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Cover photo: Chinese hand puppets from the Center’s collection. Photo by M.C. Pindar.
THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

PUPPETRY: ECHOES OF SOCIETY

CENTER FOR PUPPETRY ARTS
The Center for Puppetry Arts Museum has been presenting quality exhibitions of puppetry since its inception in 1978. Exhibits have ranged in subject matter from puppetry in a particular culture, such as “Celebration of African Puppetry,” to the puppetry of a particular artist or company, “The Art of the Muppets,” to the analysis of a particular type or style of puppetry, such as “Masks: Power and Magic.” With each new exhibit the Museum continues to grow and set new goals, while our audiences continue to learn more about a fascinating art form.

Puppetry is an exciting art to study. In viewing a puppet performance, audiences become fascinated with the mystery and magic the object is capable of and touched by the symbolism inherent in the performance. Puppetry is a special art which knows no bounds. The puppet is not limited as flesh and blood actors, who are restricted by their bodies. A puppet can reach beyond the possibilities of the “real world” because of its creative construction. When brought to life, the puppet can offer an exciting world of art and entertainment; rich in myths, rituals and cultural heritage. The Museum strives to present this world of performance within its artistic, historical and cultural perspectives, and this exhibit of the Center’s permanent collection, “Puppetry: Echoes of Society,” is no exception.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generosity of our donors who have so graciously helped build our collection over the years. When Nancy Lohman Staub donated the initial 150 objects in 1978, we hoped that the Center’s collection would become one of the best in the country. Since that time, a number of people have helped us toward our goal of presenting and maintaining a global collection of puppetry and puppetry related materials. I would like to acknowledge them at this time: Merna Alpert; William S. Arnett; Angela Belfort; Pak Boediardjo; Grace Braun; Jesus Calzada; Mrs. Donald Cordry; Mr. and Mrs. James B. Cumming; Taseddin Diker; Armia Escobar Duarte; Mollie Falkenstein; Janie Geiser; Don and Ruth Gilpin; Melvyn Helstien; Henson Productions; Mrs. Edith Hills; Edith Huff; Hsiao Hsi Yuan Puppet Troupe; Henri V. Jova; Allelu Kurten; Caroline Lutz Collection, Westhampton College, University of Richmond; Jero Magon; Alfredo Medina; Puppetmongers-Powell; Bruce D. Schwartz; Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Solomon; and Mr. and Mrs. Nils E. Wennerholm. Nancy Lohman Staub continues to be a valuable contributor and supporter.

Each exhibition and its accompanying publication is produced at the Center by our dedicated Museum staff. Thanks go out to Becky Fielding and Kerry McCarthy for their able assistance. Finally, this project would not have been possible without the support of the National Endowment for the Arts Museum Program. Their assistance ensures our ability to continue presenting puppetry exhibits for the public.

— Vincent Anthony, Executive Director —
As we increasingly become a truly global village it becomes more and more important to access and understand our multi-cultural world. One way to do that is to examine the art and artifacts of our societies. Because most cultures utilize puppetry in some form or another, it affords a unique insight into societies across the globe. For thousands of years and in most cultures, puppetry – the theater of manipulated objects – has been a vehicle used to convey the thoughts, feelings and ideals of both amateur and professional puppetry artists. By examining the form and function of the puppets used by these performers, we come to realize that puppetry is, in fact, a reflection of our societies and ourselves.

The diversity of roles puppetry plays in the lives of people across the globe ranges from the early shamanistic uses of puppetry by the Chinese, to its appearance at circumcisions in Java, to its transmittal of eighteenth century tales of love and duty in Japan, to the youth society performances of Mali’s Bamana people, to the satirical Punch and Judy of England, to its use by animal behaviorists with baby condors in California.

To understand the depths and complexities of this art form we must dissect its varying purposes and appearances in societies around the world. We examine puppetry in light of three primary functions: 1) Roots in Ritual -- puppetry’s appearance in societal rituals and ceremonies which express the beliefs, values and principles of a community; 2) Heritage, History and Modern Myths -- puppetry’s function as communicator of a society’s myths, stories and folklore; and 3) Mirth, Mockery and Amusement -- puppetry’s role as a satirical commentator on social and political structures as well as its role as entertainer, clown and comedian.

Most American audiences perceive puppetry as either an entertainment for children or a trivial art form. While most adults will
admit to a fascination that intrigued them as children they maintain that the magic of puppetry is no longer suitable for grown-ups, or maybe puppetry isn’t really “art.” The deceptive simplicity of puppetry may be shed to reveal it as the most complex of the art media. The combination of visually appealing sculptural objects or puppets, narrative, music, and the choreography of puppet manipulation, is, in fact, a combination of the elements found in the plastic arts, literature, music, traditional actor-based theater, and dance. The complexities of this union elevate the puppet theater to a level of sophistication that has fascinated artists for centuries. Western artists who understood the importance of the puppet theater include Marc Chagall, Wassily Kandinsky, George Bernard Shaw, George Sand, Josef Hadyn, Garcia Lorca and Manuel de Falá.

But puppetry is not owned by the West alone. In fact, its very roots lie in Asia where early documentation may be found in the Mahabharata, a Hindu epic dating to the tenth century B.C. Comparatively, puppetry in the United States is a relatively young art. Although early Native American traditions existed, our conception of what puppetry is today didn’t arrive until the 1920’s with Tony Sarg. And perhaps it wasn’t until the age of television that we readily embraced puppetry with characters like Howdy Doody, Kukla and Ollie, and the Muppets. Puppetry presents a magical world for children and more importantly it offers adults an opportunity to explore and test the boundaries they’ve set when they define the word “art.” Ranging from Bread and Puppet Theater’s annual “Our Domestic Resurrection Circus” performance which speaks about our political environment to Janie Geiser’s eerie commentaries on nuclear war, these puppetry performances look beyond intrinsic entertainment value. They speak about contemporary adult issues in a language rich with meaning and haunting images.

The world of puppetry mirrors the world in which we live. In speech riddled with symbolism, puppetry comments on the very issues that bind a community together — shared values, beliefs and traditions. So, when looking at puppetry as a means to understand others, we must also utilize this tool to understand ourselves. Yes, we can learn something about Turkish culture by examining the Karagöz shadow puppet plays but we can also look at contemporary American puppet plays and see a bit of ourselves amongst the masks, puppets and performance objects.

The puppet stage is a microcosm reflective of the world in which we live. Puppets are created to mirror, satirize and elevate our lives, our aesthetic sensibilities, our celebrations and rituals, our myths and stories, and our senses of humor. By examining the many facets of our lives in which puppets participate, we discover that puppetry is as diverse, rich and complex as the world in which we live. The puppet play becomes an eloquent and symbolic echo of a much more grand drama, the drama of the human condition.

— Kerry McCarthy, Museum Director —
Before Westerners settled in North America, Native American cultures had been practicing the art of puppetry for some time. Since no written histories exist of the Native American use of puppetry, per se, no one knows for certain how ancient an art it is. But Bernal Diaz, the scribe for Hernando Cortes’ expedition through Mexico in 1524, noted that the Mexican natives understood the magic and manipulation of puppets. Paul McPharlin theorizes that because Diaz did not describe a performance, the puppets were probably holy objects which would not have been shown to a European. These Pre-Colombian articulated figures were authenticated by the Smithsonian Institution and are presumed to have been used in ritualistic ceremonies by the Hausteca peoples.
It is theorized that puppetry simultaneously developed in India and China. Indian merchants and missionaries spread the art to Southeast Asian countries such as Burma, Thailand and Malaysia while the Chinese took the art to Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The oldest tradition of Indian puppetry is found in Rajasthan where legend attributes the birth of the first puppet to Brahma, creator of the world. This association of puppetry with a deity suggests the important role the art played in this culture. The puppet theater itself becomes a metaphor for the human relationship to the gods in that the puppets are manipulated and animated by an unseen force, the puppeteer and creator.

In India, puppetry appears at fairs, in religious celebrations and at rites of passage. The plays combine magic, healing power, and religious beliefs of the people and are performed to celebrate the Hindu epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. Even though the puppet theater is much more secular today (puppets now are used to teach population control and oral rehydration) the puppet theater wouldn't continue without paying proper respect to the past traditions and rituals.
Shadow puppetry in Thailand may date back to the seventh century but the earliest documentation is found in Palatine law, c.1462. The Thai plays are based on a regional version of the Ramayana known as Ramakien. Although these plays appear at rites of passage they are primarily performed for entertainment. Two styles of shadow puppetry developed in Thailand: the nang talung, a folk tradition; and nang yai, a large style of puppetry performed for the courts. The nang talung puppets are smaller scale shadow puppets which usually have one articulated arm and are more popular. They are similar to the Javanese wayang kulit in form, manipulation and musical accompaniment. The nang yai are large non-articulated shadow puppets.
Three primary types of puppetry can be found in Java, the largest of the Indonesian islands: wayang golek, three-dimensional wooden rod puppets; wayang klithik, flat wooden puppets; and wayang kulit, flat leather shadow puppets. Wayang performances generally occur outdoors in the evening at important life cycle events such as circumcisions, weddings, or funerals. The plays last up to eight hours in length and generally act out stories from the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. Other cycles of stories also exist such as the wayang cepak which uses wooden rod puppets draped in Javanese court dresses to tell the adventures of Amir Hamzah, the uncle of Mohammed.

Today the wayang performances are more secular in nature but many of the ritualistic features of this ancient art still remain. The appearance of the wayang at rites of passage, the use of ancient language within the performance and the offerings of food and holy water prepared for the spirits all indicate the art's roots in ritual.
Javanese performances follow a typical pattern. A noble hero sets off on a journey to solve a problem for the royal court. He encounters coarse and scabrous characters he must defeat. Inevitably this leads to a war which the righteous hero wins because of his humility and sense of duty. These stories occur in epic time. But when the clowns or punakawan enter the stage at midnight (most performances begin around 9:00PM), they speak to the audience in the present time, and their jokes include contemporary jabs at local politicians. The chief clown is Semar, a servant to the righteous forces and a deity, and he is accompanied by his sons which include Gareng. Gareng's vocabulary is mono-syllabic, and his thoughts are very limited.
Puppetry performances occur twice annually in the Segu Region of Mali, and are presented by the youth associations, men aged 14-40. The shows generally last up to five hours in length. The performances are marked by rivalry in which the young men compete to see who the strongest puppeteers are and whose performance is the best. This community theater is primarily entertaining in nature, yet a ritualistic element is suggested because it is custom to perform the puppets prior to the harvest and planting seasons. The mask tradition performed by elder men, however, is considered much more serious and important.

This particular character, the antelope, is an important bush animal which is frequently represented in both farming and fishing communities. This animal head appears out of the top of a costumed armature in which the puppeteer is completely hidden. The small figures attached to the antelope's head are articulated through the movement of the head itself.
These puppets are called maani or little people. Both probably represent the conventional character of the beautiful woman. This character's role changes with each new generation. She can represent the ideals of motherhood, or she can be a wanton woman. Innovation of character depiction, carving, and manipulation, equally tempered with tradition, have kept this vibrant performance art alive in the Segu region.
Head of figure; Republic of the Congo; Hand held puppet; c.1981; Gift of Allelu Kurten and Nancy Lohman Staub.

This female head, evident by the coiffure represented, appeared in a dance called *kyebe-kyebe*. The heads emerge from a conic costume made of raffia grasses while the puppeteer remains completely hidden within the costume. These dances, accompanied by song, are used to honor the snake god and creator, Djö.
Similar to the bunraku style of puppetry found at Osaka, this form of rod puppetry from Awaji utilizes three puppeteers for each figure. The dress of this particular puppet indicates it is probably “Osome” from Chikamatsu Hanji’s tale Shinpan Utazaimon, “The Love Story of Osome and Hisamatsu,” written in 1780. This play deals with a popular theme, the struggle between love and duty. In this particular tale Hisamatsu is torn between his duty - marrying the girl he was promised to, the daughter of the man who adopted him upon the death of his own Samurai father - and joining himself with his true love, Osome, who has rejected the proposal of a wealthy merchant.
The earliest Chinese legend about puppetry dates to the tenth century B.C. and the court of Mu Wang, the Chu Emperor. Yan Shih was the puppeteer sentenced to death by the Emperor, a man made irate when the puppets winked suggestively at the women in his court. The puppeteer quickly revealed the interior mechanics of the puppets. Upon realizing that these moving characters were animated objects, the Emperor spared his life.

The stories told by the puppets in China are taken from the same sources which are depicted by live actors and storytellers. Popular plays sprang forth from Chinese historical tales, romance stories, legends of outlaw heroes and the supernatural.
Antonio Allessi was originally from Italy and lived in the nineteenth century. He carved this puppet in 1870, and it was subsequently purchased by puppeteer Otakar Dubsky's (1880-1951) family. Puppetry in Czechoslovakia has a rich heritage which continues today in the work of such companies as Drak.

**DR. FAUSTUS, DEVIL AND EVIL BIRD**

Carved by Fritz Herbert Bross; Germany; Hand Puppets; c.1950; Gift of Nancy Lohman Staub.

Bross was a puppet builder who lived in Cannstatt, and it was he who pushed Albrecht Roser of Stuttgart, a master of the marionette, into the puppetry arts. Bross emphasized the importance of exaggerating expression to reveal the character while making the expression flexible. He wanted people to interpret different expressions from the physiognomy of the puppets. This is evident in the puppets he carved for "Faust," a sixteenth century puppet play which inspired Goethe to write his classic "Faust."
Tony Sarg is generally given credit for vitalizing the art of puppetry in the United States. His productions toured the country gaining him great popularity. He also illustrated children's books and created the first Macy's Day Parade balloons. Many puppeteers worked with the Sarg company including Bil Baird, famous for his early work in television and film, and Margo and Rufus Rose who later performed on "The Howdy Doody Show."

Sarg's production of Alice in Wonderland toured from 1930-1933 and appeared at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933 with Rip Van Winkle and The Rose and Ring. The puppets were modeled after the original Tenniel drawings which accompanied Lewis Carroll's book. Actress Elsie Dvorak portrayed Alice and manipulated the Alice marionette. This was one of the first times audiences had seen this trick of scale transformation, and they were captivated.
Queen Elizabeth I

Made and performed by Bruce D. Schwartz;
United States; Rod Puppet; c.1972; Gift of the artist.

Bruce D. Schwartz is world renowned for his puppetry. He is a Fellow of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation and the recipient of three Citations of Excellence from UNIMA-USA. Schwartz's work has influenced a whole generation of puppeteers working on the adult level including Janie Geiser, herself a recipient of several UNIMA-USA Citations, who credits Schwartz as an inspiration for bringing her sculptural work into the realm of puppetry. Schwartz made Queen Elizabeth I when he was sixteen. It was the first rod puppet he ever made, and it appeared in the Renaissance Pleasure Fair as an improvisational act.
The Bound Man is an adaptation of the short story by German writer Ilse Aichinger. In this tale a man awakens one morning to discover his arms and legs have been loosely bound after a robbery. The Bound Man discovers he can move within the confines of his rope. He joins the circus and amazes audiences with his simple feats. He discovers a unique sense of freedom within the limits of the bonds. This presentation offered Ludwig a chance to work in a different style. His works for adult audiences include Cirque Pataphysique, a look at Alfred Jarry and his science of "pataphysics" where anything can happen, and Heaven Hell Tour. These pieces are known for their utilization of found objects and their humorous sensibilities.
Ann and David Powell, a brother and sister team based in Toronto, have been presenting puppetry performances since 1974. *The Brick Brothers Circus* presents a humorous miniature circus of well trained bricks led by two ring masters dressed in hard hats and overalls. The bricks are transported to the playing area in a wheelbarrow. This wheelbarrow is then transformed into a stage. The bricks, attired in bright costumes, perform death-defying tricks including diving off a high dive into a paper cup filled with water and walking the high wire. This witty show transforms weighty found objects into magnificent puppet characters capable of almost anything.

**CLOWN**

Harry Burnett, together with Foreman Brown and Richard Brandon, made up The Yale Puppeteers, a troupe founded in 1923 and named after the university which prompted their start. Foreman Brown wrote the music; Harry Burnett built the puppets; and Richard Brandon was the manager. After touring for a number of years, they opened The Turnabout Theater in Los Angeles which operated from 1941-1960. Puppet shows were presented at one end of the theater and at intermission the chairs would swivel and a presentation of actor-based theater would appear on a second stage. The theater was very popular and was visited by some of Hollywood’s most elite. Their careers were later memorialized in two books by Foreman Brown.
Jim Henson (1937-1990) created over 2,000 characters in his career which began in 1954 with the television program “Sam and Friends.” In 1969 “Sesame Street” debuted, and the Muppets began teaching generations of children how to read and count. Jim Henson himself manipulated Link Hogthrob as well as Kermit-the-Frog, Ernie and other Muppet characters. Link and Dr. Strangepork appeared with First Mate Piggy as crew members on the Swine Trek in “Pigs in Space” episodes of “The Muppet Show.” Henson’s films include The Muppet Movie, The Dark Crystal, and Labyrinth, a fascinating fantasy which combined live actors with realistic puppets. These films, along with “The Jim Henson Hour” and “Dinosaurs” television shows, take electronically controlled puppets to a new level. Henson took the pioneering television work of Burr Tillstrom and Bil Baird one step further and one step closer to the hearts of generations of audiences throughout the world. The Muppets have embedded themselves into the American psyche and have made an immense stylistic impact on the work of American puppeteers.
Since the seventeenth century Punch and Judy puppet shows have been entertaining audiences around the globe. This satirical tradition, which can be traced to Italy's commedia dell'arte and its character Pulcinella, has been adopted and domesticated by various countries. Pulcinella's cousins include Germany's Kasperl, England's Punch, Russia's Petrouchka, Turkey's Karagöz, Egypt's Aragouz, and France's Polichinelle. Polichinelle was France's favorite anti-hero until the arrival of Guignol who surpassed him in popularity. But Punch and Judy shows remain favorites throughout the world because of Punch's irascible and clever nature. Not only could he escape punishment by policemen and judges, but Punch was able to trick and hang the devil himself.
KARAGÖZ

Made and performed by Taceeddin Diker; Turkey; Shadow Puppet; c.1960; Gift of Nancy Lohman Staub.

Legend attributes the birth of Turkish shadow theater to Bursa, the first capital of the Ottoman Empire, in the fourteenth century. Accordingly Hacivat, a mason, and Karagöz, a blacksmith, were constructing a mosque for the Sultan. Their jokes kept all of the workers laughing and thus delayed the completion of the mosque. The Sultan, who had also enjoyed their jests, became furious and had them executed. Because everyone missed the two comics, the Sultan called upon his spiritual advisor, a Persian dervish, and asked him to bring Hacivat and Karagöz back to life. That night he set up a white screen lit with lanterns and recreated the spirits of Hacivat and Karagöz. The pranks of the two friends were reborn in shadows.

The Karagöz tradition is still alive but it has been declining since 1900 for three reasons: political intolerance of Karagöz’s biting commentary; changing social structures; and the arrival of television and film. Taceeddin Diker teaches this shadow puppetry in Istanbul today, and one of his primary aims is to excite the younger generations about this humorous tradition.

MARIA BONITA & LAMPIAO

Made and performed by Joao Santos; Brazil; Hand Puppets; c.1988; Gift of Armia Escobar Duarte.

The mamulengo tradition of puppetry is a folk style found in Brazil in the Recife vicinity. The roots of this puppetry style are found in a diversity of cultures. Mamulengo puppetry fuses the folk traditions of native populations and black culture, as well as drawing from colonial Hispanic and Portuguese influences. This lively, often bawdy, street theater is performed by itinerant puppeteers with little or no education. These particular characters appeared in entertaining plays for adult audiences that dealt with social and economic inequalities.
This standing female is wearing a pith helmet and was probably used in a geledé masquerade. The pith helmet combined with the striped female torso suggests it was used satirically, a common context for puppets in a geledé spectacle. These performances began appearing in the eighteenth century according to tradition, and they have continued to appear at times of affliction, celebrations, funerals and with the first rainfall. These performances pay tribute to women, who are believed to have powers as great as the gods. Women are both benevolent and ruinous, and they are acknowledged and honored as mothers and gods.


Basgöz, İlhan. Karagöz: The Turkish Shadow Play Theatre. Indiana University, Turkish Studies, n.d.


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