attended the congress and several thousand more saw performances in DC and other venues. The festival exhibit, Puppets: Art and Entertainment, toured to 11 cities in the United States, reaching over 3 million. The WQED TV festival documentary *Here*

*Come the Puppets* reached 10 million more on PBS and international networks for a total exposure to over 13 million.

In 1980, Staub became a Vice President of UNIMA International. After participating in several commissions, she was named a Member of Honour. Puppeteers of America granted her a Trustees' Award for her years of service. She acted as a consultant for the creation and operation of the Jim Henson Foundation and subsequently served on the board.

In 1978, Staub donated her puppet collection to the Center for Puppetry Arts (CPA). Executive Director Vincent Anthony established a museum which now includes a Jim Henson Collection. She serves as Chair of the Advisory Committee facilitating and donating acquisitions. She considers the CPA "global collection" as her major legacy.

Over 60 articles about puppetry by Nancy Staub have been published in books, journals, and exhibit catalogues. She acted as one of the five planning editors and later as a scientific advisor to the *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts*. She tried to raise the standard and consciousness of puppetry in the United States and abroad. She hopes puppeteers around the world value her support, enthusiasm and sense of humor.

**ANDREW CHARLES PERIALE, 1952****BONNIE LILLIAN PERIALE, 1952****U.S.A**

UNIMA Members of Honour 2016

American performers, puppeteers, editor (Andrew) and graphic designer (Bonnie). The Periales have been working together in puppetry since 1982.

Bonnie, born in Newfoundland to American parents, grew up near Boston, where she showed a natural talent for visual arts and performance. In the early '80s, she directed a sacred dance company, studied Renaissance, Baroque, and 19th-century dance, and performed with a clown troupe. She also studied photography at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and ran a graphic design business.

Andrew Periale, born in New Jersey, began acting in high school and performed as a musician. He attended the University of Maine, earning a BA in Theatre and an MA in German. He developed skills in juggling and unicycling. Andrew built his first puppet show in 1973–74, an experience that began a lifelong love.

The Periales met in 1982 when Andrew, working at a Boston-area children's theatre. After a few years, Andrew took a full-time job with The Pandemonium Puppet Company in Connecticut, directed by Bart Roccoberton. A few months later, Bonnie joined him there. In 1986, they launched their own company, Perry Alley Theater, touring full-time for 20 years. They married shortly after their first performance.

In the summer of 1985, Andrew studied with Philippe Genty at the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières. The couple later took over *À Propos*, the UNIMA-USA publication, and launched *Puppetry International*, which they published for more than 37 years. They introduced advertising, peer review, and digitized back issues, eventually launching *Puppetry International Research*.

Service to the field and to UNIMA has been integral to their mission through performance, teaching, advocacy, and the editing, design, and layout of the puppetry magazines. They have received numerous honours, including several UNIMA Citations, The George Latshaw Award, the Paul Vincent Davis Award, an Emmy Nomination, a Parent's Choice Award (for the design of the Velcro Puppet Playhouse line of toys) and in 2016, they were jointly elected Members of Honour of UNIMA.





**PETER SCHUMANN, 1934**

#### U.S.A

UNIMA Member of Honour 1996

German-born American puppeteer, founder and director of Bread and Puppet Theater. Peter Schumann was introduced to puppetry and avant-garde theatre from a young age; his family experienced the dislocation and trauma of refugees during World War II. Puppeteer Max Jacob was a family friend. During Schumann's early years as an artist in post-war Germany he sculpted and danced; Merce Cunningham and John Cage were major influences.

In 1961, Schumann and his American-born wife Elka (1935-2021) came to the United States. He quickly became immersed in the avant-garde arts scene in New York City, and in addition to the work of Cage and Cunningham, was exposed to Happenings of Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, Red Grooms, and Fluxus; and Judson Dance Theater. Schumann founded Bread and Puppet Theater in 1963 on the city's Lower East Side, adding medieval passion plays, Bible stories, fairy tales and other folkloric traditions of storytelling to the scene's experimental and political influences. Guided by a philosophy of living and working within available means, Bread and Puppet work was based on papier-mâché, burlap, twine and staples that literally held the puppets and the shows together, an aesthetic he later termed "Cheap Art".

Schumann's giant puppets first appeared in 1965 at political street parades in New York City and increasingly as part of the anti-Vietnam War movement. In 1968, Bread and Puppet presented *Fire*, an understated yet hard-hitting indoor piece about the war, to critical acclaim in France, bringing the theater international prominence. Bread and Puppet became associated with such avant-garde US companies as the Living Theater, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, El Teatro Campesino and director Robert Wilson.

Bread and Puppet moved to Goddard College in Vermont in 1970. Inspired by the rural environment, Schumann created giant outdoor spectacles of pageantry, sideshows, and circus acts, which he called *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*. In 1974, the company moved to a farm in Glover, Vermont, which became the home of the annual Domestic Resurrection Circus until 1998. With the puppeteers of his Glover company, Schumann also created dozens of significant works performed in the Americas, Europe, North Africa and Asia.

From 1998 to 2024, Schumann continued to devise and direct puppet pageants, circuses, parades, street shows, workshops and exhibitions with a changing company of young artists, volunteers, veteran collaborators, continuing to address political issues from a perspective critical of capitalism and US foreign policies, and to champion everyday life, simple needs and the possibilities of collective cooperation.

Peter Schumann has been awarded many honours, including Holland's Erasmus Prize (1978) and the Puppeteers of America President's Award (1979). His work is recognized as a major force in contemporary world theatre.



**KAREN SMITH, 1954**

#### U.S.A • AUSTRALIA

UNIMA Member of Honour 2021

Australian-American actor, puppeteer, drama researcher, editor, fabric artist and women's activist. Karen Smith earned a BA (Honours) in English, French and Drama, Diploma of Education in English and Drama for secondary schools, and an MA in Drama/Indian Theatre. She worked as a Research Assistant: Asian, Pacific and American Literature (Culture Learning Institute, East-West Center, Honolulu,

Hawaii, 1978-1979), Drama Tutor, researcher/writer of reviews and articles on theatre and puppetry (1976- ), copyeditor of UNIMA-USA journal, *Puppetry International Research* (2023- ). Since 2010, she is editor in chief of *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts*, responsible for updating, translating and mounting the trilingual, second edition (2017) onto its own website ([wepa.unima.org](http://wepa.unima.org)). She oversaw significant expansion of entries on Asia, Africa and Latin America and has been instrumental in making global puppetry information more readily accessible. She continues to work on the expansion of the WEPA.

Smith initially worked in Australia as a teacher and actor and subsequently as a puppeteer, designer and builder at three Indian puppet companies in New Delhi—Shri Ram Centre Puppet Repertory, Jan Madhyam and Ishara Puppet Theatre. Her work with Jan Madhyam and Ranjana Pandey included weekly performances and workshops with differently-abled communities across Delhi and the creation and performance of four puppet plays as part of the "Violence Against Women" national project. In Jakarta, Indonesia, she studied Javanese wayang kulit performance at the arts studio, Sanggar Redi Waluyo. She has participated in numerous international conferences, using presentations and exhibits to promote puppetry as a cultural heritage, with a special interest in wayang kulit. This included curation of several exhibitions of Indonesian wayang in India and the US, as well as contributions to a UNESCO photo documentary on Indonesian Wayang.

She is a member of UNIMA India (1986- ), an honorary member of UNIMA Australia (2021- ) and an active member of UNIMA-USA (2005), serving on its Board (2007-2014, 2017-2023, 2024- ) and as president (2008-2010, 2022-2023). In 2022, UNIMA-USA awarded her a "Special Citation" for life-time achievement.

Internationally, Karen Smith served as an Independent Additional Councillor (2008-2012) and a national Councillor (2012-2025). She is a member of UNIMA International's Executive Committee since 2012, serving as president of the Publication & Communication Commission (2010-2016), president of the Publication & Contemporary Writing Commission (2016-2021), member of the Research Commission (2004-2012) and North America Commission (2008-2016). In 2016, she was elected vice president and, in 2021, president of UNIMA International (2021-2025). In 2021, she was named an UNIMA Member of Honour.





# THE PUPPET TRAIL

## TRAINING • FESTIVALS • PUBLICATIONS





This directory, compiled in April 2025, is a non-exhaustive snapshot of training courses, festivals and magazines related to puppetry arts around the world. It is based on the contributor-based directories available on the UNIMA website. The digital version is open for additions.









 Training  Publications

AFRICA			
(REPUBLIC OF) BENIN			
	ABOMEY	FITEM (Festival International de Théâtre Éducatif par les Marionnettes)	November
(DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF) CONGO			
	KINSHASA	Espace Masolo	
(REPUBLIC OF) IVORY COAST			
	ABIDJAN	Académie Ivoire Marionnettes	
	ABIDJAN	Les Rencontres internationales de la marionnette	Octobre
(REPUBLIC OF) KENYA			
	NAIROBI	Kenya Institute of Puppet Theatre	
(REPUBLIC OF) MALI			
	BAMAKO	Centre de formation NAMA	
	BAMAKO	Rendez-vous chez nous à Bamako	November
	MARKALA	Festival des masques et des marionnettes de Markala-Fesmamas	April
SENEGAL			
	NDAYANE	Festival international des arts de la marionnette au Sénégal	June
(REPUBLIC OF) SOUTH AFRICA			
	CAPE TOWN	Centre for Humanities Research - University of the Western Cape	
	CAPE TOWN	Puppetry Masterclasses	
(REPUBLIC OF) TUNISIA			
	TUNIS	Institut Supérieur d'Art Dramatique	
	CARTHAGE	Journées des arts de la marionnette de Carthage	February
AMERICA			
ARGENTINA			
	BUENOS AIRES	Diplomatura en Teatro de Títeres y Objetos Ungs	
	BUENOS AIRES	Universidad Nacional de las Artes (UNA) - Departamento de Artes Dramáticas - Especialización en Teatro de Objetos, Interactividad y Nuevos Medios	
	BUENOS AIRES	Taller Escuela de Titiriteros Ariel Bufano	
	SAN MARTIN	Universidad Nacional de San Martin (UNSAM), Unidad Académica de las Artes, Licenciatura en Teatro de Títeres y Objetos	
	BRAGADO	Titiriteando por el Pago (Pehuajo)	June

	BUENOS AIRES	Festival Internacional de Títeres Al Sur	July
	BUENOS AIRES	Festival de Títeres para Adultos de Buenos Aires	June
	(PROVINCIA DE) BUENOS AIRES	Festival Internacional de Títeres y Objetos Animados - Mundo Títere Fest	October
	BUENOS AIRES	Festival Internacional de Teatro de Títeres y Objetos	September
	CORDOBA	Festival internacional de titiriteros Juglares	November
	BRASIL		
	BELÉM	Universidade Federal do Pará - UFPa Escola de Teatro e Dança - ETD	
	BRASILIA	Universidade de Brasília Compexo da Artes - Departamento de Artes Cênicas, Instituto de Artes	
	DOURADOS	Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados - Faculdade de Comunicação, Artes e Letras - Curso de Artes Cênicas	
	FLORIANOPOLIS	IFSC – Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia de Santa Catarina – Campus Florianópolis – Curso de Formação Inicial em Teatro de Animação (FINTA)	
	FLORIANOPOLIS	UFSC – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina - Centro de Comunicação e Expressão - Departamento de Artes - Curso de Graduação em Artes Cênicas	
	FLORIANOPOLIS	UDESC – Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina – Centro de Artes, Design e Moda – Departamento de Artes Cênicas – Curso de licenciatura em Artes Cênicas e Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas (Mestrado e Doutorado)	
	GOIÂNIA	Escola de Música e Artes Cênicas Universidade Federal de Goiás - UFG	
	JOÃO PESSOA	Universidade Federal da Paraíba/ Departamento de Artes Cênicas	
	LONDRINA	Universidade Estadual de Londrina - UELI	
	MACEIÓ	Universidade Federal de Alagoas – UFAL	
	MORRO REUTER	Espaço de Residência Artística Vale Arvoredo	
	NATAL	Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – UFRN	
	PORTO ALEGRE	Espaço Cia Gente Falante - Teatro de Bonecos - Espaço de Formação de Atores-Bonequeiros	
	PORTO VELHO	Universidade Federal de Rondônia (UNIR)	
	RIO DE JANEIRO	Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro – UNIRIO	
	RIO DE JANEIRO	Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro - UFRJ	
	SÃO LUÍS	Universidade Federal do Maranhão - UFMA	
	SÃO PAULO	Universidade de São Paulo CAC/ECA/US – Departamento de Artes Cênicas da Escola de Comunicações e Artes	
	SÃO PAULO	Escola de Comunicações e Artes - ECA Universidade de São Paulo - USP	
UBERLÂNDIA	Universidade Federal de Uberlândia - UFU		
	BELO HORIZONTE	FESTIM - Festival de teatro em miniatura	May
	BRASILIA	Encontro de teatro Lambe-lambe	September
	CANELA	Mostra de Teatro Lambe Lambe - MTLL	August
	CANELA	Festival Internacional Bonecos Alegria - FIBA	October
	IGRASSU	Festival de Teatro de Bonecos de Igarassu- FETEBI	October
	RECIFE	Bonecos do Mundo - Festival Internacional de Teatro de Marionetes	Variable
	TAUBATÉ	FIS International Festival Shadow Theatre	March
	Moin-Moin Journal of Studies on Theater of Animated Forms • Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina – UDESC / Dr. Paulo Balardim		
	Revista Mamulengo • UNIMA Brasil Center ABTB CUB • Valmor Nini Beltrame, Miguel Vellinho Vieira, Gilson Motta, Izabela Brochado		
	CANADA		
	CALGARY	Canadian Academy of Mask and Puppetry - CAMP	
	CALGARY	University of Calgary - Faculty of Arts - School of Creative and Performing Arts	
	MONTREAL	Ecole Supérieure de Théâtre –Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Master- Théâtre de Marionnette Contemporain	
	MONTREAL	Association québécoise des marionnettistes (AQM)	
	MONTREAL	Concordia University	
	ALMONTE	Puppets Up	August
	CALGARY	Festival of Animated Objects	March





	MISSISSAUGA	Puppet Festival Mississauga	March
	MONTREAL	Festival international de Casteliers	March
	MONTREAL	Marionnettes plein la rue	August
	SAGUENAY	Festival international des arts de la marionnette à Saguenay (FIAMS)	July
	STRATFORD	Puppetworks!	August
	TROIS-RIVIÈRES	Micro-festival de marionnettes inachevées	November
	VAL DAVID	1001 Patentes qui bougent	August
	Marionnettes • Centre UNIMA Canada, section Québec / Michelle Chanonat		
CHILE			
	VALPARAISO	Animate, IX Encuentro internacional de títeres	October
	SANTIAGO	Festival Internacional Candelilla trae los títeres	April
COLOMBIA			
	BOGOTA	Festival Internacional de títeres Manuelucho	October
	CALI	Festival de teatro de títeres Ruquita Velasco bellas artes	October
	IBAGUE	Tolima Fantastico	November
	MEDELLIN	Titirifestival Manicomio de Muñecos	Sep-Oct
	PALMIRA	Carnaval de las Marionetas	August
	POPAYAN	Rondas Iberoamericanas de teatro de títeres y objetos	April-May
	POPAYAN	Titirifestival Popayan	October
CUBA			
	LA HABANA	Festival Habana titiritera: figuras entre adoquines	August
	MATANZAS	Festival Internacional de teatro de titeres Matanzas	April
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC			
	SANTO DOMINGO	Feria Internacional de Títeres y Objetos - FITO RD	March
MEXICO			
	HUAMANTLA	La Escuela Latinoamericana del Arte de los Títeres Mireya Cueto	
	ACAJETE	Festival Adultiterías	November
	AGUASCALIENTES	Festival Internacional de Títeres Hermanos Flores	Sep-Oct
	CUAUHTÉMOC	Festival de títeres Mireya Cueto	October
	GUADALAJARA	Festín de los muñecos, Festival Internacional de Títeres de Guadalajara	October
	DURANGO	Titirango Festival Internacional de Títeres	Sep-Oct
	HERMOSILLO	Puppet Slam Mexico	December
	HUAMANTLA	Festival Internacional de Títeres Rosete Aranda	October
	MONTERREY	Festival de Títeres La Piara	November
	PUEBLA	48 HR P3-Puebla Puppet Project	September
	VERACRUZ	Festival de Títeres Sergio Peregrina Corona	Sep-Oct
	XALAPA	Festival Internacional Hay Títeres	November
	ZACATECAS	Fandango de Arte Infantil Gachita Amador	October
PERU			
	HUANCAYO	Los Títeres como Herramienta Educativa y Comunicativa	
	LIMA	Festival Internacional de Muñecos y Objetos Animados Muñecomás	October
	Mil Vidas • Tárbol Teatro de Títeres, Martín Molida		
URUGUAY			
	TACUAREMBO	Festival Floreció	October
U.S.A			
	STORRS	University of Connecticut, Department of Dramatic Arts, Puppet Arts Program	
	VALENCIA	The Cotsen Center for Puppetry and the Arts at CalArts (California Institute of the Arts)	
	SANTA CRUZ	University of California Santa Cruz	
	CHICAGO	Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival	January
	NEW YORK	International Puppet Fringe Festival NYC	August







	NEW YORK	LA MAMA Puppet Festival	November
	PORTLAND	Puppets in Portland	September
	VERMONT	Puppets in the Green Mountains International Festival	September
	<a href="#">Puppetry International • UNIMA USA / Alissa Mello</a>		
	<a href="#">Puppetry International Research Journal (PIR) • UNIMA USA / Claudia Orenstein</a>		
	<a href="#">Puppetry Journal • Puppeteers of America / Jamie Donmoyer</a>		
VENEZUELA			
	MARACAIBO	Festival Internacional de Títeres Charlot	August
ASIA			
CHINA			
	BEIJING	The Central Academy of Drama - Departement of Puppetry Theatre	
	FUJIAN	Fujian Quanzhou art school	
	SHANGHAI	Shanghai Academy - Department of puppetry	
	MACAO	Coloane Art Festival	February
INDIA			
	NEW DELHI	Foundation Program UNIMA India Puppeteers Trust	
	BENGALURU	India Dhaatu International Puppet Festival	January
	NEW DELHI	Ishara International Puppet Festival	Jan-Feb
	NEW DELHI	PuppetOscope	April
	<a href="#">Puthalika Patrika • Sphoorthi Theatre for Educational Puppetry, Art &amp; Craft Steparc / Padmini Rangarajan</a>		
	<a href="#">Sutradhar (Storyteller/puppeteer/facilitator) • UNIMA Puppeteers Trust India / Ranjana Pandey</a>		
INDONESIA			
	BANTUL	Pesta Boneka	October
IRAK			
	KARBALA	Alhusseini Alsagher International Festival for Children	March
IRAN			
	TEHRAN	Art University, Faculty of Dramatic Art, Groupe des Mario	
	TEHRAN	University of Tehran, Faculty of Dramatic Art and Music	
	TEHRAN	Torbiat Modares University, Puppetry Department	
	TEHRAN	Soore University, Faculty of Art	
	TEHRAN	Pars University of Architecture and Art,Faculty of Dramatic Art	
	TEHRAN	The International Puppet Theater Festival Tehran-Mubarak (Biennial, in even-numbered years)	December
ISRAEL			
	HOLON	The Puppetry Arts School	
	JERUSALEM	The School of Visual Theatre	
	TEL-AVIV	School of Puppetry and Drama / Levinsky College of education	
	HOLON	International Puppet Theater & Film Festival Holon	July
	JERUSALEM	Jerusalem international puppet theatre festival	August
JAPAN			
	IIDA	Iida Puppet Festa	August
	ÔTSU	Biwako Puppet Festival	May
KAZAKHSTAN			
	ASTANA	Kazakh National University of Art	
SOUTH KOREA			
	CHUNCHEON	Chuncheon International Puppet Festival	May-June
	<a href="#">Cobazine • Chuncheon Puppet Festival</a>		
THAILAND			
	BANGKOK	NSM Harmony World Puppet Innovation Festival	November















EUROPE			
AUSTRIA			
	GRAZ	La Strada Graz	July-August
	MISTELBACH	Internationale Puppentheatertage Mistelbach	October
	MÖDLING	Figuren Theater Treff	Oct-Nov
	NEUSIEDL AM SEE	PannOpticum	June
	WELS	Internationales Welser Figurentheaterfestival	March
BELARUS			
💡	MINSK	Bielarussian State Academy of Arts – Département de l'Art de la Marionnette	
BULGARIA			
💡	SOFIA	National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts Krastyo Sarafov	
	BURGAS	DAYS OF PUPPETS International Open Air Festival	August
	GABROVO	Racho and Deshka International Puppet Festival	September
	PLEVEN	Colorful Rooster – Festival for Puppet Art for all ages	July
	PLOVDIV	Two are few, three are to many – International Festival	September
	SLIVEN	The Magic Wind – International Art Festival	June
	SMOLYAN	Adults Forbidden – International Performing Arts festival for Children and Youth Audiences	October
	SOFIA	PUPPET FAIR International Theatre Festival for Street and Puppet Theatre	September
	SOFIA	TEATROSCOPE – International Festival of Theatre Miniature	June
	SOZOPOL	Harlequin and Marionette – International Puppet and Square Theatre Festival	August
	STARA ZAGORA	International Puppet Theatre Festival for Adults “Pierrot”	September
	TARGOVISHTTE	The Magic Curtain – International Festival of Performances for Children	May
	VARNA	The Golden Dolphin – International Puppet Festival	October
	VELIKO TARNOVO	Summer, Puppets and Friends – International Puppet Theatre Festival	Jun-Jul-Aug
	YAMBOL	Mihail Lakatnik National Puppet Theatre Festival	April
📖	Kuklart • UNIMA Bulgarie / Mihail Baykov		
BELGIUM			
	BRUSSELS	Jem Festival	May-June
	EUPEN	FIGUMA – Figurentheater-Festival	October
	TOURNAI	Festival Découvertes, images et marionnettes	September
CROATIA			
💡	OSIJEK	Academy of Arts of Osijek	
	KARLOVAC	International Puppet Theater Festival Karlovac	May
	RIJEKA	Review Of Puppet Theatres	November
	ROVINJ	Abracadabra – Istria Puppet Festival	May
	VINKOVCI	Puppet Spring Festival	April
	ZADAR	Mediterranean Puppet Festival – “Mediterraneo”	June-July
	ZAGREB	PIF – International Puppet Theatre Festival	September
	ZAGREB	SLUK – Meeting of Puppet Players and Puppet Theaters of Croatia	June
	ZAGREB	Puppet Festival of The Teaching Faculty of the University of Zagreb – Luf Uf	March
CZECH REPUBLIC			
💡	PRAHA	Academy of Performing Arts Prague – Theatre Faculty – Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre	
	LIBEREC	MATEŘINKA, International Puppet Festival for pre school aged children	June
	PLZEN	Skupova Plzeň International Festival	June
	PRAHA	Prelet Nad Loutkarskym Hnizdem (One Flew over the Puppeteer's Nest)	November
	OSTRAVA	Spectaculo Interesse, the international puppet festival	October
📖	Loutkář (Puppeteer) • UNIMA Czech Republic / Kateřina Dolenská		


DENMARK			
	SILKEBORG	Festival of Wonder	November
	The European Paper Theatre Magazine   Grafisk Werk Præstø. Fjordvej 9, DK-4720 Præstø / Sven-Erik Olsen		
ESTONIA			
	TALLIN	International Visual Theatre Festival Tallinn Treff	May-June
	VILIJANDI	Theatre In The Suitcase	May
FINLAND			
	SAVONLINNA	Samiedu Vocational College	
	TURKU	Turku University of Applied Sciences - Arts Academy, Puppetry Department	
	HELSINKI	The Showcase of Finnish Puppetry (Suomalaisen Nukketeatterin Näyteikkuna)	March
	HELSINKI	Sampo Festival	August
	IMATRA	Black and White Theatre Festival	May
	TURKU	Turku International Puppetry Festival (TIP-Fest)	November
	Nukketeatteri (Theatre of Puppets) • UNIMA Finland - Suomen UNIMA / Laura Silanpää		
FRANCE			
	CANNES	ARKETAL	
	CHARLEVILLE-MÉZIÈRES	Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette (ESNAM) - Pôle international de la marionnette Jacques Félix	
	PARIS	Théâtre aux Mains Nues	
	AMIENS (RIVERY)	Le tas de sable - Ches Panses Vertes	
	TOULOUSE (QUINT-FONSEGRIVES)	La Boîte à Outils - ODRADEK-Pupella-Noguès	
	TOULOUSE	Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès	
	APT	Greli grelo biennale Internationale de théâtre d'objet	March
	AURAY	Festival Meliscènes	March
	CESTAS, CANÉJAN	Festival Méli Mélo	February
	CHARLEVILLE-MÉZIÈRES	FMTM Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes - Pôle international de la marionnette Jacques Félix (Biennial, in odd-numbered years)	September
	DIJON	Semaine de la Marionnette	April
	DIVES-SUR-MER	Festival RéciDives	July
	HAUTS-DE-SEINE	Festival MAR.T.O.	March
	HENNEBONT	Les salles mômes	Oct-Nov
	LA CHAPELLE-SUR-ERDRE	Festival Saperlipuppet	April
	LA RÉUNION	Festival Tam Tam	Sep-Oct
	LYON	Festival Micro Mondes	November
	MIREPOIX	Festival MIMA	August
	PARIS	Biennale des arts de la marionnette (BIAM) (Le Mouffetard) (Biennial, in odd-numbered years)	May-June
	PARIS	Les Scènes ouvertes à l'insolite (Le Mouffetard) (Biennial, in even-numbered years)	June
	REIMS	Orbis Pictus	May
	STRASBOURG	Micro Giboulées	March
	TOURNEFEUILLE	Festival Marionnettissimo (1)	November
	Manip – Le Journal de la Marionnette • THEMAA (UNIMA France) / Laurence Pelletier, Mathieu Dochtermann		
	Marionnette et Thérapie • Association marionnette et thérapie, / Marie-Christine Markovic		
GEORGIA			
	BATUMI	Batumi State Arts University	
	TBILISSI	Georgian Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film State University	











GERMANY				
	BERLIN	The Ernst Busch University of Dramatic Art Puppetry Department		
	STUTTGART	Figurentheater - Puppetry and Animation - State University of Music and Performing Arts Stuttgart		
	BAD KREUZNACH	Festival marionettissimo (2)	November	
	BERLIN	Theater der Dinge - International Festival of Contemporary Puppetry and Object Theatre	October	
	BOCHUM	FIDENA - Figurentheater der Nationen	May	
	DACHAU	TheaterTage Dachau	Oct-Nov	
	DÜLMEN	Figurentheatertage Dülmen	Oct-Nov	
	ERFURT	International Puppet Theatre Festival Synergura	July-August	
	GÖTTINGER	Göttinger Figurentheatertage	February	
	HERZBERG/ELSTER	International PuppenTheatreFestival im Elbe-elster-Land	September	
	MAGDEBURG	International Figure Theatre Festival "Blickwechsel" Magdeburg	June	
	MÜNCHEN	KUCKUCK - Theaterfestival für Anfänger	March	
	MÜNCHEN	Internationales Figuren theater festival Muenchen	May	
	NÜRNBERG	Internationales figuren theater festival	May	
	ORTENAU	Puppenparade Ortenau	March-April	
	PREETZ	Preetzer Papiertheatertreffen	September	
	SCHWÄBISHCH GMÜND	International Shadow Theatre Festival	October	
	STAUBING	Figurentheaterfestival Straubing	March	
	STEINAU AN DER STRßE	Steinauer Puppenspieltage	Sep-Oct	
	STUTTGART	IMAGINALE - Internationales Theaterfestival animierter Formen	February	
	<a href="#">Das andere Theater • UNIMA Germany / Silke Technau, Dr.Antonia Napp, Stephan Schlafke, Stephan Wunsch, Martin Labedat</a>			
	<a href="#">De:Do • Open Access Journal / Prof. Dr. Insa Fooken &amp; Dr. Jana Mikota</a>			
<a href="#">Double • German Forum for Figuretheatre and Puppetry / Mascha Erbelding, Annika Gloystein, Christina Röfer, Tim Sandweg, Katja Spiess, Dr. Meike Wagner, Christofer Schmidt (Festivalkalender, Notizen)</a>				
<a href="#">Puppen, Menschen, Objekte • Verband Deutscher Puppentheater (VDP) (Association of German Puppet Theaters) / Klaus Grimberg</a>				
<a href="#">Symposium, Notebook • UNIMA Germany / Silke Technau, Stephan Schlafke, Martin Labedat</a>				
GREECE				
	ATHENA	University of Athens, Faculty of Early Childhood Education		
HUNGARY				
	BUDAPEST	University of Theatre and Film		
	SZIGETMONOSTOR	Freeszfe Society		
	PÉCS	Karakult International Shadow Play Festival and Exhibition	April	
	<a href="#">Art Limes • Hungarian fund for promoting cultural activities / Jenő Virág</a>			
ICELAND				
	REYKJAVIK	Academy of the Wooden Puppet		
	HVAMMSTANGI	Hvammstangi international Puppet Festival	June	
ITALY				
	FAENZA	Atelier della Figure - Scuola per Burattinai e Contastorie		
	MODENA	Il Teatro di Animazione in Funzione Terapeutica		
	PADOVA	Universita delgi Studi di Padova - Cours "Teatri di Figure, Storie de Estetiche" DAMS		
	PIACENZA	Animateria		
	ROMA	Universita degli Studi Roma Tre Dipartimento di Filosofia, Comunicazione e Spettacolo - Corso "Tradizioni, Mestieri, Teatro Vivo"		
	VERONA	Accademia di Belle Arti di Verona - Teatro di Figura		
	BERGAMO	Borghi & Burattini	Jul-Aug-Sep	
	CAGLIARI	ANIMA International Festival	Sep	
	GORIZIA	Alpe Adria Puppet Festival	Aug-Sep	
	PALERMO	Festival di Morgana	November	
	PALERMO	La Macchina Dei Sogni	Aug	

	PINEROLO	Immagini dall'Interno - Festival Internazionale di Teatro di Figura	June
	PORTO S. ELPIDIO	I Teatri Del Mondo	July
	PONTE A EGOLA	La luna è azzurra - Festival Internazionale del Teatro di Figura	June
	RAVENNA	Festival Internazionale dei Burattini e delle Figure Arrivano dal Mare!	May
	ROME	Immagina International Puppet Festival	May
	SORRIVOLI	Festa dei grandi Burattinai di Sorrivoli	August
	TORINO	Incanti – Rassegna Internazionale di Teatro di Figura	September
	Animatazine • Independent / Alessandra Amicarelli & Valeria Sacco		
LITHUANIA			
	KLEIPEDA	Kleipeda University	
	VILNIUS	Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater	
	KLAIPEDA	Festival Materia Magica	May
NETHERLAND			
	DEN HAAG	School of Puppets	
	AMSTERDAM	International Pop Arts Festival	February
	DORDRECHT	International micro festival - Internationaal poppentheaterfestival	August
	MEPPEL	Internationaal Poppenspelfestival	September
	De wereld van het poppenspel NVP-UNIMA-NL / Peter Vermaat		
NORWAY			
	OSLO	Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences - Department of Art, Design and Drama	
	OSLO	Berger Figur I Fossekleiva	Sep-Oct
	OSLO	Go Figure!	June
	STAMSUND	Stamsund Theatre Festival	May
	Ånd i hanske • UNIMA Norway / Elin Lindberg		
POLAND			
	BIĄŁYSTOK	Akademia Teatralna Wydział Sztuki Lalkarskiej w Białymstoku	
	WARSAW	The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw	
	WROCLAW	Ludwik Solski State Higher Theatre School in Cracow - Puppetry Faculty in Wroclaw	
	BIĄŁYSTOK	Festival Metamorfozy Lalek	June
	BIELSKO-BIAŁA	International Festival of Puppetry Art	October
	HAJNÓWKA	Międzynarodowy Festiwal Teatralny Wertep	July-August
	OPOLE	All-Polish Puppet Theatre Festival	October
	WARSAW	International Festival of a Puppet Theatres and Film Animation for adults “Puppet is a Human too”	November
	Teatr Lalek (Puppet Theatre) • Polunima / Lucyna Kozień		
PORTUGAL			
	LISBON	Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa - Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa	
	AGUAVA-SINTRA	É Só Palheta	May
	LISBON	FIMFA Lx - Festival Internacional de Marionetas e Formas Animadas	May
	PORTO	FIMP, Festival Internacional De Marionetas Do Porto	October
	Noticias da marioneta • El museu da marioneta de Lisboa / Ana Paula Rebelo Correia		
ROMANIA			
	BUCURESTI	The National University of Theatrical and Cinematographic Art « I.L. Caragiale	
	IASI	University of Arts George Enescu, College of Musicologie, Composition, Music pedagogy and Theatre	
	TARGU MURES	University of Arts Targu Mures	
	CLUJ-NAPOCA	Puck International Festival	October
(FEDERATION OF) RUSSIA			
	EKATERINBURG	The Ekaterinburg State Theatrical Institut	
	IRKOUTSK	The Theatre School of Irkutsk	
	MOSCOW	The Vakhtangov Theatre Academy	
	MOSCOW	GITIS (Institut d'art théâtral de Russie)	



	NOVOSIBIRSK	Novosibirsk State Theatrical Institute	
	ST.PETERSBURG	St. Petersburg State Theatre Arts Academy	
	YAROSLAVL	Yaroslavl State Theatrical Institute - Department of Puppet Theatre	
	RYAZAN	Riazanskiye Smotrin	September
	MOSCOW	Sergei Obraztsov International Puppet Theatre Festival	September
	Theatre of Miracles Obraztsov Puppet Theatre/UNIMA Russie / Nina Monova		
SERBIA			
	SUBOTICA	International Festival of Children's Theatres Subotica	September
SLOVAK REPUBLIC			
	BRATISLAVA	Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava - Theatre Faculty - Department of Puppetry	
	BRATISLAVA	Bábkarská Bystrica Festival	October
SLOVENIA			
	LJUBLJANA	University of Ljubljana - Faculty of Education	
	LJUBLJANA	International Festival of Contemporary Puppetry Art Lutke	September
	MARIBOR	Bienale Lutkovnih Ustvarjalcev Slovenije / The Biennial of Puppetry Artists of Slovenia	September
	MARIBOR	Summer Puppet Pier	August
	Lutka Magazine • Public Fund for Cultural Activities / Tjaša Bertoncelj, Ajda Rooss, et Maša Jazbec		
SPAIN			
	BARCELONA	Institut del Teatre de Barcelona Escola Superior d'Art Dramàtic (ESAD)	
	BARCELONA	Títère Arte	
	MADRID	Centro del Títère	
	BILBAO	Dantzerti	
	ALCANTARA	Al*Títère	October
	ALICANTE	FESTITITERES. Festival Internacional de Títeres de Alicante	December
	BARAÑÁIN	Festival Internacional de Títeres de Barañáin	May
	BARCELONA	Festival de Putxinel·lis d'Hivern	November
	BARCELONA	If Barcelona	November
	BERGARA	Muestra Internacional de Títeres para adultos	October
	BINEFAR (HUESCA)	Imaginaria - Festival de títeres e imagen en movimiento	May-June
	BILBAO	Bilbao TX	November
	CADIZ	Festival Internacional del Títère Ciudad de Cádiz	May
	CASTELLON	Festival Internacional de Titelles Portsxinel·la	April
	ELCHE	Calendureta - Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Títeres y objetos visual de Elche	April-May
	FERROL	Festea	October
	FERROLTERRA	Entes Animados	September
	FUENLABRADA	Titirifuentes	September
	JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA	Festival Internacional de Títeres de Jerez de la Frontera	September
	LLEIDA	Fira de Titelles de Lleida	May
	MADRID	FIT Madrid - Festival internacional de títeres del Retiro	August
	MADRID	Pendientes de un Hilo	November
	MADRID	Titirimadroño	October
	MALLORCA	Festival Internacional Teatre de Teresetes	May
	MERINDADES	Festival de Títeres de las Merindades (Different towns of Castilla y León)	August
	MOLLET DEL VALLÈS	MITMO- Mostra Internacional de titelles de Mollet del Vallès	April
	MURCIA	TITEREMURCIA - Festival Internacional de Teatro de Títeres de la Región de Murcia	November
	ONTINYENT	Mostra Internacional de Titelles a la Valla d'Albaida	October
	REDONDELA	Festival Internacional de Títeres de Redondela	May
	RIANXO	Titiriberia - Festival de Títeres Tradicionais	August
	SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA	Galicreques	October

	SANTILLANA DEL MAR	Bisontere, Festival Internacional de Títeres de Santillana del Mar	May
	SEGOVIA	Festival Internacional de Títeres Titirimundi	May
	SESTAO	Festival Internacional de Títeres de Sestao	November
	SEVILLA	Feria Internacional del Títère de Sevilla	May
	TOLOSA	TITIRIJAI – Festival Internacional de Marionetas de Tolosa	November
	VALLADOLID	Encuentros TEVEO	November
	VALADERRUBIO	El Rinconcillo de Cristobica	May-June
	ZARAGOZA	Festival Iberoamericano de Títeres	September
	ZARAGOZA	Festival Internacional de Teatro de Feria “Parque de las Marionetas”	October
	Fantoche • UNIMA Spain / Joaquin Hernandez		
	Puppetring, private online Puppet, Shadow and Marionettte magazine (English/French), Titeresante (Spanish), Putxinelli(Catalan). Associació Interseccions / Toni Rumbau		
SWEDEN			
	STOCKHOLM	Pop Up Puppets, International Puppet Theatre Festival	August
	VÄSTRA FRÖLUNDA	FIGUR – international festival of puppetry & animation	November
	Dockument • UNIMA Sweden / Agneta Attling		
SWITZERLAND			
	VERSCIO	Accademia Dimitri	
	BADEN	Figura Theaterfestival	June
	LOCARNO	Festival internazionale con figure Il castello incantato	Aug-Sep
	NEUCHÂTEL	Marionnettes – Festival international	November
	Magma • Magazine du Théâtre de Marionnettes de Genève / Isabelle Matter		
TÜRKIYE			
	ISTANBUL	Istanbul International Puppet Festival	May
	IZMIR	Izmir International Puppet Days	March
UK			
	EXETER	University of Exeter	
	LONDON	Royal Central School of Speech and Drama	
	EDINBURGH	Manipulate – Festival	February
	HULL	Beverley Puppet Festival	July
	LONDON	Mime London – contemporary visual theatre	Jan-Feb
	NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE	Moving Parts Newcastle Puppetry Festival	April
	SKIPTON	Skipton Puppet Festival	September
	Puppet Master • British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild / Brian Hibbitt		
	Puppet Notebook • British UNIMA / Tim Butler Garrett		
UKRAINE			
	DNIEPROPETROVSK	Dnipropetrovsk Scenic College	
	KHARKIV	Kharkiv State I. P. Kotlyarevskyi Art Institute, Animation Department	
	KIEV	Kiev Municipal Academy of Variety and Circus Art	
	KIEV	Kiev National I. K. Karpenko-Karyi University of Theatre, Cinema and Television	
	LUGANSK	Lugansk State Academy of Culture and Arts	
	CHERKASY	Lace Of Tales	October
	KIEV	Kiev International Festival of Puppet Theaters	October
INTERNATIONAL			
	Critical Stages, nò 19 Special Topic: The Art Form of Contemporary Puppetry		
	IATC – International Association of Theatre Critics / Margareta Sörenson (Sueden) & Jean-Pierre Han (France)		
	La Hoja Titiritera • UNIMA-Tres Américas, Subcomisión América Latina / Susy López Pérez		
	Puppet Plays, multilingual open source platform, a research programme funded by the European Union Université Montpellier 3 / Didier Plassard		
	In EU puppet		



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Stage design and puppets: Iva Gikova, Ivaylo Nikolov  
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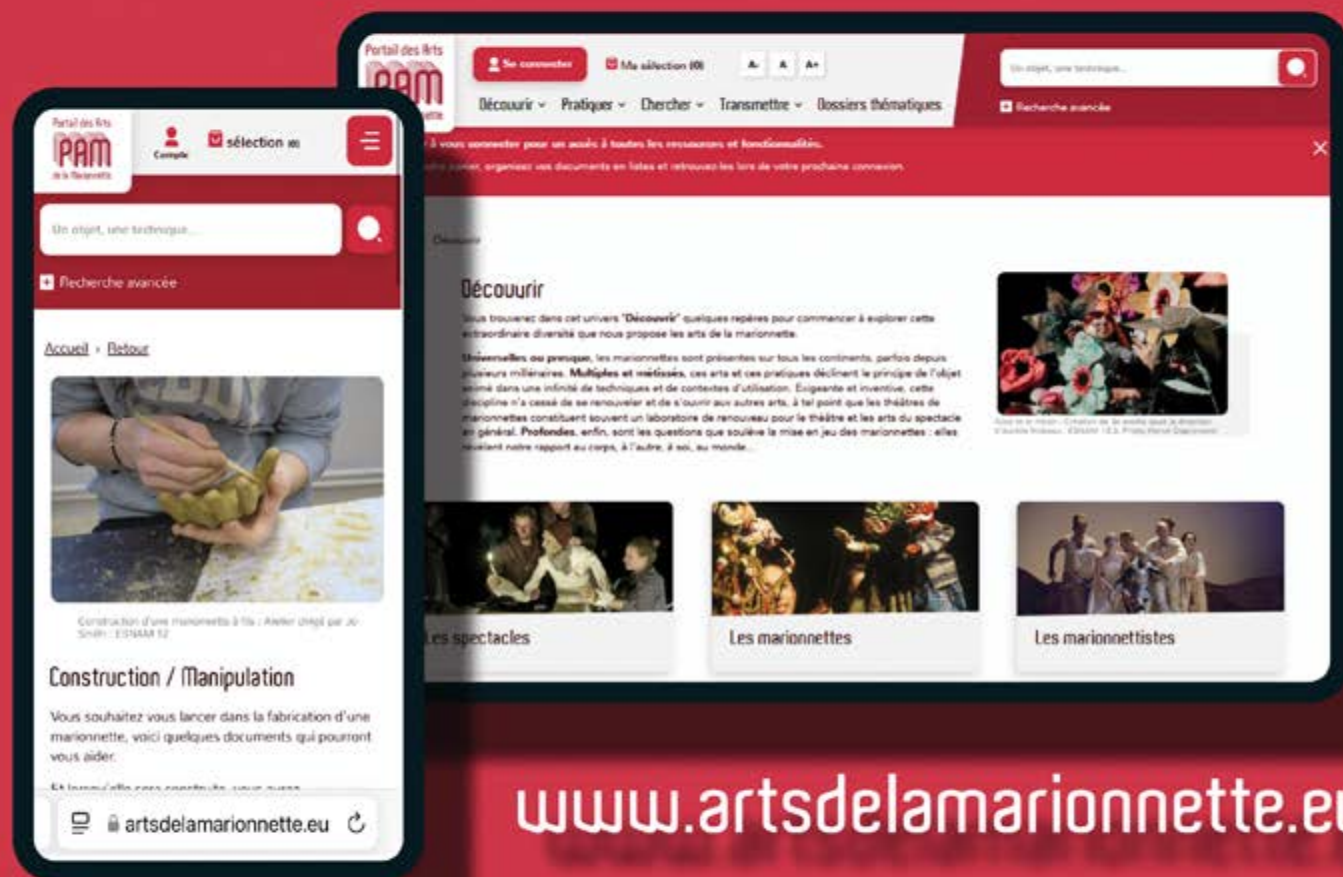
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