Who Said That!??!

the art of the contemporary american ventriloquist

an exhibition at the center for puppetry arts

by todd stockman
What do we call these little “beings” that seemingly burst forth with life at the knee of a skilled ventriloquist performer? Some people find the D word (Dummy!) too abrasive for these all-too-alive little creatures. The term ventriloquial figure or vent figure is the most widely used term among the professionals in the field. But whatever we call them, they are, in fact, a form of puppet.

The Center for Puppetry Arts decided to concentrate on the contemporary American ventriloquist in a retrospection of the 20th century. I feel compelled to acknowledge two of the most extensive collections of ventriloquial that are open to the public. The wonderful Vent Haven Museum in Covington, Kentucky, is a private collection incorporated in 1961 as a living trust for the revered collector W.S. Berger (1878-1972) who collected all things ventriloquial with a vengeance. The property of Berger’s old home and the small buildings that stand there serve as a memorial to him, and house a wonderful and diverse collection of several hundred vent figures and thousands of rare items of memorabilia. They sometimes sponsor a Ventriloquist’s ConVENTion, and they curated an exhibition of some of the collection’s treasured items at the Contemporary Arts Center of Cincinnati in 1976. The official catalog brochure of the Vent Haven Museum, Selections from the Permanent Collection, has become a valuable collectors item.

Valentine Vox, esteemed author of I Can See Your Lips Moving (Plato Publishing, North Hollywood, 1993) maintains an expansive collection of ventriloquism items within the Movie and Magic Memorabilia Museum, currently housed in O’Shea’s Casino in Las Vegas. Vox’s remarkable collection has a decidedly international, largely European, emphasis. Vox and his assistant Jeff White have recently formed the International Ventriloquist Association to help perpetuate their ventures. Their devotion to the art of ventriloquism is evident in the museum and the enthusiastic activities headquartered there. In 1997, they began hosting an annual Las Vegas Ventriloquist’s Convention.

Here at the Center for Puppetry Arts, we have mounted the largest independent exhibition of ventriloquial in the world. WHO SAID THAT!?! THE ART OF THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN VENTRILOQUIST brings together the generous cooperation of individual performing artists, craftsmen, collectors and institutions to present a study of the role of the American ventriloquist in the entertainment landscape of the 20th Century. In this regard, it is groundbreaking. We hope that its success will encourage the propagation of similar exhibitions in the coming years, and aid in generating renewed enthusiasm for this intimate and rare performing art form.

The title WHO SAID THAT!?! is intended to refer not only to the anonymous voice created from the ventriloquist’s still lips, but also to the fact that without their human counterparts, these beautifully crafted puppets stand silent and motionless awaiting their master's voice and guiding hand. Many masters are highlighted in this catalog. They are presented as a cross-section and as a respectable representation of the scope of the art in contemporary times.

Todd Stark
Curator, WHO SAID THAT!?!
This colorful mosaic painting by Dick Weston (detail at right) was reproduced on the cover of the North American Association of Ventriloquists memorial tribute publication in 1979 to the late great performing artist, Edgar Bergen. The impish quality of one of America’s premier ventriloquist figures, “Charlie McCarthy,” is captured from the artist’s interpretation of a 1930s publicity still. More than twenty years past his death at age 75, Bergen remains a major inspiration to today’s American ventriloquists. Born as Edgar John Berggren (1903-1978), he could easily be dubbed “The Father of Modern American Ventriloquism.” His stellar career shot upward from vaudeville to, of all things, radio, and into Hollywood motion pictures and television. He brought the art of ventriloquism to the forefront of American popular culture. Bergen, who was sometimes goaded by his puppet side-kicks for lazy lip-control, remained a brilliant comedy writer and developed characters that were rich in uncanny personality and comic possibility. The country bumpkin “Mortimer Snerd” and the old maid “Effie Klinker” have accompanied the monocled “Charlie McCarthy” into posterity. (See also Theodore Mack.)

With a career that spanned decades, Stanley Burns (1919-1998) was best known for the unusual and mysterious “Dr. Lichee” who magically appeared to remain alive after the ventriloquist had left the figure alone on the stage. His main figure, “Bruce,” is a Frank Marshall masterpiece, and the figure “Uncle Sam” was carved by the late George “Pinxy” Larson and used by Stan during the Bicentennial celebrations of America’s independence in 1976. Stanley was regarded as one of the nation’s foremost authorities on the art of ventriloquism, having amassed a major private collection of books, posters, playbills, puppets and photographs. His talents were featured in the films Desperately Seeking Susan and Radio Days. Just prior to his passing, he put the finishing touches on a major work on the history of ventriloquism, titled Other Voices: Ventriloquism from B.C. to TV, to be released soon as a CD-ROM. He lived in a Manhattan high rise with his devoted wife and long-time companion Sylvia Burns, in a home overflowing with a burgeoning collection of fascinating ventriloquial memorabilia. (See also Frank Marshall, Pinxy and Shari Lewis.)
(Sam)
This Brooklyn-born African-American vaudeville headliner was often billed as “America’s Polite Ventriloquist” or “The Black Napoleon of Ventriloquism.” John Cooper (1873-1966) would perform in a contrived barbershop setting that often included many vent figures that he would move behind and operate one at a time, himself portraying the barber. His characters included the shoeshine boy, manicurist and various customers. Cooper is noted in the Dictionary of American Negro Biography by Logan and Winston (W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1982). “Sam” was his principal character and often appeared as his sole partner when headlining in such fashionable New York nightspots as the Kit Kat, Hotel Lexington and the El Morroco. His daughter, Joan Maynard, has graciously consented for "Sam" to leave his home at the Brooklyn Historical Society and visit the Center for Puppetry Arts for this exhibition. Joan Maynard was personally on hand for the opening festivities of WHO SAID THAT?! at the Center for Puppetry Arts. (See also Theodore Mack.)

(Ikey MacGregor, Miss Tillie Albright)
Charlie “Chuckles” Fowler (1923-1994) exemplifies the rare performer who combined clowning with the allied arts of magic, ventriloquism and “Punch and Judy” into one show. “Chuckles’ Old Fashioned Circus Side Show” combined all of these performance techniques and more into a program that was in great demand in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area during most of his lifetime. As a youngster, Fowler purchased his first figure from Frank Marshall for $35, which Charlie transformed into “Bumpy the Clown.” Much of his influence in the art came from close correspondence relationships with Colonel Bill Boley and the late Keith “Oskar the Clown” Parr (dates unavailable). Charlie generously shared the inner-workings of his act in “Chuckles’ Clown Corner” in the New Oracle ventriloquist magazine published by the Society of American Ventriloquists. (See also Foy E. Brown and Frank Marshall.)
Spencer Horsman represents the youngest of the newcomers to the art of ventriloquism. As a child of eight he placed at a talent competition at the Vent Haven ConVENTion. He was invited to perform on the Late Show starring David Letterman on August 9, 1994, making him the first and only ventriloquist to have performed on that program. An offspring of two Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey alumni clowns, Spencer has inherited the gift of showmanship, combined with magic and ventriloquism to great effect. He currently studies ventriloquism with the great professional ventriloquist Sammy King. “Dexter” (a Jerry Layne figure) made national headlines when he was temporarily lost by the United States Postal Service while in transit to his hometown of Baltimore from a refurbishing visit on the West Coast. A very sad young Spencer was featured on national television and in People Magazine while postal authorities scrambled to clear up a potential public relations disaster. This “Dexter” was found and safely returned, and subsequently replaced by a larger and more mature Tim Selberg creation to match Spencer’s growth into adolescence. This time, little “Dexter” happily made the trip to Atlanta through the United States Parcel Service without mishap.

(Lamb Chop, Hush Puppy and Charlie Horse video clips)
This multiple Emmy Award, Peabody Award and UNIMA Citation of Excellence recipient could easily be dubbed the “First Lady of American Ventriloquism.” In a career that spanned a 1952 appearance on Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts through the continuing successes of PBS’ Lamb Chop’s Play-Along and Charlie Horse’s Music Pizza, Shari Lewis (1933-1998) led an amazing career with her beloved hand puppets. Shari decided early on that the smaller cloth puppets were more compatible with her petite stature and that they best depicted her natural warmth. As a child, she studied ventriloquism with three professional ventriloquists: Monsieur Brunard (1901-1986), Stanley Burns (1919-1998) and John W. Cooper (1873-1966) at the behest of her late father, the “Official Magician” to the City of New York. Shari was vehement about not allowing her young audiences to see the puppets life-less and therefore understandably refused to exhibit them. She personally selected the vintage video-clips for us to include in WHO SAID THAT?!! Sadly, Shari passed away during the run of this exhibition.
(Cat-A-Lion, Audrey Duck)

Dr. Linn rose to national fame during her appearances as a special guest on the PBS program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* in the 1970s. She spent several years at Boston Children's Hospital combining puppet therapy and ventriloquism into a healing dose of understanding for children. She has lectured extensively all over the world on the use of puppetry as a therapeutic tool. Her handcrafted "Audrey Duck" and "Cat-A-Lion" puppets have been featured in several video series designed to help children cope with difficult issues ranging from death and loss to chronic illness and abuse. The Audrey displayed in WHO SAID THAT?!? appeared in the video *I'm Still Me: Helping Children Cope with Childhood Cancer*, distributed by the Leukemia Society. Audrey is wearing a scarf because she has lost her hair due to chemotherapy treatments for childhood cancer. Dr. Linn's most recent work includes creating, writing and performing in *Different and The Same: Helping Children Identify and Prevent Prejudice* (Family Communications, Inc., Pittsburgh, 1996), an award-winning video series for classroom use. Dr. Linn's live performances for children have been recognized by an UNIMA Citation of Excellence and by the Boston Parents’ Paper's Performer of the Year Award.

(Scorch)

Ronn Lucas signifies the new breed of innovative artists who paid their dues in the Comedy Club genre of the 1980s and 90s. Lucas' win in a San Francisco Comedy Club Competition propelled him onto Broadway to star with Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller in *Sugar Babies* and onto Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*. He later starred on British television in his own series in the early 90s. Shortly thereafter, "Scorchi," a magnificent fire-breathing dragon, was developed into a major network television series here in the United States. Ronn's other unique trade-marks include "Buffalo Billy," the soft cloth style figure; the talking sock routine: "My tooshie looks like an elbow!"; blowing up a balloon while the puppet is singing; and the creation of a clever mask device that has elevated the old standard vent routine of using a volunteer from the audience to a whole new level of technical novelty genius.
This legendary performer is probably best known in show business circles as a Master Magician and the operator of one of the nation's largest magic shops - Magic, Inc. in Chicago. As a side act, he developed an elegant vent bit with "Lefty," which quickly caught on and led him to 14 appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and generated immense popularity. The Smithsonian Institution owns this "Lefty" glove puppet, and has graciously lent it to us for this exhibit.

Marshall recently encored his trademark routine and unique comic rendition of the song "If I Had My Way" with "Lefty" at the 1997 Festival of the Puppeteers of America in Toledo. Jay is also a renowned "Punch and Judy" performer and collector.

No ventriloquist is adored and admired more by his peers than Jimmy Nelson. Jimmy continues to perform his characters, best known to millions as the stars of the famed Nestle' commercials which aired from 1955-1965. "Danny" would sing his clear falsetto: "N-E-S-T-L-E-S, Nestle's makes the very best", followed by "Farfel's" lower and nasal "Chaw-klit!" Nelson holds the distinction as having one of America's longest associations as a TV spokesman for a commercial sponsor. Our exhibition features an original Frank Marshall carved "Danny O' Day", complete with crying eyes and a smoking device, along with a cloned version (by Ray Guyll) of Frank Marshall's "Farfel". Jimmy Nelson has been voted "Ventriloquist of the Year" at the Vent Haven Museum. He received a similar honor at the Las Vegas Convention in the summer of 1998. Jimmy always takes time to greet aspiring ventriloquists or to sign autographs. His *Instant Ventriloquism* (Juro, 1964) record has coaxed thousands of potential ventriloquists with their store-bought "Danny O'Day" dolls (from Goldberger Doll Company, Brooklyn) to practice the art. (See also Frank Marshall.)
(Dirty Old Man)
Hailing from Queens, New York, this performer is frequently billed throughout the area as “Chilly Willie and Rosco.” They are regularly featured in the “Ventriloquist’s Dummy Choir” on NBC’s Conan O’Brien show and recently toured Budapest with that program. “Dirty Old Man” (circa 1987) was at one time used by the performer for adult parties. The figure was donated by Willie to the Center for Puppetry Arts for the noteworthy exhibition AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN PUPPETRY, which was curated by Schroeder Cherry in 1994. “Dirty Old Man” was initially purchased from the Maher Studios, of Littleton, Colorado, one of the world’s largest suppliers of figures and educational materials to ventriloquists, and publishers of Newsy Vents. (See back cover.)

(Plugger McPat, Foy Brown Boy, Shaun)
“Plugger McPat” is a wooden Craig Lovik figure subsequently painted by New York artist Philomena Marano that starred in the New York stage play His Master’s Voice by Dick D. Zigun in New York 1985. “Plugger” was an evil dummy who, when equipped with a toy machine gun, posed an ominous threat to the ventriloquist’s mental health. “The Foy Brown Boy” (circa 1985) was purchased as an intended copy of an earlier Foy Brown work called “Obie” who had appeared at the Center for Puppetry Arts and venues around the world in “Todd Stockman In Concert.” As is so often the case, the wood-carved replica never quite captures the unique charm or character of the original, even when copied by the original artist. The Smithsonian Institution has lent “Shaun,” a basic “Charlie McCarthy” doll recreated into a new character by Todd’s mother. “Shaun” appeared with the teen-aged performer at the White House for a Diplomatic Children’s Christmas Party in 1978 hosted by Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter. (See also About The Author/Curator and Foy Brown.)
Mark Wade has concentrated on children's entertainment in a most successful career that includes hundreds of performances each year in school assemblies and concerts. Mark prefers to use the softer, Muppet-style cloth puppets and proclaims that they are much more popular with today's children's audiences than the traditional wooden variety. At one time, "Rudy" was the staple star of his ventriloquism act. "Rudy" is a prime example of the rare and wonderful craftsmanship of the late Jack Coats (1931-1973). Mark generously shared his experiences in creating and performing a kid's show in the hardcover Kid Show Ventriloquism (Samuel Patrick Smith Publications, 1996). Mark Wade had served as founder and president of the Society of American Ventriloquists (SAV) from 1976-1986, which is, sadly, no longer in existence. The SAV publication The New Oracle remains a treasured collector's item. (See also Jack Coats.)

(Cecilia Chicken, Johnny's Sister)
No one among ventriloquists has become more of a show business icon than Señor Wences, whose career has spanned the entire century. Wenceslao Moreno, with his "S'all right? S'all right!" and "Difficult for you, for me it's easy," from Pedro's head-in-the-box and Johnny's face on a fist, respectively, has developed two of the most admired and affectionately parodied tributes to the art of the novelty act. Señor Wences was brought to the forefront of American pop culture as a recurring star on the Ed Sullivan Show, the hugely successful weekly television variety program that ran from 1948 to 1971. Wences made at least 48 appearances on the show. Today, the street outside the legendary Ed Sullivan Theater in New York is renamed "Señor Wences Way" in tribute to this reigning king of variety entertainment. He resides a couple of blocks away at the enviable age of 102. We are pleased to display a girl fist puppet used by Señor Wences in a TV commercial, and a head of the beloved "Cecilia Chicken" puppet.
The star of numerous Las Vegas revue shows, Weston's career is a stellar example of a performer headlining in the casino revue shows during the middle to late part of the century. He was born Earl Henry Estenson (1926-1996) in Minneapolis. At an early age, inspired by an Edgar Bergen broadcast, he found himself performing family shows with "Eddie O'Connor" (by Martin Stevens, 1904 - 1983). Later, he switched to the supper club circuit, before embarking on a career path that took "Dick Weston, Aunt Martha and Clarence" to the top of the marquee in Las Vegas. His career included 28 months on the "Lido Show" at the Stardust Hotel; 15 months at the "Hello America" show and 12 months on "Pizzaz70", both at the Desert Inn; and in "Bravo Vegas" at the Imperial Palace in the 1980s before retiring into an active avocation as a remarkable painter of neo-impressionist paintings. His work was featured posthumously in "The Puppets and Pointillism of Dick Weston" at the Las Vegas Art Museum in 1997. Dick Weston created all of his own vent figures, with the help of puppet builders John Shirley (1917-1993) and Lemuel Williams (unknown-1954). All Weston creations are constructed of plastic wood and possess a distinctive rustic charm that became Weston's hallmark as a ventriloquist. The saucy "Aunt Martha" (constructed in 1954) and the inebriated "Clarence" (1959) helped him achieve his greatest fame. All of the other characters, except "Eddie O'Connor," were crafted in 1949 and were retired prior to his arrival in Las Vegas in 1959. (See also Martin Stevens and Edgar Bergen.)

This dynamic duo on loan from the Smithsonian Institution were major stars on 1950s network television, including The Paul Winchell-Jerry Mahoney Show from 1950-1954 and in various series and variety shows through the 1980s. The original "Jerry" was carved by Chicago figure-maker Frank Marshall. "Knucklehead" (courtesy National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution) is alleged to have been created by Winchell himself. Some experts theorize that Knucklehead was also created by Frank Marshall and transformed by Winchell. His book, Ventriloquism for Fun and Profit (Ottenheimer, Baltimore, 1954), was very successful in teaching the techniques of ventriloquism and dummy-making to a new generation of potential young artists. As a side-note, Dr. Winchell received a patent in 1963 for one of the early models for the artificial heart which kept a calf alive for 94 days. He resides today outside Los Angeles, California, and recently made a rare personal appearance at a Ventriloquist Convention to much acclaim. (See also Frank Marshall.)
(Sister Mary Annette)
Pady Blackwood had no idea what he was getting into when he created “Sister Mary Annette” for the original New York production of Danny Goggin’s “Nunsense.” The show has burgeoned into one of America’s most produced musical shows and longest running Off-Broadway hits. Actress Semina DeLaurentis received much acclaim in this role, and went on to perform it in the video version in the early ’90s. Pady’s popular nun puppets have subsequently appeared in thousands of performances around the world of “Nunsense,” “Nunsense 2” and “Nunsense 3.” Blackwood is widely known as the principal manipulator of “Howdy Doody,” having performed the famous marionette for television and live appearances with Buffalo Bob Smith (1918-1998) since the 1970s. He was also a longtime principal puppeteer with the Bil Baird Marionettes, Puppetworks and Dreamstuff Puppets in New York. Pady now resides in Dallas, Texas.

(Foy Brown Boy, Miss Tillie Albright)
As one of the most prolific figure-makers of the last century, Foy E. Brown (1901-1989) turned out hundreds of ventriloquist figures and “Punch and Judy” puppets during his career. A son of ventriloquist Charles E. Brown (1862-1947), Foy would often carve the front half of the head in more easily carved basswood, and the back half from the less expensive and more readily available pine. His puppets have an unmistakable style and look about them and are always branded with the small die “FEB Figures” on the head-stick and inside the head. “Miss Tillie Albright” and the “Foy Brown Boy” figures share these familial resemblances and birthmarks. Brown’s workshop was located in Lawrence, Kansas, and remained very active until the artist’s death in 1989. Some professional ventriloquists that have used Foy Brown figures include Todd Oliver, Dennis Bowman, Greg Clausen, Tommie Atkins and Bob Mason (1924-1998). (See also Charlie Fowler and Todd Stockman.)
RudY

LeRoy Jack Coats (1931-1973) was born in Detroit and is revered among ventriloquists and collectors as one of the great figure-makers of the century. Much of his later work was influenced by the look of the hugely successful, and more famous, Frank Marshall. His early works possess a charming and unique style of their own. According to Gary Koepke, a leading expert on Coats and owner of three of his figures, "With a carving schedule of three hours a night on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and another four hours on Saturday, Jack Coats carved about 40 figures a year plus all the repairs and repaints that his shop generated. Jack's wife Pat did all the wigging. Jack's clients during the late 60s and early 70s included former Miss America Vonda Kay Van-Dyke, Bill DeMar and many of the top vents in the business." (See also Mark Wade.)

Dr. Lee, Punk Girl

Joel Leder balances a career between traveling on the high seas as a ventriloquist headliner on Carnival Cruise Line and starring in Las Vegas revues, with crafting inventive and unique vent characters in his Las Vegas garage/workshop. He recently cloned copies of Jeff Dunham's "Walter" puppet for a Hertz television commercial. Leder prefers to cast his originally designed characters in fiberglass. Joel has developed a fresh style that includes new-age and kooky puppets that are sometimes science-fiction based and/or of a more horrific genre. His characters are used widely by many professionals, including Dialogue Magazine editor Bob Ladd, whose "Elvira" is a truly memorable Leder creation. "Dr. Lee" and the "Punk Girl" are two examples of his unique and fresh cartoon-like style. "Punk Girl" is actually two-faced. Visitors to WHO SAID THAT?! have enjoyed walking around her and discovering her two distinct personalities. Joel and "Dr. Lee" appeared in The Immortals (1995), currently in video release.
Theodore Mack was the revered figure-maker who created the original "Charlie McCarthy," perhaps the most famous vent figure of all time. Ventriloquists have debated about the creator of Charlie for years. A young Edgar Bergen bought the puppet at the Mack Brothers workshop (the brother was Charles Mack) in the 1920s. Edgar Bergen wrote to me in the late 1970s attesting that the original "Charlie" was created by "Theo" Mack, and I have personally inspected the original wood-carved version that is now part of the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Bergen had several versions of "Charlie" manufactured in later years from a variety of materials, which have added to the confusion. It is suspected that some of these have been acquired and further duplicated by collectors. One "Charlie," alleged to have been used by Bergen, recently sold for more than $100,000 by a top auction house to famed magician David Copperfield. We are delighted to display a wonderful treasure from the Mack workshop with John W. Cooper's "Sam," created in the early part of the twentieth century. (See also Edgar Bergen and John W. Cooper.)

(Jerry Mahoney, Ikey MacGregor, Tommy Knots, Girl, Danny O'Day)

The late Frank Marshall (1920-1969) is admired and respected among ventriloquists for his fine craftsmanship. His style, popularized by "Jerry Mahoney" and "Danny O'Day," set a trend that quintessentially represents the 1950s and 1960s television era. Marshall turned out countless figures from his Chicago workshop, all of which are valuable collector's items. Five fine examples of his work are here: the original wood-carved "Jerry Mahoney" from the Smithsonian Institution; Charlie Fowler's "Ikey MacGregor" and the "Tommy Knots" and "Girl" figures, on loan from Alan Semok. Those figures were original and popular novelty items Marshall churned out on his "dupli-carver" machine. Jimmy Nelson, who still performs with his original "Danny O'Day," "Farfel," and "Humphrey Higby" characters, wrote in a 1979 tribute, "Frank Marshall was the world's greatest figure-maker; that goes without saying." (See also Charlie Fowler, Jimmy Nelson and Paul Winchell.)
(Uncle Sam)
“Pinxy” was the professional nickname for George Larsen (circa 1865-1960) of Chicago. His wife, Grace, was known as “Madame Pinxy” (unknown-1948). They were noted “Punch and Judy” performers. He sometimes manufactured handcrafted vent figures for sale in the early to mid 20th century. “Uncle Sam,” on loan from Sylvia Burns, is a prime example of the “Pinxy” style. (See also Stanley Burns.)

(Gran’pa)
Known throughout the industry as the “Dummy Doctor,” Alan Semok maintains great respect for the classic style vent figures as he lovingly and painstakingly refurbishes, clones or creates them. He has crafted scores of original figures for other ventriloquists from his New Jersey studio, completing the “Gran’pa” in time for this exhibition. He works in the more traditional “knee figure” style, and Semok figures always capture a rare richness of emotion in the face. Alan is also busy outside the shop performing as a ventriloquist, actor and puppeteer, as well as now serving as the official voice of two of “The Three Stooges” for their estate. Alan has developed a world-renowned reputation for refurbishing great ventriloquist figures and other puppets, including “Howdy Doody,” to their original grandeur. (See also Frank Marshall.)

(Eddie O’Connor)
Martin Stevens (1904-1983) is known as one of America’s great marionettists, who along with partner and wife Olga Stevens (1899-1983), toured their puppet shows extensively throughout the US. He was the first President of the Puppeteers of America in 1937. “Eddie O’Connor” is one of only six ventriloquist figures believed to have been crafted by Martin Stevens. “Eddie O’Connor” was sold to dealer Fred Maher (1896-1952) in the 1930s and subsequently landed on the lap of a young Earl Estenson in Minneapolis in 1943 and launched the career of the promising young artist later known as Dick Weston (1926-1996). “Eddie O’Connor” is crafted in wood dough. (See also Dick Weston.)
Todd Stockman is the author of this catalog and curator of WHO SAID THAT!!?: THE ART OF THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN VENTRILLOQUIST. Besides becoming a nationally recognized expert and historian in the fields of ventriloquism and puppetry, he has enjoyed an award-winning career that has taken him around the world from Anchorage to Zanzibar performing on luxurious ocean liners. He's worked on television projects produced by Children's Television Workshop and Mister Rogers' Neighborhood; and on many national TV commercials. Todd appeared once at the White House for President Jimmy Carter with Jim Henson (1936-1990), and once for President George Bush with Shari Lewis (1933-1998). He has been trained by Burr Tillstrom (1917-1985), coached by Kermit Love, and directed by Frank Oz. He has curated exhibitions at the Las Vegas Art Museum, and works from The Todd Stockman Collection have appeared in prominent exhibitions nationwide, including "Puppets and Things on Strings" at the Smithsonian Institution. He is a frequent contributor to several national publications including The Puppetry Journal. Todd has won four Manhattan Association of Cabaret's "MAC Awards," and the highest recognition awarded to an individual performer in the art of puppetry: The Citation of Excellence by UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette), an international puppetry organization. He spent the spring and summer of 1998 serving as Technical Advisor and puppeteer for director Tim Robbins' new motion picture titled The Cradle Will Rock. Todd Stockman calls both New York City and Baltimore home.

I must acknowledge a new and undying respect for curators everywhere.


And of course, I extend personal and extra special thanks to the Center Staff: Vincent Anthony, whose vision and dedication has created and developed this world-class Center for Puppetry Arts. Former Museum Director Dona Aaron who laid a great deal of the groundwork. Congratulations to new Museum Manager Susan Kinney on her first exhibition. Museum Registrar Anne Lanford. Marketing Director Debbie George, for supervising this catalog and arranging publicity. And the photographers whose credits appear throughout. Cathy Northen. Dare Martin. And the Center's oft unsung heroine, Lisa Rhodes. Alexander "Xan" Deeb. And the artistry of designer Joe Peragine.
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