

***The Art of Contemporary Puppet Theater***  
at the Katonah Museum of Art February 28 - June 13, 2010

Dear Educator,

The Katonah Museum of Art is delighted to share *The Art of Contemporary Puppet Theater* with visiting school groups. This dynamic exhibition shines light on world-renowned artists who explore this ancient art form – puppetry – in extraordinary new ways. The focus of this exhibition is on the art of puppet theater – that magic mix of storytelling and the visual arts, fusing painting, sculpture, music, movement, and technology.

Works by thirteen contemporary artists fill the galleries with dramatic tableaux of puppets, props, and sets, from shadow puppets to marionettes, and from tiny toy theater to bigger than life whole-body puppets. Your students will enter the galleries as “puppet scene investigators” using observing, describing, analyzing, imagining, and questioning skills to explore this wonderful and mysterious art form. Where do puppet performers get their ideas? How are puppets made and manipulated? How do puppeteers bring hand-made objects to life?

In addition, the Learning Center exhibition, ***Puppets Around the World***, celebrates the rich variety of puppet forms from around the world including a Javanese rod puppet, a Sicilian marionette, Chinese hand puppet, Turkish shadow puppet, and a hand and rod Muppet. Your 90 minute class visit includes both an interactive tour of the exhibitions and an “object theater” activity in the Learning Center.

The KMA education department welcomes collaborative planning for class visits to ensure the value, relevance, and enjoyment of your students. Let us know how you will be using your visit so that we may best serve you. We look forward to sharing this dynamic exhibition with you and your students.

Thank you for choosing the KMA for your class visit.



Karen R. Stein  
Director of Education  
914-232-9555 ext. 2969  
kstein@katonahmuseum.org

★★★ A few works in this exhibition may surprise students who associate puppets with humorous subjects. Some artists have pushed the boundaries of this medium in order to tackle contemporary social and political concerns. These particular works would be engaging for middle to high school age groups, but for elementary school visitors we have selected exciting works that are age appropriate and relevant to younger visitors. To help prepare your students for their visit please spend a few minutes discussing their experiences of and thoughts about puppetry. The enclosed full color images from the exhibition have suggested questions to begin a discussion about works students will see on their visit.

**We have enclosed the following pre-visit materials which you can adapt to the needs of your own students:**

- Exhibition overview: Curator’s Introduction
- Glossary of puppetry and art terms
- Puppets Around the World
- 3 images from the exhibition with discussion questions
- Pre-visit activities: *Puppet Character Development* and *Communication through Gesture*
- Name Tag Sheet – Please have each student arrive wearing a name tag with **his/her first name clearly written**... Thank you.

# The Art of Contemporary Puppet Theater

At the Katonah Museum of Art February 28 – June 13, 2010

## Introduction by curator, Leslee Asch

In every culture man has created stories and myths to explain the forces surrounding him and the fears, hopes, and dreams he carries within. For centuries, masks and puppets have been used to add magic to the storyteller's craft. As early as the fifth century B.C., the first historian, Herodotus, referred to figures operated by strings in ancient Egyptian ceremonies and processions. There is always something profoundly sacred about the puppet, dwelling as it does on that indefinite border between life and its absence.

Puppetry serves as an extraordinarily powerful means of giving form to the internal or invisible. Once considered exclusively the province of shamans, inanimate objects are brought to life before our eyes, allowing our imaginations to soar. In Native American and Pre-Columbian ritual performances, certain masks manifest an exterior animal form that, when opened by strings, reveals the spirit contained within. In Indonesian shadow play, viewers are transported from the corporeal work-a-day world to an inner world of deeper spiritual understanding. The point of view of the puppeteer as demi-God – controlling this often miniature world – neglects to see that the puppeteer's art is in fact conveying quite the reverse. This is a form in which the connections to forces outside ourselves are made evident. The puppet may be shown to struggle with its manipulator, but ultimately it is this clarity of connection, of roles or levels, which allows the puppet's movements freedom and grace.

The word "puppet" comes from the Latin *pupa*, meaning "doll." But puppets are more than dolls, for in them is the illusion of life. They are symbolic mirrors in which we are startled – and sometimes delighted – to see ourselves reflected. In Latin, *pupula*, a diminutive form of *pupa*, means pupil, as in the pupil of the eye. Are these figures powerful tools to help us see?

Inherently multidisciplinary and drawing on the universal language of images, puppetry crosses international borders and bridges diverse cultures. At its very heart it is a fusion of art forms: all elements of the visual and performing arts are employed, including painting, sculpture, text, music, movement, and technology.

Puppetry is the perfect union of the theater, which puts ideas into action, and the visual arts, which give them form. Puppet actors are created actors – designed to fit a specific role and to illuminate the essence of a character. Puppet theater is also innately interactive. The words "willing suspension of disbelief" are often used to express the idea that the audience accepts the characters as real, knowing full well that they are inanimate objects given the appearance of life through human intervention. This, I believe, is why puppetry was lost for so long as an adult art form and was relegated to childish entertainment. Sadly, in our society only children have been allowed to maintain the capacity for wonder, awe, and fantasy, which opens the doors to this co-created act. In the hands of a skilled actor, a puppet – which may be no more than a carved wooden head attached to a piece of cloth – moves, speaks, and acquires a personality. To our unending amazement, an inanimate object comes to life.

As artists look for points of connection between diverse media and cultures, the flexibility and expansiveness of puppet theater engages practitioners all over the world. *The Art of Contemporary Puppet Theater* includes a selection of works by some of the artists who have helped me understand and appreciate the breadth of the form. This illustrious group includes two MacArthur "genius" Fellows, six Guggenheim Fellows and many Obie winners. Collectively, they have all received awards and honors far too numerous to detail.

## PUPPET GLOSSARY

**PUPPET:** A puppet is an inanimate figure that is made to move by human effort before an audience.

Bill Baird, *Art of the Puppet*

## TYPES OF PUPPETS

**HAND PUPPET** (glove puppet): A hand or glove puppet is a figure that is slipped over the puppeteer's hand. The performer may use various fingers to control the character. A well known variation on the hand puppet is the mouth puppet, made famous by the Sesame Street and Muppet characters (On display in the Learning Center). Finger puppets are also a type of hand puppet.

**ROD PUPPET:** This is a figure worked from above or below with rods. The puppeteer holds a central rod which controls the head and body movement. Two other rods, worked somewhat like chopsticks, are used to control the arms separately. Rod puppets range in size from miniatures to the giant pageant figures. (On display in the Learning Center)

**SHADOW PUPPET:** A shadow puppet is a two-dimensional figure made with hinged parts manipulated by rods. In performance, the figures are generally held against a translucent screen illuminated from the puppeteer's side. The puppets are manipulated from a spot between the light source and the screen and the performance is seen in silhouette. (On display in the Learning Center)

**STRING PUPPET:** A string puppet or marionette is any figure that is animated by strings. The term marionette (Little Mary) derives its origins from the puppets that were used to enact Nativity plays. (On display in the Learning Center)

**BODY PUPPET:** A body puppet is a full-bodied figure worn by one or more performers and manipulated from within. In some larger body puppets, such as the character Snuffleupagus from *Sesame Street*, two people work inside the puppet to control the body and facial movements. Facial expressions are often controlled mechanically.

**OBJECT PUPPET:** A type of puppet created with found or everyday objects.

## TYPES OF PUPPET THEATER

**VICTORIAN MARIONETTE THEATER:** When we think of puppet theater, we usually think of the Victorian marionette theater that blossomed in Britain between 1860 – 1914. Punch and Judy puppet shows reached their height of popularity during the Victorian era when puppets performed as actors that were almost human. The theaters were easily transportable and set up at fairs, carnivals, and town centers.

**BUNRAKU:** The Bunraku Puppet Theater in Osaka, Japan has developed serious, specifically adult drama. Each Bunraku puppet is manipulated by three performers in plain sight of the audience. The principal puppeteer wearing a black kimono, and with his face visible to the audience, manipulates the head of the puppet. This is an honor for which he has studied and apprenticed many years for. The two secondary puppeteers perform the feet and hands. They are also clothed in black kimonos, but their heads are covered by black hoods.

**BLACK THEATER:** This style, sometimes called Czechoslovakian Black Theater, builds on the bunraku-style. The puppeteers are dressed in black and move against a black backdrop. A “curtain of light” separates the puppeteer and the puppet. The puppet is seen in the pool of light and the puppeteers remain invisible behind them.

**TOY THEATER:** Originating in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, toy theaters developed as series of theatrical portraits which were printed four to a sheet, containing the set and all the characters for a play. The characters could be colored, pasted on cardboard and cut out; the scenes mounted and placed in small model theaters and a complete drama in miniature could be performed.

**OBJECT THEATER:** Loosely defined as the theatrical manipulation of objects this term generated a lot of excitement in the 1980’s as a new phenomenon in the performing arts. The objects in object theater range from everyday household items to just about anything a puppeteer cares to animate. The performance can be representational or highly abstract.

**TABLE TOP THEATER:** A puppet usually operated by rod or direct contact from behind, on a surface not dissimilar to a table top (hence the name). Shares many characteristics with Bunraku.

## **ELEMENTS OF PUPPET THEATER**

**ACTOR:** A person who interprets a role and performs it in a play.

**ANIMATION:** Imparting life, interest, spirit, motion, or activity

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR:** The person who chooses the material and oversees the theatrical production.

**CHOREOGRAPHY:** The arrangement of movement in time and space

**DIALOGUE:** A conversation in a play between two or more characters

**ENSEMBLE:** A group of complementary parts that contribute to a single effect

**GESTURE:** A movement of the body, hand, or arm that expresses a specific meaning or emotion

**PANTOMIME:** Actions or gestures without words

**PROPS:** Objects used on the stage that help create a sense of place

**PUPPETEER:** A person who controls and animates puppets

**SCALE:** A consideration of the size of one object relative to another object

**SCENE:** A part or section of a play

**SCENERY:** Painted elements used in the theater to represent a place or environment

**SET:** The arrangement of scenery and props on the stage

# PUPPETS AROUND THE WORLD

Puppetry has developed in different parts of the world with many unique structures and mythology. The term 'puppet' has a simple origin. It is derived from the Anglo-Norman word '*poppe*' meaning 'doll.'

## Asian Puppets

While we cannot be completely certain, some scholars hold that puppetry originated in India about 4,000 years ago. In Sanskrit plays, the narrator is called 'Sutradhar' or 'holder of strings,' which is similar to a puppeteer. Early Indian puppet shows dealt with religious themes and political satires. Chinese puppetry can be traced back to 2,000 years ago. The famous Chinese shadow theatre was then called '*pi ying xi*' or 'theatre of the lantern shadows.' Puppeteers held sway over all sections of society including the royal courts by the Song Dynasty in 960-1279 AD.

Japan is not a stranger to puppetry either. One of its many forms, the *Bunraku*, has received acclaim all over the world. This form depicts Shinto temple rites. By 1730, it had become so complex that each puppet had to be operated by three puppeteers. Many other Asian countries have also encouraged puppets. Thailand's *hun krabok* or rod-puppet theatre, Vietnam's *moa noi ruoc* or water puppetry, and Java's *wayang kulit* or shadow puppets are notable examples.

## Middle-Eastern Puppets

Explorers have discovered figures with movable parts dating back 4,000 to 5,000 years ago in the Middle East. Egyptian hieroglyphs of 2000 BC portray 'walking statues' in religious dramas. The Turkish Shadow Theatre called *karagoz* is one of the most noteworthy puppet theatres in the Middle East. Puppets are said to have travelled from China to Turkey via India. Other theories state that the Turkish rulers were impressed with puppet shows in Egypt and brought the tradition back with them. Puppets have assumed poetical overtones in the Middle East. A form of shadow puppetry is called *khayal al-zill* or 'shadows of imagination.' Here, live music consisting of drums, tambourines, and flutes is played, along with smoke, fire, thunder, rattles, and elements that may evoke strong reactions from the audience. Iran also boasts of a unique style of puppetry where there are two players in the performance.

## European Puppets

Puppets made their first emergence in Europe through Greece. Puppet plays were shown at the Theatre of Dionysus at Acropolis. This gave rise to the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, where performers travelled from place to place in half-masks or with puppets. Puppeteers did not enjoy a high social status and consisted mostly of then pariah groups like Jews and Gypsies. However, in 1310, the Church began to encourage puppetry, which helped it flourish. Italian puppet shows, known as marionettes, produced momentous shows like the tragedy 'Dr. Faust.' However, puppeteers became divided into two groups—the privileged theatre artists and the street performers, who continued to be outcasts. Innovations such as increasing the number of strings controlling the puppets were made in marionettes. The *opera dei pupi* in Sicily employed rod marionettes and depicted medieval epics of the Charlemagne knights.

## African Puppets

Africa may have captured the tradition of puppetry from Egypt. From ancient times to today, Africans use puppets in ceremonies in secret societies, healing and hunting ceremonies, ritual dramas, as well as for entertainment.

## American Puppets

In the Teotihuacan culture of Central Mexico, about 600 BC, puppet-like statuettes were part of funerary rites. Puppets were included in ceremonies among the indigenous people of North America as well. European puppeteers accompanied Mexicans to America but eventually America developed its own unique puppet styles and characters. The USA has pioneered puppetry since the 1960s. Politics came to be portrayed in puppet shows through Peter Schumann's 'Bread and Puppet Theatre.' Jim Henson came up with 'Muppets', soft puppets made of cloth or foam rubber. Television popularized puppets with programs like 'Sesame Street' and 'The Muppet Show.'

## Puppet Artist Website Information

**BASIL TWIST** [www.basiltwist.com](http://www.basiltwist.com)

Original Productions, Upcoming Events, Collaborations, Bibliography, Dream-Music Press, Internships, Contact

**BRIAN SELZNICK** [www.theinventionofhugocabret.com](http://www.theinventionofhugocabret.com)

click on "about Brian Selznick" for his biography Author and illustrator of the book  
The Invention of Hugo Cabret

**ERIC BASS** [www.sandglasstheator.org](http://www.sandglasstheator.org)

Repertoire, Presentations, Workshops, News, Awards, Co-Founder of Sandglass Theater  
History, Artistic Statement, Contact

**HANNE TIERNEY** [www.hannetierney.com](http://www.hannetierney.com)

Performance work, Work in Progress, Artist Biography, Press, FiveMyles is an art and exhibition space  
FiveMyles, Contact in Brooklyn, NY

**JANIE GEISER** [www.janiegeiser.com](http://www.janiegeiser.com)

Portfolio, Biography, News/Links, Automata, Contact Co-founder of Automata, a non-profit artist driven  
organization

**LIZ GOLDBERG** [www.lizgoldberg.com](http://www.lizgoldberg.com)

Profile, Contact, Painting, Animation, Galleries, Awards, Teaching and Education

## PUPPET ORGANIZATIONS

Puppeteers of America: [www.puppeteers.org](http://www.puppeteers.org)

International Puppetry Museum: [www.puppetrymuseum.org](http://www.puppetrymuseum.org)

Center for Puppetry Arts: [www.puppet.org](http://www.puppet.org)

Puppet Art: [www.puppetart.org](http://www.puppetart.org)

The Art of Puppetry: [www.puppetsbostonguild.org](http://www.puppetsbostonguild.org)

World Festival of Puppet Art: [www.kadmusarts.com](http://www.kadmusarts.com)

Union Internationale de la Marionnette-USA: [www.unima-usa.org](http://www.unima-usa.org)

Sagecraft Productions: [www.sagecraft.com](http://www.sagecraft.com)

Puppetorium [www.puppetorium.com](http://www.puppetorium.com)

The Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry: [www.bimp.uconn.edu](http://www.bimp.uconn.edu)

Cotsen Center for Puppetry and the Arts: [www.calarts.edu/theatre/contsencenter](http://www.calarts.edu/theatre/contsencenter) (CalArts)

Uconn Puppets Blog: [www.uconnpuppets.blogspot.com](http://www.uconnpuppets.blogspot.com)

Puppet Vision Blog: [www.puppetvision.info](http://www.puppetvision.info)

The Jim Henson Foundation: [www.hensonfoundation.org](http://www.hensonfoundation.org)

Handspring Puppet Company: [www.handspring.com](http://www.handspring.com)

Sandglass Theater: [www.sandglasstheater.org](http://www.sandglasstheater.org)

Puppet Art Theatre: [www.puppetarts.com](http://www.puppetarts.com)



## **RALPH LEE/METTAWEE RIVER THEATER COMPANY**

*The Heroic and Pathetic Escapades of Karagiozis, 2004*

### **About Karagios puppetry:**

The puppet face that you see is Hatziavatis. He is a main character in *Karagoz*, the traditional Turkish shadow puppet play that was first performed in Turkey around 1390AD. Today Karaghiozi puppeteers travel through towns and villages in Greece putting on their shows and even appear on Greek television. *Karagoz* plays tell funny stories about everyday life, or they recreate fairy tales, or they tell tales of heroes.

### **About Ralph Lee:**

Like the wandering minstrels of the olden days, Ralph Lee travels from town to town bringing the magic of his masks and giant puppets to parades, pageants and seasonal celebrations. Often performing outdoors, his Mettawee River Theatre Company enacts myths, legends and folk tales from Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa for a wide-ranging audience of families and their communities. Original music, songs and big movement add an important element of drama to each performance.

In this piece, the artist Ralph Lee gives larger-than-life proportions to traditionally diminutive two-dimensional figures. In our exhibition, you will see several other characters from his *Karagoz* play.

### **Discussion Questions:**

#### **Materials:**

Puppets can be made from many different materials.  
Identify all the materials used for this puppet face.

#### **Expression:**

Puppet faces express emotions.

What emotion does this puppet face express? Where do you see that emotion?

Make your face into the same expression!

#### **Performance:**

Can you imagine how this puppet is used on stage?



It is used on top of an actor's head!



## **MABOU MINES**

Captain Hook and Peter from *Peter and Wendy*, 1996

### **About rod puppets:**

A rod puppet is a puppet constructed around a central rod secured to a head. It is controlled by the puppeteer moving the metal rods attached to the hands of the puppet and by turning the central rod secured to the head. Three dimensional rod puppets evolved from shadow puppets. Rod puppets can include other puppet types, like muppet-type puppets, Japanese bunraku, or Western table-top puppets. However, rod puppets can be made out of anything and everything - household items, clothes, toys... Rod puppets are most frequently used in productions that use a light curtain. This is a special lighting effect, where the puppet is visible, but the puppeteer is not. Rod puppets are extremely versatile and can also be used in a variety of theatrical situations.

### **About Mabou Mines:**

Mabou Mines is a world-famous theater troupe led by artist Lee Breuer. It started in 1970 as a collective group to create works that would explore language and acting. Breuer and his downtown troupe are renowned for producing multi-disciplinary creations integrating the work of visual artists, puppeteers and musicians, and offering fresh perspectives on classic works. Breuer is noted for his extensive work with puppets and it is his "deep purpose" to bring puppetry into serious American theater.

## **Discussion Questions: The Role of Puppet and Puppeteer**

Staging a puppet show is complex. It requires careful planning.

Look at the picture.

How many puppets do you see?

How many puppeteers do you see?

How do you think the puppeteers figure out what to do and when to do it?

**Visual language:** We can speak very loudly without using any words at all. Puppets do that all the time. Body language conveys important information about a character and about a story.

What does the raised arm of Captain Hook tell us?

What does the raised arm of Peter tell us?

What's the story here?



**HANNE TIERNEY**

*How Wang-Fo Was Saved, 2001*

**About Object Theater:**

A bridge between theatre, visual art and puppetry, Object Theater utilizes three-dimensional objects to tell a story. The Object Theatre movement began in the 80s in Europe and used objects as symbols and metaphors to explore ideas. Object Theater elevates the object from the status of prop to active agent. It juxtaposes and joins the human and the object together onstage.

**About the Artist:**

Hanne Tierney makes abstract theater without human actors. From the control panel of a complex system of counterweighted pulleys and transparent fishing line, she brings to life characters as unexpected as a metal coil, a window blind, or a yard of fabric. Standing or crouching off to the side, in full view of the audience, she simultaneously manipulates her puppets and narrates the action in a series of gracefully choreographed movements. Through a language of subtly nuanced gesture, these objects speak to us with human emotions in their purest and most intense form.

**Discussion Questions:**

scene... characters ... movement ... voice

- Look carefully at this scene. What colors and shapes do you see? Where could this be taking place?
- Describe the figure in blue. If you took her pose, what would you be feeling or thinking? What would her voice sound like?
- Describe the figure in red. If you took his pose, what would you be feeling or thinking? Imagine his voice – how would you describe it?

What might happen in the next moment between these characters? Imagine a short dialogue between them.

### Pre-Visit Activity: PUPPET CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Every puppet has a personality. The puppets that you will see in our exhibition all have very unique personalities. Sometimes you can tell a personality from what someone says or sometimes by how someone looks. Color in the character below with as much detailed information as you can. Think about personality, expression, color, pattern, and details. You can even add props or background.



# **“LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF”**

## PUPPET CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

- Look carefully at the **character you created**. Imagine what kind of character it might be.
- Fill in some information about your character below.
- If you wish, you can bring your puppet to Museum and introduce us to it!

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Puppet's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Puppet's Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite color: \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite pet: \_\_\_\_\_

Important people to your puppet: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where does your puppet live? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Favorite thing to do:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does your puppet say all the time?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your puppet's mood (grouchy, friendly, sad, funny...)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Anything else that is special about your puppet? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## PUPPETS: COMMUNICATION THROUGH GESTURE

We use our bodies to communicate a lot of things. We nod our head to say “yes” or shake it back and forth to say “no.” We lean forward when we are listening to someone. We lean back when we want to stay away. We also use body language or non-verbal communication to show emotion. For instance, we smile when we are happy and we cry when we are sad.

Puppeteers are masters at using the body language of their puppets to communicate emotions, action, and story. Although two puppets may be made exactly the same way, each puppet can communicate a different message because it is being operated by a different puppeteer.

**Can you tell what emotions these expressions communicate?**




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**What do these body positions tell us?**




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Imagine you can make any kind of puppet you would like, made out of anything you would like. On the back of this paper draw your imaginary puppet portraying an emotion. Try to be as detailed as possible. Think about the construction of the puppet and the materials that you might use. Let your imagination run wild!



## **Nametag Activity Sheet - *THE ART OF CONTEMPORARY PUPPET THEATER***

On your visit to the Katonah Museum of Art you will see amazing puppets along with sets and props.  
Use the puppet theater outline below to create a nametag to wear on your visit. Please make sure your name is clearly written.

