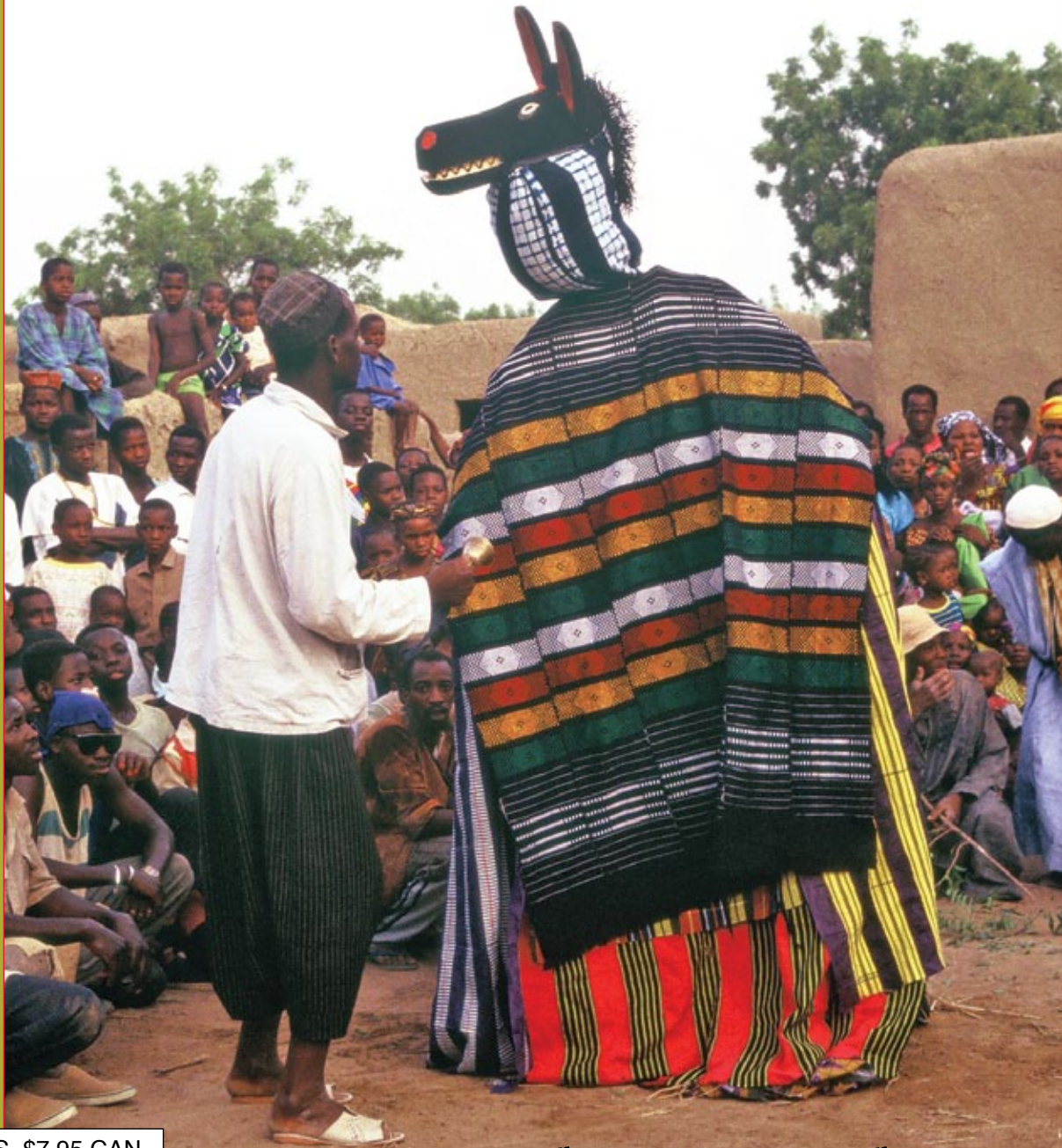


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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

issue no. 41

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On the COVER:
Nama -the hyena- in Mali, by Elisabeth den Otter
photo: Elisabeth den Otter *see page 5*

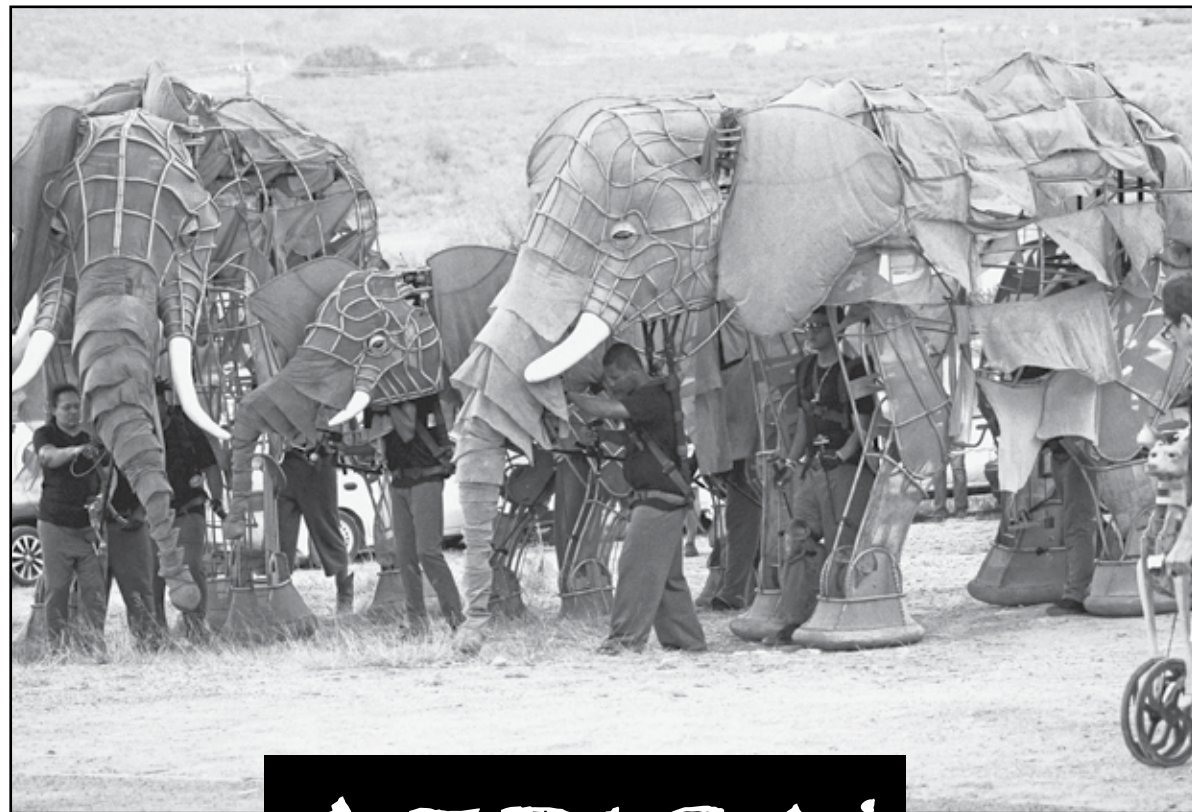


PHOTO: R'IAAD DOLLIE

AFRICA!

It's big. It contains multitudes. The bulk of Africa is composed of fifty-four fully independent states populated by over a billion people speaking well over 1,000 languages.

Puppets of various traditions can be found in many of these countries, making adequate coverage in a fifty-page magazine impossible. As the puppetry of Africa is too important—and dazzling—to be ignored, however, we must make a start!

This issue features the puppetry of several regions of Africa. In the north, the hand puppet tradition of Aragoz in Egypt is celebrated in a new book by Nabil Bahgat, reviewed by Bradford Clarke (page 46) and its Moroccan variant, Alargeoz, elucidated by Siraj Mohamed (page 44).

From West Africa, Elizabeth den Otter introduces us to the puppetry of the Bozo (or Boso) and Bamanan people of Mali (page 5). Many of these figures depict animals, life-sized or larger. A favorite of mine is Sigi the bush buffalo, which is not only a puppet, but serves as a puppet stage for smaller puppets that he carries on his back! Heather Denyer (who wrote about Uganda's Werewere Liking in PI #37) takes us on a visit to the town of Boromo in Burkina Faso to meet the African offshoot of Les Grandes Personnes—figures of men and women that walk through the streets, towering over villagers and even buildings (page 12). Denyer also brings us to the Teni-Tedji festival in Benin, where we meet puppeteers and other performers from several nearby countries (page 16).

From South Africa, Dutch artist Saskia Janse recounts the story of her collaboration with Macebo Mavuso, from the Eastern Cape, in which they turned an odd bit of his tribe's history into a production using actors and puppets (page 33). Professors Lawrence Switzky and Veronika Ambros—as contributing editors—have assembled a selection of articles that present other aspects of the puppetry of South Africa, and which highlight the influence of Handspring Theater, a group we have featured many times, beginning with issue #1. Founded by Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones in the late 1970s, they worked against apartheid and for human rights. Some of the many performers they've worked with over the years have gone on to work elsewhere, or form their own theaters (page 21).

We also have a fascinating account by Ron Binion, who has been involved in humanitarian work in several African countries. His narrative really speaks to the resilience and creativity of people living many miles from goods and services (page 36). Also, Nancy Staub introduces us to the collection of African puppets housed at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta (page 40).

In addition to our coverage of Africa, John Bell reviews a book on modern puppetmasters of Spain, and Claudia Orenstein visits a rare exhibit of the puppetry of Robert Anton.

It is a commodious issue that we hope reflects some of the color and brightness of the horribly misnamed Dark Continent.

– Andrew Periale



FIGURES MADE BY THE NYAMWEZI PEOPLE OF TANZANIA

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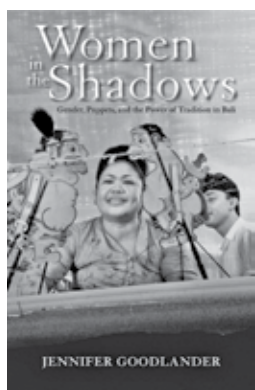
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A new book by *Puppetry International* contributor,
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This book is a fascinating journey that begins in the home of Goodlander's teacher in a small village in southern Bali. *Look for a full review in our next issue.* In the meantime, here is the information to order a copy:

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CEW YE KELEN YE (ANTELOPE)

THE SECRET COMES FORTH: The Depiction of Animals in Bozo and Bamanan Puppetry in Mali

Text and photos by Elisabeth den Otter

A scorching afternoon in June on the banks of the Niger river in Mali. The youth association of the village of Kirango is celebrating its annual masquerade, with circle dances, masks and large puppets in the shape of mythical animals. Songs tell about their beauty and power, accompanied by drums, gourd rattles and clappers. Through the masquerade, exciting stories are told. They are a vehicle for expressing deep feeling, often symbolically. They also serve to confirm cultural identity; during the masquerade, society presents itself: "This is how we are and what we think about life."

Kirango (arrondissement Markala) is a village with over six thousand inhabitants, located on the bank of the Niger river about 40 kilometers northeast of the city of Ségou. Kirango has six residential quarters, organized along ethnic and occupational lines. The Bamanan are farmers, whereas



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NAMA (HYENA)

Of Dancing Masks and Men

During the masquerades of the Bamanan and Bozo of Kirango, large puppets in the shape of mythical animals (“*sogow*,” literally “animals,” “meat”) are made to dance by puppeteers that are hidden inside. Some of the animals also carry small rod-puppets on their backs that can dance. They alternate with masked dancers, equally representing mythical animals and symbolic persons. These hidden dancers express the

character represented by the puppet or mask, through their movements.

There are visible dancers as well: the guide who accompanies a character, and dancing with it, often in unison, and members of the youth association, who perform circle dances and have jumping contests.

The Bozo are the “inventors” of the puppets: the oldest types have the form of a cage-like wooden structure covered with either cloth or grass that serves as the animal’s body. They are

paraded on boats on the river (a bird, a horse, an antelope). More modern types perform in the water or on land; they represent mainly aquatic animals such as various types of fish, crocodiles, a hippopotamus and so on. They are made of a bamboo frame covered with cloth (or plastic) and are manipulated by a man crawling on all fours; one might call it a “body puppet.”

The Bamanan have copied a number of characters from the Bozo. Some have a straw body and a wooden head (rod puppet). Their frames are relatively small, and carried by one man. They are shown only at night and represent domestic animals (sheep) and bush animals (antelopes). The day-animals entirely covered with cloth are bigger: The head of the animal is a large rod puppet and smaller rod puppets are sometimes carried on the back of the animal or attached to its horns. They represent bush animals such as antelopes and buffaloes and are carried by two or three men. A more recent type of animal is entirely made of cloth and represents animals with four legs, such as a camel, a giraffe, etc.

An interesting category is that of the “strong” animals; they are difficult to capture. For the Bozo these are the dog-fish, the crocodile and the hippopotamus; for the Bamanan they are the buffalo, the lion and the elephant. The accompanying songs praise the animals, the hunters and the ancestors.



TALADUNKONO (PELICAN)

the Bozo are fishermen. They belong to the Mande language group: Bamanan is spoken by three million Malians, and Bozo by 150,000 persons. Bamanan may be considered the “lingua franca” of Mali, even though French is the official language.

My first visit to Kirango dates from 1990. The International Puppet Theatre Festival wanted to include puppetry from Africa in their upcoming puppet theatre festival, and sent me to Kirango to check out the possibilities for a European tour. In the following years, I went back a number of times in relation to a puppet exhibition I was preparing, and for which the Bamanan youth association made a set of masks, puppets and musical instruments. Needless to say that all this would not have been possible without the bond of mutual friendship and respect that has been formed in those years.



The Bamanan Masquerade

Just before the arrival of the rains, in the beginning of June, many villages in the district of Markala celebrate their annual masquerade, a public event performed on the village plaza. The one celebrated by the Bamanan of Kirango is described in more detail below.

The masquerade generally takes place on three consecutive afternoons and two nights. The organization is in the hands of the youth association. Membership is mandatory for men from fourteen to forty years old, and women from fourteen until marriage at about twenty. The men and women are divided into four age groups, which participate in circle dances and acrobatic dance competitions. Then it is the turn of the puppets and the masks, separated by short intervals of song and dance. All these different types of dancing by puppets, masks and humans are accompanied by drumming and singing.

The Characters

The *sogow* represent mythical animals and human beings. The body of the animal is quite large: a frame measuring around 2 meters long and 1.5 meters high. It is covered with cloth, in order to conceal the puppeteers inside who manipulate the rod puppets. The head of the animal is a large rod puppet. Smaller rod puppets are sometimes carried on the back of the animal or attached to its horns. The dramatis personae are humans, spirits and mythical animals, metaphors for the full range of human virtues and vices. Animals of the savanna are represented in the form of antelopes, buffaloes, birds, hyenas, etc. Domesticated animals such as cows, horses and sheep make an appearance as well.

The bush buffalo, Sigi, symbolizes strength and the power of tradition. On his back, he carries small rod puppets representing women pounding millet, a crocodile, a mother-with-child, musicians, a female dancer and the like. Sigi’s dance is slow and stately. At times, the animal stops, to give the puppets on its back a chance to go through their motions: The women pound, the farmer hoes, the musicians play and the dancer twirls around.

The well-liked Kònò, the bird that announces the rains, prances around the plaza in a very elegant way, flapping its wings. and Warabacaco, the Striped Wildcat, stomps around, hurling itself towards the public at times, to their great enjoyment and excitement!

Whereas the *sogow* generally represent mythical animals or bush spirits, the small puppets show scenes of daily life: women pounding millet, a hunter, a young bride with her dowry, a mother with her child, a modern women smoking a cigarette, a European, etc.

The *sogow* that act during the day are called *sogow fini*. At night the *sogow bin* are used; they are covered with straw instead of cloth and do not carry small puppets on their back. They represent animals, wild or tame, and bush spirits like Nama, the hyena.

The masked dancers also represent mythical animals, like Gõnfarinman, the Courageous Chimpanzee. He is a very provocative character and dances around kicking up a (sand-) storm and approaching women in a lewd way. Taasiddònin (literally “Reflect a little”), a sexy woman, dances in a rather teasing and voluptuous manner.

The masks and puppets are manufactured by the black-smith-woodcarver, member of the Bamanan youth association. Members of the association cultivate his fields, to compensate him for his efforts.

No difference is made between puppets and masks: both are called “mask” since they resemble each other in many ways and serve the same purpose: to represent mythical and symbolic beings through concealed human beings. They can be viewed as two sides of the same coin, since both are a means to establish contact between the invisible world of the supernatural and the visible human world.

During the Bamanan masquerade, the Bozo fishermen do guest appearances with their *sogow* in the shape of various types of fish, crocodiles, a hippopotamus, etc.

The Songs

There are from one to ten songs to go with each character, from which three to four are chosen for each performance. Some songs may be used for various characters. In all there are more than 200 songs.

The songs refer either to particular qualities of the characters, make a reference to a particular narrative legend, or serve

as metaphors for a variety of human behaviors. The songs are intended to flatter the character, to heighten its prestige, and to move the dancer to action.

For instance, one of the songs accompanying the bush spirit *Jinè* talks of the inequality between co-wives:

*An jèra, cèla de, o ye tiyen a ye
Cè ka fò an bè dama kakan
O ye, nyèdòn kuma ye*

You and me, this is our husband,
it's true
He says that we are equal
But those are not true words

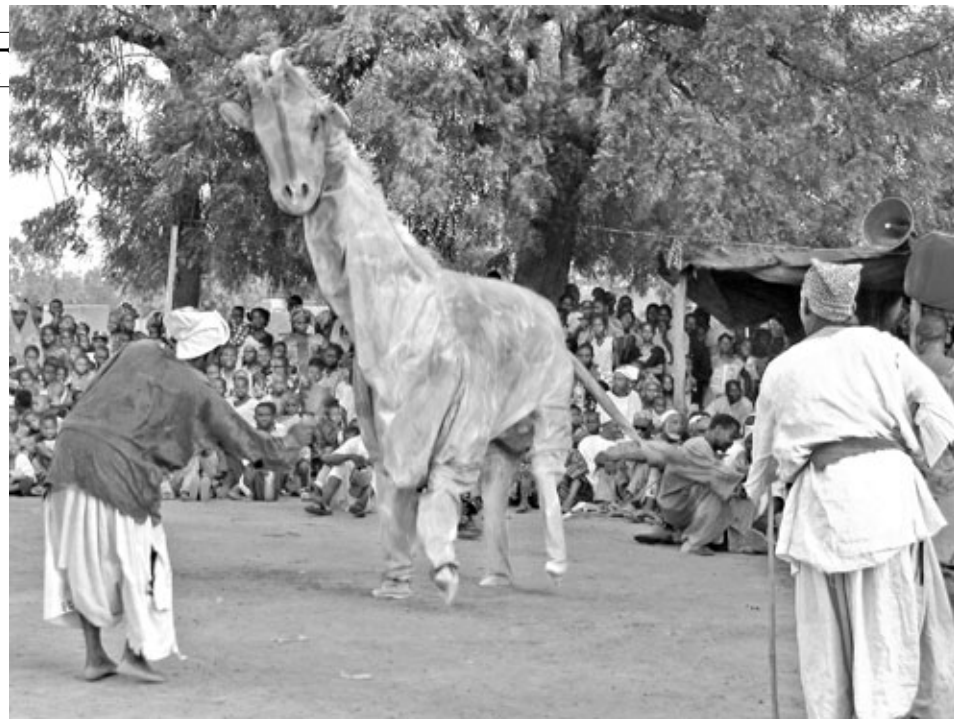
Contrary to the well-known *jeliw* (griots, or bards) who are professional musicians specializing in singing praise songs, the performers at the masquerade are considered amateurs.

The Musical Instruments

The music is performed mainly on drums (a large wooden kettle drum *chun*, which is beaten with both hands) and various cylindrical drums (the single skinned wooden *bòngolo*, beaten with thin sticks and the double skinned wooden *nganga*, beaten with a thick stick). The female chorus keeps time with wooden clappers (*tegere*) and calabash rattles. The characters are announced by a man playing an antelope-horn (*buru*), and accompanied by a man playing a hand-bell (*daro*) to guide them. During the actual masquerade, the group of musicians is changed at regular intervals, the best group being kept for the most important masks.

*For bibliographical references,
please go to our website and check
out the "extras" for issue #41.*

www.unima-usa.org



NTILEN (GIRAFFE)

The Dances

Dance plays an important role during the masquerade. Puppets, masks and people dance, each in their own way and for their own purpose. The dances of the puppets and masks (by hidden dancers) serve to express their characters, whereas the (visible) people-dances are a means of expressing feelings of togetherness and joy.

Since the puppeteers and the masked dancers cannot see their way, they need someone to guide them. This is done by a man shaking a hand-bell and giving them verbal instructions as well. When the performance reaches a high point and the puppet dances the best he can, the musicians come closer, play more intensely, and the guide dances around it, leaping high into the air. The puppet, its guide, and the musicians become one single sound and movement. The dancers accompanying the *Ciwara* masks imitate the movements of farmers hoeing the field. Sometimes people will dance behind a puppet or a mask, to "accompany" it, as a sign of admiration.

The Bozo Masquerade

According to legend, the Bozo fishermen are descendants of *Faro*, the water spirit and creator god. They also have masquerades which, contrary to those of the *Bamanan*, do not take place yearly but only once every ten years at the occasion of circumcision, or whenever there is a reason to celebrate (a good catch, or "just because we are happy"). The masquerade is paid for by the proceeds of collective fishing, instead of cash as is the case with the *Bamanan*. The musical accompaniment is done with three single skinned drums (*bòngolo*) and a double skinned drum (*nganga*).

The day animals are rod puppets on cages covered with cloth and straw, much like the night animals of the *Bamanan*; they may carry a few small puppets on their backs. The mask of the Courageous Chimpanzee (*Gònfarinman*) comes first, as is the case with the *Bamanan*, followed by an antelope, a bird and a hippopotamus. All, except the hippopotamus who actually swims in the water, are paraded on boats that drift by on the Niger River, close to the beach. The musicians and singers are seated in boats as well. An amazing sight! The night masks represent mainly aquatic animals, such as fish, the crocodile, the water turtle. They do not carry small puppets on their backs.



GONFARINMAN (CHIMPANZEE), CHILDREN'S MASQUERADE

Music, song and dance play an important role during the masquerade of the *Bamanan* and the *Bozo*. Much better than the spoken word, they convey and reinforce emotions and create a special atmosphere. Add to this the participation of the public, in song and in dance, this truly can be called "total theatre."

Communitas, Communication and Cultural Identity

For the people of *Markala*, the masquerade offers an opportunity to be together with relatives and friends, to show off their finest clothes, and to express their joy through dancing elegantly.

According to the people of *Kirango*, the purpose of the festival is to re-establish a sense of unity and to draw people back into the village in order to celebrate its identity as a community. However, there is also the possibility of bringing to the surface the contradictions inherent in social experience. Unity and solidarity are reflected in songs referring to mutual understanding and love, saying that children of the same mother, friends, family and the wives of one man should love each other. Individuality and competition can be seen during the acrobatic competitions and when new puppets are paraded. For the duration of the festival, everyday social relationships are reversed. Young people become the actors while the elders are the onlookers.

Communication, verbal as well as non-verbal, takes place. Important cultural information is passed on, from performers to public. The message is "wrapped" in music, song, dance, costumes, masks and puppets: symbolic forms of image and sound. Within the framework of the masquerade, the people of *Markala* celebrate their origins and their relation to the animals of the land and the water.

Total theatre, popular theatre, or ritual drama is an important way of release. Whether one is a musician, a singer, a dancer, a puppeteer or part of the participating public, playing an active part in such an event is an emotional happening. By means of total theatre a feeling of togetherness is created during communal celebrations of rituals during which emotions can be expressed in (symbolic) ways. One can speak of aesthetic pleasure as well, when the quality of the music, song, dance, costumes, puppets and masks fulfill the criteria of what is considered beautiful. For the *Bamanan* and the *Bozo*, the masquerade is a means of expressing and reinforcing their cultural identity.

Increasingly, such factors as formal schooling, the out-migration of youth to cities, islamization and the lack of adequate funds to finance masquerades, have contributed to their demise in many communities.

At the same time, the government has recognized the

masquerade as an important part of Mali's national cultural heritage and has encouraged and supported the participation of local troupes in regional, national and international festivals. A relatively new phenomenon is cultural tourism. This could in time deteriorate to a performance-on-command, where the groups are no longer in control of their own culture. In *Kirango*, while this tradition still holds sway over the hearts and minds of the community, what will the future be for its village-based youth associations and for their masquerades? While the theater has always been open to innovation, it has also remained grounded in the shared history of the village. Will increasing privatization and globalization end up decoupling the theater from its collective roots?

Elisabeth den Otter (1941) studied Cultural Anthropology in Leiden (1972-1979) and was curator of the department of Ethnomusicology of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (1988-2003). In 1996 she curated a large exhibition of puppets from Asia and Africa. She has been doing research in Mali since 1990. website: www.elisabethdenotter.nl

Endnotes:

For the written *Bamanan*, Père Charles Bailleul's "Dictionnaire Bambara-Français" (1996) was used, with a simplified spelling (fewer tone marks). Proper names are usually spelled in the French way (Coulibaly vs Culibaly).

See a longer article on this subject, with sound excerpts:

www.elisabethdenotter.nl/site1/Homepage_of_Elisabeth_den_Otter/Publications_files/depiction_of_animals_in_Malian_puppetry.pdf

A short YouTube film shows fragments of the DVD "La fête des masques *Bamanan* de *Kirango* (Mali)."

www.youtube.com/watch?v=AREsXmsBbc

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KONATÉ SCULPTURE (SEE PAGE 15)

MY VISIT WITH THE AFRICAN GIANTS:

Les grandes personnes de Boromo

by Heather Jeanne Denyer

I was the only passenger to get off the bus in the small town of Boromo, Burkina Faso in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was 100 degrees in November and the *Harmattan* season's dust filled the air of the bustling marketplace. I barely noticed though because I was on a mission: to see the giants. There's something truly magical that happens when the five-meter-tall puppets parade through town. Everyday life seems to stand still from the moment that the impressive heads appear over the mango treetops and thatched roofs, heralded by percussive music. Trucks, bush taxis and scooters pull over to the side of the road to gape. Children run out from their schools and adults from homes and the market, their eyes wide with wonder – some full of fear, but most full of joyful amazement. For a brief period of time, heavy realities are lightened as face after face breaks into a big smile.

The parent organization of *Les Grandes Personnes* (the big people) was founded in Aubervilliers, France, in 1998, and has sprouted over twenty smaller companies worldwide including associations in Brazil, Chili, Mozambique and South Africa. The first and most important of these is located in the small town of Boromo in West Africa. French artist Christophe Evette had the idea to develop the fifteen-foot puppets after a visit to Burkina Faso in 1987. Evette was inspired by the manner of African performance traditions to bring art to public spaces. The puppets provide a form of "street theatre" that is intended "for all audiences," as he explained to me.¹ It was also during this visit that he met wood sculptor Bomavé Konaté, who has been sculpting masks, statues and figurines from wood since he was ten years old. Although the sculptors for *Les Grandes Personnes* use papier-mâché rather than wood, the aesthetic borrows from Konaté's influence, reflecting the West African spiritual fetish traditions.

Like traditional performances, *Les Grandes Personnes* include music accompaniment to draw audiences to the spectacle. Drummer Dramé Bakova leads the other *griot* musicians, who play *balafon* (a wooden xylophone) and three different types of drums: the *tama*, the *djembe* and the *doumdoum*. As in traditional African theatre, the musicians create a festive mood and help motivate the storytelling in individual shows. However, Evette was wary of the connec-

tions to such traditions that continue to bear spiritual significance for many communities in West Africa. He wanted to distinguish *Les Grandes Personnes* from the wooden masks of traditions like the highly stylized Dogon masks with simple geometric facial features: "The desire to respect living practices and to avoid evocations determined, by default, a more-or-less realistic aesthetic, anthropomorphic with a treatment based on paintings" (95).

The puppets are similar in construction and use similar manipulation techniques as Bread and Puppet, although Evette was not aware of Peter Schumann's group when he designed his giants. For practical reasons, the puppet heads and hands are crafted in papier-mâché rather than in wood like traditional masks and fetishes. However, it was important for Evette that the puppets incorporate material as well as aesthetic influences from the area; therefore, locally found objects provide structure, such as empty plastic water bottles for fingers and gourds for eyes. Molds for the heads and hands are made from mud, lined with plastic, and filled with paper scraps from cement bags, fabric strips and a paste made of mashed corn and millet. When these body parts have firmed, they are removed from the molds and then painted.

At the same time, blacksmiths prepare the body. The center of the body is a metal frame that the puppeteer wears like a backpack, secured by straps across the chest and stomach. A metal rod reaches up from the top of the frame, through the neck of the puppet to the head, where it is attached. The hips and backsides of the puppets are filled out with spirals of chicken wire, while other areas, such as chests and bellies, are made with papier-mâché. After the puppet is assembled, tailors sew giant skirts, shirts and pants to dress it. Existing puppets include a Rastafarian named Barnaby, a tattoo-covered ghost

and a fashion-conscious woman named Poko. The entire process from start to finish might take two weeks for a single puppet, although they are reused. The puppet structure has evolved since the first performances – the concepts have become more complex, but the structures themselves have become simpler, lighter and more efficient, particularly for travel purposes. Sonago Idrissa, a blacksmith, explained to me how the structure has been altered so that the body parts are detachable, folding efficiently, while the heads are placed in metal cases to protect the integrity of the design structure.

For the puppeteers, manipulating the giants is no easy task. Assistants are always on hand to help erect the puppets and to "put them to bed," as Joel Zongo explained to me. During a parade, two others spot an active puppeteer in case they are overwhelmed by the wind, like they might be if they were flying a large kite. The puppets weigh between twenty and thirty kilograms, so performers need to be replaced during longer performances. Shoulder straps attach to the metal frame, which also provides a base for loose plastic hoses that stretch out for the arms and legs. The puppeteer controls the arms with two long rods, each attached at the wrist level of the puppet. The legs of

the male puppets are attached to the puppeteers' shoes, and the puppeteer's feet are the puppet's feet. (The female puppets have loose flowing skirts with no legs underneath.)

Les Grandes Personnes de Boromo perform regularly at opening ceremonies for theatre festivals and have toured throughout the region and to France and Spain, but the tours are largely sponsored by Evette's core group in Aubervilliers. The Burkinabé association managed by Dri Zong subsists on the funds brought in from training at the center and the canteen he and his family run there. They perform principally for local audiences and at regional festivals.

Their first show, "The River" in 2003, brought together 200 participants, some of whom remained to form the group of thirty that exists today. Some shows aim at teaching health lessons to children. For example, a recent project taught dental care with a giant mouth and a correspondingly large toothbrush; another used a large baby and an enormous eye to show the consequences of improper hygiene leading to eye infections. Other shows offer social commentary, including "The Big Family" (2005) about a mixed-race marriage and the ensuing family conflicts. The most political piece to



LES GRANDES PERSONNES IN COURTYARD

date was “Military Rout” (2011) performed in Ivory Coast. The show told the story of the Burkinabé people who fled in the wake of the 2002 military coup.

Regardless of whether they are performing in a street parade, for school children, or as part of a festival, the giants’ presence is astounding. Both the scale of the puppets and the manner in which they are operated complicate ways of viewing these material performers. Unlike hand-held marionettes, they command a visible presence from far away. In fact, their entrance into a village, announced by the sound of drums, creates quite a spectacle, not unlike the arrival of a masquerade full-body puppet like the Zangbeto figure of local tradition. As they approach, spectators perceive something magical – real, live giants before them. The puppets, because of their colossal stature, allow spectators of all ages to behold the extraordinary, as if through the eyes of a child: “The difference in scale between the spectators and the puppets is that of the relation between a young child and an adult” (Evette 101).

Margaret Williams’s comparison between the puppeteer and the magician is apt here. She considers that both “manipulate not only objects but also audience perception”; they “set up an interactive relation between performer and objects, and at times even seem to create the sense of a psychic force between them” (24-5). When the puppeteers dance, their movements reflect on an exaggerated scale through the larger bodies they carry. In a way, the puppeteers of *Les Grandes Personnes* are magicians because their movements are sent as physical impulses transmitted through the material performer. When the puppeteer moves, the puppet’s body corresponds. For example, as the puppeteer walks, the puppet’s head bounces, the arms and legs wobble, and the bosom and posterior bob up and down. As Joel Zongo explains, “If I move my left shoulder... I know that [the puppet] will move, too. So whatever I do, that’s what the giant does.” Unlike with hand-held puppets, the puppeteer cannot see their charge, but must *feel* it as an extension of their own body.

The audience’s “double focus” in puppetry performance is complicated in the instance of the African giants. With hand-held puppets and marionettes, “the co-presence of the puppeteer and the puppet requires that a double focus on both the performer and the puppet be achieved” (Paul Piris 31). The spectators remain aware of both bodies at the same time, while accepting a single presence as the two move together. Yet, in the case of *Les Grandes Personnes*, the spectator’s gaze is drawn upwards to the lofty heights of the giants, neglecting the presence of the puppeteer. West African puppetry traditions tied to spiritual beliefs like the full-body *Sogo Bó* puppets of Mali negate the presence

of the human performer – as they temporarily become the puppet, their human identity is suspended. Contrary to the co-presence that Piris describes in the examples of western puppetry forms, the role of the puppeteer in African masquerade, or full-body puppetry, “is a role with mystical attributes that has been likened to returning to the womb and a responsibility that can only be assumed by an initiate” (Rosen 9). Although the puppeteers are not fully covered in the case of *Les Grandes Personnes*, they, themselves, lack a subjective presence as they have comparably less matter than the puppets they control. Indeed, from a distance, only the puppets are visible to spectators. Furthermore, the movements of the human and the puppet are not presented side by side; instead the two move together, as one.



In Boromo, the *magic* of the puppets is powerful. As Williams assesses, puppetry and magic share “a point of intersection between acting and manipulation that is not only physical but visual and psychological” (24). *Les Grandes Personnes* realize this affective potential when African audiences perceive the giants as magical spirits. Puppeteer and sculptor Souleymane Djenda remembers at one particular performance, “People ran away, ran into their houses and slammed the doors. Others, when you reached out the puppet’s hand to them, they screamed!” and Joel Zongo describes audience reactions to the puppets: “There are often people who faint. They think that there are actual ‘genies’ approaching.” Heralded into village centers by percussive beats and cheering, *Les Grandes Personnes* feel otherworldly. Although the puppet characters seem human-like, these giants are also mythical creatures. When they come out to dance, people believe in the magic.

Heather Jeanne Denyer is a PhD candidate in Theatre and Women’s Studies at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her dissertation is “Re-Defining Gender and Sexuality in New Francophone Theatre in West Africa.” She teaches theatre and African studies and is a dramaturg, translator and a Returned Peace Corp Volunteer. (Cameroon 2003-2005)



YAKABO KONATÉ



JOEL ZONGO

Endnote:

¹ I visited Christophe Evette and Yakabo Konaté in France in October 2015 and the members of *Les Grandes Personnes* in Boromo in November 2016. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes are from personal interviews. All translations from French are my own.

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CHRISTOPHE EVETTE

TENI-TEDJI FESTIVAL

Porto-Novo, Benin

November 30 - December 5, 2016

by Heather Jeanne Denyer



While the city of Cotonou, Benin boasts a large theatre scene through multiple cultural institutions, a national theatre and an international theatre school, Teni-Tedji, the annual festival of puppetry and street arts founded by Jude Zounmenou in 2010, steals the spotlight every December, when it brings together artists and enthusiasts from across the French-speaking Diaspora for a week in the capital of Porto-Novo. Zounmenou developed the festival as a way to encourage a renaissance in the practice and appreciation of puppetry and street arts in Benin: “We want to develop puppetry [in particular] in our country because it’s the ‘art of arts’ – the synthesis of all the arts.” In fact, Benin has a long history of “fetish” practices, using material objects in spiritual ceremonies, as the practice of voodoo is centered in the town of Ouidah. In a way, developing puppetry arts today is reconnecting with the country’s rich traditions.

Since its first edition, the festival has welcomed around 56 companies from 41 countries and offered over 164 shows to celebrate regional and intercultural performance. One of a number of regular festivals in the West African region dedicated to “marionettes,” Teni-Tedji is slightly smaller in scope than the more famed FITMO (Festival International du Théâtre des Marionnettes de Ouagadougou) and similar international festivals in Niger and Ivory Coast. However, the intimacy of the event, communal meals and happy hours, added to the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff, help create a close community of festival artists and invited guests during the weeklong event.

Sponsored in part by international organizations including UNIMA, the Institut Français of Benin, the Swiss Confederation and local companies *benincultures* and the Ouadada cultural center, the festival boasts local sponsorship as well from the national library of Benin – on whose grounds the festival is based – and local schools, where spectacles were presented for the young spectators. King Tofo of Porto Novo also expressed his heartfelt appreciation of the local event at the opening ceremony this year. Participants receive room and board, and transportation is provided between events. While traveling in West Africa offers a number of challenges, Zounmenou and his team do their utmost to make their guests feel welcome. The week of puppetry passes quickly, although some festival artists take advantage of the visit to enjoy the

local beach towns and tour the capital afterwards.

This year’s event invited performances from Belgium and France, in addition to the African groups from Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and the host country. Shows varied from innovative solo performances such as *Maritime*, by Géraldine Carpentier-Doré of the Belgian group Compagnie Les Petits Délices; to theatre for development works like *Que sommes-nous devenus?* (What Have We Become?) by Thakamou of Benin, that addresses the reality of child soldiers in Africa; to presentations of local performance traditions and so-called “street arts,” like the bamboo dancers of Compagnie Agbe de Houédo.

The festival boasted works both large and small, starting with crowd-drawing giant puppets, Les Géants de Thakamou (inspired by Les Grandes Personnes de Boromo), in a parade through town to officially launch the festival. A later treat was the tiny spectacle of Théâtre Optique’s (Charlotte le Bec and Mattéo Massa) diorama-sized rendering of Hans Christian Andersen’s tale, “The Little Match Girl.” The festival also included works intended for older audiences such as Compagnie Nord Ouest Théâtre’s adaptation of *Antigone*, and the delightful children’s show, *La Gentille et la Méchante*, performed by French-Moldovan artist Victoria Stefaniuc of Compagnie Demi Luna.

For the African spectators in attendance, the festival did not fail to offer a variety of international puppetry forms, from the everyday objects of alarm clock, toy car and cocktail umbrellas in *Maritime*; to animation and miniatures in Théâtre Optique’s curiosity; to traditional Moldovan square-shaped cloth puppets in Stefaniuc’s show. *Maritime* follows the adventures of a young woman whose daily routine is abruptly interrupted by the discovery of a tropical fish in her newspaper. She sets off on a journey to bring Jaune (Yellow) back to his native Tahiti, with the help of a young, enthusiastic audience and the creative use of toys and common objects. Stefaniuc uses Moldovan glove puppets to recount a traditional tale of a good girl, who selflessly helps others and is graciously rewarded, and a bad

girl, who ends up empty-handed. Regional folk guitar music accompanies her energetic performance. Through simple actions repeated throughout and a playful attitude, the performer shares Eastern European culture while teaching a lesson to her captive audience of Beninese children. “The Little Match Girl,” (*La petite allumette*) creates the illusion of an automaton through an animated background of snow falling in a northern European village and a small wooden dowel on a matchbox sled pulled by an invisible string. The single audience member listens to a soft soundtrack on headphones. They watch the simple puppet pine for the warmth and luxury of the houses the little match girl passes by, as a hand reaches in to strike a match, lighting up the captivating scene for a moment; then, seconds later, the light and warmth vanish and she succumbs to hunger and the cold, dying outside and alone.

The efforts of the African troupes, Gasca, Thanakou, and La Compagnie

du Fil to educate their student audiences do not fail to entertain. The first company uses wooden rod puppets while the other two use simple string marionettes made of papier-mâché and cloth to convey a deeper significance through a simple story. Gasca of Ivory Coast’s colorful doll-like puppets tell the story “The Gift” (*Le Cadeau*) about a girl who has passed her baccalaureate exam after high school. Her father wants to reward her with a gift, but all she asks for is peace. Thanakou of Benin somehow manages to add humor to the verbal antics of militants who break into a schoolroom to abduct children to fight. They prove themselves buffoons as they put the children through stark physical training, while scoffing at their pleas for food and rest. The show ends happily, however. When set with the task of killing an innocent man, the child soldiers refuse, and he rewards them by helping them escape. The Burkinabé group, La Compagnie

du fil, also treats a dark situation with humor and a ray of hope, as they portray a female prisoner who wins over her guard with love; together, they cleverly overthrow the tyrannical prison head. In the playful puppet performance, audience members laughed at the physical violence. However, the message of working together to resist oppression was not lost.

The festival does not limit itself to western varieties of puppetry. In fact, Teni-Tedji is officially a festival of puppetry and street arts. Those in attendance were treated to Congolese percussion music and dance from Groupe Hugembo and local acrobatic artists performing at the King’s palace. Particularly inspiring were the two Beninese traditions showcased: the young bamboo dancers of Compagnie Agbe de Houédo and the Gelede dancers. The Gelede dancers of Les As du Bénin, directed by Stanislas Degbo, are not initiates and their dance is not part of a sacred ritual; it is presented





MASKED GELEDE DANCERS

as entertainment and to raise awareness of the tradition. However, the dancers' identities remain unknown as their faces are hidden by a white cloth. The male performers portray female spirits dancing to percussion instruments and singers. They wear helmet masks on their heads with wooden sculptures that might represent animals or human activities. They might include sculptures

of a woman nursing a child, a hunter chasing an elephant, or even a couple copulating. The mask faces are painted white and pink with three horizontal lines on each cheek and the forehead. These lines represent the facial scarring of the Yoruba people who developed the tradition, used for recognition and acceptance. The Gelede dancers wear elaborate costumes with red and gold sequined elephants and birds and gretot bells on their ankles. In the choreography, three dancers move together, to the accompaniment of drums and song. As they make their way across the stage, the lead dancer chases evil spirits from the area with a goat tail, leaving peace in their wake.

In order to maintain their practices, both the Gelede and the bamboo dancers perform for tourists and lay audiences, rather than purely in the context of sacred rituals. In fact, when I interviewed members of the Compagnie Agbe, they explained how they were trained by a master, Anicet Adanzounon, ten years ago because he feared the dying out of the tradition, unique to the Aizo people. The company members include fifteen boys and young men, including

brothers from three families who have learned either drumming, voodoo dance (led by Finagnon Adanlinkan) or the impressive pole acrobatics. The performance begins when the sage (Adam Dédégbada) dances with a lit torch to chase away evil spirits, while Léonard Ahon sings a prayer. Albert Agba and Honvou Dédégbada then climb to the top of the bamboo poles, encouraged by the drumbeats of musicians (Roméo Adanzounon; Rafaël, Richard, Gabin Andavoçétien Agba; Gilbert Ananou; Roger Bossu; Massimo Dansou; and Daniel Dédégbada). By mounting the poles, the acrobats reach towards the sky spirits that nurture life on earth. Delicately balancing on top, they reach out their arms and legs, then flip upside-down some fifteen feet above their audiences. Even for the audience of school children and their teachers, the spectacle offered a rare and exciting experience.



PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



COMPAGNIE GASCA



COMPAGNIE DU FIL

One concern as a festival attendee was the intercultural issues raised by European performances. For example, while the adaptation of *Antigone* made use of the gifted Beninese singer Gisele Adandédjan as co-narrator, I found myself wondering why this play was being performed for a Beninese audience, and wondering at the manner in which it was being told: through the eyes of a Frenchman. The show recounts the lives and deaths of Oedipus's extended family, represented by salt-sprinkled skeleton outlines on the sand playing area. In this telling (which seemed to imitate African griot storytelling), Sophocles remained foreign to the Beninese student audiences, who had a hard time following the names of the fallen Greeks. The musical accompaniment of a recorder piping "Greensleeves" further removed the story from the local audiences, with its foreign repetition.

During the performance, the skeletal outlines are symbolically swept away as the narrator recounts the death of the figures they represent – the actions of stepping on and then destroying these representations of ancestral graves were unsettling. In the end, very little of *Antigone's* tale of defiance and the voice of protest were heard.

Another drawback to the festival was that, even though the performances were held in the late afternoon and early evening, audiences were often limited to schoolchildren bused in for the occasion. Further publicity would help to attract larger and more diverse audiences. Performance locations at fairly distant local schools and the palace grounds provided a challenge to potential spectators as well. Performance start times were often delayed and sometimes impeded by challenges that western artists take for granted, such as the advent of rain or power outages. However, the opening parade and the amplified music on the centrally located library grounds drew in crowds of curious passers-by, including street vendors, scooter taxi drivers, local merchants and many children who stayed to enjoy the free entertainment.

Criticisms aside, the festival was a pleasure to attend. I can surely say that, as evidenced by the rod puppets of Compagnie Gasca, the string puppets of Compagnie du Fil and Thanakou, the giant puppets and the masked Gelede dancers, puppetry is alive and well in West Africa; it just needs more audiences and enthusiasts to keep it that way. ☀️



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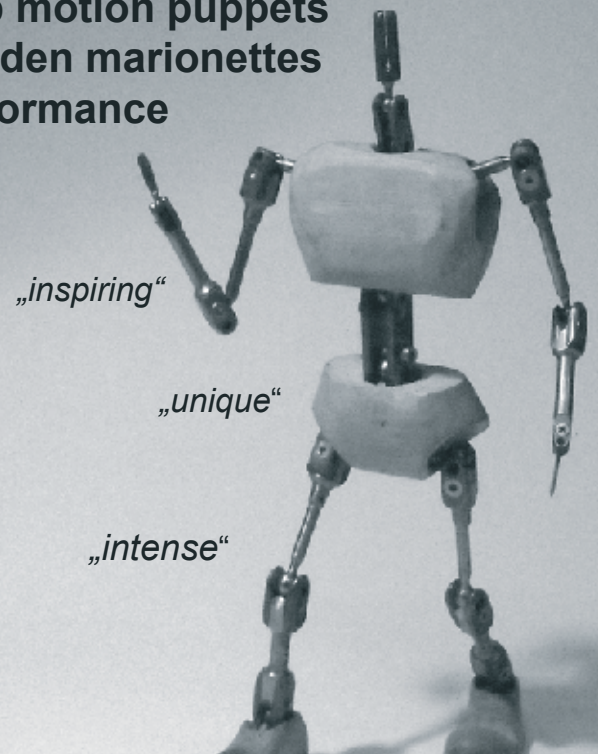
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Profile on South African Puppetry

by Veronika Ambros and Lawrence Switzky

According to one origin story of Handspring Puppet Company, co-founder Adrian Kohler encountered — and purchased — a wooden carving in the window of the Totem Meneghelli Gallery in Johannesburg in 1978. The figure's threadbare cotton costume hid a set of rods, evidence that the sculpture was really a puppet that belonged to the Malian Bambara tradition. A year before, the Sullivan Principles had been circulated in the US, the first in a wave of protests that demanded foreign businesses and federal agencies divest from state-sanctioned segregation in South Africa. As South Africa drifted towards isolation from the rest of the world, Kohler and his partner and artistic collaborator Basil Jones embarked on a romance with West African puppetry. That tradition, along with Bunraku, Czech and Italian marionettes, and countless other influences would infuse Handspring's manifold art.

Handspring is the foremost model for puppetry in democratic South Africa: its commitment to radical inclusiveness has stood against, and apart from, the separations of racism. In 1992, the same year as a whites-only referendum that endorsed the demolition of apartheid and two years before the country's first democratic election, Kohler and Jones broadened their practice by collaborating with visual artist William Kentridge on *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. Their *Woyzeck* adapted Georg Büchner's proto-expressionist play to a contemporary African context and added film to Handspring's growing multi-media repertoire. *Woyzeck*, like all of Handspring's work, defines puppetry as an art that is omnivorous in its inclusions: of artistic media; performance cultures, both "high" and "low"; several of South Africa's eleven official languages; races and genders; actors and opera singers who share the stage with puppet performers; and, spectacularly in *War Horse* (2007), non-human animals.

This brief profile traces Handspring's spirit of radical inclusiveness in three current South African examples. Scholar and playwright Jane Taylor's essay on the Handspring Trust and the Barrydale Parade and Festival details how artistic outreach in the Karoo region east of Cape Town has enabled economically disadvantaged children to recognize their own lives and creative agency as significant.

Next, Sonia Norris interviews Lara Foot, Director and CEO of the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. Foot's plays pair actors and objects to give voice to the victims of rape and

poverty in rural townships, particularly women, who have been misrepresented and silenced by sensationalistic journalism. Foot describes her art as the creation of parallel and intersecting narratives of persons and things and discusses the pivotal importance of hope as a force for resistance and change.

Foot's call for hope beyond reason echoes across the third piece — a tribute by Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones to puppet artist Ncedile Baki, who was killed at the end of February. Ned was a member of Ukwanda Puppets and Design Arts Collective, Black puppeteers currently in residence at the Factory for the Arts at the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape. Ukwanda is a Xhosa word meaning "to grow" or "to develop," and in context it means to produce a positive change in a community. With his fellow artists Luyanda Nogodlwana, Siphokazi Mpofu, and Sipho Ngxola, Ned invented a distinctive puppetry aesthetic, rooted in his apprenticeship with Handspring but equally derived from the celebration of African storytelling, animals and landscapes.

South African puppetry artists today confront a moment of historical crisis and transition that rivals the time of Handspring's founding. South Africa has the largest and most widely reported HIV epidemic in the world.¹ Anti-immigrant demonstrations have led to outbreaks of violence. The largest student protests since the end of apartheid in 1994 have shut down several national universities in a bid to make higher education affordable for Black students from low-income families. Puppetry's dream of inclusiveness, the transformative exchange of subject positions and the recruitment of difference are more necessary now than ever.

Veronika Ambros is associate professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto.

Lawrence Switzky is assistant professor of English and Drama at the University of Toronto.

Endnote

¹ www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/sub-saharan-africa/south-africa. Accessed on March 1, 2017.

LARA FOOT: Economy of Storytelling & Abundance of Hope

by Sonia Norris



Lara Foot is the Director and CEO of the Baxter Theatre Centre in Cape Town, South Africa. She is a multi-award winning playwright, director and author internationally renowned for her productions dealing with deeply challenging social issues in South African communities. Her most famous plays, *Tshepang* (2004) and *Karoo Moose* (2009), which have toured internationally, tell stories of the rape of an infant, based on the true story of the 2001 rape of a nine month-old child in a South African township, and the gang rape of a young woman in an isolated village in the Karoo, a desert region to the east of Cape Town. It is her use of visually evocative theatrical styles that provoke the imagination and the heart, as opposed to conventional realism, that makes it possible for audiences to engage with such hard-hitting subjects in her shows. Lara's productions provide an opportunity to re-examine our humanity and, ironically, she does this through the specific use of non-human objects in relation to human actors.

Lara Foot would not call herself a puppet theatre artist. Neither

would she call herself a physical theatre, object theatre, or clown theatre artist, yet her work, so rich in visual metaphor, the magic of object manipulation and hope, encompasses all of these inter-related alternative theatre styles. These are performance genres that extend beyond a naturalistic presentation of reality, creating a space to engage with reality from an altered perspective. In a recent conversation I had with Hand-spring Puppet Company co-founders Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, it was debated whether this kind of performance is heightened style extending beyond reality, or hyper-realism focusing in on the minutiae of reality. Both interpretations are highly selective in the aspects of reality they choose to present, purposefully leaving space in the storytelling for the audience to fill in the gaps. Lara Foot's productions are full of these



MNCEDISI SHABANGU, NONCEBA CONSTANCE DIDI IN *Tshepang* PHOTO: ANDREW BROWN



KAROO MOOSE PHOTO: RUPHIN COUDYZER

creative gaps, offering the audience an unusual power not imparted in conventional theatre, which Basil Jones identifies in his article "Puppetry and Authorship" as "an interpretive authority" empowering the audience to become "generators of meaning" (Taylor, 261), complicit in the process of storytelling. It is exactly this complicity, along with an economy of storytelling, that inspire the visually evocative artistic choices of Lara Foot in the telling of difficult human stories.

In December 2016, I had the opportunity to interview Lara at the Baxter Theatre and discuss the evolution of her theatrical vision, specifically how her South African roots have influenced her subject matter, her uses of object theatre and metaphor, as well as her decision, in confronting horrific stories, to choose hope.

On Metaphors in Object Theatre

Lara: I suppose metaphor would be something that is in all my work. Objects and puppets and how they tell stories and how they inhabit a narrative, I have been fascinated by that for my whole journey. It's the economy of storytelling that interests me. I'm interested in the economy of how one can engage an audience and have that invisible relationship, it's a kind of flirtatiousness, that you are hooking them in through a style that is exciting and very watchable. I could equally use a monologue or object theatre or a puppet—I use what I need to tell that story. When I did *Tshepang*, I wasn't going to pretend that a baby is being raped on stage—how does one create that? So obviously metaphor is going to be important. I find symbolic metaphor or poetry in objects to tell the story because it invokes memory in the observer. So through metaphor you can hook into somebody's experience or memory and they can then start to create the story for themselves or imagine the story for themselves. If I use a loaf of bread as a child that's been raped [*Tshepang*], I'm asking the audience

to picture the child. So the principle is the same, I want *you* to imagine, I want *you* to take part, I want *you* to use your *own* memory, your *own* experience, your own narrative, to create the story with me.

And also not to pretend things—I hate pretend. So not to pretend that this child has just been raped. I don't want to pretend that, I want to *tell* it. And then you can imagine it. There are a whole lot of elements of realist theatre that I love, but I don't like to pretend on stage that we are doing anything—this is what we are doing because we are telling a story. The same in *Karoo Moose*. I'm not going to pretend she was gang raped, I'm going to put her in a bowl of water and kick a soccer ball at her and make the sounds of the gang, and the audience then imagines the gang rape.

What's important is how do we set the object up, like the bread, from the beginning of the play so that it has a whole journey [for the audience], and how do we set the little boy up, played as a broomstick, so that when the broomstick breaks we feel for the little boy, and by the time that broomstick comes back at the end of the play and penetrates the bread we know that this little boy grew up and raped this little girl—then the audience has already created their own journey, that whole narrative, and *that's* the exciting bit for me about theatre and how we need to tell it.

The Influence of African roots

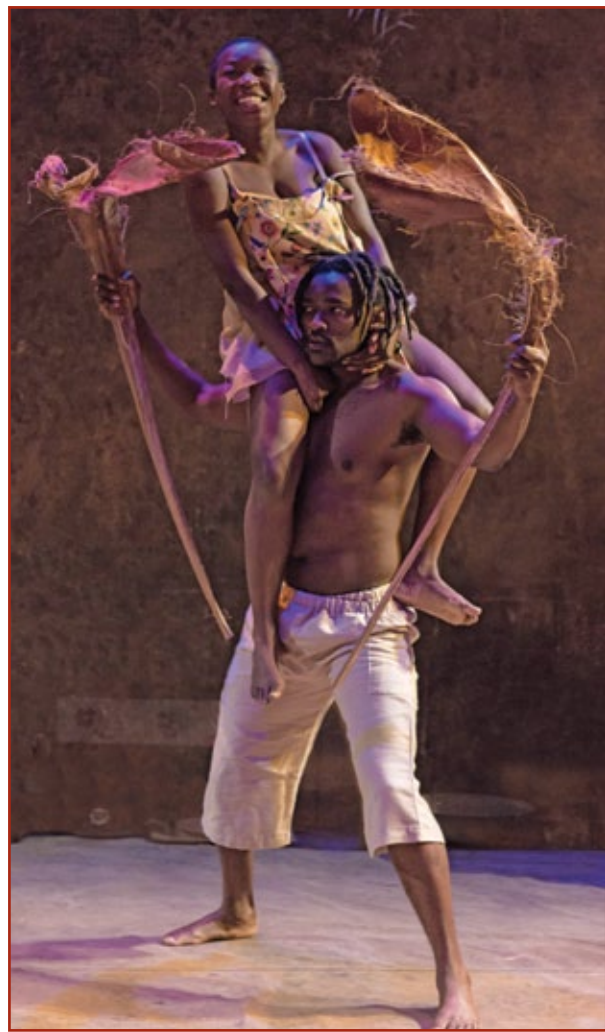
Sonia: Has your artistic vision and the elements of metaphor and the symbolic use of objects been influenced by your connection to traditional African storytelling?

Lara: Probably, it's hard to say where it all came from, but probably. There was the Poor Theatre and agitprop theatre of the seventies and everyone was making theatre to protest against the Apartheid movement. We used whatever we could

and there were no budgets for sets and costumes, and establishment was owned by apartheid government and if you wanted to work in those theatres then you could only work with white people but then you got the budget for sets and props and costumes. So there was a rebellion in us that said, “You know what? I don’t need your revolver, I’m gonna take a bucket of paint and put a plank on top of it and the actor’s gonna stand there and I’m gonna move him around and I will be far more effective than your \$500,000 revolver.” So it came from a bit of rebellion—I can be more creative with R10 and you can be the millionaire.

And of course there is the symbolism in African storytelling of using what objects are there. And in real African storytelling certain things will have significance, be it a bowl or a calabash or a seed or a plant, each object would have

some kind of mythical value and I suppose it’s that value that you give to objects that might have influenced me. There’s nothing nicer for me as a director, once I’ve written the script, than to get whatever the script alludes to in terms of objects in the room for the first day of rehearsal. For instance, in *Karoo Moose*, it was a cabbage, a drum, a bonnet of a VW, a soccer ball, and I put these in the room and then we see what happens with the actors. So there’s a playfulness, the moment we get into the room. We’re not trying to make something happen, but it evolves, very organically, with the objects—if you can create the right space in the room. Especially when I am working with Black performers, because there is a different way of approaching a space, so I don’t direct as a director, I’m very much in the middle of it and playing. Like the young girl coming out of the drum for the birth in *Karoo Moose*. There was a drum lying in the room with a slit in the hide, and I just went “Can you fit in that drum?” And it’s one of the most beautiful images, everyone just loves it. Or the boys were playing soccer at lunchtime and I said [to the female actor], “Just stand in that bowl. “Let’s kick the ball at her.” We have to have an open mind and be playful in that way. So I think that very much comes from an African-ness.



Sonia: Can you speak about being a White South African choosing to tell stories from Black communities and the connection you claim to have to these stories?

Lara: It hasn’t gone unchallenged...If you are telling a story that happens not in your particular community but in somebody else’s community... I think what makes it my community, *too*, is that I am equally responsible for what happens in that community. But I understand very, very clearly that it is also *not* my story. so the way that I tell it has to be from a place, not of respect, not of humility – well those things too – but from a collaborative community place. It’s a collaboration with whoever is in the room. I think it’s how you approach the

work that you are either allowed or not allowed to tell that story. There might come a phase now, with what’s happening with the universities and all the protests, where people will question again why is this person telling our story, but it’s not really your story [...] it’s a story in your *community*, yes. Then it’s your story, but it’s also my story because I am also responsible, I’m responsible, my ancestors are responsible – not as Whites, but because all of us are responsible for the community we create. The society we create. So it’s a *how* – how do we really work together?... [South African Professor] Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela writes amazing stuff about empathy and the perpetrator and the victim, and that’s influenced my work in recent years. I think the hope for her is empathy. Not forgiveness, but empathy.

Choosing Hope

Sonia: Your plays deal with extremely challenging social issues, telling stories of people living in circumstances stemming from what you have called “the despair of a community without hope.” And yet your plays always offer a possibility of hope. Has your belief in, or understanding of, or relationship with hope changed over time?

Lara: Yes, it has. I’ve written two plays recently, *The Inconvenience of Wings* (unpublished) and *Fishers of Hope* (2017), and *Fishers* explores the concept of hope from beginning to end and every character I created around their relationship to hope. I really looked at that because Mandela died and that was our great hope, so what happens when hope dies? We have to look beyond that. So things have shifted...the essence of hope and the need for it is still, I believe, as crucial as ever, but I suppose its longevity is under a little bit of strain, especially in South Africa with what’s been happening. So it still exists, perhaps not as brightly as in my previous work, but always knowing that it’s fundamental for survival. And when critics have questioned me in the past about it, or the academics, about why does your play have to end with hope, I always find that amazing, as if that happened by accident. I *choose*, I *choose to choose* it! It’s not some sort of arbitrary idealistic belief. It’s brave to choose hope. Do you know what I mean? In this insane, insane world. [...] Something shifted radically in our country with Mandela dying [in 2013]. We don’t have a leader. We don’t have a *possibility* of a leader... Hope is so essential for survival that some countries have chosen to hope for dictators that have murdered millions of people, even hope for a war, because really what hope is, is you are hoping for *change*. You want change. So therefore a war, a dictator, a Trump, a Zuma, is *change*. Because of hope, you might make the most *disastrous* decision. If you think about the poverty that exists and the *anger*, and you say “Here’s a hope, here’s this leader, it’s ok that we’re going to kill half the population because we’ll have change.” So hope can also lead to other things... It’s that realization that has made me understand that hope can have two heads. So that’s shifted. But I know that without hope, you can’t live... .

Sonia Norris is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto and a theatre director/devisor in Canada. In December 2016 she was in South Africa working with Handspring Puppet Company on their production *Olifantland* in Barrydale.

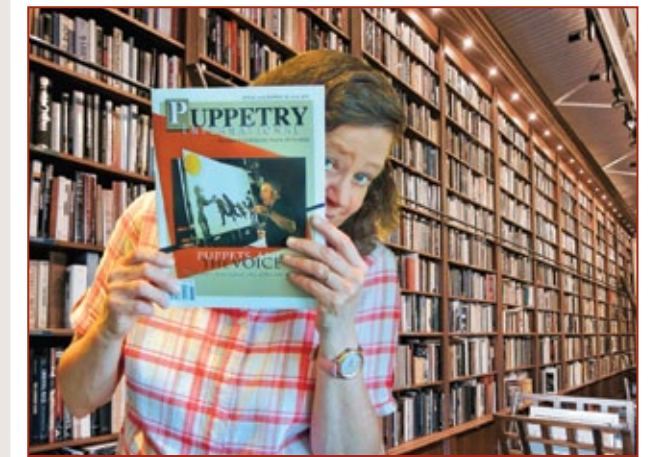
Endnote:

Taylor, Jane, Ed. “Puppetry and Authorship.” *Handspring Puppet Company*. South Africa: David Krut Publishing, 2009. Print.

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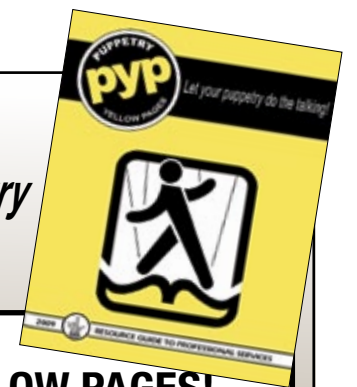
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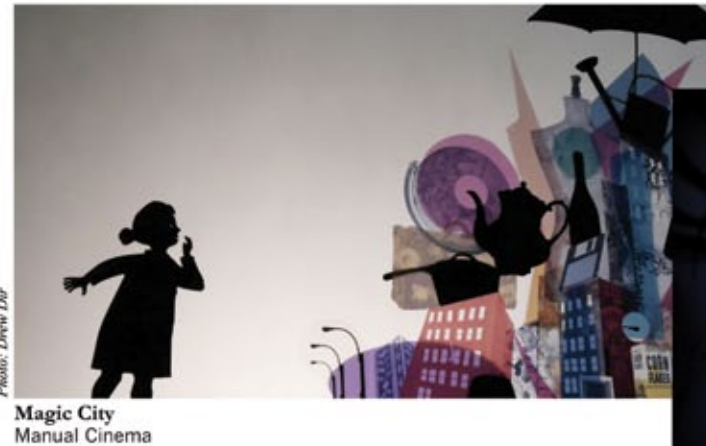


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Liz Parker and
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Photo: Marielle Solan
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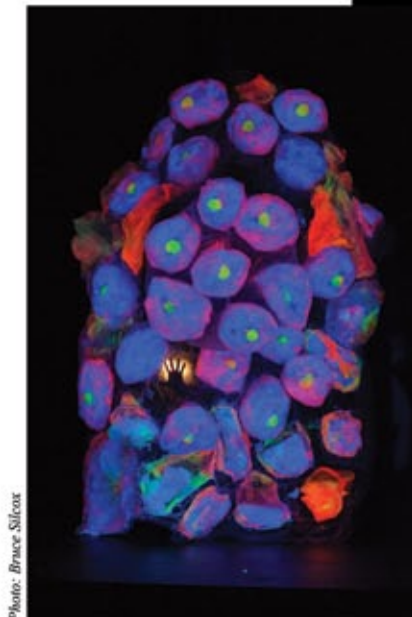


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Subjects and Objects:

The Aesthetics and Prosthetics of Puppetry Arts in the Western Cape, South Africa



by Jane Taylor

for Handspring Trust and LoKO, the Laboratory of Kinetic Objects

In 2016, there is an enigmatic small disruption on New Bond Street, London. The beautifully-wrought cane horse, familiar to his fans as “Joey” of the fabled theatre production *War Horse*, steps out onto the pavement, to the beguiled fascination of passersby.

The unnatural horse is, in some sense, in one of its “natural environments” as the progeny arising from a collaborative engagement between Handspring Puppet Company, of Cape Town, South Africa, and the Royal National Theatre, based in London. Inside the auction house, a virtual cavalry, all donated from the Handspring studio, are on auction, raising funds for the work of the Handspring Trust, a non-profit organization that supports puppetry and performance arts in South Africa.

Within the auction house a “suite” of horses and other puppet figures are on display, and the image below is suggestive in particular ways. These ghostly limbless forms appear in the middle of *War Horse*, a play about horses on the battlefield

in the First World War. These uncanny presences (distinct in design from the hyper-realised horses at the centre of the plot) function as a sign of the threshold between the organic and the inorganic. The puppets, as part-objects, evoke a sense of the misery of the animal harnessed within the military-industrial complex. In some ways, they remind us too of the prosthesis that became so significant an emblem of WWI. But in this essay, the rather husk-like puppets also provided a metaphor of the work being done with the support of Handspring Trust, because these puppets were in circulation as art objects, in order to raise funds for the ongoing work of Handspring Trust.

For the past seven years the Trust has been immersed in an ongoing initiative in rural South Africa, in the village of Smitsville/Barrydale. That is a distinctive community, yet exemplary in the sense that it still bears the evidence of the

PARADE PHOTOS: ROBYN SWART

racialized deformations of the Apartheid state. The village of Barrydale (in the “Little Karoo” - a semi-desert region some three hours drive from Cape Town) was, under Apartheid legislation, split into a white community (Barrydale) and a non-white community, Smitsville. Within the logic of separate development, persons were classified and separated on some spurious notion of race; previously integrated societies were sundered. Boundaries were drawn, and the white village of Barrydale emerged, and a so-called “coloured” village of Smitsville was inaugurated a few miles into the mountainside, out of sight. The local community of Smitsville now refer ironically to their new setting as “Steek my weg” [“hide me away”]. There is little economic activity in the broader region, and what there is, is dominated by the wine industry, with some regional fruit crops and a small tourism initiative. The social and political ills of unemployment, such as alcoholism and domestic violence, are widespread, with high rates of fetal alcohol syndrome.

Handspring Puppet Company has historically engaged in projects of creative renewal in regions of scarcity, and Handspring Trust is committed to supporting that commitment. The Trust has been developing an initiative that draws together puppetry arts, universities, activists and theorists, in order to generate social renewal through an international community of makers and thinkers. Each year, on the Day of Reconciliation (Dec. 16th), there is a parade and performance in the village; scholars from around the world have been visiting the small community in order to watch Handspring at work.

The Day of Reconciliation is an annual national holiday which prompts South Africans to consider their desire for a transition to an ever-increasingly thoughtful and anti-racist society founded on mutual regard and the celebration of social complexity. The principle in some ways is a response to the expectations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a founding legal and political event in the transition to a democratic society. The parade in Smitsville/Barrydale moves between the historically white and coloured villages, and the celebrations and theatre production are staged in an amphitheatre constructed in the grounds of a school that is between the two “zones.” Apartheid sought to fix raced

PHOTO: JANE TAYLOR

identities by restricting movement between communities and through the policing of boundaries. These events of the parade celebrate mobility and fluidity.

The project has been sustained by the ongoing commitment to pedagogy and activism from several key partnerships with members of the community: “Net Vir Pret” [“Just For Fun”] is an arts education initiative run with great skill and dedication by the local activist Peter Takelo who has a team of innovative and responsive staff and volunteers; “Magpie” (an arts initiative of makers who innovate and design artefacts and furnishings using recycled materials); and the educator Derek Joubert, all help to steer and support the work ongoing across the calendar year. Theatre makers from arts programs in Canada, the US and other northern countries volunteer and help with design, and graduate students come in for the weeks preceding the public events. With support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape aims to establish ongoing academic exchange potential across the North/South hemispheres.

Locally, the research and development of these festivities are now integrated into the cycle of the learning year of young pupils in the area, who are engaging in theatre training, design, sound and material experiments. They are also given access to specialists who take them through a program of enquiry for questions with a bearing on the show under reconstruction. The youth have had specialized teaching on slavery in the Western Cape, environmental activism and elephant ecology, rock art and Khoisan mythology.

The puppetry arts themselves develop a range of psychological and manual dexterities. Performers and audiences are invited to imagine propositional bodies, animated through acts of empathy. Selves become almost infinitely malleable, with surrogates “standing in” for beings. Projective identification is possible, and the bounded self can be liberated into any number of forms.

In the past several years, the commitment to pedagogical and intellectual renewal through this intervention has grown and developed. Handspring Trust has established a substantial relationship with the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape. Through





PHOTO: R'IAAD DOLLIE

this link, we have been able to structure a long-term relation for the school children from Smitsville to gain access to a tertiary education, something that had only ever been an extremely remote possibility in the past. Handspring Trust has been committed to creating corridors of mobility for youth who otherwise are given scant opportunity for choosing their own futures. We have also cultivated periodic engagements with young theatre-maker scholars from the international community. They help in the development of the puppets and live with and amongst the communities of Barrydale and Smitsville. For our visitors it is a key opportunity for an embodied experience in rural South Africa, resulting in a profound transfer of knowledge and capacities across communities. The parade and performance now generate significant economic activity in the area; with householders opening their homes to visitors and alternative initiatives in arts production take advantage of the seasonal audiences for the opening up of exhibitions and other events.

Smitsville/Barrydale is a numerically small community, in a particularly beautiful setting. Young



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scholars and artists who visit to work with us experience an extraordinary level of affirmation from the playful care and nurture facilitated through the work with puppets. The local puppeteers are at the same time growing substantially in self-esteem and regard through their work with objects: the puppets that they make are in some meaningful way embodiments of themselves as projective presences. The puppet is a profound and almost infinitely variable field of meanings, and children can construct projective identities that are free of gender, race, even species. How much bliss there is in such imaginative release!

Over the past several years the subject matter considered within the annual shows in Smitsville/Barrydale has itself provided the instruments for historical as well as philosophical exploration.

In 2014, the show was built around the exploration of the mythological and iconographic traditions of the Khoisan people of the region, the indigenous community whose offspring now are the inhabitants of Smitsville. The ethnicity and cultural identity of the first persons of the region is much disputed; as Khoi and San are in many quarters understood to be one group, distinguished by cultural practice and region – the one group predominantly hunter-gatherers and the other pastoralists. The conjoined name, Khoisan, is an indication of this now dominant interpretation of the history. In the colonial literature the hunter-gatherer groups were frequently referred to as Bushman and Hottentot, though there too, these designations were almost arbitrarily applied.

In Smitsville, the community are now largely Afrikaans speakers (Afrikaans is a uniquely South African dialect arising from the Dutch settler community with some variants through Malaysian influences), with scant knowledge of the indigenous languages that would have flourished in the region before colonization. Historically Khoi and San languages, together with various other influences in the area including Xhosa and Malay groups, would have been part of the Karoo cultural complex.

As the Khoisan communities were subjugated and in some measure assimilated into the colonial culture, local belief systems, exchange and subsistence patterns were broken. Generally the local inhabitants were dispossessed and displaced in wars of aggression and acts of extermination, as well as through disease and starvation.

With Net Vir Pret, Handspring Trust supported research undertaken into the local history, and caves around the region were visited,



PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



giving the school children the opportunity to learn about their cultural inheritance through the rich traditions of cave painting in the region, and also through educational contact with scholars and historians. Several fine puppets were made that embodied animal figures of mythological significance such as the Eland and the Praying Mantis.

In 2015, the show examined the history of the names in the region, an exploration that was brokered through a period of research with some of the school children who were taken into a dialogue with the "Slave Lodge" in the city of Cape Town (a museum of cultural history that is housed in what used to be the central slavery encampment in the colonial city). Children discovered that in many cases their family names were evidence of a history of enslavement, and fairly common names such as Februarie or Januarie would indicate the time of year in which a slave had been sold. The children were introduced at the same time to archival research techniques.

Handspring Puppet Company appreciates that they have a rather distinctive opportunity and obligation in relation to the animal. Puppetry arts uniquely make the staging of animal consciousness possible. This past December, the show produced, *Olifantland*, considered the precarious situation of the African elephant, under increased and severe threat on the continent. Still poached for their ivory tusks, the extraordinarily complex matriarchal herds that once dominated Africa have been butchered, as their wide-ranging territories have been exploited and fenced off. The children involved in developing the puppet elephants were taken for a period of research at the famous Addo Elephant Park in the Eastern Cape, where they observed elephant herds in the wild. The powerful and transformative impact of this kind of work is

difficult to overstate, as the young puppeteers observe the animals not simply from the position of scholars or witnesses. They are required to imaginatively project themselves into the elephant. The demands of puppetry performance require the children to note such textures as the elephant's interactive care; their communicative vocabulary ranging from aural to visual cues; the signs of stress; the defensive behaviours of the matriarchs with youngsters; interactions with other species; playfulness as well as power.

The children imagine themselves as elephants: they hear with their sensitive ears, feel the weight of vast bodies, forage for food, interact with tactile curiosity using their trunks. This is all observed and learned behavior; and the relation of regard and attentiveness between human and mammal is significantly altered.

Handspring also developed a research contact with a group of women who work in the Limpopo region as members of an anti-poaching group, *The Black Mambas*. These women have become a frontier of defense working for wildlife, and it seemed appropriate to acknowledge their commitment to species diversity.

We are in an era of significant threat to diversity. Human populations are pressured to conform, as religious freedoms and complexity are flattened into a homogeneity of values under late capitalism. Agency is diminished as makers become consumers. Species diversity too diminishes, and that diminishes us all. A world in which we do not wonder at that which is foreign to us can hold no surprises. Handspring Trust is committed to keeping surprise as an animating power in the world.



RED EARTH REVISITED

by Saskia Janse



Our production recreated the legendary story from South Africa, about Nongqawuse, a young Xhosa girl who prophesied that the Xhosa would be rid of their enemies if they killed their cattle and burned their grain. A migratory stork is the narrator in this vibrant revisiting of the story to determine if she really was the cause of the disaster that ensued...

In the spring of 2003 Africa knocked on the door of our theatre (Speeltheater) in Edam, in the Netherlands. A young man was standing in front of the door and asked to see us. His name was Macebo Mavuso. He told us he came from the Eastern Cape in South Africa and was performing at that time at a festival in the north of the Netherlands with his own theatre company. Speeltheater Holland was known as a professional theatre company that combined acting with puppetry, and Mr. Mavuso was particularly interested in working with us, because of our reputation in that field.

We were often approached by people who wanted to work together with us, and it was impossible to honor all these requests, but we were very intrigued by his story and his Xhosa background, so we decided to go and see his (two-man) puppet performance. After that, we talked further, and there it started.

In 2004 Speeltheater Holland started with the development of the play *Red Earth*, a play based on a true story: the historical tragedy of the Great Cattle Killing and the young Xhosa girl Nongqawuse, who dramatically changed the history of the tribe in South Africa. It was the wish of Macebo Mavuso not to tell a Western tale, but to tell young black people their own stories, and this particular story is an important part in the Xhosa history. We were deeply struck by the story of Nongqawuse. It is not only a story about the past, but unfortunately it is a story of all times. Also, young people are still the victims of religious or political wars. For us it had relevance for today.

We decided to make the play with two actors and puppets, in English, and to make a small tour in South Africa. That it would grow into a much larger project we never could have imagined.

THE PASSING OF
NCEDILE DAKI

PHOTO: NCEDILE DAKI

National Theatre of Great Britain. He attended the opening of a special exhibition on the Making of *War Horse* to which he had contributed and enjoyed a standing ovation from the audience on the occasion of the group's attendance at the show.

In 2013, Nced toured with Janni Younge's production *Ouroboros*, travelling to Charleville-Mézières, Bruges, Toulouse, Combs La Ville, Fontenay sous Bois, Mulhouse and Strasbourg, and then to India, where Nced stayed on, travelling alone through this exciting land—a real expression of his bravery and sense of adventure.

In 2014, Nced was the logical choice as the backstage technician who cared for the horses when the UK production of *War Horse* toured South Africa.

He also became fully committed to the annual puppet-making that happened in Barrydale to celebrate our National Day of Reconciliation, and last year was manipulating one of the elephant puppets. This is how director Aja Marneweck described it:

...In the death of (the elephant) Mnumzane scene, Nced performed the young (elephant) Mandla. He was the head and trunk, the main vehicles for touch and empathy. Every time, he would bring me to tears because I saw such compassion in Mandla's eyes, I swear I even saw tears. And I told Nced how much he moved me, and that only the greatest puppeteers hold the secrets of how to transfer such love through themselves to the puppet, let alone a large elephant. His ability astounded me.

This work was seen in CNN's *Inside Africa* documentary and broadcast to 212 countries, 300 million households and hotel rooms throughout the world.

As work on *War Horse* puppet making was beginning to tail off, Ncedile and Luyanda, both employees at Handspring, began working with a group of youths in Masiphumelele township near Cape Town. In 2010, they had formalized this group into Masiphumelele Youth Development and were joined by Siphon Ngzola and Siphokazi Mpofo. This quartet began writing a play and their first production, *Qhawe*, developed and directed by Mongi Mthombeni, went to the National Arts Festival and was the recipient of a Standard Bank Encore Ovation Award in 2015.

2016 was a great year for Nced in that he was the designer of Ukwanda's giant Slysa Tsotsi pantsula dancing puppet that performed at the Cape Town Carnival, becoming a favourite of the crowds. People remember Slysa Tsotsi now as a kind of self-portrait of Nced.

—Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler

It is with the greatest sorrow that we announce the death of our dear colleague and friend, Ncedile Daki, senior Handspring puppet maker and co-founder, technical director and designer of Ukwanda Puppetry and Design Collective, formerly known as Masiphumelele Youth Development.

Early on Sunday morning, February 26, he was returning to his home after a party when he was cruelly gunned down and his car was stolen. Wounded, he ran from his attackers but he succumbed almost immediately.

Back in 2004 Nced was living in Masiphumelele and attending art classes at the local library. He'd recently finished high school, and Sue Alexander, the founder of the library, spotted his talent and introduced him to Handspring, which he joined in 2011. He started with very simple work, bending and binding cane for the horse puppets for *War Horse*. Initially he was quiet, self-deprecating and modest. But gradually he became more communicative and he began to reveal his other qualities: generosity, kindness and a sense of humour that was based on a real sweetness. His talent for puppet making began to grow rapidly. This was founded on Thys Stander's mentorship, who taught good technique and a proper discipline as a creator. Nced kept notes on all he did at work and even under pressure could be relied upon to meet deadlines. By the end of his first year at Handspring he was doing much more complex work.

Nced joined the group of 21 Handspringers that went to London to see *War Horse* at the invitation of The Royal

Before I started writing I was very insecure. What did I know about South Africa, about the Xhosa culture? Very little. The Dutch have a history in South Africa, but what we learn in school is the story of the Dutch colonizers, the Boers (later driven away by the English when gold and diamonds were found) but not much about the people who lived there before the Dutch settlers came, like the Zulu, the Kho San, the Xhosa. And nothing about their way of life and what happened to these people when their land was taken away and they were under Dutch and later English rule.

To be able to write the play I needed, besides the literature, the stories and studies I could read about the Xhosa history, real stories from Xhosa people. We decided to go to the Eastern Cape, where the tragedy of the Great Cattle Killing took place around 1853. We travelled seven weeks with the two (Xhosa) actors and we talked and talked and talked. About their childhood, their upbringing, their family life. About their religion, customs, about ancestors, their initiation. And of course about Nongqawuse. Who was this girl, what do people think about her now, do they still know the stories about her? This really helped me.

For the design of the set and puppets (by my partner, designer and director Onny Huisink) this travel was very inspiring. The Eastern Cape landscape with the scattered huts and houses, the concentration of small villages with Xhosa people, often still wearing blankets, inspired him to create the hills, made of the red woolen blankets with miniature rondavels (Xhosa houses) and dozens of small puppets and cattle to tell the story of the people. The tragedy of the schism in the tribe, the dying cattle, the famine, caused by Nongqawuse's prophecy, dividing the people into Believers and Non-Believers, could be told in a visual way.

Also to see the possibilities in the Eastern Cape of places where we could perform influenced the way of setting up this play. We wanted to be able to play anywhere, inside as well as outside. A flexible set, simple materials, easy to transport from one place to another. To be there—see the colors, hear the stories, feel the atmosphere, touch the red earth—helped us to create this play. Being aware of the limitations of venues and technique made us find new, creative ways to make an intimate audience space that could be easily adapted: a round corral, made of wooden branches. For the Xhosa, this

is not only a place where the cattle are safe from wild animals, it is also a holy place for gatherings and rituals.

My initial unease, as an outsider telling their story, was diminished but still there. That's how the character of the Stork puppet was developed. A bird that flies from North to South, overseeing the situation, observing, wondering and sometimes commenting: a character that every audience can identify with.

Because we made this play for children, I needed another character opposite Nongqawuse, so I created her girlfriend Mandisa. Both characters were puppets. The broken friendship between the two girls because of the change in Nongqawuse, is a situation children can identify with. It is no longer the story of adults, but of two girls who are the victims of adult decisions.

We opened the play on the Grahamstown Festival and performed in South Africa, for schools, in rural areas and even in the prison of Kirkwood for young delinquents. After that we decided to bring the play to the Netherlands and performed in different locations, outside in the fields as well as inside, for instance at the beautiful Africa Museum in Arnhem. The reaction of both audiences and the media was very positive and very engaging.

In 2010, after almost 40 years, we decided to stop our company in the Netherlands and to continue as independent artists. The company's name was changed to Speeltheater Holland Studio and now mostly works abroad.

Because we no longer had storage space, we wanted to bring Nongqawuse, the set, props and puppets back to South Africa. We contacted Macebo

PHOTOS: CARLA KOGELMAN



Mavuso again, so he could go on with it and play in South Africa again. In order to do that we came for two weeks to rehearse the play one more time and after that to perform it a couple of times in Cape Town. The organization ASSITEJ South Africa offered space in exchange for workshops and a master class for young people from the townships of Khayelitsha. After a few days of workshops with them, the director was so overwhelmed by the talent and skills of these young people that he decided to ask them to perform in the play for three days.

They were thrilled and it went so well that a new plan was born for a production of the play on a larger scale: *Red Earth Revisited*.

We held auditions to find young, talented students from South Africa as well as from the Netherlands. Finally we formed a group of five young people from different backgrounds from two continents, not only to perform and build up experience and skills, but also to give them the opportunity to learn from and experience each other's culture during the whole process. They performed in this production with three professional actors from South Africa.

To recreate the play on a larger scale, we worked closely with the community from the township of Hamburg and the organization Keiskamma Art Project in the Eastern Cape. They made the costumes, as well as more small puppets and cattle for us.



pets. We had special help from one of the professional puppeteers, Roshina Ratnam, who trained with Handspring Puppet Company. To become familiar with our style, to train movement and give attention to the smallest details, it all takes a long time. But in the end it was fruitful and rewarding. We were invited to perform the play at the UNIMA World Festival in Tolosa/San Sebastian in Spain. For that occasion and to make the play accessible for the people there, the two Dutch students were replaced by two Basque actresses.

After that, the set and puppets were shipped back to Cape Town. Speeltheater has moved on with new projects, but we hope the play can go on there. Who knows how this adventure will go on and how long the Stork will keep on flying?

Saskia Janse is a playwright and the co-artistic director of Speeltheater Holland Studio.

MATERIAL SURPRISES IN AFRICA:

What We Bring to Puppet Workshops in the Developing World and What We Take With Us

by Ronald Binion

The scissors were too close to the edge of the desk. They were heavy, chrome metal scissors with “Made in Germany” printed on the blade. As I moved something on the desk I accidentally knocked them off. They fell, hit the concrete and broke. The sturdy looking pair of scissors were now in pieces on the classroom floor. I’ve never seen scissors shatter like porcelain from a short drop. My heart sank.

This was early April of 2011 and I was in Kalongo, Uganda teaching a puppet workshop. We were in the middle of a puppet building session. Normally, losing one pair of scissors would not be a big deal, we did have other scissors for the class to share, but I became very worried.

The puppet workshop was held at Dr. Ambrosoli Memorial Hospital in northern Uganda and was funded by GOAL, an Irish aid organization. The workshop was designed to teach youth participants how to create useful puppet shows. The intent was to develop community presentations that ef-

fectively communicated health messages about HIV/AIDS. My job was to teach performance, puppet building and facilitate the creation of new puppet scenes. We needed to make our own puppets for the class and the final presentation. I chose a style of puppetry that would involve basic materials and still produce useful characters. Despite the low-tech design it would prove to be a greater challenge than I imagined.

A few days earlier I had flown to Kampala, Uganda from the United States bringing with me some basic hand tools in my luggage. To supply the month-long workshop, the plan was to shop for tools and materials in Kampala, the country’s capital and largest city. Most of my shopping was done at Owino market, which is a massive open-air, second-hand market. We packed the supplies into a GOAL Land Rover and drove seven hours north to Kalongo on a rugged dirt road.

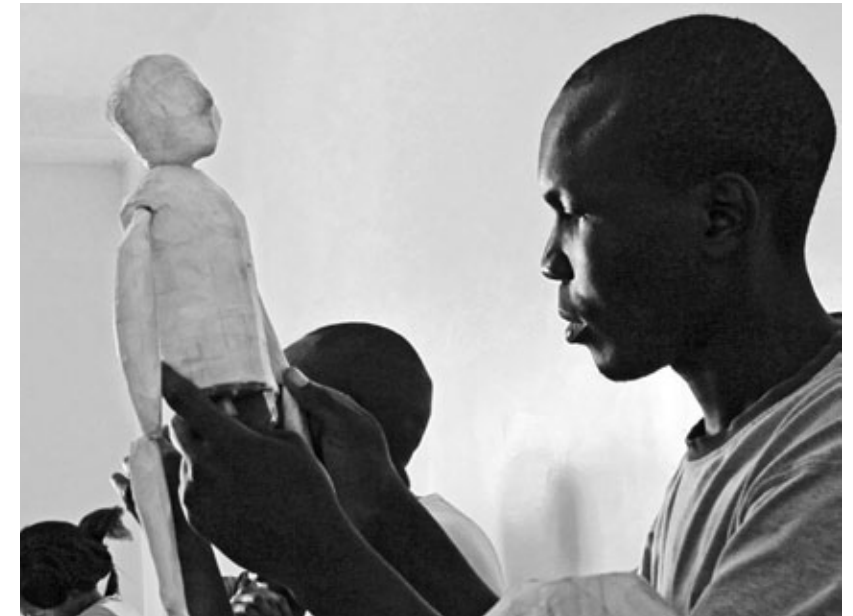


PUPPET WORKSHOP FOR GOAL INT., 2011 – FINAL PRESENTATION IN OMIYA PACHUA, UGANDA

There were 25 students from neighboring youth organizations in the puppet workshop. We had to share the tools and stretch the supplies over four weeks. In the next few days the remaining Owino-purchased scissors all broke. How were we going to continue puppet building for the next three weeks?

The broken scissors were my first indication that the goods we bought were suspect. They were counterfeits. The scissors were not from Germany, but were more likely factory made in Asia, shipped in massive cargo containers and dumped onto the secondary markets for unsuspecting customers in order to make a quick and unscrupulous profit. It was a wincing reminder of the downside of globalization. The closest markets were seven hours away, so I had to work with what I had.

Thankfully, I had a several pairs of ordinary craft scissors in my personal kit. The students were very polite about sharing, but two scissors for 25 students was ridiculous. The broken scissors were just one example of poor quality goods. We also wound up with an entire box of



GOAL KENYA PUPPET WORKSHOP, 2011
PARTICIPANT CREATING A PUPPET FIGURE WITH CARDBOARD AND TAPE

masking tape (painter’s tape) that was useless. Our savior was a can of contact cement that was surprisingly strong but extremely toxic. The glue likely contained chemicals that are banned in other countries.

In retrospect it may seem obvious that materials purchased at an informal market should have been poor quality, but in Africa it is always a challenge to source affordable and reliable supplies. Scams and counterfeit goods are a normal part of life. It was a tough lesson to learn but one that brought home the stark reality of how much puppetry depends on reliable tools and materials. We still managed to make fun and useful puppets and create a lively presentation. I was inspired by the patience and perseverance of the participants in my workshop. When something didn’t work they shrugged it off and just found another way.

Quality tools and materials can be found in Uganda but they are expensive. I saw a hot glue gun priced at \$75 (US). There is a huge gap between the cheap knock offs and the overpriced goods that work. When the budget comes from donors it is hard to justify such an expense for a puppet workshop. Experienced aid workers have reassured me that it is a constant challenge to find affordable supplies without being gouged on price or buying inferior goods.



GOAL UGANDA PUPPET WORKSHOP, 2011 – PARTICIPANT CREATING A PUPPET FIGURE WITH FOAM FOUND ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD



PERIPHERAL VISIONS INTL. MEDIA PUPPETRY WORKSHOP AT NAFASI ARTSPACE, DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA, 2016— PARTICIPANTS WORKING WITH A CAMERA AND MONITOR

To corroborate my observations I spoke to Lisa Buckley who is a trainer for No Strings Int. and Peripheral Vision Int., as well as a highly experienced television puppeteer. She shared some stories of her own training work in Africa.

Lisa designed puppets for a workshop in Madagascar that would use recycled plastic water bottles, but it wasn't until she was in the country that she realized there was a problem.

Lisa elaborated, "We asked them to gather a bunch of used water bottles and then we come to find out that water bottles are a precious commodity. They put oil in them, the kids make toys out of them and so they are very special and very valued. We most certainly were not going to get any water bottles to make puppets out of. That sort of smacked me in the face. You have to make sure that simple items are not needed in other ways."

Lisa then told me about utilizing a natural resource in Madagascar for making shadow puppets, "I went outside and just grabbed some banana leaves and they had these bougainvillea flowers which make great gels for shadows. You just tape them on the paper and you get all of these colors. They only last for a day but it's incredible. The leaves and flowers are puppets in themselves."

In February of 2016 Lisa and I were able to put our lessons to the test when we conducted a two-week puppetry workshop for Peripheral Visions Int. in Tanzania. The workshop was held at Nafasi Artspace in Dar es Salaam and

was devoted to teaching television-style puppetry. We were teaching performers for a new production of a puppet series called "Katwe Corners."

Lisa and I each brought suitcases full of supplies and tools. I brought scissors, tape, felt, welding rod and 220-volt hot glue guns I purchased in Iceland, Lisa brought hula hoops, bicycle inner tubes, toys and games. I also brought a fleet of simple practice hand puppets that I made in Brooklyn.

Lisa's equipment was used for the critical team-building exercises and games that transition students into the peculiar world of puppetry. Lisa said, "Sometimes I feel like I'm going to work as a circus clown when I travel because I'm working with adults who have never done these things, especially for some of the countries that are war torn, just for that week or two we work with them, we can make them feel like kids again."

In our workshops in Tanzania we were able to jump start our training with a fleet of fleece puppets, but as the participants created their scenes we were busy making cardboard props and felt costume pieces. It is exhilarating to be crafting props in a matter of minutes to workshop a new scene. Over time there seem to be a handful of props that always wind up being made; desks, mobile phones, motorcycles, steering wheels, coffee mugs, beer glasses, newspapers, cameras, microphones, book bags, footballs (or, in the US, "soccer" balls) and often DJ stations with turn-tables and headphones.

At one point Lisa was alarmed when she watched me jamming a stick into a wall socket in order to cram a European-style plug into a UK style outlet. It was a trick I learned in Nairobi. This procedure is not something one will find in a travel guide, but in East Africa it is routine since many 220-240 volt devices have European plugs and adapter plugs are just not practical day to day—not when one can cram a non-conductive stick into the socket to defeat the third grounding wire guard and force the EU plug to make contact with live power!

Our two-week puppet workshop in Tanzania successfully trained a group of puppeteers that performed on a new television series that deals with social issues and is currently being broadcast in Uganda. There is a unique feeling of accomplishment in sharing the skills of puppetry and using the art for projects that make a difference in people's lives.

Both Lisa and I have learned a lot teaching overseas. Many lessons are technical challenges, but we also learn a lot from the people we meet. It is a joy to hear their stories and see how they interface with puppetry. I am inspired by seeing how resourceful they are, but am also deeply moved by the stories they share through the puppet scenes.

When I am back in the US, I encounter puppeteers whose ideas are very specific and depend on scarce materials. When these materials are out-of-reach, this becomes

the excuse for the project to grind to a halt, and yet hardware stores and craft and fabric stores in the US are full of easy to access supplies. I'm surprised when I observe the attitude that not having one item becomes an insurmountable hurdle.

It is in these moments when I remember that puppetry demands a greater obligation to research and development, but success can often be found in simplicity and working with what is on hand. I have witnessed inspiring puppetry in East Africa when all we had available was paper and glue and rocks. Lisa Buckley adds, "Literally, with just a cardboard box, a little piece of paper and a stick, you can have a show. Just keep it simple. It works."

We can make great puppetry and imaginative art with the things we have around us. Maybe we will have to import supplies or bring our tools and materials to new places, but as artists we should always be looking for the discoveries right in front of us and examining familiar things with renewed value. Also I should try not to put scissors too close to the edge of my desk.

Ronald Binion, In addition to his humanitarian projects, has worked for over twenty years in theater and television. He has worked for the the Muppets, among others, and has two Emmy nominations for costume design.



PERIPHERAL VISIONS INTL. MEDIA PUPPETRY WORKSHOP AT NAFASI ARTSPACE

THE AFRICAN COLLECTION OF THE CENTER FOR PUPPETRY ARTS MUSEUM

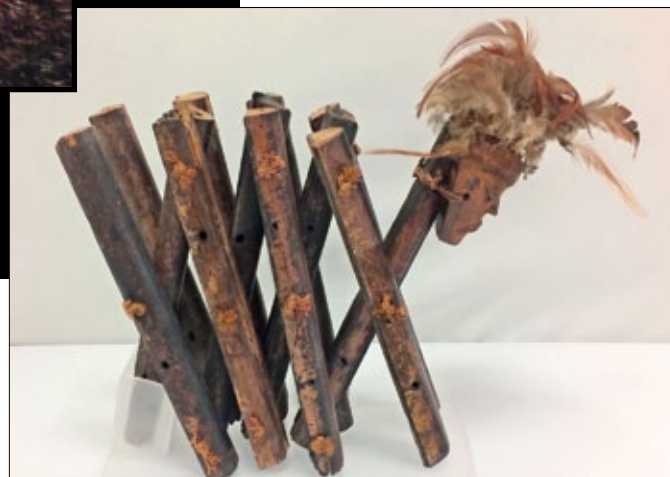
by Nancy Lohman Staub



"RAG MAN" EFFIGY, HAND-HELD, POSSIBLY USED IN RITUALS. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

DIVINATION PUPPET, ACCORDION CONTROL. PENDE PEOPLE, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

In 1980, I gave my puppet collection to the Center for Puppetry Arts (CPA) of Atlanta, Georgia, which has become the largest organization in the United States whose total focus is the art of puppetry. My personal goal as a collector is to obtain examples of significant traditions, styles and forms of puppetry from around the world representing their various functions in society. I continue to serve as a consultant and chair of the acquisition committee of the CPA Museum and Research Center, which houses several publications about African Puppetry. The goal of the museum program is to educate the public not only about the art form, but its creators and their communities.



Traditions of inanimate objects used in rituals, ceremonies and performances still exist among many of the innumerable ethnic groups of the vast African Continent. Observers as early as the fifth century BC recorded puppetry in Africa. We can only conjecture that indigenous peoples developed some form much earlier. UNESCO designated two living traditions involving puppetry in Africa as Intangible Cultural Heritage:

Masks and Puppets in Markala' of Mali and The Oral Heritage of Gelede in Benin, Nigeria, and Togo.

The CPA Museum has examples of those traditions and others from Sub-Saharan Africa including puppets by the Bamana and Boso of Mali, the Ibibio, Ibo and Yoruba of Nigeria, the Kuyu and the Pende of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Nyamwezi of Tanzania. I recently obtained



an articulated ritual figure from the Ewe people of Ghana. Modern marionettes by Danaye Kalenfei of Togo and Yaya Coulibaly of Mali demonstrate the evolution of puppet traditions. The CPA Museum holds several puppets from North Africa: hand and shadow puppets from Egypt and rod marionettes from Tunisia. Last year, Cheryl Henson donated the spectacular life-sized warhorse, Tophorn, created by the contemporary South African Handspring Puppet Company. The total number of puppets at CPA from Africa is currently ninety-seven. Photographs of many can be accessed on the CPA web site: puppet.org.

The invaluable CPA consultant for the African Collection is Mary Jo Arnoldi, curator for African Ethnology and Art at the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Author of several publications about puppetry in Mali, she even donated some puppets to CPA.

I recommend two comprehensive references for puppetry in Africa. First, *Marionnettes et masques au Coeur du Théâtre Africain* by Olenka Darkowska-Nidzgorski, a researcher with the Centre National des Études Africaines in Paris, published in 1980. Resulting from extensive field studies, it is profusely illustrated by Denis Nidzgorski's outstanding photos, diagrams and a few historic images. The other is the *Encyclopédie mondiale des arts de la marionette* published by UNIMA in 2009. The UNIMA web site is posting an updated version with English and Spanish translations on its web site:

www.unima.org.

KIEBE-KIEBE HEAD, HAND-HELD BY DISGUISED DANCER. KUYU PEOPLE, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

WEDDING COUPLE, JIGGING DOLLS, STRUNG ON A CORD AND BUMPED TOGETHER. NYAMWEZI PEOPLE, TANZANIA

THE AFRICAN COLLECTION OF THE
CENTER FOR PUPPETRY ARTS MUSEUM



BOSO FISHERMEN, ROD PUPPET.
BAMANA PEOPLE, MALI



HYENA, STRING PUPPET.
MADE BY YAYA COULIBALY,
MALI



MAANI (LITTLE PERSON),
ROD PUPPET.
BAMANA PEOPLE, MALI



PLEASURE BOAT, ANTIQUE SHADOW PUPPET REPLICA.
MADE BY DR. NABIL BAHGAT, EGYPT

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



ROD MARIONETTE FROM VERSION OF SICILIAN OPERA
DEI PUPPI IN WHICH SARACENS WIN. TUNISIA



ARAGOZ



BAKHITA



FELFEL

ARAGOZ, FELFEL (SON OF ARAGOZ) AND
BAKHITA (A WIFE OF ARAGOZ) HAND PUPPETS
ALL MADE BY DR. NABIL BAHGAT, EGYPT

A VIEW ON THE HISTORY OF PUPPET AND DOLL ARTS

by Siraj Mohamed



ALARGEZOZ PERFORMANCE, FAYOUM, 2012

According to the available documents, Morocco officially recognized the art of puppets and dolls in 1959. This came into play with the Actor School, related to the Ministry of Youth and Sport, under the supervision of Mr. Bear Luca, who trained and prepared a group of artists to perform shows for kids. A national group was formed and took on its shoulders the responsibility to foster this type of art. During its tours across the majority of Moroccan cities, the puppet theatre received the applause and interaction of the audience. Unfortunately, there isn't much data about this period of time.

Despite its strong start, the puppet and doll theatre in Morocco hasn't evolved yet. It has remained locked for individual experiences and for the initiatives of some associations interested in children and childhood, which have used the art of puppets as an element of attraction. These experiences are often characterized by a lack of experience and professionalism. This makes the performance unable to rise to the professional level, too. The strongest evidence of this is the fact that, up to the writing of these lines, there isn't a specialized training center dedicated to puppet and doll theatre. Additionally, the High Institute of Theatrical Arts doesn't include a puppet theatre department, concerned with training artists in the scope of puppet fabrication, animation

and scenography. Puppet techniques are simply given as a decorative design lesson.

It should be noted that the puppet and doll arts are deeply rooted in Moroccan culture, not in the actual European form. Moroccans have known puppets and dolls as forms of culture and heritage intertwined with traditions, customs and popular folklore. The puppet is present in the ritual of asking for rainfall (Ganja). It's present in the Tamazight New Year celebrations (Alhagouz), too. It also appears with the rites of spiritual treatments, and with religious occasions taking place in museums like Boujloud and Sidi Alketfi.

The disappearance of Alargeoz from Jamaa El Fna square, classified as a world heritage site which includes most of the live forms of amusement from ancient times, remains a point that requires research and investigation, as does the shadow theatre Morocco knew during its reign of Andalusia, where the name of Ibn Daniel (son of Daniel) shone as the brightest author of shadow theatre texts in the fifth Hijiri century [11th



AL AMANA (SWAZZLES)

century CE]. Shadow theatre shows were presented during that time in palaces and popular markets, and were considered an entertaining medium common and familiar to people. It was a golden era for Moroccan scientists who invented an advanced projector through which characters were animated by a hand mill, as depicted by Ibn Hazm in his book (*Ethics and Biography*) when visiting Seville and witnessing the prevalence of this machine among folks on the streets.

Despite the rooted practices of the puppet and doll arts in Morocco as stated above, puppet theatre hasn't sufficiently progressed to meet its audience and staff needs, compared with the regional experiences of countries like Egypt and Tunisia. These countries are leaders in this kind of art in the Arab world.

Personal Experience

Under these conditions I travelled to Lebanon, Beirut, in 2010 to participate in an art residency for puppet and doll theatre organized by the Arab Association for puppet and doll arts. In the course of this residency, I became familiar with techniques of puppet construction and animation techniques

through intense workshops supervised by specialized and professional teachers and experts such as Steve Tebaldi and Sara Bourwan. The result was the presentation of a show (*Beirut Cloth and Light*) on the stage of the Beirut Theatre in concert with twelve young artist-trainees from the Arab world. That was the beginning of my personal journey with the puppet and doll arts. The journey led me to Egypt, where I stayed from 2010 to 2014, in order to learn and become acquainted with the local leading experts. First, I worked with a variety of art groups and teams using puppet arts as a medium of art production. In addition, I received training in the sphere of acting and film making at the hands of international trainers like Jacques de Sierra. This has deepened my knowledge in this regard. In this period of time I introduced the character of Bourahal, derived from Moroccan heritage, as my first art product in the domain of the puppet and doll arts. Later on, this work would develop into a range of shows using the character of Bourahal.

In 2012, I met Nassif Azmi, an expert in the art of the Egyptian traditional Aragoz (in Morocco Alargeoz or Arajoz). For two years I

lived in his workshop in the village of Fayoum, where I learned techniques of sculpting wood and other materials, animation techniques, performance and singing through Al Amana (also Alamana, what the British would call a swazzle). Thanks to its metallic and attractive voice, Al Amana is seen as a remarkable sign of the heritage of Alargeoz. This art is associated with the rest available in France, Italy and Spain. As a result of this experience, a mobile "castelet," or booth, was manufactured to present Alargeoz shows on the streets, gardens and in public squares.

Through the years of my journey of professional formation in Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia and other countries, I was always thinking about how Morocco might benefit from the great potential of the arts of puppet and doll theatre, and how this art form can contribute to the development of my country, and how it might be possible for Moroccans to explore this amazing and wonderful art. This obsession has occupied me in all my meetings with artists and culture practitioners until I was appointed representative of the International Union of Puppet Artists (*UNIMA*) by Secretary General Mr. Jacques Trudeau in 2014.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 52)



NASSIF AZMI'S WORKSHOP FAYOUM, EGYPT, 2012

Egyptian Aragoz: Egyptian Traditional Hand Puppet

by Nabil Bahgat

translated by Ahmed Abdullah
revised by Nadia El Kholi
Cairo, Egypt: The Supreme Council
of Culture, 2012. 468 pp.



I first became aware of the work of Dr. Bahgat after he donated a collection of Egyptian shadow and hand puppet replicas to the museum of the Center for Puppetry Arts, having previously presented them in an exhibition that he organized elsewhere. Bahgat is the founder of the folk performance organization Wamda Troupe for Shadow Theatre and Al-Aragoz Arts. Wamda has performed internationally and collaborated with Pennsylvania's Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble on a 2006 production that toured in the US. Dr. Bahgat was instrumental in an effort to place Aragoz on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding status (which has not been successful as of this writing). The preservation and promotion of traditional Egyptian puppetry is clearly his passion, so I approached his book with a great sense of anticipation.

Relatively little has been written in English about the Egyptian folk puppet traditions, but as is often the case, surviving scripts of the 13th-century Cairo dramatist Ibn Dāniyāl have led to translations and extensive literary analysis related to Egyptian shadow theatre. But as Dr. Bahgat makes clear, the Aragoz hand puppet tradition has never commanded as much scholarly attention, let alone respect, even in Arabic. In fact, some scholars had essentially declared Aragoz to be an extinct form of folk theatre. Bahgat argues that not only is Aragoz not dead, but that the Aragoz street performance is a true representation of the thoughts and concerns of the average Egyptian citizen. He argues that the Aragoz theatre, as well that of the traditional shadow show, are important forms of resistance against the encroachment of Western models upon Egyptian art forms and national identity. With this in mind, he approaches his subject through the lens of an engaged folklorist, documenting contemporary performers and their performances (taking place primarily between 2003 and 2009).

The book is organized in three major chapters. The first focuses upon the origins of the genre, major themes contained within the plays, puppets, the use of

stereotypical (or archetypical) characterizations, and other folkloric aspects of the show, as well as the influence of the shadow theatre. He provides short profiles of the Aragoz performers whom he observed. The second chapter serves as a description of the performances, including the practical and business related elements, the nature of the show venues and their respective audiences (these include wagons with audience seating, tents, and self-contained booths that allow the performers to sit and present longer plays). The characters and comic techniques used by the performers are discussed in detail. Finally, the third chapter consists of transcriptions of performances. Dr. Bahgat has supplied links to YouTube performances for each one; all were still current as of February 2017. The book is well illustrated throughout, with many photos of individual puppet figures, performers (generally men, though one works with his wife) and performances shown in different contexts.

The general performance parameters of the Aragoz show are certainly similar to other hand puppet traditions, as well as shadow traditions such as the Turkish Karagoz and Greek Karagiozis. The concerns of the common man are paramount. Aragoz works in a variety of professions, and much of the action has to do with his frustration with the corrupt officials or dishonest tradesmen with whom he comes in conflict. The plays are full of verbal wordplay (not easily translated, but well contextualized when necessary) and rhythmic repetition, often ending with the "villain" of the piece chased offstage by Aragoz, if not actually murdered. The "co-performer" is especially important in most Aragoz performances; rather than playing a minor role, or functioning exclusively as a translator of the puppet

hero's swizzle-speech, the Aragoz co-performer (often a musician, and who may be a puppeteer himself during other performances) serves important functions within the play, often carrying the scene when Aragoz is off-stage. As audience interaction and participation is very important, the co-performer leads songs and in other ways ensures that the audience remains engaged. Aragoz, who is happy to spit at him, also often abuses him!

The nineteen plays, transcriptions of authentic performances, took place in different venues, and the themes vary accordingly. One play, performed in an orphanage, emphasizes positive behaviors on the part of the students. Other plays that are intended for adult audiences at festivals or other public venues represent a grittier folk form: sexual, violent and familiar territory for Punch scholars. Improvised around common scenarios, each is given individualized interpretations by the performers; consequently, the scripts lack the bland qualities that often characterize folk plays in publication. While the plays contain topical references to popular songs and Western products, only a few are overtly political. While a generic "foreigner" often appears as an antagonist, two short plays specifically focus on Israeli leader Moshe Dayan, who consistently meets a bad end, and a third includes an audience member's request for a popular anti-Israel song. At least on the surface, religion plays a small role in these scripts, as is the case in many other Islamic societies with strong puppet traditions. Although Allah and the Prophet are often praised in prayers and blessings, both in dialogue and in song, the themes of the plays are essentially secular. As Dr. Bahgat observes, Aragoz plays connect with audiences by depicting the daily life experiences of an average male Egyptian citizen: birth, education, military service, marriage and work. The last play, *The Demon*, ends with Aragoz's own death.

This fascinating book contains a dense treasury of primary research, well presented and interpreted. It is an important addition to primary works documenting world puppet traditions.

—review by **Bradford Clark**
Bowling Green State University

(Thanks to Nancy Staub, who obtained a digital review copy of the book from the author.)

Further reading:

Hussein, Nashaat. "The Revitalization of the Aragoz Puppet in Egypt: Some Reflections." *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 3:1, 2012.



RAND AFRICAN ART www.randafricanart.com

UNIMA-USA Scholarships



NICK HUBBARD, SCHWÄBISCH GMÜND, GERMANY, 2012

UNIMA-USA is happy to announce our annual scholarship of \$1,000 that will be awarded to American puppeteers to attend training workshops abroad. The deadline for applications is December 1st for study in the following year.



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or contact Irina Niculescu at:
scholarship@unima-usa.org

THE THEATRE OF ROBERT ANTON

EXHIBITION 12/7/16 - 2/11/17

BROADWAY 1602 UPTOWN

5 E. 63 Street, 1ABC, New York, NY

I now understand that when I was nine years old and my mother took me to see one of Robert Anton's shows while researching her book on surrealist theatre, *Theater of the Marvelous*, that I was among a precious few able to witness these magical events. In order to preserve the intimacy and spellbinding atmosphere of the experiences he created, Anton restricted his audiences to no more than 18 at a time and insisted that his shows never be filmed. In the 1970s, his enthusiastic supporters came from New York's avant-garde arts scene and included celebrities such as Stella Adler, Susan Sontag, Hal Prince, John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Still, Anton remained relatively unknown in the US, though more prominently recognized and celebrated in France, where he was invited to live and perform for a year at the Chateau de Vincennes outside of Paris. With his untimely death in 1984 from AIDS, at the age of thirty-five, lucky initiates squirreled away memories of his mystical shows like precious keepsakes. His puppets were also safeguarded, by Barbara Stoler who was with him in his final days and who, in spite of many requests for exhibits, kept the puppets under wraps until now, finding with curator Anke Kempkes and the gallery BROADWAY 1602 UPTOWN the right setting in which to resurrect his work.

BROADWAY 1602 UPTOWN fittingly presents itself as a bit of a secret: Located in the lobby of a pre-war residential building on New York's Upper East Side, it displays no identifying signs, so visitors must intuit that they have arrived at the right location and buzz button 1ABC to be ushered in. Housed in a converted apartment, the gallery offers two small exhibit rooms. The front room displays Anton's puppets, arranged throughout in evocative configurations. His craftsmanship resides in the small heads, about 1-1/2 inches tall, with distinct, sometimes eerie faces, placed



atop drapes of black velvet, replicating the way he brought them to life in performance. According to Kempkes, "These faces were inspired by people Anton observed at Verdi



Square Park, close to his 44 West 70th Street apartment, an area populated in the seventies with aged opera singers and junkies."¹ Many of his "actors," glare at the spectator with myste-



rious smirks or penetrating looks. A chorus of female heads with long curly blond locks and dark eyes stand dramatically around a severed head, figures from an ancient Greek tragedy.

Two startling creatures, demons perhaps, have heads made from hermit crab shells. Other cast members include a long skeleton in a purple boa and feathered headdress, a white-faced, turbaned man with his two eyes peacefully closed but an enormous third eye wide open in the middle of his forehead, and a haggard Pope with purplish complexion in a gold embroidered miter. A few of the faces resemble Anton himself, one sporting oversized ears and another with his curly black hair worn in a large Afro. Miniature props, all painstakingly constructed in minute detail, offer further glimpses into Anton's theatrical imagination: antiquated books, a deck of cards, Hebrew language newspapers tied in a bundle, a torah scroll placed next to a white bearded figure, and an elaborate wheeled cart with cascades of junk hanging from every side, attended by a bag-lady in green sunglasses whose hat is bedecked to echo her cart. In 1975, Françoise Varenne described Anton's shows as, "A mesmerizing and surrealist universe born out of the fantasies of a young man refusing any realities and taking refuge in the imaginary" with "No music. No dialog."² The exhibition draws these qualities from his figures, even in their stasis. The show offers those unfamiliar with Anton's work a chance to sample his exquisite artistry and, for those who have first-hand experience of his work, a chance to bring the memories of his performances back to life through their confrontations with these stars from the past. The space is not entirely silent, however; jazz music plays in the background reflecting the occasional musical outburst that accompanied the vivacious gyrations of Anton's dancing skeleton.

The second room displays memorabilia such as personal letters, the suitcase Anton placed his puppets in for traveling, and sketches for stage designs. Anton's love of theatre began during his childhood in Texas as he

recreated in miniature the sets of musicals his parents took him to see in London and New York. He studied stage and costume design for two years at Carnegie Mellon before moving to New York and in 1973 designed a musical, *Elizabeth I*, collaborating with Elizabeth Swados. His later projects, in the 1980s, were small, animated sets that acted as performances unto themselves with lights and moving parts.

A monitor in the exhibit room plays footage of interviews with Anton's friends and devotees. The material is for a documentary in progress, and the curator is eager to connect with others who might have memories to share. These personal recollections provide first hand descriptions of the performances as well as perspectives on Anton who, from all accounts, was an uncompromising, but passionate and endearing artist, inhabiting a magical world of his own imagination, in which friends cherished being immersed. His greatest artistic influences were George Grosz, Odilon Redon, Hieronymus Bosch, and William Blake (for his illuminations), revealing a sensibility towards both symbolism and expressionism. He was also a great admirer of Felini's films and a set of clown figures in the exhibit, expressive faces in white paint, topped with richly patterned cone-shaped hats, stand as an homage.

Anton was also deeply interested in mystical subjects, especially alchemy. Françoise Varenne writes:

But in order to give birth to his puppets to make them alive and suffer, Robert Anton takes on the gestures of an alchemist. He creates beings that transform through mutation. Each metamorphosis is painful, surgical and magical. Between these characters and their creator strange mute relationships are established. (*Le Figaro*, 14 May 1975).



The images that run through his silent pieces — an old woman birthing an egg, a man in pursuit of a golden key, the opening of the third eye — further reveal the influence of alchemy and mysticism on his work. Maurice McClelland's 1975 article "The Puppet Theatre of Robert Anton" probably offers the most detailed view into one of his shows with a step by step description of a performance from "Prolog" to "Epilog." In one passage, for example:

Snow swirls around a fur-clad monk sitting in stolid meditation atop a white mountain of ice. His creator's naked hand appears behind him, each finger tipped with a gold cuff and tiny dancing hand. Amidst them moves the horrifying gold head of a horned demon, who jabs and pokes the sitting man to no avail. The demon offers him gold, music, food, tickles his sex, and finally builds a temple of monstrosities around the unmoved man, animating them himself until the dust is sprinkled from above and all the gold trappings get stripped away. We recognize our old friend when his peaked fur hat is removed, but he doesn't recognize anything at all; not the hand waving in front of his eyes, not even the golden keys that are offered. A white veil drops over him, making him part of the mountain again before he is lifted away.³

The description reveals the mythical dimensions of Anton's work as well as his artistic attention to detail in actions and images throughout the piece. In *Theatre of the Marvelous*, my mother put him in her closing chapter, "Corona Magica: The World as Alchemical Stage," and states that "Mythical procreations and alchemical rebirth, mysterious transformations and metamorphoses, are the themes and images of Anton's intimate puppet theatre."⁴

Anke Kempkes has brought Anton's compelling figures, and the memories of his work, back into the light to beguile us with their wizened faces, knowing glances, skeptical looks. They beg to be set into action to bring us once more on their mystic journeys.

—review by Claudia Orenstein
Chair/Professor, Theatre Department,
Hunter College CUNY

Endnotes

- ¹ "The Theatre of Robert Anton," accessed January 23, 2017, <http://broadway1602.com/exhibition/robert-anton/>.
- ² Françoise Varenne, "Le Monde Silencieux de Robert Anton," *Le Figaro*, May 14, 1975.
- ³ Maurice McClelland, "The Puppet Theatre of Robert Anton," *The Drama Review (TDR)* 19, no. 1, 1975. p. 83.
- ⁴ Gloria Feman Orenstein. *Theatre of the Marvelous: Surrealism and the Contemporary Stage*. New York: New York University Press, 1975. p. 286.

IMAGES FROM
"THE THEATRE OF ROBERT ANTON,"
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Masters of the 20th Century: Puppet Theatre by Adolfo Ayuso

Tolosa (Spain): TOPIC, 2016. 199 pp.

The continuing growth of puppetry history seems to be accelerating. Efforts that began in the early twentieth century with such pioneering works as Paul McPharlin's *The Puppet Theatre in America*, or Henryk Jurkowski's *History of European Puppetry*, which forayed into vast, unknown territories, can now afford to focus on histories of specific times, places and practices. Adolfo Ayuso's *Masters of the 20th Century: Puppet Theatre* does this for modern Spanish puppetry in a fascinating study that follows the interwoven paths of early, middle and late 20th-century puppet performers. The book is a catalogue of an eponymous 2016 exhibition that Ayuso curated in San Sebastian on the occasion of the UNIMA World Congress held nearby in Tolosa. Following upon such works as Francis George Very's 1957 *Historia de los Títeres en España*, Ayuso's study of over twenty puppeteers is able to consider the trajectory of Spanish puppetry in the turbulent 20th century from a post-Francisco Franco perspective, seeing the rise of Franco's fascism, the Spanish Civil War, and the long post-war Franco period, as the weighty context in which Spanish modernist puppetry thrived or merely survived.

Spanish puppetry has a rich and deep history, from the marionettes Cervantes described in the pages of *Don Quixote*, to the ubiquitous and towering medieval *gigantes* and the unique three-fingered handpuppet traditions of Catalunya, but, as in the rest of Europe, the 20th century pressed modern artists and traditional puppeteers to rediscover older forms and invent new ones in response to the social, technological and cultural changes of the times. Barcelona's avant-garde cabaret *Els Quatre Gats*, like its cousin *Le Chat Noir* in Paris, began in 1897 by featuring shadow puppets, but these were superseded by traditional Catalan handpuppetry—*putxinel·lis*—whose technique was (and is) based on a carved wooden torso operated by the puppeteer's three middle fingers. Juli Pi was the *Els Quatre Gats* puppet master, writing over 100 plays featuring Titella. Titella was the epitome of a young Catalan man who, like most other local puppet heroes, embodied the essential traits of his community (a feature that would become problematic later under Franco's repression of Catalan culture). Pi was one of a number of Catalan handpuppet performers, including Arturo de Sant Hilari, Ramón Montserrat, Antoni Faidella, the Anglés and Vergés families, and Ezequiel Vigués, whose professional name was Didó. The early 20th-century Catalan puppeteers were extremely popular throughout the region, playing in local fairs, town squares and theaters as well as in cafés.



While Catalunya might be considered the spiritual center of Spanish puppetry, despite its location on the eastern edge of the country, a particularly strong form of puppet modernism emerged in Granada, on Spain's southern coast, among a coterie of young artists including poet Federico García Lorca, composer Manuel de Falla and the visual artist and puppeteer Hermenegildo Lanz. All three were caught up in youthful culture focused on creating new forms of art and re-discovering Spanish traditions. Folklore, flamenco and puppetry were part of these enthusiasms, and Lorca, Falla, Lanz and their friends turned particular attention to Spanish puppetry, creating a puppet company—*Los Títeres de Cachiporra* (sometimes translated as *The Billy-Club Puppets*)—that explored the avant-garde possibilities of popular handpuppets; a modernist opera—*El Retablo de Maese Pedro*—that enacted Cervantes' riotous story about Don Quixote's problematic inability to separate puppet conflict from real life; and modern drama written expressly for puppets such as Lorca's *El Maleficio de la Mariposa* (*The Butterfly's Evil Spell*). Lanz designed puppets, sets and costumes for such shows, including flat cut-out toy theater puppets for the group's production of a medieval Spanish play, *El Misterio de los Reyes Magos* (*The Story of the Three Kings*). Ayuso explains how Lorca's personal antipathy to Lanz led him to downplay Lanz's important contributions to these productions, a fascinating insight into the eternally complicated psychologies of artistic creation. But this is

overshadowed by the success of such productions as *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, which toured throughout the world in the 1920s, establishing itself as a landmark of modernist opera and puppetry. Spanish fascists murdered Lorca in 1936, but Lanz, Falla and others in the Granada circle survived to face the onerous difficulties of living under the repressive Franco regime, which fully understood the dangers of innovative art making. Lanz stayed in Spain, and even found ways to make some puppets within the strict confines of Franco's culture apparatus, but faced a hard life. Ayuso writes that Lanz "had to pretend absolute submission and even surrender to the Regime. Inside, he was consumed by his fear and cowardice. If fate was cruel for the people who had to flee abroad, no less outrageous was the fate of those who had to put up with the disgrace every day out on the street. In 1949, at the end of one of the usual indoctrination courses, which were compulsory for those suspected for their past, Lanz had a stroke in the middle of the street. He died a few hours later."

Ayuso chronicles the work of other notable Spanish puppeteers, including Miguel Prieto and Rafael Dieste, who thrived on the same inspirations guiding the puppet artists in Granada. Creating puppet shows for children's education and entertainment, or performing agitprop pieces for an "Emergency Theater," even on the front lines, Prieto and other puppeteers found ways for puppetry to fully engage in the conflicts of the times, despite the ultimate defeat of their cause. Artist Salvador Bartolozzi ventured into puppet theater after great success as a modernist stage designer and children's book illustrator beginning in the 1910s. He created a family of cloth puppets in the 1920s that he and his partner Magda Donato performed outdoors in Madrid's Retiro Park as Teatro Pinocho, as well as in films. Bartolozzi was exiled to Mexico after the Civil War, but his work created a strong precedent for the live and filmed performance of children's puppet shows.

One of the more unusual, but essentially important aspects of modern Spanish puppetry is the work of the Englishman Harry V. Tozer. Tozer came to Catalunya in 1925 as an accoun-

tant, but soon became smitten with Barcelona's *putxinel·lis* handpuppets, which he documented with brilliant illustrations. Inspired by the work of Paul McPharlin (among others), Tozer began to experiment with marionettes, bringing modern string puppet practice to the fore in Spain, and helping to inspire a generation of young post-Franco puppeteers in the 1970s, including Joan Baixas, Teresa Calafell, Herman Bonnin, and Xavier Fàbregas.

The end of the Franco regime allowed puppetry in Spain to blossom in ways it hadn't seen since the Lorca/Falla/Lanz experiments of the 1920s and 30s. Francisco Porras was an idiosyncratic puppeteer and puppet historian who, with his wife Tina Delgado-Ureña, did considerable work on television, toured live puppet productions, and created *Titere*, a magazine devoted to puppetry and puppet history, in 1977. Through *Titere*, Ayuso points out, Porras was able to uncover and celebrate the repressed history of pre-Franco puppet experiments.

Finally, *Masters of the 20th Century* examines the work of Pepe Otal, who, inspired by circus traditions, the sixties, and Bread & Puppet Theater in particular, created work that was "theatrical, transgressive and provocative." Otal's ambitious, sprawling creations seemed to follow anarchic organizing principles, but they inspired scores of artists to collaborate with him, and then go off and create their own work. Otal's embrace of late-20th-century effervescence and energy also included a devotion to Spanish theater tradition, for example in his 1985 version of Calderon de la Barca's classic religious play *El Gran Teatro del Mundo*.

Ayuso admits early on that focusing on the above artists as "masters" is an inherently challenging task. Many other 20th-century Spanish puppeteers could also have been termed masters, but the limits of the exhibition did not allow for such inclusion. Ayuso points out that a complementary exhibition at the same time featured the compelling work of Catalan puppeteer Joan Baixas, and that still more attention needs to be paid to other modern Spanish masters of puppetry.

—review by John Bell

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Puppet and Doll Arts

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45)

A Return to Homeland

My primary task here was to write a report about the puppet and doll arts in Morocco. That wasn't an easy task due to the lack of statistical data and contact information on the practitioners of these arts. The archive available has been limited to personal property (see the report of the representative of Morocco about the last conference UNIMA San Sebastian, Spain, 2016). However owing to several national and local meetings with artists and practitioners interested in the puppet and doll arts, a general debate has been launched on this topic. Afterward, a general consensus was reached about the need to establish the first association specializing in the arts of puppets and dolls in Morocco, concerned with improving puppet and doll theatre in the Moroccan cultural scene, and being a stage upon which artists and officials would be addressed to improve and realize the dynamism of puppetry locally.

The result has been the founding of the Moroccan Association of Puppet and Doll Arts in Taounate, my hometown. The association presented its first street theatre show (Fichta), for which the audience applauded warmly. It also organized workshops for adults and youngsters to improve the puppet-making and manipulation skills in educational and social institutions. It held seminars, as well, to discuss puppet and doll arts and the stakes of its development.

Because of the efforts it has made, the association was invited to participate, alongside famous names in the sector of puppet and doll arts, in the Second Arab Forum for puppet and dolls art organized by the Arab Authority of Theatre, the



STUDENT AND MASTER, FAYOUM, EGYPT

National Center for Puppets and by the High Institute for Theatre Arts in Tunisia in order to be familiar with and benefit from the Tunisian experience in the field with a view to improving this type of art in Morocco.

The following year the association, in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of culture, the Cairo puppet theatre and the Arab Authority of theatre, I presented "Bourahal: a Visa around the World" during the Third Forum in Egypt, 2015. This has given the association local and regional fame at the level of the Arab World and North Africa.

In order that the Moroccan Association of puppet and doll arts not remain merely an individual and personal experience, it has been necessary for us to work on a project that would pave the way for the flourishing of puppet and doll arts in Morocco. Many sectors would benefit from this project, which must have been made long ago, to achieve professionalism and the requested objectives. The project is to create a specialized training center devoted to the puppet and doll arts, as is the case in other countries.

To this end, this year we have let our doors open for support and funding to establish the first National Center for the puppet and doll arts. With a view to reaching this objective, we invite you to offer support or advice for the sake of this kind of art.

In this article I wanted to draw a wonderful picture of the art of puppets and dolls in Morocco. This is an ongoing process, but we are proud of what we have achieved in this domain. We are sure that many hold the same dream of developing the arts of puppets and dolls, though in different ways. Again, we invite you to support us so that the audience can enjoy and benefit from this great and noble art, which deserves so much more attention.

Siraj Mohamed graduated from the Institute of Journalism and Media Services in Casablanca in 2007, then devoted himself to work in the theater in Taounate Province (a bit south of the Strait of Gibraltar). He hopes to build a national center of arts education and puppetry in the town of Taounate.

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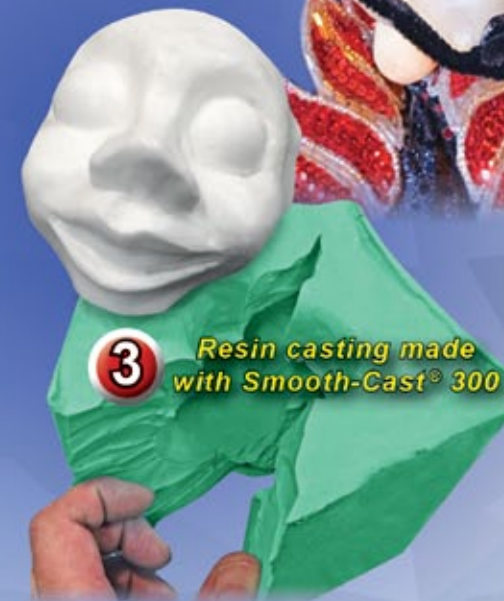
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