

**The following Conference was scheduled to take place in the spring of 2006. The schedule was complete, workshop presenters and keynote speakers were in place – but it never happened. Still, there is much here to be learned from and cogitated upon. We would be enthusiastically in favor of revising and updating the proposal. We have come a long way in the field of museum studies in the intervening decade and a half, but we still have a long way to go. Editor.**

**Unique Challenges for Museum Collections of Puppetry  
An International Conference and Festival**

Organized by the  
**Center for Puppetry Arts**  
Atlanta, Georgia  
**April 26-30, 2006**

**Overview**

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There are more than 200 publicly accessible collections with significant puppetry holdings in museums and libraries throughout the world, and from April 26 to April 30, 2006, the leaders of these collections will convene in Atlanta, Georgia. Together with their colleagues in the field as well as critics, scholars, and enthusiasts, they will explore the unique challenges facing international museum collections of puppetry; and, with the general public, they will experience a festival of live and filmed performances by international puppetry artists.

Every year, puppeteers gather at national and international festivals to share new works and technological developments in the performing arts. Annually, international, national and regional museum conferences foster peer exchange and share advancements within the field. Never, however, has there been an international convocation of the leaders of museums, repositories and collections of puppet theatre, a universal art form that stretches across the boundaries of culture, geography and time. As puppetry is the only performing art in which the actor is an object, museums of puppetry have a significant role to play in the art form in preserving the performer, as well as props, scenery, and costumes.

The Center for Puppetry Arts will, for the first time in history, convene its museum colleagues from across the nation and across the globe for an international exchange and dialogue that addresses the collections, exhibition, documentation, and preservation issues shared by these performing arts collections. The forum will include panel discussions and addresses by 10 to 20 leading museum and puppetry experts from around the world including Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the USA. An audience of 75 to 100 puppetry and performing arts curators, scholars, experts, students, and journalists are expected to attend, listen and participate in these conversations. The materials developed as part of this convening will also be compiled and shared with the public online to ensure that this historic meeting is documented and accessible to a larger audience in the thousands.

In order to shine a public spotlight on these first ever peer-to-peer exchanges, the conference will also include a series of public performances and film screenings that will share the magic of puppetry with thousands of members of the general public. These public events will put the conference's work in context and will provide rare opportunities for general audiences to experience both folkloric and contemporary African, American, Asian, and European puppetry performances as well as films that showcase the best of puppetry from India, Mexico, United States and Vietnam.

Local distinguished institutions such as the High Museum of Art and Emory University are being approached to partner on this project as co-presenters of the public performances. UNIMA-USA, the American branch of the world's oldest international theatre organization, will co-sponsor the overall event.

The activities associated with the *Unique Challenges for Museum Collections of Puppetry: An International Conference and Festival* will serve an audience of nearly 100 museum professionals, students, and scholars and will have lasting impact on the delivery of services these cultural repositories provide their audiences in international cities. Additionally a general audience of several thousand will attend the festival of performances and documentary and puppet animation film screenings.

### **Vision and Goals**

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Generally speaking, museums are cultural and educational institutions that are repositories for the world's culture, heritage, and achievement; they preserve the past, define the present, and educate for the future.

Puppetry museums fulfill these broad public service goals through their exhibition, performance, and educational offerings. They teach young and old alike about an art form in which the performer creates the illusion of life, and the audience accepts the object as alive. Puppetry provides a lens to the world that can be used to discover all aspects of society ranging from religion to blasphemy. Bamana Youth Society puppets from Mali, for example, demonstrate the use of social satire by young people in West Africa. Javanese wayang kulit shadow puppets accompanied by gamelan musicians share knowledge about Indonesian aesthetics, religion, literature and mythology. Turkish Karagoz puppet plays offer insight into a body of literature and provide an astounding chronology of a generation of ethnic stereotypes. When exhibitions of these works are further interpreted through hands-on art making activities and live performing arts experiences, the educational experience is complete.

While national and international service organizations exist to serve both the museum (American Association of Museums, International Council of Museums) and puppetry (Union Internationale de la Marionnette, Puppeteers of America) fields, there is no organization or professional opportunity for the leaders of puppetry museums to come together to teach and learn from each other about the unique exhibition, collection, and preservation issues they confront as a distinct field.

The international conference, *Unique Challenges for Museum Collections of Puppetry: An International Conference and Festival*, will provide the museum directors, conservators, curators and educators of puppetry collections with the opportunity to come together for a once in a lifetime discussion that focuses on the challenges they solely confront, together.

The goals of the conference and festival are to:

- Build a network of peers who together can face conservation, preservation, acquisitions, exhibition and documentation challenges associated with this performative, and necessarily ephemeral, medium.
- Introduce colleagues to collections and programs and inspire future opportunities for collection sharing through object loans and traveling exhibitions.
- Create opportunities for puppetry curators and historians to develop and implement exhibition proposals for participating venues.

- Exchange information on preservation and conservation challenges unique to a collection of objects designed to be seen in performance and in motion.
- Impart knowledge about acquisitions opportunities that may fill lacunae in respective puppetry collections.
- Foster innovative exhibition design to enliven potentially static displays of puppets and other performative objects.
- Provide general audiences in Atlanta with access to rarely seen global puppetry performances and films and in so doing build a new generation of enthusiasts for the art form.

## Partnering Organizations

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- **Center for Puppetry Arts** (participation is confirmed)

Kermit the Frog and his creator Jim Henson cut the ceremonial ribbon opening the Center for Puppetry Arts (CPA) in 1978, and today, it serves 280,000 on-site participants annually. As the largest organization in the United States whose sole focus is the art of puppetry, the CPA's mission is to build recognition of the art form and increase awareness of puppetry's aesthetic and educational aspects while benefiting the community-at-large through arts, education, and human services. It is committed to entertaining and enlightening audiences, nurturing the world community of puppet artists, expanding and exploring the past, present, and future of puppetry.

The CPA is home to a Museum and Research Library collection of 4,500 artifacts, 7,000 square feet of exhibition galleries, three theatres (ranging in size from 70- to 350-seats), a puppet construction and scenic shop, and educational and distance learning workshops. It is a leading voice in the field, hosting national and international conferences and festivals and has garnered acclaim from *Newsweek* as "one of the most exciting companies in American theater." The CPA was selected by The Ford Foundation as one of 28 national organizations recognized for success in management and innovative programs; has received prestigious Kresge Foundation awards for three capital campaigns; and serves as headquarters of the U.S. branch of Union Internationale de la Marionnette.

CPA will serve as the lead organizer of the event and will host the conference panel sessions and select performances at its site. It is in the process of approaching additional local partners in Atlanta to co-sponsor the event:

- **UNIMA-USA, the American Center of Union Internationale de la Marionnette** (participation is confirmed)

UNIMA-USA, founded in 1966, is the American Center of Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), which was established in 1929 and remains the oldest international theatre organization in the world. The organization's mission is to promote international understanding and friendship through the art of puppetry. UNIMA is a Non-Governmental Organization and a member of UNESCO. UNIMA-USA's activities include the publication of the magazine *Puppetry International*, organizing international conferences, promoting the field through a directory of touring puppetry productions, and recognizing excellence in the field with annual citations.

UNIMA-USA will co-host the conference and public performances/film screenings and assist in promoting the conference and advocating for its findings within the international puppetry community.

- **High Museum of Art** (to be confirmed)

The High Museum of Art is the leading art museum in the Southeastern United States. The Museum has two locations: the Richard Meier-designed main facility is in Atlanta's Midtown arts and business district, and the High Museum of Art Folk Art and Photography Galleries are downtown in the Georgia-Pacific Center. The High's collections include African art, American art, decorative arts, European art, folk art, modern and contemporary art, and photography. Today the High welcomes nearly 500,000 visitors annually, boasts a collection of over 11,000 works of art, and serves a membership of more than 40,000 households, the eighth largest museum membership in the country.

High Museum of Art will be invited to host the conference opening celebration and several performances and will be asked to market the performances and films to its own membership and general audiences in Atlanta.

- **Emory University and the Emory Gamelan Ensemble** (to be confirmed)

The Emory Gamelan Ensemble, housed at Emory University, consists of up to 20 musicians who perform on a full set of instruments (both slendro and pelog tunings) made by Pak Djumadi and Pak Tentrem of Surakarta, Java. Emory professor, Steven Everett formed the ensemble in 1997. It has since presented several wayang kulit (shadow puppet plays) performances with the puppeteer Midiyanto; has performed for His Holiness, the Dali Lama at Cannon Chapel; and has made appearances at the High Museum of Art, the Asian Cultural Experience of Atlanta, and at several universities in Georgia. Guest performers and teachers have included Javanese musicians Pak Sumarsam and Pak I.M. Harjito (Wesleyan University) and Midiyanto (Central Java) and American teachers, R. Anderson Sutton (University of Wisconsin) and Sarah Weiss (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill).

Emory will be invited to host several performances of its Gamelan Ensemble with a dalang or master puppeteer and will be asked to market the performances and films to its own membership and general audiences in Atlanta.

- **Other Performance Venues** (to be confirmed)

One or two other local partners will be approached to host global puppetry performances at their venues.

## **The Conference**

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*Unique Challenges for Museum Collections of Puppetry: An International Conference* will feature remarks from distinguished speakers, panel discussions that explore weighty issues, and opportunities for the delegates to attend puppetry film screenings and live performances with the general public.

- **Speakers and Panelists**

The CPA will invite 10 to 20 leading scholars, curators, and museum specialists to participate as speakers and panelists in the conference. The CPA will seek funding to support travel costs for its international guests and preliminary contacts have been extended to many of the prospective participants. Distinguished guests may include:

- Mary Jo Arnoldi, Curator of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institute, USA
- Larry Baranski, Detroit Institute of Arts, curator of the Paul McPharlin Puppetry Collection
- Simone Blasy, Director, Musée Historique de Lyon et Musée de la Marionnette, France
- Constance Nebel, Curator, Canadian Museum of Civilization
- Schroeder Cherry, Deputy Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, USA
- Alan G. Cook, Conservatory of Puppet Arts, USA
- Boris Goldovski, Museum Director, State Central Academic Puppet Theatre, Russia
- Cathy Haill, Theatre Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, England
- Im Rini Hariyani, Museum Wayang Pemerintah Propinsi, Indonesia
- Jane Henson, President of the Jim Henson Legacy, Co-Founder of the Jim Henson Company's Muppets, USA
- Ellen Hughes and Dwight Blocker Bowers, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, USA.
- Michael Meschke, Director, Marionetteatern, Sweden
- Museo Nacional del Titere, Mexico
- Faizaan Peerzada, Founder, National Center of Puppetry, Pakistan
- Dadi Pudumjee, UNIMA-India (unless he suggests a museum person)
- Bart Roccoberon, Curator, Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry and Professor, University of Connecticut, USA
- Fernando Augusto Santos, Mamulengo Museum, Brazil
- Michael E. Shapiro, Director, High Museum of Art, USA
- Nancy Lohman Staub, Founder of the CPA Museum, USA
- Barbara Cohen Stratyner, Curator of Exhibitions, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, USA
- Ing Hana Studnickova, Curator, Muzeum loutkarskych kultur v Chrudimi of Czechoslovakia
- Wendy Teter, Curator of Anthropology, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, USA
- Sennosuke Takeda, Director, Takeda Museum, JAPAN
- Wolfgang Till, Museum Director, Munchen Stadtmuseum, Germany
- Otto van der Mieden, Director, Poppenspel Museum, The Netherlands
- Marianne Vibaek, Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, Italy

- **Audience and Attendees**

In addition to the conference speakers and panelists, the CPA will invite representatives from the world's puppetry and performing arts collections, students and professors from universities with strong programs that study the use of performing objects in world cultures, and leading scholars and critics interested in the art form to attend the panel discussions. Additionally, multiple staff members from the panelists' organizations as well as an affiliation of collectors who've approached UNIMA-USA about founding new puppetry museums in the US will also be invited to register. These observers (up to 100) will attend all conference sessions and have the opportunity to interact with the panelists during question-and-answer sessions following each presentation, as well as through informal networking opportunities at meals and performances. A nominal registration fee for attending the four days of the conference, including food, lodging and performance tickets will be charged.

The CPA expects to attract the audience for this conference through targeted promotion within the field. Promotional materials will be sent to the more than 200 puppetry collections documented by UNIMA. Examples of additional collections in the United States include, among others, the Charles H. MacNider Art Museum, Chicago Historical Society, Pittsburgh Children's Museum, American Museum of Natural History, National Museum of American History. Additionally, the CPA will nationally distribute information to the major performing arts collections (e.g. Fales Library at New York University, Library of Congress, Wexner Center for the Arts, San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum), university programs (e.g. University of Connecticut, Cal Arts), museum associations and publications (e.g. American Association of Museums, Museum News), and theatre critics who've written extensively about puppetry in major media outlets (e.g. The New York Times, Washington Post, American Theatre, Performing Arts Journal). Additionally, UNIMA-USA will announce the conference to its national membership and will ensure that the many puppetry companies now building collections for future exhibition and interpretation are invited to attend, listen and learn about best practices in the field.

- **Conference Agenda**

*Unique Challenges for Museum Collections of Puppetry: An International Conference* will take place April 26-30, 2006 at the Center for Puppetry Arts. The agenda<sup>1</sup> is as follows:

**Wednesday**

- **Opening Night Celebration and Performance of West African Puppetry**

**Thursday**

- **Morning Session I: Welcoming Remarks**

Nancy Lohman Staub, founder of the CPA's Museum of Puppetry and noted American scholar of puppetry, will provide introductory remarks, welcoming the audience to Atlanta, describing her vision for a puppetry museum, and citing highlights along her five decade career in the field as she has helped the CPA build a leading puppetry collection, research and exhibition program.

- **Morning Session II: Keynote Address**

The Keynote Address to be made by a distinguished leader in the field (such as either Schroeder Cherry, Deputy Director of the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services and puppeteer, or Henryk Jurkowski, noted puppetry scholar and theorist) will outline the issues for the conference and note the need for the two fields of museums and the performing arts that intersect to come together to explore the challenges of collecting, exhibiting and preserving performance objects. Topics to be touched on include:

- Legendary American puppeteers Burr Tillstrom and Shari Lewis both forbade exhibition of their puppets until after their deaths--what are the implications of exhibiting their work now?
- In preserving performing objects, should puppetry museums turn to puppeteers who know how the objects were designed to operate or to trained objects conservators who understand the lifespan of the materials?
- What are the best methods for displaying and interpreting the performing arts in what can be stiflingly static exhibitions?

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<sup>1</sup> The conference agenda is subject to change based upon final input from the conference participants, confirmation of artist and film availability, confirmation of co-hosting organizations, and participation of international consulates and countries.

- **Morning Session III: Mission and Purpose**

This panel of four speakers will explore the definition and mission of a puppet museum. Panelists will offer their own case studies in founding puppetry museums, discussing the importance of clarity of mission, how to face the challenges of a museum when you've already tackled those of a theatre, and important lessons learned in establishing collections and interpretation strategies that preserve the history of the form and educate and inspire the public.

- **Lunch**

- **Film Screening**

- **Afternoon Session I: Formal Presentations of Collections**

The invited panelists and registered guests who represent formal collections and repositories open to the public will sign up to participate in five-minute audiovisual presentation (e.g. slides, PowerPoint, video) of their collections. Each museum/library will outline the size and scope of the collection; collecting, acquisition and exhibition strategies; and cite two short-term and two long-term goals. This will provide information not gleaned through the conference resource manual, allow each participant to see where there might be affinities and opportunities for affiliation, and open doors for collaborations. The information shared in this session will let each participants assess where there may be opportunities for collaboration such as through object loans, traveling exhibitions, and shared acquisition purchases.

- **Dinner**

- **Performance of Anderle Marionettes of Slovakia**

## **Friday**

- **Morning Session: Open Networking Session for Speakers and Attendees**

Conference panelists and registrants will have the opportunity to informally exchange information about their collections, focus and inventory with their colleagues and the invited speakers. Discussions of exhibitions, need for object loans, and announcements of important collection acquisition opportunities will also be discussed

- **Performance of CPA Production of *Rainforest* and CPA Museum and Collections Storage Tour**

- **Lunch**

- **Film Screening**

- **Afternoon Session: Preserving the History of Puppetry**

This panel of four speakers will discuss preservation issues unique to a puppetry collection. This panel will offer individual case studies in how collections have sought to amplify their holdings with acquisitions that further enhance the puppet's history. For example, in the case of collecting the work of a contemporary artist:, are there methodologies in place to acquire history beyond the remnants of the actual puppet itself, such as through oral histories, critical reviews, photographic documentation, and design sketches. What are best practices for making this history available to scholars and general audiences alike?

- **Dinner**

- **Performance of Emory Gamelan Ensemble at Emory University**

### **Saturday**

- **Morning Session: Best Practices in Creating Performing Arts Exhibitions**

This panel of four speakers will outline best practices in exhibiting the work of puppetry artists by including interpretation that places the object within its performance context with recorded sound and music, visual material that conveys movement and transformation of the objects, photographic documentation, stages and scenic materials, and other ephemera and documentation such as models and sketches that explain the creative process. The panel will also explore the importance of puppet poses which should be sensitive to actual performance movements for cultural reasons as well as to give a sense of suspended motion; an emphasis on performance techniques and controls; and how lighting can create focus, mood and further simulate live performance settings.

- **Lunch**

- **Film Screening**

- **Afternoon Session: Repair, Replace or Stabilize? Dealing with Performance Wear and Tear**

This panel of four speakers will include puppeteers and conservators/collections managers who have approached puppet conservation differently. Because puppets are made from a range of fragile materials (cloth, string, paper, foam, plastics), they are materially fragile. After the wear and tear created by sometimes-daily performance, conservation can be a challenge. The panel will explore decision making strategies that guide professionals to determine when and if a puppet should be repaired, replaced, or stabilized. Attendees will be directed to preservation resources.

- **Dinner**

- **Performance of Punch and Judy**

### **Sunday**

- **Morning Session: Sharing the History Beyond the Gallery Exhibition**

This panel of four speakers will offer case studies in sharing the histories embedded in their collections and reaching new audiences beyond the reach of the exhibition gallery. The panel will explore how publications, electronic media, offline and online catalogs, accessible archives and storage facilities, interactive virtual museums, and distancing learning technologies can reach new publics and enhance the audience's understanding of the art and history of puppet theatre.

- **Lunch**

- **Film Screening**

- **Afternoon Session: Where Do We Go From Here?**

This moderated session will be a culminating discussion that offers conference presenters and registrants with the opportunity to outline the lessons they will take back to their respective institutions, pursue fruitful collaborations, and outline next steps for this collective. The



conference participants will determine if future convenings should be planned and formal associations or affiliations made with service organizations already connected to this field.

A formal conference evaluation will be distributed, which will shape future decision-making about next steps and provide benchmarks for measuring the success of the convening.

- **Dinner and Closing Party for Registrants, Panelists, Artists, and Partnering Organizations**

### **Putting the Work in Context**

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Any museum of puppetry by nature of its very definition must present live performances. While exhibitions may often present the objects within a static environment, the audience will have a more complete educational experience if they can see puppetry as it is meant to be seen, in motion. Thus, the conference will provide attendees and the general public at large with the opportunity to see the work within its performative context through a complementary world festival of performance and film. Several partners are being approached to host guest puppetry artists from all over the globe to perform at their sites.

- **A World Festival of Performances**

In an effort to open the conference up to the local community and demonstrate the CPA's leadership and innovative role in the field, it will co-host a world festival of performances with UNIMA-USA and local partners (CPA will approach the High Museum of Art, Emory University, and other sites as co-sponsors). Performances will take place at each of the presenting venues and will include (please note that the CPA is now contacting artists and final confirmation of participation is pending):

- Javanese wayang golek (rod puppet) performances with the Emory Gamelan Ensemble and guest dalang (master puppeteer) Dr. Kathy Foley of University of California, Santa Cruz who is also a curator and scholar with an expertise in Indonesian performing arts traditions. The performances will feature an excerpt from the classic text the *Ramayana* and will take place at Emory University.
- African Show. The Center is in the process of locating an African troupe to exemplify puppetry's rich cultural roots in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cultures in this part of Africa have utilized puppets and other objects to teach and entertain throughout the centuries, and this tradition continues today.
- Anderle Marionettes of Slovakia is a company distinguished by the range and variety of trick marionettes. The puppets in this company's very unique performance have been passed on from generation to generation within the company members' family. Trick marionettes are puppets which are jugglers, acrobats, and the like. Each performance is a combination of circus and puppetry arts, and the puppets are masterfully manipulated. The performance is accompanied by live original music.
- Many audiences are familiar with Punch and Judy, a cycle of puppetry performances that grew from the Italian commedia dell'arte and Pulcinella traditions and have become most closely associated with England. A partner venue (to be selected) will host a modern interpretation of Punch and Judy as performed by Professor Dan Bishop of Cornwall, UK. Professor Bishop has performed Punch for 25 years, and his interpretations have been seen at 50 puppetry festivals in eleven languages.

- Center for Puppetry Arts company under the direction of Jon Ludwig will perform *Rainforest Adventures*. This performance takes an educational look at the earth's oldest living ecosystem from Ludwig's uniquely modern and offbeat point of view—a perspective that has earned him the field's highest honors and positive critical acclaim in the local and national media.

- **Puppetry on Film**

The CPA and possibly other partner sites will schedule film screenings for both the conference attendees and the general public on each day of the conference. This festival will feature documentary films that preserve and interpret world puppetry traditions and include:

1. *Tay Puppet Story: Tham Roc Village*

This documentary follows a box of water puppets saved since Vietnam's campaign against superstition in the 1950's. In this story of cultural revival, the last surviving members of a venerable puppet troupe lead young apprentices in mounting the first public performance in nearly 50 years. Vietnam Museum of Ethnology and Richard Connors, 2000. 30 minutes.

2. *The American Puppet: A History of Puppetry in America*

This is the first documentary film to chronicle puppetry's colorful evolution in the United States. Archival film, rare photographs, historical reenactments and engaging interviews with some of the most influential puppeteers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, help bring the story of American puppetry to life. Mazarella Brothers Productions, Inc., 2001. 60 minutes.

3. *Kathputli: The Art of Rajasthani Puppeteers*

This documentary explores the unique and colorful world of kathputli puppet theatre as it is maintained and performed by itinerant families in Rajasthan, India. Puppeteers demonstrate the construction and manipulation of the wood-and-string creations used in this ancient form. Smithsonian Institution Office of Folklife Programs and the Rupayan Sansthan, 1985. 28 minutes.

4. *Masks of Mexico: The Art of an Enduring Culture*

The Curator of *Behind the Mask in Mexico*, an exhibit of masks and costumes at the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM, discusses the customs and beliefs behind a collection of performing objects used in ritual celebrations in three separate regions of Mexico. KNME-TV Albuquerque, 1998. 25 minutes.

## **Documentation and Resource Materials**

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Each conference attendee (both registrants and speakers) will be provided with a resource packet of information and materials about the presenting museums, as well as a compendium of information on exhibition and conservation resources. The package will also include information on each of the panelists' museum/collections, participant contact information, a synopsis of their collections, and an outline of their collecting, exhibitions, educational, and preservation strategies. The CPA will compile these documents into one publication that will serve as a lasting documentation of the conference. The materials will be made available online to the general public as a PDF file accessible through both the CPA and UNIMA-USA websites.