

# PUPPETRY

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# PUPPETRY AND CELEBRATION

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### ABOUT THE COVER

Giant puppet designed by Ralph Lee for Mettawee River Theatre Company in 1990. Constructed of brown paper, fabric, feathers, string, and rattan inner frame. For the show *Wichikapache Goes Walking* by Howard Norman, from *Swampy Cree Trickster Tales*. Lee, fascinated by the frequency of transformation scenes in Cree stories, was inspired to “make use of the way that things could come together out of nothing.” Photo by Richard Termine.

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## EDITORIAL

### LET'S CELEBRATE!

After two issues about relevant though emotionally heavier topics, the environment (issue #52) and war (issue #53), we decided to bring attention to the festive side and focus on puppetry and celebration from around the world. Puppetry has long been featured in numerous types of celebrations. For this issue we are embracing an expansive definition that includes holidays, recurring religious and secular events, private and public rituals, personal and communal happenings and the experience of a puppet as a joyful thing that comes to life. Celebrations in this vein also include anniversaries and jubilees of companies, institutions, and individuals who exemplify and uplift puppetry practice and performance. In line with this idea, we are launching a new recurring section, "Who's Who," with a feature about the indomitable Ellen Stewart, founder of La MaMa etc. based in New York City and long time advocate and presenter of puppetry from around the world.

We start our journey with a peek into Jewish and Muslim celebration in the Northeast United States with three articles. Chad Williams reflects on his experiences performing for diverse Jewish communities throughout New York City during holy days. Jenny Romaine, also in NYC, shares the ethos and community building of the Great Small Works and FiHI Ma FiHI collaborative Iftar feasts held during Ramadan. And finally Matthew Cohen offers an insightful and detailed article about the creation of his Wayang Purim play developed in 2021. We then expand out into festivals and projects aimed at community building and re-imagining with Andrew Periale's article about the work of Sara Peatie in Erie, PA; Ana Lorite's transnational, multi-year investigation of puppetry and human connection that took her around the world; Paulette Richard's insightful expose about the role puppets played in the making of Disney's Little Mermaid; Mari Boyd's performance review about a puppet piece that celebrates the life of a counter cultural Japanese artist; and Frans Hakkemars report on the 17th biennial international festival of puppetry at Saguenay in Quebec, Canada. Threaded in each of these articles is a keen awareness that it is both people and puppets that together create meaning. In this issue we also celebrate some of the people who have been so important to our art: Ralph Lee and Ellen Stewart from the United States, and The Guérin family from Bordeaux, France currently celebrating 170 years. The celebration of many things puppet continues with a recent explosion of publications about puppetry, four of which are reviewed here. And finally we honor this year's UNIMA-USA citation awardees.

Note: The theme for this issue and its articles were chosen prior to the current escalation of hostilities in the Middle East. UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette) was first formed in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1929 and, after its rupture during WWII, was re-activated. Our founders knew puppetry could lead to greater understanding and healing despite the grim politics of that "Cold War" period. UNIMA-USA's mission has always been "to promote international understanding and friendship through the art of puppetry." We stand by that mission and support peaceful outcomes in all conflicts.

— Alissa Mello

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# YOU'RE JEWISH, RIGHT?

## PERFORMING FOR JEWS IN NYC by Chad Williams

In a centuries-old temple, a tiny rabbi holding a massive Torah scroll dances to a thumping Jewish pop parody song while her congregation claps and moves among the flashing colored lights. Outside, machine gun-toting New York City Police Department officers grimly survey every passing pedestrian, anticipating another hate crime. In a small back room, on a floor covered with a multicolored foam mat, a puppeteer readies their show for kids aged 0-7 about *Simchat Torah*, the celebration of reaching the end of the Torah scroll and rolling all the way back to the beginning to start again. Because it's not *Purim* (that commemorates survival of the Jews who were marked for death by their Perian rulers in the 5th century) or Hanukkah (the winter Festival of Lights that celebrates the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem in the 2nd century), only a handful of people ever ask for this show and even less will see it with music, lights and amplified sound.

My name is Chad Williams, and I perform Jewish puppet shows for Jewish audiences in the greater New York City area. Though I am not originally of this culture, I married a Jewish puppeteer and we began to perform for this very specific audience. My wife and I created shows for high holidays, Shabbat (every Saturday) and we have been to most *shuls* (Jewish schools) around the region from the most Orthodox to the most Reformed. Since those early years I have come to know other puppeteers on the East Coast of the United States who also perform these specific shows. Sometimes it's a rabbi or their spouse, other times a trained puppeteer, sometimes it's a person with a guitar and good intentions. The demand for wholesome Jewish entertainment for kids is high and we are one of the companies who fill that niche.

Descending down the marble staircase into a large theater space in the basement of an uptown *shul*, one passes decades of posters of their in-house *Purim*

*shpiels* (plays) that mimic the style of contemporary Broadway musicals. While there is a performative aspect to many Jewish traditions, including Passover where the *Haggadah* can read as a script with stage directions, the holiday most associated with a performance is *Purim*. In New York, *Purim* plays retelling the ancient story of Queen Esther saving the Jews of Persia are done as high-energy musicals, serious high budget films, and zany puppet shows performed by rabbis, large puppet troupes and solo performers.

It is accepted that every single professional puppeteer who performs Jewish stories will have a *Purim* show, and with good reason. Not only is it tradition to have a performance, either for the kids while the adults sit through the long reading of the *Megillah* (scroll) or as a fun community event, but it is also rabbinical law (*halacha*) that every Jew must read the story of Queen Esther every year. Listening to someone speed through

the story fulfills this requirement, and watching a performance also counts. As a Manhattan rabbi once told his congregation while I set up my booth, "inside your brain, there is no difference between hearing the words and reading them yourself: therefore, hearing the story is just as good as reading it."

The story of *Purim* is a wild tale with a party-loving King, a beauty contest, a mustache-twirling evil villain, high stakes—all the markings of a great drama that fits well with the elevated craziness that is a puppet show. Centuries before Harry Potter's central villain "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named," it was tradition to yell, spin groggers and make noise to "blot out" the villain's name during the *Megillah* reading. It is also, as I was told by a Brooklyn rabbi, "a way to wake the congregation up" and get them involved. It's also a lot of fun for kids. Everyone dresses up in costume! Chinese Theatre Works, based in Queens, performs a version of

Performing on the bimah (where the Torah is read) at the Isaac M. Wise Temple. Photo courtesy of WonderSparks Puppets.



the story with *Budaixi* (Chinese hand puppets) where the characters are all animals from the zodiac. In West Hartford, University of Connecticut Puppet Arts students performed with Indonesian shadow puppets the story of “Wayang Esther” (see Matthew Cohen’s article beginning on page 12). My company does a traditional hand puppet show with centuries-old gags lifted from Punch & Judy.

As a mobile puppetry theater which performs Jewish shows, our other most popular holiday show is Hanukkah. Our setup is a traditional European-style booth that measures 4’ wide by 4’ deep, so we can fit into any tiny New York City space. Unlike *Purim*, which takes place on a specific date, Hanukkah lasts 8 nights which extends the number of possible performances we can do. Our window for doing Hanukkah shows can run for weeks while for *Purim*, every *shul* is asking for the same exact date and time.

Who is allowed to perform Jewish shows and what is considered taboo? When I first began puppeteering in 2009, I came to the community as an outsider, a *goy*, who knew the Old Testament stories but had never experienced the incredibly fun culture and traditions that surrounded each holiday. I had to fall flat on my face several times in order to understand what some Jewish puppeteers knew from the outset: don’t try to shake an Orthodox woman’s hand (*shomer negiah*), don’t have a woman puppeteer sing to an Orthodox audience (*kol isha*), wear modest clothes that cover up skin (*tzniut*), don’t fudge any part of the *Megillah*. When we create new Jewish shows, we make sure that it can succeed without amplified sound, lights or music (*melachah*).

While there have been a few exceptions where I was asked flat-out “wait, are you Jewish?” or to my wife “don’t tell anyone that you *are* Jewish,” the communities around NYC are pretty relaxed when it comes to who performs their own stories back to them. It’s more about trust—“you do know the story, right?”—and definitely word of mouth about which entertainers can have fun

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while getting across the message of the holiday. In some cases it is actually better that I am not Jewish, as this allows me to skirt the rules forbidding Jews to work on Shabbat or holidays, opening up opportunities to perform for more Orthodox communities who are looking for screen-free entertainment for their children.

Just as every flavor of Judaism has its own level of adherence to Talmudic law, puppeteers and other entertainers who pass the threshold and enter these spaces are expected to conform to the unspoken rules of each community. Great Small Works’ Jenny Romaine compared this to entering an Actor’s Equity theater space. There are specific directives you must abide by, and you better figure them out quick. In the greater NYC area, a spectrum of observance of rabbinical laws is present, so one place might not care if you plug in your own lights, while another place might ask for you to set up your booth a few days in advance (I don’t know anyone who actually said yes to this). Most temples just request that you don’t use mics, lights or music on Shabbat (*Saturdays*).

Some Jews isolate themselves in giant hotels during holidays where the staff of *goyim* take care of the things they are forbidden to do (cooking is a big one). Sometimes it’s just for a weekend, sometimes a whole week or more. An entire community of hundreds of families have the run of a hotel and a never-ending stream of Jewish magicians, clowns, animal handlers, circus arts, puppeteers, etc. come in to help the children pass the time. The men are all together studying the Torah while the women are all together deepening their fellowship—Orthodox communities tend to segregate by gender. When I arrive at a situation like this, finding where to go is the hardest part of the job. Since my client cannot pick up their phone and the hotel staff have no idea where I should go, I have to walk around asking people until I either find the rabbi or a conference room with a piece of paper marked “children’s room” on it.

Since Jews are forbidden to handle money on holidays,



Z. Briggs builds a Queen Esther puppet for Purim. Photo by Chad Williams.

and Shabbat is the most important holiday of all, working on these days means we have to be flexible about getting paid. Sometimes our client will say “your check is on my desk” so we pick up our fee and they technically didn’t handle money. Other times a *Shabbas goy* will have our payment or they’ll just mail it out later.

No matter what the situation, we are tasked with being both flexible and intuitive to the needs of a very special community whose stories and culture we celebrate with puppetry now and then. While there are many variations of Jewish communities in our area, they are all united in faith, culture and food. The puppeteers who serve

these congregations with shows about their history and traditions might have a few hurdles to jump over, but are always welcomed with open arms. I very much enjoy being a part of it all, and I learn new nuances every time I overhear a rabbi’s *drash* (sermon) while setting up my booth. No matter what the occasion, we are here to serve the families of the Jewish communities in the United States—and we’ll keep performing, G-d willing.

### About the Author:

Chad Williams is Co-Artistic Director of WonderSpark Puppets based in New York City as well as a writer, director, performer and most recently a Fulbright teaching specialist who tours nationally and internationally.



# Spaghetti

# RAMADAN

## A SPIRITUAL KINSHIP CELEBRATION

by Jenny Romaine

For the past seven years, Great Small Works and Fihi Ma Fihi have come together to host collaborative Iftar feasts (a daily meal during Ramadan) and spiritual kinship celebrations known as Spaghetti Ramadan. We produced online events throughout the COVID lockdown, but usually we celebrate the holiday of Ramadan in outdoor dinners where the audience is invited to meander through a beautiful New York City community garden and be fed with spaghetti, music and performances shared by artists from across the Muslim world.

Photo by Erik McGregor.  
Courtesy of Great Small Works and Fihi Ma Fihi.



Ramadan is a time of introspection, but also of heightened socializing. Each Iftar is another chance to embody a version of the world we want to live in. Spaghetti Ramadan was brought into being to create a consciousness of the Muslim World and its diaspora, to embody spiritual kinship, and to address the disaster of social fragmentation.

Spaghetti Ramadan began in 2017 when two NYC cultural workers, a Muslim and a Jew, conceived of a spiritual kinship celebration to bring people together at a time of increasing polarization. The Muslim in the partnership is Arian Nakhaie, the founder of the adaptive strategies consulting firm Fihi Ma Fihi ([fmfworlds.com](http://fmfworlds.com)), named after the Persian mystic Rumi's philosophical treatise "Signs of the Unseen." The Jew is Jenny Romaine, co-artistic director of the New York-based theater collective Great Small Works ([greatsmallworks.org](http://greatsmallworks.org)). Nakhaie and Romaine met through political organizing and art making in NYC in 2015. Jenny and Arian's bond has cultivated an open shared space that allows for the free exchange of ideas.

Great Small Works is a company of White artists committed to building deep partnerships with visionary cultural workers from many traditions. We've been



Photo by Erik McGregor. Courtesy of Great Small Works and Fihi Ma Fihi.

hosting Spaghetti Dinners for twenty-five years. When we break bread together at these cabaret/puppet slam evenings, we deepen the rootlike systems between our communities. An Iftar is also a communal meal, one that Muslims eat after sunset during Ramadan to break the day's fast.

Spaghetti Ramadan was created to build a consciousness of the Muslim World and its diaspora, in a broader spiritual context and to say there is nothing inevitable about Islamophobia, nationalism, or any other ideology that divides people.

In our events we trace the story of Abrahamic wisdom traditions through scholarship, hospitality and performance, aspiring to create what Rumi called a "Plain of Peace." Towards this goal, we have shared magnificent live music from the Arab World, Greater Iran, South Asia, West Africa and from Afro-diasporic

cultures that have given life to many traditions including Hip Hop.

Puppetry has also always been part of the communal enjoyment. At our first Iftar in 2017, we presented Hayali Ibrahim Yazici of Karagöz Everywhere ([karagozeverywhere.com](http://karagozeverywhere.com)) in "It's a Shadow Play: A Tradition of Ramadan" with an introduction by Aysen Darcan, Ph.D. In 2018, Arian/FiHi Ma FiHi created new live music for segments of *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926), a film by Charlotte "Lotte" Reiniger, a German director and pioneer of silhouette animation. For our online rendition in 2020, "Jews, Muslims, and Bears, Oh My," Arian was living in Dubai. The show's MC's were two-dimensional painted puppet bears having their own garden parties in Dubai and NYC. In 2021, people in ornate, oversized mushroom body costumes chanted excerpts from the *Song of Songs*, a shared devotional poem for Abrahamic traditions, in many languages.



Photo by Erik McGregor. Courtesy of Great Small Works and Fihi Ma Fihi.

In 2023 I/Great Small Works created a new puppet show for the event called Three Cookbooks in the Garden. The piece was a stage illusion about eggplant that answered a real question I had. The script begins like this:

“My friend Jewlia<sup>1</sup> told me that to truly be an adult in the Sephardic Ladino speaking Jewish cultures of Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Sarajevo and North Africa, one must be able to prepare eggplant in at least 7 ways.”

“Why, I wondered, staring at the ceiling one sleepless night, did eggplant become so important in a cuisine emanating from medieval Islamic Spain?”

“It turns out that for centuries people were terrified of eggplant, loathed it! Even compared

it to the eggs of demons and bile. But then it happened, at one of the most magnificent feasts Baghdad had ever seen....”

The show features music from the Ladino-speaking Jewish community of Rhodes, specifically a song called “Los Guisados De La Berenjena” (the Eggplant Stews, or Seven Ways to Make Eggplant), learned from a band called Aman Aman.

In the pageant, we learn (thanks to the scholarship of Palestinian writer and cookbook author Reem Cassis) how eggplant went from being something despised to something beloved. It happened because of some daring kitchen experiments performed by a young woman named Buran living in Baghdad in the year 825CE.

...Buran, whose full name was Khadija,

was a nerd from a family of astrologers and scientists. She was born in a court where ancient knowledge and discovering new knowledge were a dedicated focus.

...Buran held a great wedding feast that included thousands of pearls scattered on a mat for guests to help themselves to, and a 70-pound candle of ambergris set in a candelabrum made of gold.

Her wedding banquet was lavish and the food extraordinary. She even made an eggplant dish! This was shocking because eggplant had been so feared and despised.<sup>2</sup>

In magical transformations that follow, oversized ornate cookbooks are revealed. Each one represents another era in a period called the Convivencia, a time in medieval Spain where Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities lived in great proximity to each other. The closeness fostered many kinds of shared cultural production including the preparation of eggplant.

Behold the 10th century Arabic cookbook “Kitāb al-ṭabīḥ” (book of dishes) which reveals an entire section devoted to eggplant recipes, including kosher Jewish recipes. Many of the dishes are attributed to the Abbasid prince Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi or to Buran herself.

#### About the Author:

Jenny Romaine is a director, designer and puppeteer and co-founder/artistic director of the OBIE winning Great Small Works visual theater collective. She is music director of Jennifer Miller’s CIRCUS AMOK. Romaine/Great Small Works performs, teaches, and directs in theaters, schools, parks, libraries, museums, prisons, street corners, and other public spaces, producing work on many scales, from gigantic outdoor spectacles with scores of participants, to miniature shows in living rooms.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Jewlia Eisenberg (1970-2021) was a composer, scholar, extended-technique vocalist, lay Cantor, and the founder of Charming Hostess. Her work explored the particular emotional, erotic and spiritual terrains that the voice can traverse. Her work spanned the intersection of text and the sounding body, pushing for translation strategies between verbal and non-verbal languages.

<sup>2</sup> From the script by Romaine sourced from “How Eggplant Conquered Arab Cuisine” by Reem Cassis <https://newlinesmag.com/first-person/how-the-eggplant-conquered-arab-cuisine>

<sup>3</sup> Adapted by Romaine from many sources including Sephardi: Cooking the History. Recipes of the Jews of Spain and the Diaspora, from the 13th Century to Today by Hélène Jawhara Piñer (Author)

<sup>4</sup> Additional research for this project was done by linguist, chef and historian Ozzie Gold-Shapiro

...Eggplant is also the subject of poetry and song pouring forth from fourteenth-and fifteenth-century Spain, like La Cantiga de las Merenjenas or “song of the eggplants,” which lists thirty-five ways to prepare the beloved fruit.

...By the 13th century, “Kitab al Wusla ila Al Habib” (Scents and Flavors), a Syrian cookbook, had over 15 recipes for eggplants ranging across various chapters from pickled and sautéed, to stuffed with meat (kosher) and stewed.<sup>3</sup>

In this performing object pageant, Abrahamic faith traditions meet in the kitchen.<sup>4</sup> I won’t reveal the grand finale puppet trick, but let’s just say, in the spirit of Spaghetti Ramadan, that what was once perceived as bitter, becomes better.

Divisiveness is killing us. Spaghetti is rigid. But, when placed in hot water it becomes flexible. It can mix and mingle with anything. Let’s enjoy this short time we have together. Let’s bathe in the rivers of wisdom traditions that we know, in our core, lead to the same ocean.

# WAYANG ESTHER



## IN CELEBRATION OF THE JEWISH HOLIDAY OF PURIM

by Matthew Isaac Cohen

Presentation for the online panel “Puppets, Holidays and Holydays: Sharing Heritage” sponsored by UNIMA-USA, February 12, 2023. With co-panelists Stephen Kaplin and Manuel Antonio Morán Martínez.

In traditional Java, Indonesia until the recent past, *wayang kulit*, also known as shadow puppet theatre or just wayang, has mostly been embedded in ceremonial or ritual contexts, such as weddings, circumcisions, thanksgiving for a good harvest or fishing season, commemoration of ancestors, and so on. Plays performed by the puppeteer (*dhalang*) were, until recently, largely determined by the context. A wedding would occasion a play about a wedding; a ritual event marking the seventh month of a woman’s first pregnancy would require a play about the birth of one of wayang’s heroes; annual village cleansing rites (*bersih desa*) featured plays connected to the rice goddess Sri. In contrast, when wayang is performed in North America, Europe and other areas outside of Southeast Asia, it tends to be a thoroughly secular

affair intended to entertain and educate audiences about a distant culture, build solidarities between Indonesia and other countries, or explore the potentials of wayang as an artistic medium.

There are exceptions to this sacred/profane dichotomy, of course. Memorably, a performance I gave at Yale University Art Gallery in 2017 that both marked the arrival of the Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets, the world’s largest wayang collection, and was intended to dispel any lingering malignant influences. Appropriately, the play performed was a ritual drama called *Barikan*, enacted annually in a cluster of villages in the Cirebon cultural area of Java to guard against troublesome spirits—which I performed with Yale’s resident gamelan group, replete with ritual offerings.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Recalling this propitious Yale performance, and the tradition of themed plays connected to ritual contexts in Java, I thought long and hard about which play to perform when approached in 2021 by a local philanthropist to perform a puppet show at the Mandell Jewish Community Center (JCC) for the Jewish holiday of *Purim*. This funder intended the project from the outset to be a platform for bringing two of her favorite philanthropic causes, the Jewish community of West Hartford, Connecticut and the University of Connecticut (UConn), into a productive cultural dialogue. I was in some ways ideally situated to take a lead artistic role—as both a UConn professor and the father of two kids who were in daycare and after-school care at the JCC. But while I have sometimes included Biblical themes in wayang plays, I had never before created a production for a Jewish cause.

Fortunately, there is a tradition of *Purim* puppet plays that goes back at least a century. The play that I chose is a variant of the well-known Ashkenazi Jewish tradition of the

*Purim shpiel*, in which the story about the salvation of the Jews of the ancient Persian kingdom of Shushan by the virtuous Queen Esther and her uncle Mordechai from a plot machinated by the king’s evil minister Haman. This same story is often chanted from a parchment scroll (*megillah*) in synagogue on *Purim* and is enacted by amateur actors as a community-based comical farce following the synagogue service. As a result, there exists a stock of plays by Jewish authors retelling the story of Esther, all intended for *Purim*-time performance. From the 1920s and early 1930s, for example, come a shadow play in German verse by amateur German puppeteers Alex and Lotte Baerwald; a Yiddish-language comical farce by the Modicut troupe of New York’s Lower East Side; a hand puppet play co-written and performed by Emily Solis-Cohen, Jr. and the famous Italian-American puppeteer Remo Bufano; and a shadow play by American novelist Meyer Levin. More followed.

Among these, the one that cried out to me was a music-theater piece with words and music by composer-writer Barbara Benary titled *Wayang Esther: A Javanese Purimspiel*. This 2001 composition combines vocal oratorio with *gamelan* and Javanese shadow puppets. It was written for Benary’s own ensemble Gamelan, Son of Lion (from Benary’s name: “Ben Ari” means “Son of Lion” in Hebrew), which she co-founded in 1976 with composers Philip Corner and Daniel Goode. This ensemble uses as its core musical instruments a *gamelan*, or gong-chime ensemble based on Javanese tradition but constructed by Benary from iron and aluminum and tuned

to a unique musical scale. *Wayang Esther* is a follow-up to a 1994 work in a similar style titled *Karna: A Shadow Puppet Opera*. While *Karna* uses characters and stories from the *Mahabharata*, a standard source for Javanese shadow puppet theater, *Wayang Esther* is based on *The Book of Esther* and the Jewish interpretive tradition of finding contemporary resonances for ancient scripture. The work highlights the theme of ethnic cleansing—both Haman’s attempt to kill all the Jews of the empire and Mordechai’s response to this plot, namely the killing of Haman and his sons, as an effort to stamp out Amalek, the arch enemies of the Jewish people. Thinking explicitly of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, Benary queries: “how we in modern times can or should react to genocide and mindless violence? Who is an innocent, and must children suffer for the deeds of their fathers? And must we carry old wars forever in our hearts?” In the original production, which premiered at Here Arts Center in New York City in February 2001, puppetry was directed by the Javanese puppeteer Ki Joko Susilo, one of my main wayang teachers, and Barbara Pollitt, a University of Connecticut Puppet Arts graduate who has collaborated with Julie Taymor, Lee Breuer, George C. Wolfe, and other leading American directors. Puppets in the original production were traditional figures made in Java of the type normally used for *Mahabharata* plays.

While I had huge admiration for Benary’s music, which so ably combines two different musical styles, I was less thrilled by some of the other aspects of the original production. Our new production, created as a collaboration between Son of Lion and UConn’s Puppet Arts





Figure 3

program, was a radical reworking. Changes included:

1. All the main characters (King Achashverosh, Haman, Haman's wife Zareh, Mordechai, and Esther) speak entirely in Biblical Hebrew, with interpretation supplied by the clown-servants Limbuk and Cangik (cast as Esther's ladies-in-waiting), Semar (the king's minister) and his sons Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong. This is a practice adopted from Balinese *wayang kulit*, in which leading characters speak in the ancient ecclesiastical language of *kawi* and their words are explained in modern Balinese. A retired Hebrew teacher assisted with Hebrew pronunciation.

2. Songs were sung by professional singers and the dialogue was performed by the *dhalang* or lead puppeteer (myself). In the original, all the dialogue, including the clown scenes, were fully scripted; in our version, dialogue was improvised anew in each rendition, with the exception of the Biblical Hebrew passages,

which were fixed.

3. A new set of puppets were created based on illustrations from an illuminated *megillah* scroll created in Venice, Italy circa 1740 that we reproduced courtesy of the Klau Library of Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Though not signed, the illustrations are believed to be the work of Aryeh Leib son of Daniel of Goray, a Polish migrant to Venice. Our new puppets based on this *megillah* were designed by Joko Susilo (who is based in New Zealand) and executed in buffalo hide at the studio Omah Wayang Mas Kamto, located in Sukoharjo, Central Java, under the supervision of master wayang maker Guntur Sulistiyono (figures 1 and 2).

4. During most of the songs, the wayang elements were supplemented by live shadow puppet sequences created by UConn Puppet Arts students using overhead projectors and hand-held lights that were projected onto a second screen on the opposite side of the stage as the wayang screen.

5. Inspired by Chicago's Manual Cinema, the audience could see both the *dhalang* and the other shadow puppeteers in action. The shadow screens were shot by video cameras and live mixed by our video projection designer, Nicole Lang, at the time a 4th year MFA student at the Yale School of Drama. The audience could, at any point, look at the puppeteers in action, the accompanying gamelan and singers, and/or the mixed projection that was thrown up against the theater's back wall (figure 3).

6. We performed both an evening version of the production for an audience of adults and older children, which concludes with massacres, the gruesome hanging of Haman's sons, and the plaintive song *Vidui*, a prayer for redemption, as well as a matinee version for a mixed audience, including younger children, which omitted this ending and substituted a sing-along of the familiar *Purim* song "Once there was a wicked, wicked man."

The resulting production arguably had a more contemporary aesthetic than the original production but both reflected what philologist A.L. Becker (another of my wayang gurus) called wayang's text-building constraints through which ancient texts are made to speak the present.

As a community-based production sponsored by a building-based organization, it was important for the JCC to run ancillary programming in order for the community to prepare for the production. One of these was an exhibition titled *Purim Puppetry* that I co-created with the exhibition's designer, Matt Sorensen,



Figure 4

that ran for most of the month of March in the JCC's central gallery space (figure 4). This exhibit included a wealth of contextual information about our production, puppets in traditional and modern styles, video showing the performance process, an interactive scroll that was a reproduction of the 18th century *megillah* used as source material, and an interactive shadow screen with puppets from the production reproduced in cardboard by UConn Puppet Arts students (Joko Susilo instructed the students via Zoom on how to make these replicas.)

The two other significant elements complementing the productions involved children in the JCC's preschool program. All the upper classes of the program participated in a *Purim* puppet building competition. The results, one

puppet per classroom, were displayed in the halls of the JCC and prizes awarded to the best entries. It was left up to the teachers to decide on what sort of puppet would be constructed by their classes, and to the children to build and decorate these puppets. The children in the preschool (among them my son), as well as older children enrolled in the after-school Kids Korner program (among them my daughter), were also able to visit the theater where we performed for short workshops on gamelan and shadow puppetry, delivered by a member of Son of Lion and UConn Puppet Arts students. The intention behind these programs was to foster respect for the art forms of the production and encourage the children to attend the performances with their families.

The project garnered very appreciative feedback from everyone involved. Audiences were astounded by the cinematic scope of the shadow puppetry. One of the UConn puppet students wrote in a post-production Critical Reflection: "The overall takeaways from this performance when it comes to shadow puppetry at large are many, but perhaps most importantly were the ways in which creating a large scale shadow piece is a collaborative exploration that consists of detailed planning alongside happy discoveries." Detailed planning was a hallmark of all involved—from the careful reconstruction of Benary's score from the many parts left from 2001, to the research and development of the shadow puppet elements, to the care that went into the community components. We all made "happy discoveries" along the way and we parted ways inspired to create future collaborations.

#### About the Author:

Matthew Isaac Cohen is a Professor in the Department of Dramatic Arts, UConn, and a scholar-practitioner specializing in global traditions of puppet theatre, Indonesian performing arts, intercultural and transnational performance, and cultural heritage.

**Figure 1.** Mordechai from an illuminated Book of Esther scroll (*megillat Esther*) made of parchment on wooden rollers and measuring 3.9 x 82.6 inches. This scroll was created in Venice, Italy circa 1740. Reproduced courtesy of the Klau Library, Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

**Figure 2.** Mordechai as a shadow puppet, based on Aryeh Leib's illustration. Designed by Joko Susilo and executed in buffalo hide at the studio Omah Wayang Mas Kamto. Photograph by the author.

**Figure 3.** *Wayang Esther* in rehearsals, February 28, 2022. UConn puppeteers Alison Doyle (foreground) and Matteo Villanueva (background). Photograph by the author.

**Figure 4.** Exhibition view of Purim-themed puppet toys. Such toys create opportunities for children and the carers to play with the characters of the Book of Esther and explore the themes of the holiday. "My Purim Puppets" is a set of glove puppets inside a plush purple bag, distributed by Chabad Lubavitch. "Purim Finger Puppet Theater," a set of toy finger puppets and a cut-out theater façade, recollecting nineteenth-century English toy theater, a popular form of home entertainment. Photograph by the author.

# SARA PEATTIE

## PUPPETRY THAT CELEBRATES COMMUNITY AND DIVERSITY

by Andrew Periale

When I reached Sara Peattie by phone, the AmeriMasala Festival she'd been working on had just concluded. AmeriMasala is the brainchild of Lynn Johnson—"an interesting guy" as Sara put it.

It is an annual event that celebrates African and worldwide cultures and is held in Erie, PA—a diverse, working class port city on Lake Erie that has been out at elbows and trying desperately to enlarge its cultural footprint. This was AmeriMasala's thirteenth iteration, and Johnson has been getting community buy-in the old fashioned way: walking the streets, handing out flyers and talking to anyone who will listen. Large parade-style puppets have always been a part of the event, and Johnson not only uses them in the festival but as walking billboards, drawing in local residents of all ages to help construct more puppets and participate in the parade.

For those of you unfamiliar with Sara Peattie's work, she has been creating and using large puppets her entire career, which started when she was still a teenager in the early 1970s, working with Bread and Puppet Theatre. Since then she has founded and maintained the puppet lending library in the basement of Emmanuel Church in Boston. The hundreds of puppets housed there can be borrowed by groups putting on celebrations, or in spectacles that Sara herself is involved in, like the Boston First Night Parade.

A few years ago I nominated Sara for an award for "Leadership in Community-Based Theatre and Civic Engagement," and sought out people she'd worked with over the years on celebrations large and small. Here are a few excerpts from their responses:

*"Sara leads workshops that engage people—often with little or no experience, and perhaps no belief in their own abilities—in transforming the humblest of materials into magical creatures and worlds of enchantment. Many of the puppets, masks, banners and other creations hold positive messages about the beauty, diversity, and grace in our world."* — Cecily Miller, Curator of Public Art, Arlington Commission for Arts & Culture

*"Sara has a masterful way of offering just enough guidance to ensure no one gets lost along the way, while also providing plenty of free rein to creatively wander. Her innovative approach is both accessible and exceptional, and she has inspired many of our students to use puppetry as a medium for self-expression and political articulation."* — Corey Harrower, Director of The Vermont Governor's Institute on the Arts

*"... her impact is not only local (NYC) and worldwide (the audience for the Parade) but filters back in a direct*



AmeriMasala Festival 2023, Erie, PA. Photo by Sara Peattie.

*way to many other communities. Generations have learned from her in this Parade setting..."* — Jeanne Fleming, Artistic & Producing Director of the Village Halloween Parade, NYC

*"In a city where the cultural events are often financially out of reach, these engaging performances are sometimes a child's first introduction to theater and applied puppetry."* — Kimberly Maier, Executive Director, The Old Stone House, Brooklyn, NY

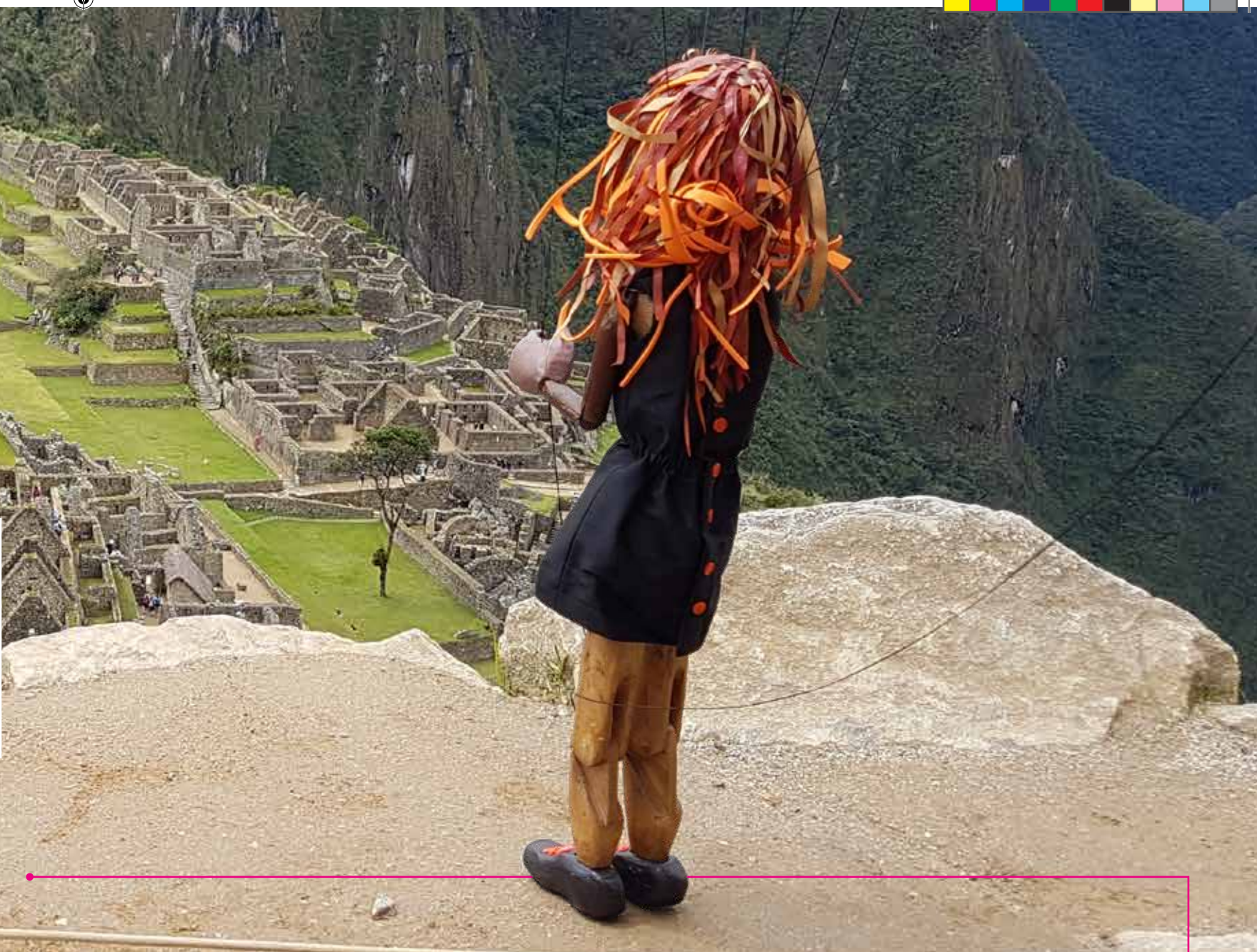
*"Beyond New Haven, Sara has worked with hundreds of school groups, community groups, ... to create parades and pageants and shows giving voice to their own stories. She works closely with people to understand the roots of their passions and concerns; she teaches them techniques for creating masks, puppets, banners and costumes; ... and she convinces them to go before an audience."* — Trudi Cohen, performer and former UNIMA-USA board member

One of Erie's strengths is its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic population. Anyone can participate and everyone is welcomed. Included were drummers from the Cleveland Djapo Cultural Arts Institute; Bollywood Masala; Italian dancers of Erie; Vybe Queenz, an Erie-based youth dance troupe; traditional Arabic folk ballads and West Indian Revelation, made up of local musicians with diverse Caribbean backgrounds. And of course: puppets! Sara led a team of volunteers for two intensive days of puppet construction. This is the kind of celebration that can forge friendships and heal a community. Sara knows this as well as anyone, and helps to make it happen.

### About the Author:

Andrew Periale is the co-director of Perry Alley Theatre and the founding editor of Puppetry International magazine.

# PUPPETRY AS CELEBRATION OF HUMAN CONNECTION



Peru, Nitunga puppet, 2019. Photo by Sergio Aguilar.

## A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON A 30-MONTH JOURNEY AROUND THE WORLD

by Ana Lorite

In September 2017, together with my husband and artistic partner, Sergio Aguilar, I embarked on a journey around the world with 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 higher 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 they 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, and shared 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.



Sanggar Paripurna Bali - Indonesia, Samuel the cat puppet, 2017. Photo courtesy of Ana Lorite.

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 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 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, 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, Franky was able to connect with an elderly woman, who was opening shells in the street, for assistance. She not only 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



China, Franky puppet, 2019. Photo by Sergio Aguilar.

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 not seen by his teacher 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 inter-generational 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



Peru, *The orange box* show for Amantani Island Community, 2019. Photo by All Ways Travel.

week. The museum's puppet theater was also used as a storytelling space and the Aymara and Quechua peoples 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 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 was not just an art form; it was 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

#### About the Author:

Ana Lorite, co-creator of the puppet and circus company Naranjarte, is a professional puppeteer with a UK Diploma in Puppetry. She completed her teaching and Drama studies in Spain. [www.naranjarte.com](http://www.naranjarte.com)

# RALPH LEE

FROM  
STREETS  
TO  
STAGES  
TO  
TELEVISION

by Matt Sorensen



Devil Masks by Ralph Lee  
Photo by George Riveron.  
Courtesy of Teatro Sea.



Photo by Richard Termine.

I met Ralph Lee and his wife, Casey Compton, in the Fall of 2022 while I was the Interim Co-Director of the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry at the University of Connecticut. Ralph's work was to be the subject of our upcoming winter exhibition, and I had the exciting task of facilitating the curation, design, and installation of the show.

The Ballard Institute director, Dr. John Bell, who was on sabbatical at the time, had known Ralph's work as a participant in the early days of the Halloween Parades, had seen performances of the Mettawee River Company in New York City, and had organized Mettawee performances at Bread and Puppet Theater in Vermont in the 1980s. He had wanted to exhibit Ralph's puppets and masks for many years because, despite Ralph's many contributions to puppetry, his

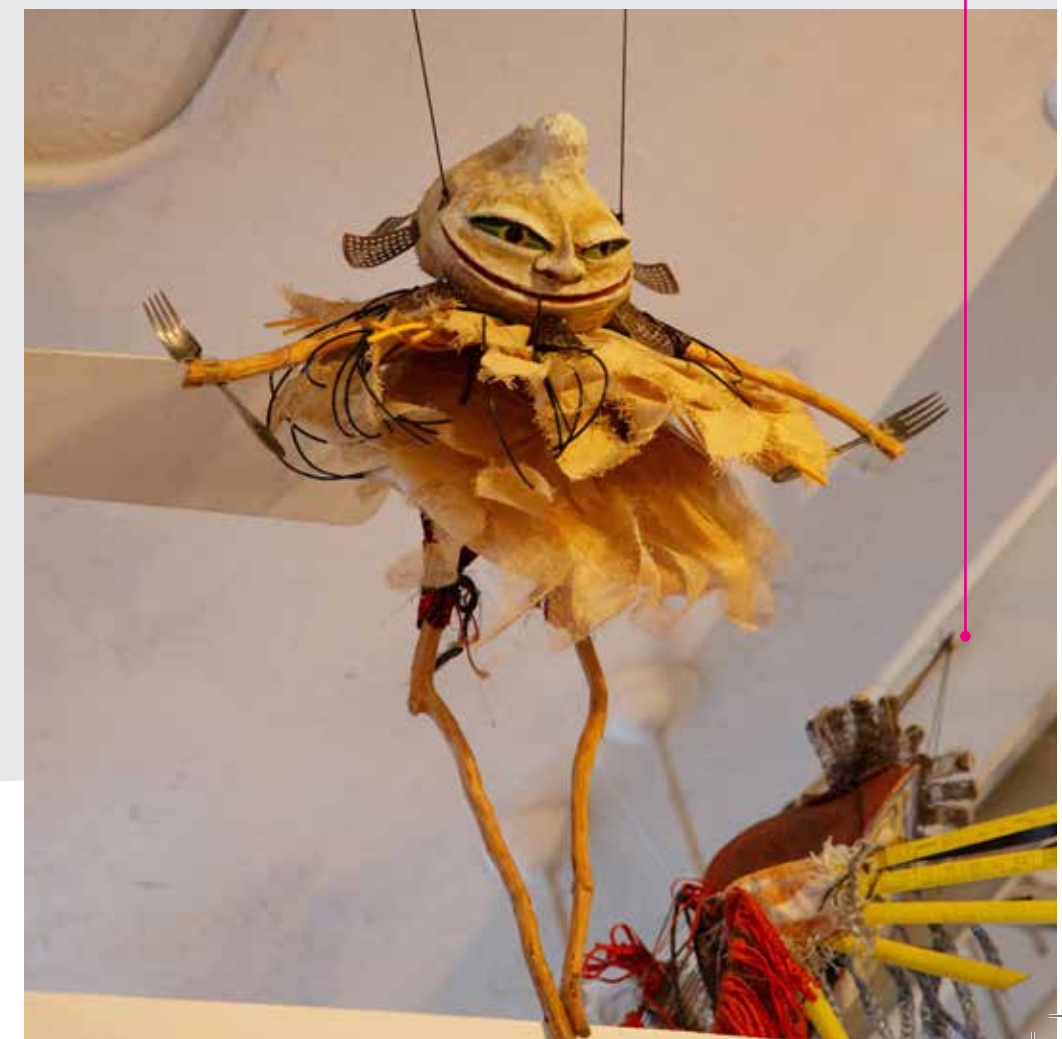
work had not received as much attention as the work of other contemporary artists such as Peter Schumann and Julie Taymor. Dr. Bell had already begun the process of identifying potential items for display with Ralph and Casey, so my first task was to learn from Ralph what the story of this exhibit would be. This show would not be a comprehensive career retrospective, since the prolific artist's body of work was too great and varied to effectively accomplish



Spirit Bird Costume by Ralph Lee.  
Photo by George Riveron.  
Courtesy of Teatro Sea.



Old man and Old Woman Masks by Ralph Lee.  
Photo by George Riveron. Courtesy of Teatro Sea.



Found Object Marionette by Ralph Lee.  
Photo by George Riveron.  
Courtesy of Teatro Sea.

that task. Instead the pieces were selected by Ralph as a “greatest hits” exhibit representing how he wanted people to experience and interpret over six decades worth of masks, puppets, and giant figures.

*Myths, Legends, & Spectacle: Masks and Puppets of Ralph Lee* opened at the Ballard Institute in late January 2023 and closed in early July, before its remounting at the Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural & Educational Center as part of New York’s International

Puppet Fringe Festival. The festival was dedicated to Ralph this year, which he knew prior to his passing in May; it was serendipitous that our work at the Ballard was able to continue to honor Ralph and his abundant contributions to the New York theater, dance, and puppetry scenes from the 1970s to today.

Considering how significant they have become to me professionally and personally, it’s hard to believe that prior to that meeting I was unfamiliar with Ralph and



Rod Puppets by Ralph Lee.  
Photo by Richard Termine.

Casey, the Mettawee River Theatre, Raph's creation of the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade, or any of the myriad productions which have benefitted from Ralph's gifts. I am grateful to say that is no longer the case.

Ralph's work is exquisite; his craftsmanship and talent for design, as well as his selection of various materials, textures, and stories, all coalesce into an incredibly rich and varied body of work. An even

more profound takeaway for me, and for those who knew him, was Ralph's unwavering kindness, deep compassion, and his unpretentious generosity. As I was learning stories of their work and their life together, Ralph and Casey quickly became artistic and personal heroes, embodying my own idea of "the dream career" for theater artists.

I am thankful to have had the opportunity to meet Ralph, and incredibly proud of my small-yet-

meaningful role in honoring the memory and the magnificent legacy of this great man and artist. My interactions with Ralph, his loved ones, and his work have made an indelible mark on me, the global puppetry community, and hundreds of thousands of people who have been touched by his career. Ralph's spirit and talents are sure to continue to be celebrated and highly-revered for many years to come.

#### **About the Author:**

Matthew Sorensen is a puppeteer, theater artist, filmmaker, educator, and museum exhibition designer based in Connecticut and New York. His puppet production company, Puppet Bucket Productions, has designed and built puppets for theater and film around the world.

# THE GUIGNOL GUÉRIN THEATRE CELEBRATES 170 YEARS<sup>1</sup>

by Yanna Kor

The Guérin family of Bordeaux, the oldest puppeteering dynasty in France, is celebrating the 170th anniversary of Guignol Guérin. This is an opportunity to bring the extraordinary story of the Guérins to a wider audience.

## The Guérin family

The founder of the Guérin dynasty was Etienne-Paul-Jean Guérin (1815-1869), who set up his glove puppet booth in Bordeaux's central square in 1853. He passed the torch to his son, André-Paul-Jullien Guérin (1849-1910), who in turn handed down the tradition to his son. Now in its fifth and sixth generation, the Guérin family counts three active puppeteers: Philippe (1950) and David (1980) Guérin, who entertain children in the Parc Bordelais, and André Guérin (1953), who performs in Bordeaux's Jardin Public. In the summer, like their ancestors, they move to the seaside resorts of the region: André goes to Royan, which has been second home to the Guérins for over 140 years; Philippe and David tour the beaches of Nouvelle-Aquitaine.

## From Polichinelle to Guignol

For today's audiences in Bordeaux, Guignol and Guérin are inextricably linked. Yet, contrary to popular belief, the story of Guignol Guérin does not begin in Lyon, but in Paris, in



André Guérin with his son Joseph, Arcachon, about 1900. ©Guignol Guérin.

a tiny Polichinelle *castelet*—puppet theatre—set on the Champs-Élysées. It was in the tumultuous year of 1848<sup>2</sup> that Paul Guérin, a carpenter from La Rochelle, tried his hand at puppetry in the capital. The experience was short, but significant. Within a few years, after having settled in Bordeaux, puppetry became one of his main sources of income. He staged short comic plays with three or four characters, featuring popular Parisian types Polichinelle, Pierrot and Bamboche, such as *Polichinelle mort et vivant*, *Polichinelle et Pierrot déserteurs*, *Bamboche et Pierrot voyage dans la lune*.

And what about Guignol? It was probably André, Paul's son, who introduced the Lyon puppet into the programme. In the 1880s, *André Guérin's Guignol* became an established part of Royan's Casino summer entertainment program. At the beginning of the 20th century, André and his son Joseph-Paul Guérin (1875-1926) performed a mixture of traditional Polichinelle and Guignol repertoires, adding parodies of actors' plays, such as *Don Quichotte* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*.<sup>3</sup>

In 1913, Guignol made its first transatlantic voyage with Joseph Guérin. Though interrupted by the First World War, the Guignol shows on cruise ships resumed in 1920 for an-

other nineteen years, mainly with Joseph's son, Alexandre-Olivier-Fernand Guérin (1905-1970). The programme included the traditional plays: *La Morale en baton*, *Le Deménagement de Guignol*, *Le Château du diable*, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Polichinelle did not accompany his "colleague" but continued to entertain the children of Bordeaux and Royan with old plays that were brought up to date. Gradually, his role was limited to that of the "régisseur," a puppet who presented the show without taking part in it. He typically performed short comic sketches to warm up the audience



The fifth and sixth generations of the Guignol Guérin (from left to right: André Guérin, David Guérin and Philippe Guérin). ©Guignol Guérin.

before the main event. For example, Polichinelle threw cloth sausages into the audience, who picked them up and threw them back.<sup>5</sup> After the Second World War, Polichinelle ceased to be part of the show and Guignol has reigned at the Guérin theater ever since.

## Always tradition, always renovation

The Guérin repertoire, like the company, took shape slowly over generations of performers. Polichinelle's plays were rewritten for Guignol and are still staged to this day. The Guérins call them "family plays." However, the parodies that performed by Joseph and Fernand Guérin were abandoned by Fernand's sons, Maurice-Patrick (1947-2006), Philippe and André, due to the complexity of their staging and their length. At the beginning of 2000, Philippe Guérin, in his search for a contemporary Guignol repertoire, initiated the creation of educational plays. Thus, with his son David and in collaboration with the writer Michel Suffran, he produced Guignol shows on the impact of pesticides on the environment (*Guignol et le jardin magique*, 2001) and on recycling (*Guignol à la plage*, 2003). David Guérin, for his part, created a series of short Guignol videos with his family in response to the health crisis of 2020.<sup>6</sup>

Today, Guérins' repertoire is made up of old Guignol plays such as *Turlupiton*, *Le Duel*, *Les Voleurs volés*, *Les Créanciers de Guignol*, *Guignol marchand de veaux*, *Guignol marchand de bois*, and of "family plays" such as *Lowinsky*, *Le Moins et le brigand*, *Les Aventures du Père Pantalon*, *Les Aventures du Père Bertrand*. The complete list includes more than 300 plays. The choice of which play to perform depends upon who the audience is; for example, André Guérin plays *La Racine d'Amérique* for adults only. Sometimes the story is changed by a need on the artist's part to respond to current events. There have also been times when a line from one day's show inspires the puppeteer's choice about what to play the following day.

While it has always been important for the Guérins to stress that they perform "the true Guignol of Lyon" (*Le véritable Guignol lyonnais*), this has not prevented their shows from responding to current events. This dialogue between the past and the present, tradition and modernity, has kept the Guérin Guignol both relevant and beloved by the public for 170 years.

**This article has focused on the Guérin family's glove puppet shows. It should be noted, however, that the Guérins also ran the Théâtre Saint-Antoine marionette theatre for a long time. From 1858 to 2007, it performed exclusively at the spring and fall markets of Bordeaux. But that's another story to tell and another anniversary to celebrate.**

## About the Author:

Yanna Kor is a doctor in theatre and performing arts studies, specialising in Alfred Jarry's theatre and 19th century French puppet theatre. She is an associate researcher of the CEAC laboratory, research programme "Lumière de spectacle", at the University of Lille.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my deep gratitude to André and David Guérin for allowing me access to their family archives and for patiently answering all my questions. This article would not have been possible without their kind help.

<sup>2</sup> In February 1848, the February Revolution took place, which put an end to the July Monarchy (1830-1848).

<sup>3</sup> Parodies, representative of the modern Guignol repertoire, were introduced in 1870 by Pierre Rousset. Despite fierce criticism, they took root and were at the height of their popularity at the turn of the 19th century.

<sup>4</sup> "Programme d'une croisière," in Jeanne Brannes Gouardère, *Le Guignol Guérin et son théâtre Saint-Antoine*, 1985, 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> Interview of the author with André Guérin, June 14, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> The videos are available on the Guignol Guérin website, <https://guignolguerin.fr/videos-guignol-marionnettes/> (accessed July 4, 2023).



# WHO'S WHO



*The Raven*, directed by Ellen Stewart, puppets designed by Federico Restrepo. Photo by Richard Greene.

# ELLEN STEWART (1919-2011)

## NEW YORK CITY PUPPETRY TRAILBLAZER

by Alex Morgan

**A**merican director, impresario, playwright, and founder of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (E.T.C.) in Greenwich Village of New York City. Ellen Stewart was a pioneer of New York's Off-Off Broadway theater community and she presented the work of many significant puppetry artists. She declared in 2004, as she was opening

an eight-part puppetry festival with support of the Henson Foundation, that "La MaMa has always loved puppetry, it is only now that people are noticing" (Abrams 2009). Artists of all nations, races, genders and sexual orientations have performed at her venue since its 1961 inception. Her commitment to diversity created ties across the world and La MaMa-affiliated

Ellen Stewart. Photo by D.E. Matlock courtesy of the La MaMa Archive.



Ellen Stewart at Vietnam National Puppetry Theatre. Photo courtesy of Theodora Skipitares.

groups have existed on every continent but Antarctica. Works presented include 5,000 productions by 100,000 artists from over sixty nations. Stewart's impact earned her a MacArthur Foundation fellowship in 1985, induction into the Broadway Hall of Fame in 1993, honorary doctorate degrees, and other accolades.

Before her career in theater, Stewart was interested in fashion design and had to persevere through many barriers as a black woman in mid-20th century America. Stewart was told that the Traphagen School of Fashion in New York City accepted black students, unlike many other schools then. She traveled to New York City in May of 1950, hoping to attend, but instead worked as a porter, operating an elevator at Saks Fifth Avenue. She later stated that it "was one of the only jobs that 'coloreds' were allowed to do" (La MaMa

1988). As a black woman, Stewart was supposed to wear a blue smock during her job but she wore her own dress designs underneath (Badger 2005, 14:30). Stewart's design talents were eventually recognized by Saks Fifth designer Edith Lances and Stewart became an Executive Designer in August 1950. She was given the nickname "Mama" by her assistants at this time.

Stewart entered the world of theater to assist her thespian friends Frederick Lights and Paul Foster. In 1961, while she designed dresses in her apartment, her basement was used as a theater space. When the theater needed a name, her colleagues suggested her nickname, and Café La MaMa was born at 321 East 9th Street. In the early years, Stewart was harassed by neighbors and authorities. Some assumed the club was a brothel and others were opposed to a black woman living nearby, so in 1963 she relocated to a larger space at 82 2nd Avenue, which she called La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (E.T.C.). Tom O'Horgan became La MaMa's artistic director in 1964. In the early years, U.S. critics were not reviewing La MaMa's work but international critics would do so during global touring, so the group traveled and eventually got recognition back home. Despite more moves and other

Jane Catherine Shaw's 2019 *Pushcart Tribute* to Ellen Stewart. Photo by Theo Cote, Courtesy of Denise Greber.



# WHO'S WHO

CONTINUED



*Seven Against Thebes*, directed by Ellen Stewart, puppets designed by Federico Restrepo. Photo by Richard Greene.

obstacles, the theater reached its enduring location in 1967 at 74 East 4th Street. The space was renovated with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and W. McNeil Lowry of the Ford Foundation. Stewart's long legacy of supporting puppetry began early. In 1962, she invited artists from South Korea to perform *Head Hunting* by Pagoon Kang Wouk in La MaMa's original basement theater on 9th street.

Many puppetry artists have collaborated with La MaMa including:

- Lee Breuer, who received several Obie awards for his puppet-related work, has worked with the theater,
- Ping Chong saw La MaMa as an artistic home, using puppetry in *Lazarus* (1972), *Kwaidan* (1998), and

other works,

- Charles Ludlam performed *Bluebeard* (1970) at La MaMa, and he went on to perform with puppets elsewhere in *Professor Bedlam's Punch and Judy* (1974) and *Anti-galaxie Nebula* (1978),
- Julie Taymor's Balinese-inspired *Tirai* (Curtain), with its heavy use of masks and puppets, had its American debut at La MaMa in 1980,
- Vit Horejs of the Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre frequently presented, and
- Mask and puppet designer Ralph Lee, of the Mettawee River Theatre Company, designed masks for *Orfeo* (1986), which Stewart directed.

Beginning in 1987, Stewart supported the work of

Colombian-born Federico Restrepo, founder of the Loco7 Dance Puppet Theatre Company; his Latinx work mixes dance and puppetry. From 1992, Theodora Skipitares had an ongoing relationship with the company. She traveled with Stewart for puppet-related collaborations in Vietnam, Cambodia, Serbia, Albania, India, and South Africa, and continues to present her original, groundbreaking puppet shows at the La MaMa Theater. The company was a presenting partner to the Jim Henson Foundation from 1996 to 2000 at its important international festivals, spearheaded by Cheryl Henson and Leslee Asch—an effort that helped raise the profile of puppetry as a genre in the eyes of New York critics and audiences (Asch 2020). Jane Catherine Shaw has frequently presented puppet works at La MaMa from 2001, for example, curating the 2021 puppet slam. Tom Lee's works, such as *Shank's Mare* (2015), a collaboration with Japanese fifth-generation puppet master Koryu Nishikawa V, also found a home at La MaMa.

Winston Tong, the Bread and Puppet Theater, Tadeusz Kantor, Great Small Works and many more puppetry artists, American, international and intercultural, have been produced there. Steve Abrams (2022), editor of the Puppeteers of America's *Puppetry Journal*, found through research in La MaMa's archives that from season one (1961-62) to season thirty (1991-92), thirty

#### About the Author:

Alex Morgan was born in Tampa, Florida. He has a B. A. in anthropology from Cornell University (2015), has worked at the Center for Puppetry Arts' Museum (2018-2021) and CNN's video archives (2021- ).

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Puppeteers: Andy Manjuck and Dorothy James. Photo by Ben Wright Smith

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by Andy Manjuck and Dorothy James

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Dorothy James - Co-creator & Puppeteer

Eamon Fogarty - Composer

Jon Riddleberger - Creative Collaborator & Puppeteer

Nick O'Leary - Consulting Director

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Tom Lee - Puppetry Director

Francisco Aliwalas - Director of Photography

Chicago Puppet Studio - Production Design

Jaerin Son - Lead Scenic Design

K.T. Shivak - Lead Puppet Designer

Blair Thomas - Puppetry Consultant

Marissa Fenley - Puppeteer Costumes

Paul Lieber - Music Editor

Fabian Obispo - Composer

Alec Styborski - Editor

Aaron Herschlag - Camera/Lighting Grip



Puppeteers: Mark Blashford, KT Shivak and Tom Lee. Photo by Francisco Aliwalas

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# SUBMARINE CELEBRATION

PERFORMING OBJECTS IN THE MAKING OF DISNEY'S THE LITTLE MERMAID

by Paulette Richards



Halle Bailey in *The Little Mermaid* (2023). Directed by Rob Marshall. Credit: Walt Disney Pictures / Alamy Stock Images.

While puppets played an integral role in the production of Disney's live action *The Little Mermaid*, they are not in evidence on screen. Director Rob Marshall chose a photo-realistic aesthetic for the film, aiming to reproduce the wonder of the BBC's popular *Blue Planet* documentary series. To realize this vision, he used a variety of performing objects, including a Disney Ursula doll, that he shot against cardboard sets to block out the "Poor Unfortunate Souls" sequence. When it came time to capture the "dry for wet" scenes, a crew in blue suits wheeled Melissa McCarthy and the other human actors suspended from harnesses attached to Tuning Fork rigs around the blue screen stage like marionettes. Eight dancers puppeteered Ursula's tentacles. Later their movements became templates for CGI compositing. Patrick Ledda, VFX supervisor on the film explains that the VFX team then had to figure out where to blend the live action and digital animation (Desowitz).

Most of Ursula's body ended up being digital with just the hands and face fully live action. Chris George Scott was one of the dancers who animated Ursula's tentacles. The UK based dancer, actor and choreographer also manipulated different Flounder puppets during rehearsals including one that was hinged so that its movements could imitate

swimming. According to Javier Bardem, who played King Triton, different puppets and puppeteers represented Sebastian the crab while Daveed Digs spoke the character's lines. Depending on how the shot was framed, "they would put different Sebastians on my shoulder. Sometimes it would be just two eyes and I go like, 'Oh my God!'" (Jirak). Craig Stein and Arina Li are listed as puppeteers in the credits though their work is only visible in dance sequences and in Li's cameo as a flower vendor.

When songwriter Howard Ashman joined the team developing Disney's animated *Little Mermaid* in 1987, he suggested changing an English Butler crab character named Clarence into a Jamaican character named Sebastian. Alan Menken's musical score then provided a Caribbean soundscape, shifting the setting of the film to the tropics. Caribbean rhythms flavor the award-winning music of the animated film, and the three-fold division of society matches the three-fold division of colonial societies in the Caribbean. Like the European colonists, the humans who live on the surface are at the top of the hierarchy. Half human and half fish, the Mer people are analogs of the mulatto class that occupied an intermediary position. The sea creatures that serve and entertain their superiors are like the enslaved

Blacks who languished on the bottom of colonial society. The 2023 live-action remake was actually shot in Sardinia, but the costumes and multi-racial cast with Black women playing lead roles as Princess Ariel and the island's queen bring more visual signs of Black Atlantic culture into the foreground. The colonial history of the West Indies remains submerged, however.

While Spain, Britain, and France had the strongest presence in the Caribbean, at various times the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and Denmark all established colonies in the islands. From the 1660s to 1803, Danish ships trafficked an estimated 110,000 Africans from the "Gold Coast" in present day Ghana to St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, now the U.S. Virgin Islands. Though Denmark was the first European nation to pass legislation abolishing the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in 1792, Danish participation amounted to 2% of the entire traffic. Hans Christian Anderson first published *The Little Mermaid* in 1837, more than ten years before Denmark ruled that slavery be entirely phased out beginning in 1848. Sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton, and indigo cultivated under oppressive conditions in the Virgin Islands continued to enrich Danish citizens until the United States purchased the islands in 1917 for \$25 million in gold coin.

In the song, "Under the Sea," Sebastian the crab alludes to the colonial history of the Caribbean, singing, "Up on the shore they work all day/ Out in the sun they slave away." Yet the next line, "While we're devoting full time to floating," perpetuates the stereotype of the subalterns as lazy, happy-go-lucky types who wouldn't do a lick of work if they were not constrained by their betters. Sebastian further reminds Ariel that the fish are all happy under the sea. This line, sung in an approximation of West Indian patois, reiterates plantation propaganda that Blacks were happy in their appointed place. Sebastian continues by saying the fish on land are in the bowl—they are captives—and those in the bowl are lucky: "One day when the boss get hungry/ Guess who goin' be on the plate?"

The original inhabitants of the Caribbean were often defamed as cannibals, but when Halle Bailey, who plays Ariel in the live action film, remarks upon the Delft blue tiles depicting fish on the hook in Prince Eric's castle, the historical record of the real cannibals who profited from the slavery and genocide practiced under European colonial regimes peeks through. In the animated version, Ariel is like a mixed-race Creole girl seeking to become "placee" (established as the mistress of a wealthy white man). She wants to be all human (white) and she wants to

Melissa McCarthy in *The Little Mermaid* (2023). Directed by Rob Marshall. Credit: Walt Disney Pictures / Alamy Stock Images.



marry the human prince even though humans are fish eaters. She is willing to give up her family and her voice in order to realize this goal. How does casting a woman descended from enslaved Africans as the protagonist of this story modulate the subaltern's desire to be "Part of that World?"

Though Colonial authorities suppressed African-style figurative objects throughout the Americas, Africans enslaved in the Caribbean had more latitude to preserve their traditional drum rhythms than those in the United States. Thus, dance steps that would have animated African mask characters were passed down through generations of carnival masqueraders as embodied knowledge. Alvin Ailey drew from deep wells of African-derived dance steps for inspiration and re-articulated this movement vocabulary in iconic works like "Revelations." Significantly, his choreography is remembered for use of fans, banners and umbrellas—objects that were integral parts of African object performance spectacles.

Appropriately it is the knowledge embodied in the Ailey corpus that surfaced when Rob Marshall sought to re-stage "Under the Sea" with a Black mermaid. Taking a leaf from Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, which used dancers from the Ballet Russe as models for the animators, Marshall brought sixteen Alvin Ailey dancers to London and had choreographers Joey Pizzi and Tara Nicole Hughes set the movement on them. First, they held auditions for sea creatures, selecting feather stars, ribbon eels, and sea turtles for the dance. Hughes notes that "when they're swimming, feather stars look like showgirls, so that's what they became in 'Under the Sea,' dancing around Halle" (Sherwin). The crew then used multiple 360-degree cameras to capture every angle of the Ailey

## PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL #54 FALL/WINTER 2023

dancers' movements. This footage became the framework for the visual-effects artists to generate the sea creatures. At the height of the dance, fluorescent pink jellyfish surround Bailey. Ailey dancers manipulating umbrellas with ribbons attached to represent tentacles served as the template for this undersea second line. Their bodies are not in evidence, but the CGI characters that replace them are, in essence, masks.

Almost 60 years before Disney released the live action *Little Mermaid* starring Halle Bailey, a hotel owner in Saint Augustine, Florida poured hydrochloric acid in the pool to force the Black protestors staging a "wade-in" out of the water. President Lyndon Baines Johnson saw the damage such hateful acts were doing to American foreign policy and pushed to get the Civil Rights act of 1964 passed that summer. This legislation outlawed the segregation of public facilities like swimming pools, but across the country, public pools were drained and filled in rather than allow integrated swimming. Access to swimming places and swimming lessons remains limited for many African Americans and as a result, Black adolescents are more than three times as likely to drown as their white peers (Gay). Fortunately, Halle Bailey, born in 2000, did grow up with access to aquatic facilities. As a child, she would swim with her sisters and pretend to be a mermaid. Disney's live action *Little Mermaid* does not resolve the colonial subtext subsumed in the story, but when Halle Bailey sings "Part of Your World," her digitally rendered mermaid mask gives voice to the ancestors' longing for recognition as full human beings. The jellyfish second line is a fitting celebration of the lives that brought us to this shore.

### About the Author:

Paulette Richards is an artist, educator, public scholar, exhibition curator and author. Her most recent book, *Object Performance in the Black Atlantic: The United States* is available from Routledge.

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November 2-18, 2023

# LA MAMA

## PUPPET FESTIVAL

Puppetry has been an integral part of La MaMa's programming since 1962, throughout our history. La MaMa has presented many notable puppet artists. In 2004, we introduced the La MaMa Puppet Festival, a bi-annual festival showcasing new contemporary puppet theatre.

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Producing Director  
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Photo of Daydream Tutorial  
Photo by Nikita Sveshnikov



Photo by Richard Termine

Nov 2-5 | Ellen Stewart Theatre  
**Sounding The Resonant Path**  
Puppetry and Design by Tom Lee

*Sounding the Resonant Path*, is a performance installation that draws on the spiritual connection between the human world and the natural environment.



Photo by Richard Termine

Nov 3-5 | The Downstairs  
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Created by Maria Camia

*The Healing Shipment* is a spiritual/sci-fi gestalt puppet musical about an Extraterrestrial named Maricama from Aricama, the land of practice, play and healing.



Photo by Richard Termine

The Club  
**Jump Start**  
A showcase of works-in-progress

Nov 3-5, 2023  
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Written & Directed by Charlotte Lily Gaspar

Nov 9-11, 2023 - Shared Program  
Featuring works from Tristan Allen, Evolve Puppets (Tanya Khordoc & Barry Weil), and Marcella Murray



Photo by Richard Termine

Nov 7-8 | The Club  
**Puppet Slam**  
Curated by Jane Catherine Shaw

La MaMa Puppet Slam returns this year with new short works of genius! These condensed works of puppetry are original, compelling, brilliant, witty, tragic, funny, stunning, startling, ironic, exotic, political, lyrical, musical, and beautiful!



Photo by Linda van Edmond

Nov 9-12 | The Downstairs  
**Daydream Tutorial**  
Created by Maiko Kikuchi

Told through a mix of puppetry, mask performance, object manipulation, and projected animation. Ten whimsical vignettes invite you step into the imaginative nexus of a series of daydreams.



Photo by Étienne Boisvert

Nov 10-12 | Ellen Stewart Theatre  
**Tricycle**  
By Les Sages Fous

A dream-like adventure begins. *Tricycle* is a spectacle of metamorphosis and transformation using objects and puppetry. As visual theatre without words, the show was conceived of for theatres as well as nonconventional spaces.



Photo by Richard Termine

Nov 16-18 | Ellen Stewart Theatre  
**The Pact**  
Created by Aaron Haskell

The battle between good and evil has waged for centuries, threatening to engulf our world in darkness. Ancestral Mother, Aurora in earthly wolf form, has returned to rescue us from the clutches of despair. Aurora has crafted a divine pact and the ability to guide us towards a brighter future.



Image courtesy of Dan Hurlin

Nov 2-12, 2023 | La Galleria  
**Motel**  
By Dan Hurlin

A motel is a liminal space, situated inconclusively between a departure and an arrival. It is a temporary detention center of sorts, where the inhabitants hold up and wait with eager anticipation for the future, or a fearful dread of it.

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Photo by Liz Linder

La MaMa Kids, Nov 4-5, 2023  
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**Go Home Tiny Monster**  
By The Gottabees

*Go Home Tiny Monster* is a wildly creative theatrical ode to a community's generosity. The show, told entirely without words, features The Gottabees' signature mix of puppetry, live music, physical theater, and joyously absurd silliness.



Photo by André Chevrier

La MaMa Kids, Nov 11-12, 2023  
Community Arts Space  
**Wood**  
By Puzzle Theatre

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*The 10th La MaMa Puppet Festival, Fall 2023 has been made possible with public support by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and New York State Council on the Arts, and support from the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Jim Henson Foundation, the Québec Government Office in New York, Puppet Slam Network, the Mellon Foundation, and the Shubert Foundation. Additional support from Cheryl Henson is gratefully acknowledged.*



## REVIEW

# A TRIBUTE TO CROSSING BORDERS

## FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DES ARTS DE LA MARIONNETTE À SAGUENAY (FIAMS) QUEBEC, CANADA

by Frans Hakkemars

FIAMS sure knows how to celebrate puppetry, as is evident by their 17th biennial version of the festival. The 141 performances – both outdoor and indoors, eleven exhibitions, five cabaret evenings and nine professional meetings delighted more than 37,000 festival-goers from July 25 to 30 in Saguenay, Québec. Marked by the return of its international component following COVID restrictions, the Festival welcomed more than 175 artists, programmers and journalists from around twenty countries. In addition, the City of Saguenay hosted, for the first time in North America, the annual general meeting of the International Association of Puppet-Friendly Cities (AVIAMA). They recognized the Ukrainian city Chernihiv, just north of the capital Kiev, for the support they gave to the reopening of their puppetry theater in October 2022 to express the value of peace. For the occasion, around thirty elected officials and representatives from Spain, South Korea, France, the Czech Republic, Netherlands and Canada came to Saguenay.

I can't give an overview of the whole festival, as I have not attended all the activities. At FIAMS it's almost impossible to experience everything—there are just too many events, spread out over too great an area, and that is a good thing. There is also a limit to what my body and soul can digest.

When I go to a performance I want to be moved...by the story itself (preferably a new one), by the performance as a whole, and by how the different disciplines interact



*Arbre* by Théâtre Modus from Quebec, Canada. Photo by Sylvie-Ann Paré.

with each other. I want to forget the outside world. I want to be touched by the perspective of the objects, the scenery and by the way the objects and actors move, perform, sound or are silent. Especially at puppetry festivals, it is a bonus for me when I feel that the story can only be performed with objects/puppets.

Here are some of the performances I enjoyed:

*Arbre*: especially for children on the autism spectrum and kids up to three years old from Théâtre Modus from Quebec, Canada. They performed with five actors/puppeteers for nine children (along with their caretakers and some invited guests) without words, very sensitive, delicate, triggering the senses in a very mild way, touching. Children were really opening up.

*Hic Sunt Dracones*: from Theatre

*Continuo* from the Czech Republic, a combination of puppetry with four female dancers and magic tricks, in which heads, legs and arms are falling apart.

*Femme de Porto Pim*: from Italy's Teatro Gioco Vita directed by shadow master Fabrizio Montecchi with a lot of French text. I could not follow the whole story, but for me it was an intelligent play with shadows.

*A Comme Animal*: by Les projets Delombre from Québec, showed very surprising images with magic moments. A human-sized puppet and a smaller body with the same head coming out of his shoulders. It reminded me of Pulcinella's offspring, also growing out of his back.

*Strict Minimum*: Théâtre à Bout Portent from Québec. One actress performed, without words, the



One of the cabinets from *La Suite dans l'imaginaire*, a tribute to pataphysian artist Florent Veilleux in Pavillon Nikitoutagain. Photo by Sylvie-Ann Paré.

whole story of life using only her two hands: birth, growing up, facing life's challenges, the death of one character and the loneliness of the other, who disappears into a complete darkness on the empty stage.

*A Suitcase from Taipei*: a nice miniature that mixed artistic disciplines in a simple suitcase presenting a vision of daily life in about twenty minutes, while you think you have been there for more than an hour.

*Pinocchio*: A funny personal version performed with a block of wood and some carving tools, from the Slovenian Maribor Puppet Theatre.

There were some things that fell short for me on the parts of both the organizers and the performers. It would be wonderful if the planners could eliminate all the single-use plastics in the catering and elsewhere. A map of the venues (including the distances between them) would be welcome. The dates of the premieres of performances could be included in the brochure. Performers: So much fog! What do you have to hide?

Consider leaving your fog machines at home. Finally, the development of the French language is very important, but not at the expense of other forms of communication. I like languages and want to promote their development, yet we know from scientific research that only about 25% of communication is conveyed through words.

I liked the two exhibitions *Odditorio* by Troy Hourie, a performance art installation containing four fully-realized cabinets, one for music and the other for three characters of oddity dolls, and *La Fuite dans l'imaginaire*, a tribute to pataphysical artist Florent Veilleux in Pavillon Nikitoutagain. I saw how successful the new Marionnetarium creativity hub was for children who want to make their own puppets with professional puppet artists. And as a participant of the Puppetry Publications Online (PPO) UNIMA sub-commission with an overview of more than fifty puppetry magazines worldwide, I welcomed the launching of the most recent issue of the Canadian puppetry magazine *Marionnettes*. <https://www.unima.org/en/projects-and-achievements/publications-directory>.



Local Saguenay artist Mylene Le Boeuf created this AVIAMA-Award for the Ukrainian puppetry for the youth theatre in Chernihiv. Photo by Sylvie-Ann Paré.

If you want to financially support the activities of the Chernihiv Puppet Theatre for the Youth, please go to [www.paypal.com/paypalme/aviamarionnettes](http://www.paypal.com/paypalme/aviamarionnettes).

**"At FIAMS 2019, I remember the young, vibrant mayor addressed a group of puppetry VIPs. What struck me about her assessment of the local population in this out-of-the-way jewel of a city? "We know how to party!" This is not an event where puppeteers gather to see each other's work, but where the entire city is celebrating puppetry."**

— Andrew Periale

**"Our many guests who came from different countries testified to me of the exceptional welcome of the people of Saguenay. Several great artists who are recognized around the world have said that the FIAMS was, in their opinion, the most beautiful festival."**

— Dany Lefrançois,  
Co-Artistic Director

**"There is no doubt that citizens are definitely won over by the arts of puppetry. Their enthusiasm for the Marionnetarium and other FIAMS activities testifies to their sense of belonging to this medium, rooted in Saguenay like nowhere else in Canada."**

— Executive Director  
Julie Maltais

## SAJI ERINA'S *BEING TERAYAMA IS MY JOB* (*TERAYAMA. SHOKUGYŌ WA TERAYAMA SHŪJI DESU*)

by Mari Boyd

Saji Erina's new puppet and physical theater performance, *Being TERAYAMA is my Job* (2023), is part of a large-scale celebration, "Commemorating 40 Years of Terayama Shūji," a series of performances, films and other events held during 2023 in Japan.

Terayama (1935-1983) was a multi-talented and prolific counterculture artist of the 1960s. In search of a new theatrical style, Terayama, inspired by Antonin Artaud and his theater of cruelty, reappraised premodern Japanese performing arts in terms of eroticism, the grotesque, decadence and aestheticism. Saji's play takes the viewer through Terayama's visionary mind to experience what he called the "restoration of spectacles" (*misemono fukken*), which refers to the display of the socially marginalized.

Saji, lead puppeteer, actor and director of *Being TERAYAMA*, is also president of the international performance company Utervision founded in 2011. The name is a neologism combining "uterus" and "vision;" while uterus may suggest a feminist approach, it is used in a more general sense to indicate conception and gestation of creative ideas, performing objects, acting and dance.

Performed at the Cocokita Studio 1, Tokyo, *Being TERAYAMA is my Job* is a collage of three of Terayama's lesser known playlets, each one exposing a different facet



*Being TERAYAMA is my Job* by Saji Erina. Photo by Hirao Hideaki, Courtesy of Utervision Company.

of marginalization in urban life with an underlying tone of what he called "universal gravity" (*banyū inryoku*), i.e. "the gravitational force of solitude that attracts human beings toward one another." (*Banyū-inryoku*). For each act, Saji uses a particular kind of puppetry—hybrid, shadow, and bunraku-style to enhance the erotic, grotesque and transformative qualities of the original characters. The focus here will be on the first and last acts, which showcase puppetry the most.

In act 1, "Farewell, Movies" (*Saraba, eiga*), a half-naked, middle-aged transgender character, Man 1, has his underarms shaved by his

lover, Man 2, while in bed. Man 1 talks about friendship; his lover holds forth on films, alterity and his mother, effectively deflating the erotic moment that Man 1 had been preparing for. The meandering conversation encourages them to move around the space—playing a guitar, weightlifting and such.

Man 1 and 2 are hybrid puppets, equipped with torso, arms and head, and are dependent on the manipulators with whom they share legs. The layering of the two bodies brings out, in startling contrast, the deteriorated puppet parts that had been grafted on in hope of eternal femininity, while the young

puppeteers' partially revealed bodies ironically hint at how the characters may have appeared in the glory of youth. Movements like weightlifting display cheekily how Man 1's sagging breasts can be lifted momentarily. Saji's hybrids also have moving mouths and large padded cheeks. While the "erotic-grotesque" quality of these puppets is humorously engaging, the ineluctable sense of loneliness may move us to a better understanding of distanced relations experienced during the pandemic.

The last act, "Comet Ikeya" (*Kometto Ikeya*), discusses the interconnectivity of the world. The Blind Girl, dressed in the colors of the Japanese flag, seems to believe everything is directly connected like a ring. She appears to be a wise fool, who understands through touch, hears voices from different dimensions, reads Braille and holds onto new age beliefs.

Saji treasures her contemporary bunraku-style puppets as the centerpiece of her performing objects and uses this style for The Blind Girl character. The head is on a stick (*dogushi*) held from inside the puppet's back without any further internal mechanism. The head puppeteer manipulates this head stick and the right arm; the second puppeteer, the left arm and a tab on the back of the puppet's costume to move the hips; the third, moves the legs by grasping the ankles.

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Saji explains that the "empty" torso must be filled by unifying the energies of the three puppeteers. Head puppeteers imagine shifting half of their weight or center of gravity to the *tanden*, an acupuncture point two fingers below the navel, and from there focuses attention and energy on the puppet. The other puppeteers follow suit and, all three together, move the puppet as if they are one person. We have learned from research in Physiology that the human body, even in sleep, is always in oscillation as its various autonomous systems continue to operate. When persons communicate or work together, a natural synchronization of body rhythms occurs whether they are conscious of it or not (See Okazaki). In bunraku work, puppeteers are close together, devoted to moving

the puppet in particular ways, so that the natural synchronization of their rhythms bring a sense of ease to their manipulation.

Saji's tongue-in-cheek play title, *Being TERAYAMA is my Job*, was originally a comment on Terayama's self-posturing. Saji now feels she has become his surrogate tracking down his creative roots, excavating his little-known plays to collage a performance manifesting his key concepts of social marginalization and gravitational solitude. Terayama was a relentless advocate for the representation of the marginalized. With the turn of national discourse to diversity, he is one of the most deserving Japanese artists to remember and celebrate today.



*Being TERAYAMA is my Job* by Saji Erina. Photo by Hirao Hideaki, Courtesy of Utervision Company.

## MAKING THE INTANGIBLE TANGIBLE by Felice Amato



*The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo, 1884-1947: The Paladins of France in America.* by Jo Ann Cavallo  
New York: Anthem Press, 2023.  
328 pages. Hardback: \$110.00;  
eBook: \$27.99.

Through the in-depth case-study of a family's New York City puppet theater, Jo Ann Cavallo offers a meticulously researched and comprehensively crafted description of the Sicilian *pupi* tradition. The richness of the subject matter and the entwining story of Agrippino Manteo (one of the millions of Italians who left Italy between 1880 to 1914), demonstrates how the study of puppetry is inherently interdisciplinary. There is little written on the *pupi* and certainly not work on diasporic iterations. The book is singular; her relationship with the family allowed her access to the last generation with firsthand knowledge, as well as the annotated scripts and notebooks—which are at the center of this work. The book, which also

contains annotated plays and extant summaries (all translated by Cavallo), details the significance of the *pupi* to notions of identity during previous centuries. The Italian-American community, she argues, experienced the stories as part of a shared history as well. Highly literate in the tradition, many spectators were familiar with the entire cycle and bought season tickets. Cavallo notes that the full cycle that the Manteo family presented cannot be seen in performance today—anywhere. In addition to the theater's importance to the Italian American community, she also cites Bil Baird, John Bell, Lumen Coad, and others to illustrate the Manteo family's influence on North American puppeteers.

Throughout the book, Cavallo looks at ways that traditional puppet forms can become reduced and simplified—or considered to be so. Through Manteo's life, Cavallo details changes to the form (such as in the late 1800's), writing that "Agrippino's mentors and models, the vanguard of Catanese culture at the time, were pioneers precisely in breaking down the barriers between puppet theater and dramatic theater." Cavallo documents extensively Agrippino's idiosyncratic transformations of third-person prose into intricate scripts, describing their marks and marginalia. She challenges the tendency to view as "static" the forms of puppetry that engage with

what might be perceived as fixed text, noting that the "notebooks containing [Agrippino's] scripts reveal in painstaking detail the entire opera dei pupi repertory..., elaborate prose dialogues (*parrati longhi*) with occasional ottava rima stanzas taken directly from the original Renaissance poems rather than from Agrippino's primary source.... The scripts even include original verses that appear to have been composed by the puppeteer himself." This is important because if practitioners are thought to merely imitate and reproduce, the form can only be seen to contract and simplify. Cavallo uses her close examination of the texts and handwritten notes to reconcile changes across two generations.

She also corrects various statements of misapprehension, explaining how and why they might have emerged—and what insights the errors themselves might reveal.

In addition to a scholarly investigation of the literary form itself, this book preserves the tangible and intangible history of the Manteo family. Many of their puppets and scripts will be available at the Italian American Museum of New York beginning in 2023. With this book, Cavallo provides the intangible counterpart. Her interpretations fill in the gaps and illuminate processes, relationships, and performances and convey how culture evolves.

## A TREASURE TROVE OF ITALIAN PUPPETRY by Andrew Periale



*The Image of the Puppet in Italian Theatre, Literature and Film.* by Federico Pacchioni, New York;  
Palgrave Macmillan 2022.  
125 pages. Hardcover \$49.99;  
eBook \$39.99

Federico Pacchioni's new book is a terrific read that should appeal both to academics and anyone with a serious interest in puppetry or culture in general. Before considering the book's contribution to puppet scholarship, I'll respond to the writing by using the same criteria with which I would respond to a poem: meaning, emotion and music.

The "meaning," or content, is the easiest to see. In each of the 12 chapters, Pacchioni introduces us to one or more works by both well-known and more obscure artists, and this is a treasure trove of material for the reader to explore. Some of the films cited will be difficult or impossible to access, but others are readily available on YouTube or Netflix, for instance, including such short films as Terry Gilliam's *The Wholly Family*, and John Turturro's *Rehearsal for a Sicilian Tragedy*. As for emotion, the

passion for puppetry that these creators (including such iconic directors as Rossellini, Pasolini and Bertolucci) had for the puppet is a revelation. More than that, the Italian puppet has been central to Pacchioni from his earliest days. His father was a puppeteer (and academic) and as a child he would travel with his father to shows. He writes:

I remember the first day I returned to Italy after moving to the United States: I walked down the stairs to my father's study in the damp, cool basement and I began to rummage through the trunk that contained the remnants of a puppet theatre that had been sold. All that I found inside the trunk was a half-sculpted wooden head, and two pairs of hands, a pack of *canovacci* [plot outlines], and, at the bottom, collections of wrinkled *lazzi*, but

the familiar smell of paint and formaldehyde, the roughness of that simulated flesh, and the wink of that barely discernible face were enough to make me feel as if I were surrounded again by the warmth of the old puppet theater.

An evocative moment that, much like Proust's madeleine, set him on a journey through the manifestations of Italian culture that likewise share a deep connection with the puppet. Both the meaning and emotion are fortified with the musicality of Pacchioni's imagery: the damp, cool air of the basement, the smell of formaldehyde, the rough feel of the carved head and hands... even when the author gets down to the nitty-gritty of analysis, his command of language makes the

book a pleasure to read.

Though I found the connection of his subjects to the puppetry of Italy both revelatory and delightful, I was particularly moved by the chapter dedicated to Lina Wertmüller. In the post-war period just prior to her work in film making, she worked as a puppeteer with Maria Signorelli, which she remembered in a 1970 interview quoted by Pacchioni:

"Later, after the war, some of us began to work with puppets and to travel around Europe with our little theater... Children came to see us and their mothers were shocked. In Sardinia they threw tomatoes at us and the police chased us out of the villages. We caused scandals and it was always an adventure." [She] pointed out

that mothers were surprised because while they were expecting to see something like Cinderella, they instead found themselves in front of Picasso-like shows inspired by Kafka.

I found the scholarship rigorous and presented in a useful way. Each chapter is preceded by an abstract and keywords. The text is extensively footnoted and there is a fairly comprehensive index. As more of a puppeteer than a scholar, though, I was more interested in the message that was conveyed in various iterations by the directors and writers featured in the book, namely, that *puppetry matters*, not only to these creators but to the culture in general. I couldn't agree more.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF STAR WARS AS MATERIAL PERFORMANCE by John Bell



Colette Searls, *A Galaxy of Things: The Power of Puppets and Masks in Star Wars and Beyond*. New York: Routledge, 2023. 129 pages. Paperback and eBook \$39.16; hardback \$136.00.

Mainstream U.S. cultural criticism has long suffered from a lack of knowledge or interest in puppetry's history, methods, and aesthetics; a huge deficit which makes it impossible for most people to understand how film, television, digital media, and live performance (in theaters or public spaces) routinely use old and new methods of object performance to share important cultural, political and spiritual issues.

Colette Searls' *A Galaxy of Things* is revelatory and game-changing in this respect through its analysis of the epic film universe of *Star Wars*. Rather than avoiding the complications of understanding masks, puppets, suit characters, automata, stop-motion and digital animation central to this blockbuster series, Searls leaps into the complex fray of object performance methods used in the films with a deep understanding of how such techniques work, how they are related to each other, and how exactly such essential material performances produce meaning.

The global history of puppetry is deeply tied to the structure of epics (for example,

the Ramayana, *Journey to the West*, the Bible and the Zuni mythic calendar), and *Star Wars* is a contemporary extension of these traditions, equally dependent on material performance to achieve its grand-scale cultural weight. Searls, a puppeteer and puppet scholar, brings her deep understanding of puppets, masks and objects to bear in her look at the highly developed world of *Star Wars*; not only the original nine-part series of linked trilogies, but also the recent *Star Wars Stories* and live-action streaming series (*The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*), which have stretched out and developed themes, story lines and characters from the original films.

Searls' critical apparatus is based on three "material character powers": "distance, distillation, and duality," which she uses to analyze the nature of droids, robots, creatures, masked characters, digital figures, suit actors, actual puppets and, of course, human actors, as articulators of a mythic (and often spiritual) vision of human society's relation to the material world. Unlike older epics, which are

undeniably tied to religious concepts and rituals, *Star Wars* is coy about its spiritual connections, centering on the enigmatic "Force" as its mystical base.

Leaning on her strong sense of the full range of contemporary puppet theory (such as Basil Jones' sense of the importance of "micromovement", or Steve Tillis' sense of an "ontological paradox" involving the dual presence of puppeteer and puppet) Searls is able to analyze such central scenes as Luke's meetings with the puppet Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), comparing them to the more recent relationship of Baby Yoda (Grogu) and masked bounty hunter Din Djarin in *The Mandalorian* (2019). Both relationships are about how to be a (good) human in a world full of machines, robots, non-human creatures, malevolent political structures and violence, and Searls points out how both Yoda and Grogu are teachers who guide their human acolytes to more humane ways of existence.

Likewise, Searls enters into the

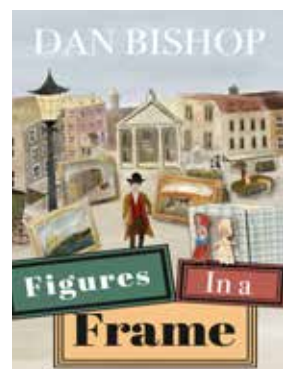
complicated nature and meaning of *Star Wars*' most compelling figure, Darth Vader, the masked character who, for Luke Skywalker, functions as the moral opposite of Yoda. Searls points out not only the critical function of the Vader mask, but also the importance of "mask revelation" (those moments when the human face under the mask is revealed) which brings out the human and non-human sides of such cyborg combinations of the *Star Wars* universe. This analysis deepens with Searls' attention to the later confrontation of morally conflicted Kylo Ren with the crushed and disfigured mask of Vader—his grandfather—in *Episode VII: The Force Awakens*, and the power the mask holds here, even though its wearer has long been dead.

The final chapter of Searls' study examines the "negative patterns" of *Star Wars*' material characters in terms of racial and class representation. Here again Searls' deft understanding of all the different methods of material performance in the epic allows her to consider the social, racial, and

gendered function of such characters. This includes the unfortunate (and hugely unpopular) introduction of the racist Jar Jar Binks CGI character in *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*; the clone soldiers based on the Black actor John Boyega's stormtrooper character; the introduction of L3-37 ("the first significant female robot") and how the masked character Boba Fett (in *The Book of Boba Fett*) reflects actor Temuera Morrison's Maori identity. Searls also explains the storyline development of the Tusken people of Tatooine in that series as "native victims of colonization."

Searls' approach to *Star Wars* as an epic based on the interactions of material and human characters is something that puppeteers may have long hoped for: a deeply intelligent study of popular culture that, rather than ignoring the actual function and importance of object performance, dives deep into its essence, explaining exactly how it works and what it means. It is the kind of work that every analyst of popular culture should read and learn from.

## AN EPIC TALE OF PUNCH AND JOAN by Alissa Mello



*Figures in a Frame* by Dan Bishop, Cornwall, UK: United Writers Publications, LTD, 2021. 423 pages. £12.95.

While reading Dan Bishop's epic historical fiction, *Figures in a Frame*, I had the ongoing and joyful feeling that I was somehow cheating. It has been a long time since I had the opportunity to read a book that was pleasurable and intersected with one of my research projects and here I was getting to do just that. This four-part epic tale of the imagined life of Eddy Adams, the protagonist, winds its way through thirty-nine years of a particularly fraught period of English and French history beginning in 1789. The novel focuses on the life of Adams's beginning with his miraculous rescue from the gallows at the

hand of an unknown saviour who appears at key moments throughout Adams's life to offer aid when it is most needed. The novel is set during a historical period in which there were: ongoing wars between England and France, social unrest in both countries, significant changes to social structures with an emerging and growing middle class offset by extreme housing and food insecurity for much of the population, and rapidly changing cultural contexts. Highwaymen and violent pressgangs were common particularly in England; in France the revolution raged. Alongside this grand historical frame, is a micro-frame

suggested by the title of the book and introduced from the very start in the history of Punch and Joan (Joan is the name by which Judy was first known in England) and its French cousin, Polichinelle. These puppets, initially the basis of a bond between Adams and a fellow prisoner, Henri Castillou, ultimately become the fulcrum around which Adams's life unfolds.

Bishop is no stranger to *Punch and Judy*. A veteran "Professor" (a Punch showman) with more than 40 years' experience performing Mr. Punch around the world, he is well versed in the history and practice of *Punch and*

*Judy*. He makes deft use of this history throughout the novel, peppering in key moments such as the early days of the booth-style show, the earliest evidence of which dates from 1785, through to legendary performances of Giovanni Piccini, the Punch showman whose performance was immortalized in the 1828 publication of *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy* with text by John Payne and illustrations by George Cruikshank. Bishop also weaves in suggestive details about the lives and performance conditions of itinerant performers, and the business side of trying to make a living while

performing on the streets of London in the early 19th century. For Adams, this now-iconic puppet duo become his reason for persevering through a volatile historic period as well as his lifelong and guiding passion. Throughout the novel, Bishop offers a well-researched page-turner filled with intrigue alongside social, political, and puppet history as cornerstone elements in a creative historiography that, like many a good adventure, culminates with a surprise *dénouement*. *Figures in a Frame* can be purchased online directly from the publisher at <https://www.unitedwriters.co.uk/store/figures-in-a-frame>.



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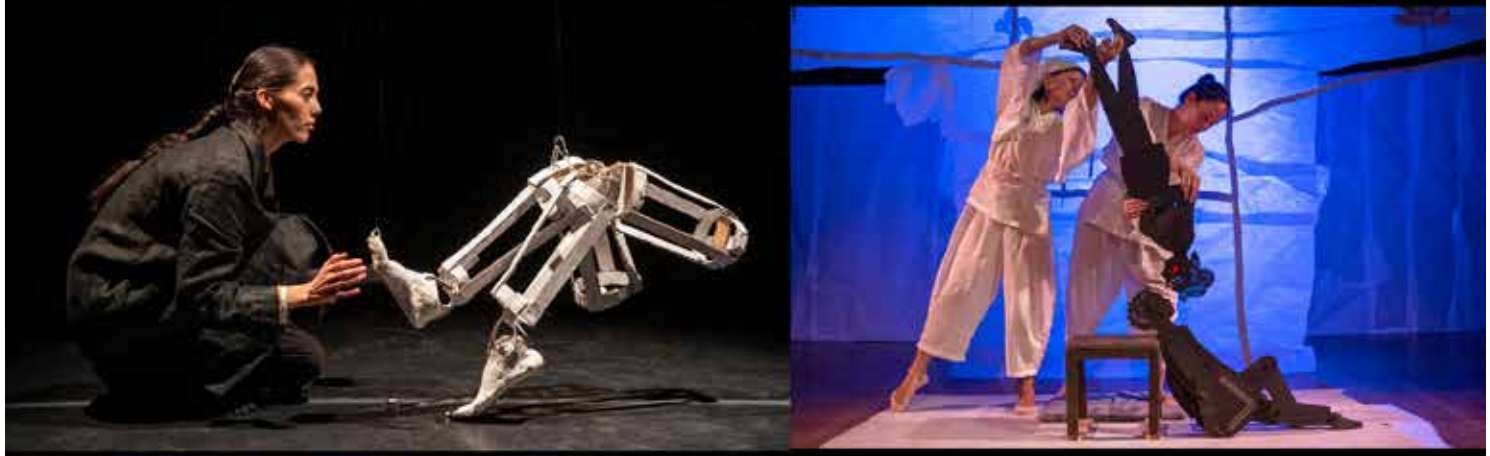
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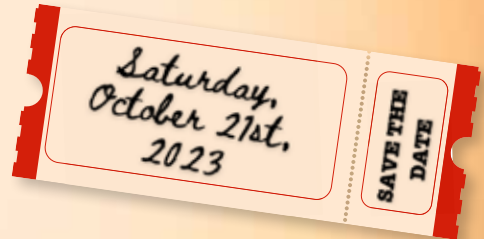
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