MASKS
OUTER IMAGE, INNER SPIRIT

January 26, 2001 through January 5, 2002
Center for Puppetry Arts
Masks: Outer Image, Inner Spirit

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Photo on cover: Dalem Mask, mid-20th century; Bali, Indonesia; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.409

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The eclectic array of masks here on display at the Center for Puppetry Arts reflects the vast array of styles and functions which masks represent in cultures throughout the world. And it is interesting to see and think about masks in the middle of such a rich center for puppetry, because although the two performance forms are distinctly different, they also share a wide range of similarities.

**Masks and the Global Revelation of Spirit**

Masks are man-made objects—sculptures really—which cover the face of a performer so that she or he may represent a character or spirit of heightened, larger-than-life presence. Both masks and puppets are performing objects—Frank Proschon’s phrase for “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated” in performance. But while puppets are built as independent units to be operated by puppeteers—the body of the puppet is separate from the body (or bodies) of its operators—masks only function when they are directly connected to the mask performer’s body, when they become one with the performer’s body. And it is this intense connection to the performer’s body, and the performer’s identity, which marks an intriguing difference from puppets.

Two major interests of western theater since the time of the Renaissance have been the creation of “realism” on stage, and the careful separation of theater away from the religious and ritual functions to which it had been tied since the origins of Greek drama (which was, of course, always performed with masks). These interests clearly led away from the use of masks, and toward a focus on the actor’s face as a major communicating device. In fact, many traditionally trained actors today will hesitate or refuse to use masks for fear that the mask will hide the face, and prevent the actor from using what he or she believes is the most expressive acting tool available. Of course, the idea that a mask would inhibit rather than enable communication is a measure of the degree to which realistic actor’s theater can misunderstand the function of masks. One would not suggest to a violinist that her instrument prevented her from achieving the full expression which her voice could deliver; the human voice and the violin are simply two different instruments of artistic communication. Masks and the human face are similarly two different ways to communicate in performance and, contrary to the fears of some theater-makers imbued with the traditions of realism, masks don’t prevent communication but instead reveal characters, images, stories and ideas on a different level of performance. As maskmaker Barbara Pollitt puts it, when the actor’s face is covered, “our attention as audience members becomes acutely focused on every movement of the body. Every emotion the actor experiences is magnified by the mask and his body in a way an unmasked actor cannot compete with.”

Certainly the masks in the Outer Image, Inner Spirit exhibit reveal these larger-than-life possibilities in an astounding variety of shapes, colors, and purposes.

A remarkable and quite wonderfully consistent aspect of both mask and puppet theater is that practically every single culture in the world has some mask or puppet tradition in its past or present; this is not something which can be said of the European tradition of realistic acting. In other words, mask and puppet theater links all the world in shared performance forms and the true study of mask theater, as this exhibit shows in a very modest way, necessarily leads one to a global perspective which considers and compares all of humankind’s various ways of re-presenting
the important things of life to the communities in which we live.

In addition to their world-wide ubiquity, another strong link between masks and puppets is their cryptic otherworldliness, the mysterious power they have as dead, material objects which somehow, paradoxically, embody life. The power of such “inner spirits” has made masks, puppets, and other performing objects central to religious and ritual performances around the world; this aspect of the power of mask theater is also something which realistic actor’s theater has a much harder time achieving. Masks not only entertain us with colorful stories about who we are, have been, and could be, but also quite often actually do things for a community: insure fertility, mark important passages of life, criticize or satirize the powers that be, and convince us that our way of life is justified and approved by higher authorities.

The Modern Rediscovery of Masks

The inter-cultural connections, larger-than-life performance possibilities, and ritual and spiritual connections which are central, or at least strongly connected, to the use of masks are also things which have made masks peripheral to, or even problematic, for the realistic images and stories that have seemed to dominate live drama, film, and television in the United States and Europe. But for over a century western artists who have bristled at the restrictions of realism have turned to masks as a means of capturing the possibility of working with larger ideas and images. At the end of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth, such theater artists as playwrights Oscar Wilde and Eugene O’Neill, director Edward Gordon Craig, designer Pablo Picasso, puppeteer Remo Bufano, dancer Mary Wigman, and countless Futurists, Expressionists, Constructivists, and Dadaists all turned to masks. In 1932, for example, O’Neill (often considered the most important American dramatist of the twentieth century) wrote that he considered mask performance “a chance for eloquent presentation, a new form of drama projected from a fresh insight into the inner forces motivating the actions and reactions of men and women [...], a drama of souls,” which was not possible through the “old—and more than a bit senile!—standby of realistic technique.”

O’Neill’s sense of “inner forces” was heavily influenced by the newly popular advances into psychology championed by Sigmund Freud, but in turning to masks O’Neill and other modern Americans and Europeans suddenly had much in common with mask traditions in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America which dealt with “inner forces” of a specifically pre-Freudian nature. This kind of early twentieth-century union of modernists and traditionalists through a common interest in mask performance is one of the most important aspects of performance in the past century.

Masks: Outer Image, Inner Spirit reflects the two major paths by which we have come to rediscover the power of masks in a modern world: travels by anthropologists, folklorists, and collectors in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe (like John Emigh, whose generosity with his mask collection has been central to the creation of this exhibition) who accumulate astounding examples of world mask traditions and bring them to their home countries for study and inspiration; and the inspired efforts of contemporary western artists (Peter Schumann and Julie Taymor, for example) who—often inspired by the traditional masks collected by others—create new building and performance techniques for contemporary mask performance. This exhibit also reflects the overlapping purposes for which masks are used: to make important things happen in particular communities, by means of ritual, and to re-present the
important things that happen in particular communities, by means of theater.

Before we begin to examine this exhibit more carefully, a word of caution: effective masks, like effective puppets, are only completed by movement, by the sequential presentation of different aspects of the mask sculpture in a way which shows us change of expression and attitude. This important aspect of mask performance is, of course, impossible to achieve in an exhibition, but the viewer might well get a sense of the movement possibilities of masks by perusing them from different angles, and imagining how the different expressions of one mask might work together in performance.

Ritual and Theater in Asian Mask Performance

The traditions of Asian performance present a rich variety of mask forms used both in rituals and theater. For example, the unusually striking basket-style Cassowary mask from the Maprik region of Papua New Guinea, from John Emigh's collection, is an interesting example of a ritual mask. This representation of a distant relative of the ostrich was used to ensure fertility during ceremonies in a community along the Sepik River as recently as in the 1970s.

Although stylistically quite different, the intense realism of the Japanese Noh mask in the exhibit has strong connections to the fantastic Papuan mask, because of the common roots both have in ritual. The Japanese mask has been identified as an example of the Mikazuki character type of Noh drama: a powerful spirit representing a wrathful warrior. While Noh theater maintains some of the ritual connections of its roots, it is also one of the oldest and most highly stylized forms of Japanese theater. In the twentieth century Noh presented itself to western eyes as an exquisite antithesis to the whole tradition of western drama, because of its focus on the creation of a particularly strong sentiment or feeling, rather than excitement through the twists and turns of a complex plot. Upon seeing a Noh performance in 1926, French symbolist playwright Paul Claudel marveled that "in western drama something happens, but in Noh drama someone happens." His statement marks the kind of sharp realization good mask performance has repeatedly provoked in western audiences: an understanding of what vast communicative powers the mask can embody.

Close connections between ritual and theater are also evident in mask traditions of Indonesia. The exhibition's Babi Huduq mask, representing a pig, was danced in East Kalimantan ceremonies for spring planting. According to John Emigh, Huduq masks "represent gods who have taken the shape of fantastic animals in order not to terrify the men and women that they grace with their presence." They are summoned for celebrations following the planting of rice fields, and "bring with them the spirits who will help make the rice grow." Serving a more specifically theatrical purpose are the masks of wayang wong, one of the many forms of traditional Indonesian theater which developed from the wayang kulit shadow puppet tradition. The mustachioed, red-faced, fang-toothed demon here is part of the wayang wong tradition from the island of Java, while the fantastic Jatayu bird mask and the refined Dalem mask (representing an elegant king) were used in similar performances on the island of Bali. On both islands such masks are used to retell episodes of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Hindu epics which constitute the core of Indonesian classic theater. The extent to which these stories permeate all levels of popular Indonesian culture can be seen by the mass-produced papier-mâché mask of Petruk, one of the irreverent and ribald clowns of wayang, who offers a comical contrast to the serious import of the epics.
Masked dance-drama has been a central element of Korean performance traditions as well, for example in the ritual performances begun in the seventeenth century in Songp'a region, now part of Seoul. The round, uniform shape of the wooden Korean masks on exhibit here is a reminder that earlier versions were made from oversized gourds. These Songp’a masks were originally used by farmers in dance-dramas performed in fields during agricultural festivals. Featuring such archetypal characters as “rich landlords, apostate Buddhist monks, lustful old men, and wayward women,” as John Emigh puts it, the often bawdy Songp’a performances were opportunities to make political protest and satirize authority figures, as well as to celebrate fertility and exorcise demons.

The Hindu epics at the core of Indonesian mask performance have also been central to the incredibly rich variety of popular mask traditions in various regions of India, as evidenced by the wide range of masks from different regions representing Hanuman, the monkey king. In this exhibition there are also four representatives of the Sahi Jatra processional theater of Puri, in the state of Orissa. The spring Sahi Jatra performances are associated with the death of Ravana (the demon king of the Ramayana) and in the processions characters from the Ramayana wearing huge masks with head decorations and gorgeous costumes present episodes from that epic on the streets in front of Puri temples. The Sahi Jatra masks on exhibit here include an elaborate mask of Shiva, the Hindu god representing the forces of destruction and cosmic dissolution; Hanuman; and Narasimha, a half-man, half-lion avatar of the god Vishnu.

In northeastern India, masked characters representing Hindu gods are part of the Chhau traditions of dance drama in Purulia and Seraikella which take place as part of rituals performed during the Chaitra Parva spring festivals. The Chhau dances are based on stories taken from the Mahabharata as well as more recent lyrical and metaphysical themes; the Chhau masks in this exhibition represent such characters as Mahisasura, a Buffalo Demon conquered by the god Durga; and Hansa, a swan.

In Sri Lanka, an island off the southeast coast of India, mask traditions also share ritual and theatrical functions. Indigenous exorcism rituals gave rise to a form of pure entertainment called Kolam, which features such masked characters as a toothy yellow lion decorated with a rich mane of raffia, and a colorful cobra-headed and winged mask, which in fact still retains some of its power as an exorcism object. And in Nepal, on India’s northern border, ancient shaman practices, animism, and Tantric Buddhism combine in such rituals as the Tsham ceremony, which, according to Emigh, celebrates the arrival in that region of the Buddhist monk Padmasambhava in the ninth century AD. The amazing wooden Tsham mask from Emigh’s collection, adorned with deer antlers, was used by lamas from Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayas in ceremonial dramas which, according to Emigh, feature “horrific masks of Yama [the king of hell] and his deathly cohorts, ferocious Bodhisattvas with the power of conquering or containing the forces of death and disease, and comic old monks.”

**African Mask Traditions**

Mask traditions of Africa were documented over 5,000 years ago by rock paintings in Algeria and masks still constitute one of the most characteristic aspects of African culture, serving in a variety of different capacities in particular African communities. They are used in performance to mark life-cycle and agricultural rituals; to offer protection from evil; to validate political authority; to teach social values; and, of course, to
entertain. A realization of the richness of African masks marked an important moment in Euro-American art, as sculptors like Picasso incorporated African design ideas into their own sculpture and mask designs.

Although this exhibit includes only a few African masks, their striking intensity and complexity, as well as the important social functions they serve, give some idea of the richness of African mask cultures. The horned Okpolumpi mask from the Tribal Art Museum in Portland, Maine, represents an aggressive spirit which, according to curator Oscar Mokeme, "comes invited or uninvited to festivals and funeral ceremonies to enforce good moral behavior." It is important to note how the Okpolumpi spirit, combining human facial features with a pair of large horns, exists not simply to celebrate and entertain, but to symbolically police the moral life of the community of which it is part. In this sense, it shares an unusual commonality with the other horned devils and demons in this exhibition from Asian, European, and Latin American cultures. Similarly, an Igbo Onuku mask on display here also plays an important admonitory role in village life—especially in the age of AIDS—and appears at funeral ceremonies and in market places to warn, as Oscar Mokeme writes, "that one must be careful not to perform foolish sexual acts or you and your life might be disfigured." Performing a different kind of function is the Udi mask from northern Angola. Made of fiber, the mask represents a spirit who protects the forest and appears in initiation and funeral ceremonies. African mask traditions were a part of African culture which was not allowed to thrive in the diaspora culture of the United States during the era of slavery, but they mark an important element of African heritage worth our study and contemplation today.

**European Mask Traditions: Carnival and Commedia dell'Arte**

The ritual performance functions of masks in Asia and Africa are mirrored to a surprising degree in European ritual performances during Carnival. Now part of the Catholic calendar year, as the days preceding Lent, Carnival's roots go back to pagan seasonal rites connected to such occasions as the Festival of Dionysus in Athens (which in fact gave birth to the masked theater of Greek drama). Carnival traditions have persisted through the advent of Christianity to the present, flourishing not only in Europe itself, but, in combination with other non-Christian rituals, in the Americas as well.

Particularly vivid Carnival mask traditions persist in small towns such as Kriens, in Switzerland, where John Emigh collected a lindenwood, paint, and cloth mask of a Washerwoman carved by maskmaker Robert Bucher in the 1990s. Such characters take part in raucous, outdoor Carnival (or Fasnacht) parades through the middle of town. Similarly, in the Black Forest region of Germany, the Fratz and Langnase (Longnose) characters from the town of Elzach are part of a vigorous carnival tradition (there called Fasnet) which annually performs highly specific masked characters, music, and activities for "raucous and rough fun in a medieval mode," as Emigh puts it, "batting bystanders on the head with pigs' bladders and grabbing men and women in the lecherous embrace of a leering devil."

The mask performances of Carnival are remarkable because every spring they depend on non-professionals to turn from their normal occupations and identities to become old women, devils, lecherous fools, or other outlandish characters in centuries-old disguise rituals. In southern Italy such rituals going back at least to the fourth century B.C. gave rise to the characters of Roman comedy and then, centuries later, to the first European professional theater of the
Renaissance, the *commedia dell'arte*. The *commedia dell'arte* was a theater form based on the interplay of archetypal masked and unmasked characters performed by a company of actors—men and women—who improvised their plays along the lines of pre-written scenarios to which they added set speeches and bits of independent physical comedy called *lazzi*. *Commedia* scenarios were based on the interplay of three categories of characters: older (and often lecherous, miserly, and foolish) men; innocent young lovers; and clownish, wily servants who functioned as go-betweens for the higher-class characters. In this exhibit the tradition is represented by masks of one of the old man characters, Pantalone and three famous servants, or *zanni*: Arlecchino, Brighella and Coviello. (Traditional *commedia* masks are crafted of leather, like the examples here by Piero Sumi; those by Peruvian maskmaker Gustavo Boada are constructed of sawdust and glue.) Pantalone is "the top of the pecking order," as *commedia* scholar Paul Rudlin puts it, who "controls all the finance available," and vainly attempts to be obeyed by his employees (the servants) and his children (who are among the lovers). Pantalone has a long, hooked nose and a pointed beard, walks stooped forward to protect his purse and privates, and speaks, as Rudlin puts it, in "a high-pitched chicken squawk." The servant Brighella is "astute, ready (for anything), humorous, quick-witted," and "capable of intrigue," and he guides the action of a *commedia* plot by inventing and implementing intrigues. Traditionally dressed in green and white, he has a characteristic walk in which his torso bends from side to side, but his head stays vertical. Arlecchino, whose English name is Harlequin, is perhaps the most famous of the *commedia* characters. Usually Pantalone’s servant, Arlecchino has the spirit of a cat or monkey, moves like these animals, is unusually acrobatic, and is mysteriously connected to some kind of magic—a clue is the wart on his forehead, a physical deformity which, as for masked characters throughout the world, makes him something of a shaman. Coviello is a large-nosed *zanni* similar to Arlecchino, but with some of the character of the braggart soldier called Capitano. Originating from Naples, Coviello "favors all that is grotesque, obscene, and mischievous," according to Rudlin. *Commedia dell’arte* not only invigorated the Italian theater of the Renaissance but, thanks to the peripatetic wanderings of numerous *commedia* troupes, influenced the development of theater across the entire European continent, from Spain to Russia, and from England to Eastern Europe. *Commedia* troupes often performed with puppets as well as masks, and in fact the *zanni* character Pulcinello is the progenitor of the English handpuppet Punch. The persistence of *commedia* traditions into the twentieth century, much like the persistence of Carnival masked performance, inspired whole new definitions of modern mask performance as avant-garde theater.

**Mixing Mask Cultures in Latin America**

Mask traditions of Latin America reflect the confluence of three strong cultures: those of Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans. Mask techniques of all three cultures have continued to survive, and even thrive, throughout the centuries since Europeans arrived in the New World, as independent traditions or mutually influenced hybrid performance forms. The European Carnival tradition flourishes on this side of the Atlantic, for example in the Puerto Rican city of Ponce, where, as in Germany, masked revelers roam the streets threatening passersby with inflated pig bladders. But in Ponce the performers appear as *vejigantes* (the name is derived from *vejiga*, the Spanish word for the
inflated pig bladder wielded by these characters): multi-horned masked demons with multi-colored winged costumes. *Vejigante* designs in particular reflect the mixture of European, African, and indigenous cultures central to Caribbean culture. The papier-mache *vejigante* characters by Louis Quintero, Alberto Gonzalez Negron, and Leonardo Pagán (from the collection of Bob Croghan) represent some of the strongest and most elaborate folk traditions of Puerto Rico, paralleled by Latin American and Caribbean carnival traditions from Peru to Mexico, and from Honduras to Cuba and New Orleans.

Maskmaker Gustavo Boada worked in the 1980s and 90s with the Peruvian theater group Yuyachkani, which emerged from university theater training in the 1970s to make experimental political theater (with unmasked actors) for popular audiences, both in the working-class areas of Lima and in small rural villages. In 1973, the group performed in a mining town in the Andes where indigenous performance traditions were still strong. After the Yuyachkani performance, according to director Miguel Rubio, “while we were speaking with the miners, one worker said to us ‘compañeros, your work is very beautiful; too bad that you forgot your masks.’” The realization that masks were a vital means of theatrical communication in Andean culture inspired Yuyachkani from that point on to employ masks and other aspects of traditional culture in their work, which began to incorporate more dance and music and became visually stunning.

The influence of traditional Andean mask performance is evident in Boada’s versions of carnival masks in the exhibition. Boada’s *Diabito* (Little Devil) mask from the northern Peru town of Cajabamba represents Luzbel, an angel who, according to Catholic beliefs, was expelled from heaven. The mask’s benign, mustachioed pink face seems at odds with the devilish horns growing out of his forehead, but Boada writes that “indigenous beliefs in the relativity of good and evil justify this juxtaposition of such antagonistic archetypical elements.” The *Diabito* character traditionally wears silk pants and a shawl, both finely embroidered and decorated with sequins, as well as a cape decorated with a picture of the Virgin Mary, and dances in the streets of Cajabamba during Carnival time holding a sword in his left hand. The indigenous *Shapish* mask from Xauxa, a red-faced devil with a feathered headdress, represents a Conquistador and, according to Boada dates back to the time of actual battles between Xauxa Indians and Spanish invaders. Now, *Shapish* characters appear in summer solstice thanksgiving celebrations carrying bows, arrows, and clubs as they dance in Xauxa streets. The neutral expression of the *Shapish* mask, Boada says, “contrasts with its energetic and war-like dance movements and creates an impression of mystery about its meaning.” The *Son de los Diablos* mask—a red, horned devil figure decorated with ribbons and a tinkling bell—is an interesting combination of Andean and African culture. Used in a variety of yearly street festivals in poor Lima neighborhoods, the *Son de los Diablos* character, according to Boada, represents an African god “Gan-Ga” and his performance is characterized by complicated acrobatic dances and improvised jokes with spectators. The increased urbanization of Peru has drawn many Peruvians away from their rural villages to such cities as Lima and one might imagine that as a consequence traditional mask performance was waning. But in fact, according to Boada, Peruvians bring their mask traditions with them to the cities, combining them with different musical and visual inspirations to create new versions of old mask performances.
This mixture of ancient masked characters and contemporary issues also marks the amazingly rich mask traditions of Mexico. The exhibition's pink-faced, bearded and mustachioed wooden mask with a moveable jaw could, like the Peruvian Shapish character, very well be an indigenous representation of a Spanish character. The male and female Hortelano farmer characters from Uruapan, in the Mexican state of Michoacan, are made from dried gourds similar to Korean traditions and similar to Korean mask festivals the Hortelano couple are used in annual fertility festivals in which the masked characters dance in street processions. According to John Emigh, who collected the masks in 1997, “while desires for fertility and good farming are at the heart of the festivities, satiric allusions to Mexican politics are frequently included, as indicated by the initials for various Mexican political parties crossed out on the male character’s hat.” A Viejito (Old Man) mask, also from Uruapan, has pre-Columbian origins and is now used in festivities marking Christmas and the New Year. Viejito masks, according to Emigh, represent ancestors of the Michoacan people and perform vigorous dances at the beginning of Pastorela plays celebrating the Nativity.

The large, horn-covered Diablo mask from the mountain town of Teloloapan, in Guerrero, is used in festive competitions on Mexico’s Independence Day as the young men performing the masked devils vie with each other in such skills as snapping a bullwhip and, behind the anonymity of the mask, present flowers to the women to whom they are attracted. Simply wearing the giant masks is a feat in itself because some of them weigh over sixty pounds. Emigh explains some of the fascinatingly complex imagery of such masks, writing that “the mask presented here draws upon Biblical imagery for the rough beast of the Apocalypse (with ten horns and seven heads, including the wearer’s), while featuring pre-Conquest imagery of the jaguar and deploying the Mexican national colors.”

North American Rediscoveries

The dizzying array of forms and functions which traditional mask performance around the world encompasses was, as I mentioned above, denied the makers of mainstream realistic theater in the European tradition. But at the turn of the last century theater artists, seeking alternatives to realism and to the limits of theater as “pure” entertainment, took great interest in the possibilities of mask performance. One such artist was Remo Bufano, one of the best-known American puppeteers during the puppet revival of the 1920s and 30s. Bufano was part of the Little Theater Movement, a nationwide American effort in the early decades of the century, to create new theater forms “dedicated to theater art, not business,” as historian John Gassner put it. Bufano worked with the Provincetown Playhouse which Eugene O’Neill had helped found and was inspired to use a variety of different puppet and mask forms in performances ranging from intimate marionette shows to giant Broadway spectacles. Bufano’s papier-mâché masks in the Center for Puppetry Arts collection include a pair of wide-eyed, brown-skinned women masks made at Bufano’s studio on Waverly Place in Greenwich Village. It’s not clear if these were used in performances or produced as decorative pieces (one of them is labeled with a price tag from the Bonwit Teller department store) but they definitely show Bufano’s interest in creating exotic African or Asian characters. Bufano’s sense of caricature is strongly present in a broad-featured mask which looks like a portrait of film star Edward G. Robinson. This character mask, clearly meant for performance, captures the characteristic wide lips and cool stare
which Robinson used to great effect for the archetypal gangsters he created for numerous movies. A somewhat different kind of caricature is present in Bufano's mask of Adolph Hitler, also clearly meant to be performed. Bufano’s Hitler mask echoes the function of political satire which is a consistent theme of world mask performance and also, perhaps, some of the unusual power of masks. It is as if the power to make a mask image of a villain—a devil—such as Hitler also implies a certain strength over the real-life character: the power to satirize also seems to suggest the power to actually vanquish such foes and this would have been a subtly important aspect of such a mask in the era of the Second World War.

The use of masks in avant-garde theater continued off and on throughout the twentieth century but achieved a particular power through Peter Schumann’s creation of the Bread and Puppet Theater in New York during the early 1960s. Schumann was influenced both by the innovations of avant-garde modernist performance and a sense of the strength of popular mask and puppet traditions. Part of Schumann’s intent with Bread and Puppet was to make theater which not only commented on American politics of the time—and particularly the ongoing Vietnam War—but tried to affect it by providing strong visual images for the numerous street demonstrations and rallies which sought to end the war. Schumann’s masks of Vietnamese ladies and skeletons, and his giant puppets representing politicians, soldiers, and airplanes, in a way attempted to effect the kind of symbolic power that processional mask performance has enacted in other cultures around the world for the purposes of crop fertility, Carnival, or political satire. The masked Garbageman and Washerwoman couple on display in this exhibit are part of large choruses of such characters which are used to perform everyday working chores in Bread and Puppet plays and parades. The simple cardboard “Teeth” masks mark a different kind of mask than we’ve seen so far: the blank, featureless flat surface does seem to efface the performer’s character, substituting the sign of an impersonal organizational power (“Teeth”) for any individual traits. Peter Schumann’s design of the Teeth masks marks a striking contrast to the rich characterizations he achieves with his Garbagemen and Washerwomen masks, but the minimalist simplicity of their form—a white, rounded contour, marked with two eye holes and the word “Teeth” where a mouth should be—is more than balanced by the ominous power they have as a group chorus in performance.

Julie Taymor’s experience as a modern theater maker is similar to that of Peter Schumann in that she has been influenced by the currents of avant-garde innovation as well as an intense exposure to traditional puppet and mask theaters—particularly those of Java and Bali, where Taymor lived and worked for four years. Taymor’s masks and puppets for the Broadway spectacle The Lion King (in addition to echoing Remo Bufano’s Broadway success six decades earlier) also reflect the power and aesthetics of African masks. Taymor’s use of masks in The Lion King is particularly interesting because she often places the masks—such as those of Scar and Mufasa in this exhibition—on top of the performers’ heads rather than in front of their faces. The resulting double sense of identity—the presentation of performer and character at the same time—becomes an important part of the imagery of the show, especially as it thus underlines the presence of African-American performers as the active agents in the production. For Taymor, the Broadway production of The Lion King “is all about race” because the presence of black performers presenting the story is so unusual on a Broadway stage. “In American mainstream theater,” Taymor
has said, "a black king is nowhere to be found." The Lion King, Taymor says, specifically addresses this lack.

Puppeteer and director Janie Geiser (who developed her puppet work in the 1980s while a curator at the Center for Puppetry Arts) is another theater artist who regularly employs masks in her productions. The five masks of Anubis (the jackal-headed Egyptian god who protected the City of the Dead) which she made for a production of Mac Wellman's 1995 Off-Broadway play *Infrared* mark the degree to which western drama at the end of the twentieth century can easily incorporate the power and possibilities of mask performance. Wellman, recognized as one of the United States's foremost abstract playwrights, creates characters and situations which exist in a kind of floating world of images and shifting levels of reality. For example, "Cathy X, a young woman with a shocking dual identity and Cathy X's shadow, a spooky temporal disturbance with a mind of its own" in *Infrared*. It is an interesting marker of contemporary theater that Wellman's expansive playwriting style allows Geiser to contribute what she terms an "Egyptian layer" of symbology to complement Wellman's text: masks quite directly connected to ancient Egyptian—i.e., African-design aesthetics.

A similar approach to the evocative spirituality of masks is evident in Sandy Spieler's work with In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre which Spieler founded in 1982 in Minneapolis. Spieler, like Julie Taymor, briefly worked with and was inspired by Bread and Puppet Theater and has nurtured a similar sense of the social and cultural role puppets and masks can play as part of a community. Spieler and her colleagues have presented an annual outdoor May Day pageant and parade with puppets and masks in a Minneapolis park since 1975, as well as indoor spectacles like *Dusk to Dawn*, a 1984 show for which she made the group of Night Beast masks in this exhibition. These masked characters, according to Spieler, were inspired by prehistoric cave paintings and accompanied the show's hero, a Man in Red, on his "mythological journey through the night and through his own death" in a production "performed as a wordless dance."

Spieler's "Origins of Corn Shrine" from the 1987 show *Table, Table* combines a life-size mask with a kind of anthropomorphic puppet stage in a show about the contemporary plight of midwestern farmers. "We built a series of animated Corn Shrines," Spieler writes, "which framed small parts of the puppeteers' bodies (mouth, eyes, hands, tongue). [...] The Origin Shrine presented a single kernel of corn from its tongue to the man and woman who were formed in its hands." Spieler's mask, clearly inspired by Central American design aesthetics, also echoes the function of Central American masks in traditional agricultural rituals.

Barbara Pollitt's masks for *Jelly's Last Jam* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* mark her design work with director George C. Wolfe, the head of New York City's Public Theater and the New York Shakespeare Festival. For an 1990 production of Bertolt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Pollitt made half-masks reminiscent of *commedia dell'arte* traditions which, like *commedia* masks, allow the actors full use of their speaking voices. In the 1920s and 30s Brecht himself was an proponent of using masks as an avant-garde technique and it is interesting that in this production of his play (which is based on a Chinese folk tale) Asian, European, and African traditions meet through the medium of masks. Similarly, Pollitt's creations for Wolfe's Broadway musical *Jelly's Last Jam* make use of the mythic power of masks to evoke the roots of the African diaspora. Wolfe's musical traces the life of jazz
innovator Jelly Roll Morton and especially that composer’s troubled connection to his African heritage. Pollitt’s ancestor masks for the show reflect the persistence of African mask aesthetics and the strength of African mask performance as the hidden patrimony of African-American experience.

Masks have been important elements of avant-garde, political, experimental, and popular theater over the past hundred years but they also infuse the most popular forms of mainstream culture. Although many people have an almost unconscious sense that performance today is dominated by the faces of actors, masks are in fact ubiquitous elements of popular culture, from Disney World to sporting events and such mass-media forms as television. Paul Zaloom, a puppeteer and performance artist who began his career with Bread and Puppet Theater, starred in the children’s science television show Beakman’s World in the 1990s, and regularly employed puppets and objects in the larger-than-life experiments he performed on camera. The theatrical world of Beakman’s World was clearly mask-friendly and an over-life-size photograph mask of Zaloom’s head was a natural addition to this performance world. Similarly, when Atlanta decided to produce the 1996 Olympic Games, they followed the custom of other Olympics, as well as professional baseball, football, and basketball teams by trying to embody the spirit of the sports event in a masked character who came to be known as Izzy. The somewhat goofy, cartoon-like character of Izzy plays up its connections to Disney-style children’s entertainment, but underneath the perpetual jollity of Izzy’s expression is a connection to deeper and larger ideas—the ideal of the Olympics as a world-wide, unifying ritual—which has much in common with much older styles of mask performance.

The continuing strength and popularity of masks, like that of puppets, seems to persist in spite of the overwhelming success of technological innovations such as film, television, and computer images. What might this mean for the performing arts of the new century? Maskmaker Gustavo Boada sees great possibilities for contemporary mask performance, saying that “in the history of theater the great moments of theatrical renaissance are initiated with a return to the mask. Theater began in Greece with masks and returned, after the medieval period, with the masks of commedia dell’arte and then also in the 1970s, with puppets, masks, and African and Asian theater influences. Every time the theater is drowned, it has always recovered this object; [...] the mask is the origin of the theater.”

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Exhibition List

**ASIA**

**Cassowary Mask**, c. 1974; Maprik region, Sepik District, Papua-New Guinea; Collection of John Emigh

**Mikazuki (?), Noh Mask**; Japan; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin Collection, AS.410

**Nojang (Old Priest) Mask**, 1996; Workshop of Chin Chung Sup; Songp'a, Seoul, South Korea; Collection of John Emigh

**Somu (Young Shaman-dancer) Mask**, 1996; Workshop of Chin Chung Sup

**Yangju, Kyonggi District, South Korea; Collection of John Emigh**

**Babi (Pig) Huduq Mask**, c. 1974; Ruma Hakam, East Kalimantan, Indonesia; Collection of John Emigh

**Jatayu (Garuda) Mask**, c. 1974; Ida Bagus Geria; Mas, Bali, Indonesia; Collection of John Emigh

**Klana, Wayang Wong Mask**, mid-20th century; Indonesia; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.383

**Petruk, children's mask**, mid-20th century; Java, Indonesia; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.387

**Jauk Mask (with Dance Helmet)**, 1998; Batuan, Bali, Indonesia; Collection of John Emigh

**Dalem Mask**, mid-20th century; Bali, Indonesia; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.409

**Kolam Mask**, 20th century; Sri Lanka; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.418

**Kolam Mask (Lion)**, 20th century; Sri Lanka; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.426

**Shiva Mask**, 1932; Gift of Sadashiv Rath Sharma, 1982; Puri, Orissa, India, Madhab and Gauri Mahapatra of Bhubaneswar, Orissa; Collection of John Emigh

**Mahisasura (Buffalo Demon) Mask**, c. 1978; Purulia District, West Bengal, India; Collection of John Emigh

**Hanuman**, mid-20th century; Orissa, South India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.408

**Hansa (Swan) Mask**, c. 1978; Seraikella, Singbhum region, Bihar, India; Shilpakushal Kumar Mahapatra; Collection of John Emigh

**Character from Ramayana**, mid-20th century; Orissa, South India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.424

**Narasimha: man/lion avatar of Vishnu; the fourth avatar of Vishnu**, mid-20th century; Orissa, South India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.425

**Tiger Mask**, mid-20th century; Orissa, India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.391

**Hanuman, from the Ram Lila tradition**, mid-20th century; Orissa, India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.385

**Mustached green character**, mid-20th century; India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.392

**Mustached pink-faced character**, mid-20th century; India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.393

**Hanuman**, mid-20th century; India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.429
ASIA
Animal Mask (Jambuvan?), mid-20th century; Northern India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.430
Hanuman, mid-20th century; India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.427
Half-black, half-white Demon Mask, mid-20th century; India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.407
Mahisasura (Buffalo Demon, conquered by Durga), mid-20th century; India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.382
Demon, with large fangs (Taraka?), mid-20th century; India; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, AS.428
Stag Mask, mid-20th Century; Nepal; Collection of John Emigh

AFRICA
Tortoise Shell Mask; Collection of Robert Croghan
Senufo Mask; Cote d'Ivoire, Africa; Collection of Robert Croghan
Okpoleumpi (Spirit Mask); Collection of the Museum of African Tribal Art
Onye Nzuzu (The Fool); Collection of the Museum of African Tribal Art
Initiation Mask; Angola; Collection of the Museum of African Tribal Art

EUROPE
Washerwoman Mask, c. 1990; Kriens, Lucerne District, Switzerland; Robert Bucher; Collection of John Emigh
Fratz Mask, c. 1990; Elzach, Baden-Württemberg, Germany; Franz Lang; Collection of John Emigh
Langnase (Longnose) Mask, c. 1995; Elzach, Baden-Württemberg, Germany; Franz Lang; Collection of John Emigh
Pantalone, Commedia Mask, c.1990; Brooklyn, New York, United States; Gustavo Boada; Collection of Gustavo Boada
Arlecchino, Commedia Mask, c.1990; Brooklyn, New York, United States; Gustavo Boada; Collection of Gustavo Boada
Brighella, Commedia Mask, c.1990; Brooklyn, New York, United States; Collection of Gustavo Boada
Coviello, Commedia Mask, 20th century; Collection of Robert Croghan

LATIN AMERICA
Blue Patina Mask, mid-20th century; Mexico; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, NA.201
Brown Patina Mask, 1934; Mexico; G. Cueto; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, NA.226
Male character, with moveable jaw, 20th century; Mexico; Center for Puppetry Arts, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin collection, NA.227
Comic Hortelano (Farmer) Mask, Early 1990's, collected 1997; Barrio Magdalena, Uruapan, Michoacán, Mexico; Marcelino Baez Lopez; Collection of John Emigh
Male Comic Hortelano Mask, early 1990's, collected 1997; Barrio Magdalena, Uruapan, Michoacán, Mexico; Marcelino Baez Lopez; Collection of John Emigh
Diablo (Devil) Mask, 1992; Teloloapan, Guerrero, Mexico; Daniel Soriel Roldán Aguilar; Collection of John Emigh
Viejito (Old One) Mask, c.1993; Uruapan, Michoacán, Mexico; Victoriano Salgado Morales; Collection of John Emigh
Bull Mask, late 20th century; Antigua region, Guatemala, VSP; Collection of Robert Croghan
LATIN AMERICA

Red Devil, late 20th century; Ciudad Viejo, Guatemala; Collection of Robert Croghan

Spaniard, 20th century; Guatemala (Western Highlands region); Collection of Robert Croghan

Son de los Diablos de Lima, c.1990; Brooklyn, New York, United States; Gustavo Boada; Collection of Gustavo Boada

Diablitow de Cajabamba, c.1990; Brooklyn, New York, United States; Gustavo Boada; Collection of Gustavo Boada

Shapish (Devil) de Xauxa, c.1990; Brooklyn, New York, United States; Gustavo Boada; Collection of Gustavo Boada

Spiral Horn, Vejigante Mask, 20th century; Puerto Rico; Luis Quintero; Collection of Robert Croghan

Janus, Vejigante Mask, 20th century; Puerto Rico; Alberto Gonzalez Negron; Collection of Robert Croghan

Old Mask, Vejigante Mask, 20th century; Puerto Rico; Leonardo Pagan; Collection of Robert Croghan

UNITED STATES

Exotic Lady, early 20th century; United States; Remo Bufano; Center for Puppetry Arts, Shirley Kleinman collection, NA.300

Exotic Lady, early 20th century; United States; Remo Bufano; Center for Puppetry Arts, Shirley Kleinman collection, NA.322

Edward G. Robinson (?), early 20th century; United States; Remo Bufano; Center for Puppetry Arts, Shirley Kleinman collection, NA.295

Hitler, early 20th century; United States; Remo Bufano; Center for Puppetry Arts, Shirley Kleinman collection, NA.314

Mufasa from The Lion King, 1997; United States; Julie Taymor; Collection of Julie Taymor

Scar from The Lion King, 1997; United States; Julie Taymor; Collection of Julie Taymor

Anubis Head from Infrared by Mac Wellman; United States; Janie Geiser; Collection of Janie Geiser

Garbageman, 20th century; United States; Peter Schumann; Bread and Puppet Theater; Collection of Bread and Puppet Theater

Washerwoman, 20th century; United States; Peter Schumann; Bread and Puppet Theater; Collection of Bread and Puppet Theater

Teeth Masks, 20th century; United States; Peter Schumann; Bread and Puppet Theater; Collection of Bread and Puppet Theater

System Works, c.1990; United States; Peter Schumann; Bread and Puppet Theater; Collection of Bread and Puppet Theater

Ancestor Masks from Jelly's Last Jam, 1992; United States; Barbara Polliitt; Collection of Barbara Polliitt

Caucasian Chalk Circle by Bertold Brecht; adapted by Thulani Davis, 1990; United States; Barbara Polliitt; Collection of Barbara Polliitt

The Origins of Corn Shrine, 1987; United States; Sandra Spieler; Collection of Sandy Spieler

Black Deer with White Stripes, 1984; United States; Sandra Spieler; Collection of Sandra Spieler

Paul Zaloom Mask, 1999-2000; United States; Paul Zaloom; Collection of Paul Zaloom
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