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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

issue no. 21

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Puppetry International is a publication of UNIMA-USA, Inc.



American Center of the
UNION INTERNATIONALE de la MARIONNETTE

*Promoting international friendship and understanding
through the art of puppetry.*

c/o Center for Puppetry Arts 1404 Spring Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30309 USA 404-873-3089 www.unima-usa.org

Production

Terrie Iaria, Lillian Meier
STEINWAY STUDIO
Kittery, ME

Printing

Gary Stratton
EDISON PRESS
Sanford, ME

ON THE COVER:

Image from Redmoon's
"Once Upon a Time"
(see page 14)

photo: Sean Williams



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
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This project is supported, in part, by an award from the
National Endowment for the Arts.

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pubblicità per
 "Puppets Under
 the Stars"
 produced by Is
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 Sardinia.

From the Editor—

"It's humongous!" says Nina Totenberg, describing the scene at the opening of the trial of Neo-con bad boy "Scooter" Libby, and specifically how much Libby's legal defense would cost: "Eleven lawyers from three top Washington law firms, and for every lawyer in the courtroom there's three or four more back in the office."

"I'm trying to do the math," says host Scott Simon.

"It's humongous!"*

I took note of this not merely because the amount of money in question would be sufficient to completely fund *Puppetry International* for 150 years (it actually would), but because, in reading through the submissions for this issue, several authors used that word: *humongous*.

As our issue focuses on examples of the world's smallest puppetry, it is useful to have a word—even a made up word like "kajillion" or "gazillion"—to confer standing in the world of the itty-bitsy-teeny-weeny by juxtaposing the flyspeck with the elephantine, the lilliputian with the humongous.

In the early 1980s, John and Carol Farrell (*Figures of Speech Theater*), newly returned from a summer course at the International Puppetry Institute in Charleville-Mézières, France, described a performance by one of their fellow students. The puppet booth was a washing machine. Tiny figures would rise out of a ground of styrofoam beads, manipulated by rods from underneath. Spectators (of which there could only be two or three) would look into the machine as if Gods peering down on mortals through some Olympian *camera obscura*. They must have felt humongous.

One can imagine the difficulty of gaining exposure (never mind earning a living) playing to such small groups. Artists working in the micro scale have employed a variety of techniques for expanding their audience base. Their strategies include providing



matchbox scene
 from Laura Heit
 page 4

puppets from the
collection of
Sally Fisher

photo: M Nelson

spectators with opera glasses, committing the work to film or video, using actors or dancers to mirror the actions of very small puppets, and using live-feed video projection of the action, projected simultaneously. As impressive and appropriate as the technology can be, it is also thrilling to see the work of practitioners such as Ken Feit, whose too-brief career was filled with memorable performances for one or two persons: "using only a toothpick, a wad of chewing gum and his two index fingers." [page 8]

This issue is full of such ingenious, original and, yes, very, very small work. We hope it brings you humongous pleasure.

George Latshaw was a giant in the puppet world. His influence is incalculable. His passing in late December was sad news to the generations of puppeteers who knew and loved the man. Manuel Moran shares with us Latshaw's impact on puppetry in Puerto Rico. [page 36] For all his accomplishments—in film, live performance, writing, editing, directing, teaching—a lasting part of his legacy will surely reside in the tiny messages he sent out on postcards. There must be thousands of them magneted to refrigerator doors all over the world. The last we received, just a few weeks before his death, was characteristically joyous and oddly prescient:

I've been captive too long, but they say I may be sprung
Nov. 14 or 15. I hope that is true. I have met you in my
dreams and the wine was A-1.

Love, Geo

— Andrew Periale

*Ms. Totenberg's words were transcribed on a napkin while driving. We apologize for any slight deviation from the original wording. From NPR's Weekend Edition® Saturday, February 2007.



Playing With Matches:

Laura Heit Explodes our Sense of Scale

by Susan Simpson



It is a tired old analogy to compare the relationship between puppeteer and puppet to that of God and man, but when God shows up slightly tipsy, wearing red lipstick and a blue sequined tube top it is possible for the idea to seem fresh again. When God appears, in person, to bother the curtains in the bedroom with a burst of breath through her pursed crimson lips, then the concept of divine intervention takes on new meaning. When God's giant mug squeezes into the room and poses the question "What is your fondest desire?" one immediately gains a visceral understanding of the value of prayer.

The God I am referring to here is Laura Heit, and the universe she presides over exists in a single cigar box. It is a parallel universe, parallel to the contents of her brain. It comes to life according to her whims on occasions she calls *The Matchbox Shows*. *The Matchbox Shows* are a series of short vignettes performed in tiny sets constructed, as the title would suggest, from matchboxes. The matches function as tree trunks, puppet rods and, of course, as points of ignition. The show is usually performed late at night for boisterous crowds while Heit sips a glass of red wine. As she performs, every thing itty-bitty is also humongous. A video simulcast of the tiny dramas is projected above her. The vignettes portray a frightening dream of perfection, a ghost story, a forest fire, and a late night hook-up that ends in outer space, among other things.

In the Matchbox universe there is no stricture on portraying the Godhead. Graven images are, in fact, celebrated and so the show ends with "30 Pictures of Myself Naked," a series of naïve line drawings of the artist engaged in mundane everyday activities (driving, welding, teaching, etc.) all sans clothing.

Heinrich Von Kliest and then Edward Gordon Craig both held fantasies of unselfconscious action, notions that the empty vessel of the puppet could channel God directly and thus express a state of grace. This is not what is happening in *The Matchbox Shows*; this God seems unconcerned with any

in fact state of grace. She is capricious and silly and revels in her oversized nature. She performs miracles occasionally, but is just as likely to set things on fire. She is almost human; her behavior often resembles the humanity of a child playing with toys. She speaks for the characters in a high thin voice that can only be associated with games of pretend. Paper people and props slide and bounce across the stage. Figures are conjured one moment and then literally cast aside the next.

There are many connotations that go along with bringing tiny figures to life: the diminutive as innocent, the miniature as domestic. Heit subverts these notions with mischievous glee. Young girls, for years, have been cutting Barbie dolls' hair, but in Heit's vignette "Blair's Desire," she cuts off not the hair, but the fingertips of the little puppet of her friend. This classic act of torture, performed with a pair of orange-handled scissors, brings winces and gasps from the audience. But this, she makes clear in her narration, was the fulfillment of Blair's fondest desire. He believed that he was imperfect because all his fingers were different lengths. So snip. Snip. Snip. "And then he was perfect," Heit declares in a sweet-as-pie voice, and with that she tosses aside the maimed hand.

Then there is the Summer Side Sausage Fairy, who turns little girls' dolls into sausages. As this is a physically and narratively condensed version of a play that Heit wrote and performed as a very young girl, it reads like a miniature object lesson on how the adult world, filtered through the eyes of innocence, can be a very perverse domain indeed.

Finally, *The Matchbox Shows* close with the last "Picture of Myself Naked." It is called "F—ing* Chicago," a tiny picture of a giant Heit doing just that to the Sears tower..... and the dollhouse was never the same again!

*actual title is spelled out —ed.

Susan Simpson: Can you tell me about how The Matchbox Shows began?

Laura Heit: I made the very first matchbox theater for a friend of mine. We had both been working at a theater doing very large-scale spectacle shows. Things like fourteen-foot devil heads and main stage shows with forty-foot whales. After many years he decided he wanted to go back to making smaller puppet shows and so I made him a tiny theater in a matchbox. The second one I made was a miniature replica of a show I directed called *Succubus*. In the tradition of Toy Theater, you could reenact the show whenever you wanted in the palm of your hand.

I know that you have done this show many times during the past several years. Over time, have you discovered what kind of images or stories are most suited to this very small scale?

Well they have to be short stories that need little explanation. Nonsense works well, visual jokes and dreams. I try and make a new show for every performance I do, and I never rehearse them so I usually find out on stage what ideas work the best. There have been a few that lived very short lives. There are often a few that are based on current events and have a short life span. For example



I had a show where Bush and Gore were professing their love to Miss Florida (2000) and another one where a bunch of my friends were in jail for making puppets before the Republican convention that same year (a true story) and I don't do those anymore.

Have you ever performed The Matchbox Shows without the video simulcast?

The very first time I did the *The Matchbox Shows* there wasn't a video simulcast and everyone sat on the floor around me. I found myself explaining what they were seeing a lot.

What do you think is the effect for the audience of seeing the show very small and very large at the same time?

I think the video projection of the tiny puppet show adds legitimacy to it. It commands a certain amount of attention. In the beginning, it was a simple solution

to allow an audience to see the shows, but now I think it's a very important part. It allows me to enter the stage and interact with myself. It feels more like an 'act,' like a magic show. There is also something very intriguing about seeing something so small so big; it's a bit like being let in on a secret.

Do you remember as a kid being really immersed in or enthralled with very small environments?

I have always loved little things. My favorite stuffed animal, as a child, was a little three-inch long flat elephant I called anteater and took with me everywhere. I had an empty sugar packet

photo: Stephanie Howard

I filled with tiny origami cranes I would make when we went out to restaurants. Then in junior high I started a dollhouse club. There were about six of us who would meet regularly to decorate a friend's great aunt's antique dollhouse.



What inspired you to make "30 Pictures of Myself Naked?"

I have always been in the habit of drawing little pictures of myself and they are almost always naked, so this was not a far stretch. As the show is usually performed in a late night cabaret, I thought a little nudity would be appropriate. There are pictures of me doing various things like watering the garden, working at the computer, doing yoga, having dinner with my parents, and on and on. They always get a lot of laughs and I am always adding more. It started out being twenty-four pictures of myself naked and now I think it's up past thirty.

After a show, a friend came up to me and said her son really liked it, but was too embarrassed to talk to me. I had known him since he was five and he was now twelve or thirteen. She said she thought it was one of his first experiences seeing a naked woman. It's a funny thing, they are just drawings, but somehow they read as very intimate, like at a little peep hole where you can see into my very private life.

Do you have a favorite moment in the show?

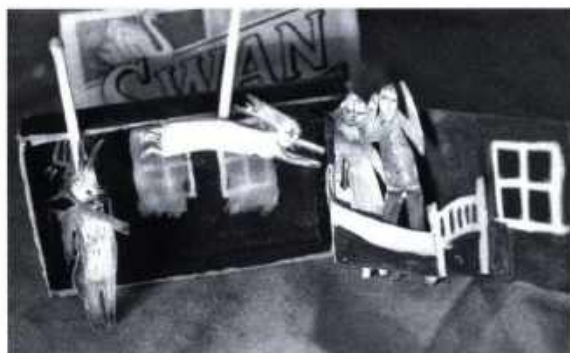
There is a little show called "Look for Me" that is funny and sad, which I think is the perfect combination for a show. It has a little forest that I light on fire and then I unroll a tiny cranky that depicts all the people running out of the forest fire. It ultimately ends in tragedy, but there is lots of screaming and hoping. I really like performing this one because I get to light things on fire.

Laura is a filmmaker, finger puppet maker, and teacher at Cal Arts in California. She's performed her Matchbox Shows at venues around the world. www.lauraheit.com

Susan Simpson is a filmmaker and puppet theatre artist living in Los Angeles. She is co-director of Automata and teaches at CalArts.

Will you tell me about "The Night of the Summer Side Sausage Fairy?"

In 4th and 5th grade, my best friend and I were prolific play writers. We wrote and performed a play for our class on a weekly basis. The most popular play, though, was "The Night of the Summer Side Sausage Fairy." It was a very simple story about a fairy that would sneak into little girls' homes at night and turn their dolls into sausages. It made sense to us then because we had a great fairy costume and a pillow that looked just like a summer sausage. I was telling a friend about this play later when I was in college and had to stop myself because I was so embarrassed when I realized for the first time how overtly sexual it was. Now I think it's really funny.



MORE MODERN MASTERS OF THE MINISCULE

SIRPPA SIVORI-ASP, 1928-2006



Alongside her many contributions to the field of Puppetry, Sirppa was a gifted performer. In the realm of micro-scale puppetry, she knew how to turn the intimacy of a small performance space to her advantage. As an audience member at one of her shows, it was like being told the most wonderful story in one's own living room.

After establishing the Green Apple Theater in Helsinki in 1971 (with two of her friends), she became a member of UNIMA International in 1972, and the president of UNIMA-Finland 1985-1992. In 1992, she was elected President of UNIMA International. This demanding task took Sirppa all over the world for the ensuing eight years, attending congresses, festivals, seminars and meetings, working hard on behalf of puppetry and UNIMA's principles of international friendship and understanding through the art of puppetry.

BERND OGRODNIK

In 2002-2003, Ogrodnik worked on a major marionette epic: *STRINGS*, for which he developed a revolutionary marionette design. Produced and filmed in Europe, it may have been the most comprehensive and innovative film work ever attempted with marionettes. With a formal background in classical music, fine woodworking, children's book illustration and movement arts, Bernd Ogrodnik has been a prominent figure in the world of puppetry since 1986. He has been creating marionettes and puppets, and masks for various theaters around the world, as well as for commercials, TV and film. He is the House Puppeteer of the National Theater of Iceland.

Yet it is the simple, tiny work we saw him perform many years ago—like the piece pictured above—that remains one of our favorites.





KEN FEIT: MASTER MICRO-TALETELLER

by Stephen Kaplin

For Ken Feit, the professions of priest, clown, prophet, fool and therapist were intimately connected. Each field, using its own particular technique set and vocabulary, traces the patterns of spirit as it flows through the human form, observes and diagnoses blockages and prescribes suitable action courses or regimens. Ken's intimate "performations" were not designed to supply ultimate answers, but he offered them up as a means of fostering recognition of the mysteries lurking just outside our mundane walls. In his own words: "All I am trying to do is find universal symbols that kind of tickle people to the threshold of personal query, and just leave them there."

Below are several of Ken's miniscule event/happenings, transcribed by a few of us fortunate enough to have crossed his path before he slipped off the Earth in 1981. In the quarter century since his car crashed in the Utah desert, we still find them burnt vividly into our memories.

Mary Aimee Sydnor —

I am 91 years old. I can close my eyes and see Ken sitting under a big tree at the Festival in Washington in 1980. I was fascinated by him. He gave me a lovely little origami unicorn that I still treasure.

Steve Abrams —

Waiting for a single kernel of corn to pop
The faith of a fool
All eyes focused
An audience waits in silence, breath held
Corn pops!
An explosion of joy on the tiniest scale
Hallowaloopty!

Fool's mass, almost complete
2 objects remain
Paper unicorn and the flame
Silent wish not fulfilled
There must be sacrifice
Unicorn becomes ashes in the air



from an uncredited photo in Foolish Wisdom by Joseph F. Martin (1990, Resource Publications)

Michael John Moynihan —

Big man brings small miracles
 A NOH string bass plays
 Water set free, an ice cube melts
 Always in transit, transition, transitory
 A river of ideas, a roadway of connections,
 a path to everywhere
 A quilt of many colors, shapes, patterns,
 worn as a kimono
 A library of books in Chicago, a bulging address book
 in a suitcase that is an itinerant home
 White shirt, pair of blue jeans, black
 Doctor Shoes oxfords
 Buzzing summer heat in the Beehive State where the
 Way, the Path, the Now suddenly leaves the Road
 And we are all left here, there and everywhere.

Stephen Kaplin —

On his way traveling north or south, Ken dropped in on the Tears of Joy Puppet Theater. After dinner he performed in my small house-trailer, using only a toothpick, a wad of chewing gum and his two index fingers (costumed in gum wrapper capes) to tell this old Buddhist parable:

A Japanese warrior climbs a mountain to ask the Zen master the way to enlightenment. The master just sits. The warrior grows restless. The Master just sits. The samurai grows angry, and raises up his sword to strike the old monk's head off. "That's Hell," says the Master. The samurai's sword freezes mid-stroke and he bows down in shame. The Master touches him gently, "That's Heaven."

Stephen Kaplin is a founding member of Great Small Works, and Chinese Theatre Workshop. He is a frequent contributor to Puppetry International.

PERRY ALLEY THEATRE'S THE KEY



A scene in which "Le Petit Bonhomme" (The Little Guy) is locked in a laundry room. The key to escape, he ultimately learns, is not the door but the realization that there are no walls.

The face, figure and hapless character of our protagonist were created by an international team of artists at the Institute International de la Marionnette, in France, including your editor. Others were Fana Vasa (Czech Republic), Blandine Rozé (France), Roni Nelken (Israel) and Preston Foerder (USA).

A MINIATURE PUPPET OPERA IN GLASGOW

by Rolande Duprey



Based on interviews with Paul Kingsley in 2003 and 2006, and on articles and press clippings provided by Mr. Kingsley

As a child growing up in 1930s Britain, Paul Kingsley's enthusiasm for Model Theaters blossomed. He was entranced with the backstage technical workings of theaters: the flies, lighting, and scenery. But instead of studying theatre or architecture, Mr. Kingsley studied music. He got a job with the Scottish National Orchestra, playing flute and piccolo.

Mr. Kingsley toured with the orchestra all over Europe. He had several opportunities to play in opera orchestras at various theaters. On buses, trains, planes, he would sketch his dream theaters, based on some he had visited with the Orchestra. He even had an opportunity to tour the Vienna State Theater, still a vivid memory. Back at home in Scotland, he built models of the theaters he had designed. He was passionate about the flying systems, lighting, and, in particular, opera performances.

Soon he began to make the scenery and characters from some of his favorite operas. In 1986, over fifty years after his passion for Model Theaters had begun, he performed his first puppet opera scenes to small salon-sized audiences.

In 2003, he performed at the Day of Puppetry at the Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre in Glasgow. The theater he used at that time he called the "Royal Court Opera." It opened up to reveal the auditorium within, with two sets of curtains, one, the safety or "fire curtain," and the other a lavish Act drop. Every detail was as precise as possible. He played a scene from *La Bohème*. The lighting, the delicate movement of the 3-inch high figures, were exquisite. Later, he showed the audience the workings of the theater and his puppets.

I believe that in presenting the visual part of any production—especially opera—on a miniature stage, the primary aim must be to create characters, costumes, settings, lighting and action which are appropriate and intrinsically beautiful, in order to give the audience the most pleasure whilst enjoying the music and its interpretation by the artists who have recorded it.

He eschews the term "toy" theater. His theater is definitely NOT a toy. It is a miniature, or model theater. Even the word "miniature" is inexact when referring to opera. How is it possible to really "miniaturize" an opera?

A view from the top gallery at Covent Garden Opera House is about the nearest one can get to this. The people look tiny and even the setting appears somewhat remote, but the orchestra and the voices remain full and expressive no matter how one sees the production. So "scaling down" an opera is not really an option. Doing it on a model theatre is so like doing it "for real"! The only difference being that our tiny opera stars cannot answer back! [from *The Puppet Master*, Autumn 2004]

Making up his miniature audience are figures made from cardboard and foam, and then clothed in silk. The heads were made out of "Miliput" modeling clay, used in military figures. The characters on stage are far more intricate. They are fully articulated figures, with jointed hands, feet, arms and legs. They do not stand on the stage floor, they each have pedestals upon which their pelvis is attached directly with a rod, and



from which their legs hang. The pelvis is the only fixed point, and the key to his manipulation technique. Above the pelvis, the torso is attached, with a wire to the head and neck (also able to be moved). The arms and legs are each operated by wires that are attached at the other end to handles, which Mr. Kingsley can pull and push using his deft fingers. One puppet can be operated by one hand, another by another hand. Mr. Kingsley does not tend to perform large crowd scenes.

The stage floor is also made especially for the movement of the figures. The basic floor is plywood, with one-inch wide cuts in an array of patterns. On top of that is a cardboard floor, with slots of 3/8 inch wide. On top of this is a layer of foam with scissor slits in it. The audience cannot see any of slots in the floor; they only see the figures moving naturally across, seemingly of their own volition. The extreme care made for these wide slots is so that the manipulation wires can be angled for greater freedom of movement. Each scene had a different stage floor, which needed to be designed for the movement of the players. Mr. Kingsley can see the stage from backstage, peeking over the scenery, much as he did as a boy when he played stage manager on his rudimentary wooden stage.

Mr. Kingsley himself best describes the lighting, in the article he wrote for *The Puppet Master* in autumn of 2003:

Lighting a model stage can be by miniature or full size equipment. My earlier theatre had 126 stage lighting circuits using miniature lanterns, all at 12 volts, and consuming about 60 amps of current. Even so, I had to employ a couple of halogen lamps to get the necessary punch.

So now I hardly use any miniature units and have sacrificed realism and scale backstage by using shop window type display lighting units. These are still 12 volt but are so powerful that I rarely use them on full. To control the lights I use domestic dimmers.

...As this is first and foremost a performing theatre I have reduced the number of circuits to about 18, which are patched to only 4 master dimmers. This is quite enough to handle whilst operating figures on stage and sufficient for artistic groupings and effects with lighting.

His performances are not complete operas. He prefers to perform a selection of scenes that last 20 minutes, not longer, so that it does not tax the audience's focus too greatly.

An audience can be under strain and restless if asked to concentrate on small characters for too long. ... In general, to give too little is far better than even a little too much. Also, there must be sufficient to interest—and even intrigue—an audience. It is not enough to wiggle the figures while the music is being played. Therein lies the royal road to Boredom! Expressive acting is called for and this implies plenty of variety of movement and a real involvement by the puppeteer, as all master performers know.

The scenes which he has mounted are:

- La Bohème* by Puccini, part of Act I
- The Barber of Seville* by Rossini, Act I scene 1
- Faust* by Gounod, Act IV
- La Traviata* by Verdi, Act I
- Siegfried* by Wagner, the end of Act III

Recently, Mr. Kingsley has stopped performing. He has built a number of model theaters and puppets over the years, all of which were eventually "taken to the refuse dump." To his knowledge, none of his performances of opera scenes were videotaped. These photos are some of the rare evidence of his work.

He is now working on a new model theatre, based on his neoclassical "Piccolo Theater" of several years ago. This one he is calling "Piccolino," and is much tinier than any other he has tried, a 1/64 scale rather than 1/24. The audience figures are a little over one inch tall. "It keeps me off the streets," he says.

Rolande Duprey has her MFA in Puppetry from the University of Connecticut. She performs original works as well as collaborating with others, and is a frequent contributor to Puppetry International.

What's new at the Center for Puppetry Arts?



PHOTO: Bradford Clark

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for more info and to buy tickets fee-free!

FOR FAMILY AUDIENCES

- **Dinosaurs**
Through April 7, 2007
by Jon Ludwig of the Center
- **Galapagos George, the Little Tortoise That Could**
April 11-29, 2007
by Barefoot Puppet Theatre, Richmond, VA
- **Beauty & the Beast**
May 4 - July 8, 2007
adapted by Jon Ludwig of the Center
- **Anansi the Spider**
July 10-22, 2007
by Tears of Joy Theatre, Portland, OR
- **Pinocchio**
July 24 - August 5, 2007
by National Marionette Theatre, Newfane, VT

FOR ADULT AUDIENCES (18 & up)

- **The Vertigo of Sheep**
March 22-25, 2007
by Thingumajig Theatre, West Yorkshire, England
- **Xperimental Puppetry Theater (XPT)** (pictured above)
May 17-20, 2007
by various artists



PHOTO: Bradford Clark

- **Puppets: The Power of Wonder**
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Includes puppets from various time periods and countries from around the globe. Be delighted and educated by the 350 puppets on display.
- **Gods and Demons, Monkeys and Men**
(pictured above)
Through July 27, 2008
Curated by Dr. Kathy Foley,
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Once Upon a Time . . .

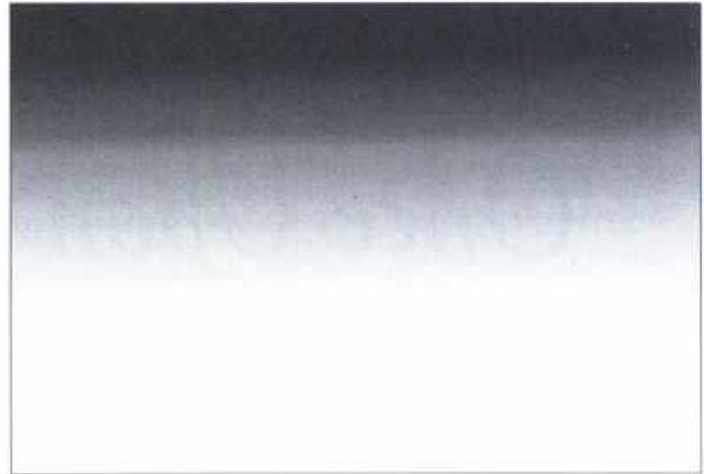


ONCE UPON A TIME: A SPECTACLE IN MINIATURE

by Seth Bockley

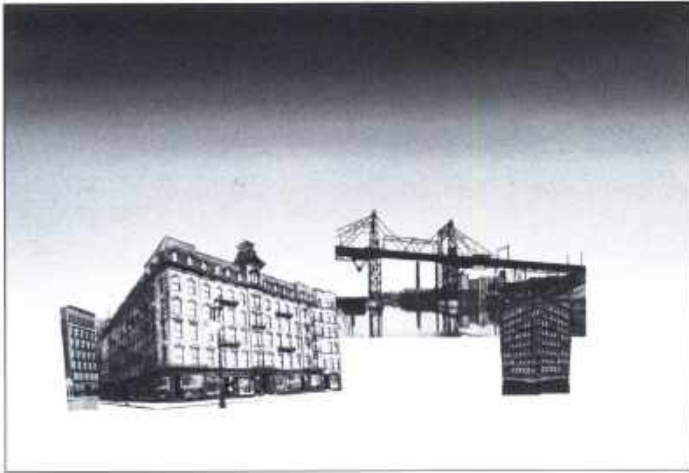
Redmoon Theater is a collaborative design-based company producing spectacles with an aim to transform public spaces into sites of celebration. These spectacles can involve such massive transformations as a building façade becoming a shadow puppet screen, a Viking-style funeral procession winding down the Chicago river, or a performer running in a giant rat wheel that shoots fireworks off on all sides. In this winter's *Once Upon A Time*, the company has created a spectacle in miniature—starring a two-inch-tall puppet protagonist—that aims to transform an audience's sense of scale and tell an immersive modern fairy tale using innovative and nostalgic visual techniques.

A four-foot stage hosts dozens of tiny paper puppets—fighting, talking, dancing and dying as their story is narrated by human puppeteers. The miniature action is captured by live video feed and projected onto an 8 x 12 foot movie screen above the toy theater. Using two cameras, a video operator employs rudimentary “editing” techniques—pans, dissolves and the like—to explore cinema effects. These film techniques, in turn, play on the conventions of cartoon—the surreal, magical and ridiculous breaking of realistic expectations. Using old and new technologies, we are liberated to play on three levels: the miniature, the human and the larger-than-life, experimenting with scale in unexpected genre-bending ways.



***A crocodile sings a song.
A wrestler's mask is removed.
A bird is born.***

The final product is the work of dozens of visual artists, several directors, interns and collaborating designers. Through the company's customarily messy process of brainstorming, collaboration and constant revision, a show is carved. In the end, Redmoon is concerned with scale in a thousand ways: through the use of the grand and grandiose, but also the sense of wonder and play in the intimate mechanical life of objects, juxtapositions of large and small versions of the same location or character, and the power to compress the universe into a single, magical space. Building *Once Upon A Time*, we have explored the relationship between cartoon and toy theater—two surreal miniature forms from distinct eras—and brought them to life in an attempt to tell a simple story with precision, craft, humanity and playful generosity.



PROCESS

There are several challenges facing design-based theater: how to collaborate with an original scriptwriter and produce the most theatrically satisfying story; how to balance story and visual content; how to collaborate actively with a team including several independent puppet and scenic designers, music composers and directors; and finally, how to craft the audience's experience of the story in a deeply satisfying way. This last involves delicate balancing of the audience's attention between several levels of content: the miniature puppets, the puppeteers and toy theater, and the large video screen above them all. A very active pre-production process includes dozens of meetings, brainstorming sessions, countless revisions and amendments and a great deal of excess: negatives on the cutting room floor.

Puppets get cut, scenes get cut, characters get cut. These decisions are not handed down from above but are determined through conversation—a dynamic process involving director Frank Maugeri, art director Angela Tillges, and company artistic director Jim Lasko, among other voices (including my own as dramaturg). It can be maddening, but it is productive. We depend on the vision and vigilance of multiple artists who are empowered with authorship over design decisions.

Drawing us together is the notion of the sacred and Redmoon's idea of the event. An event is more than theater; it is an experience that includes social exchange, transformation of public space, an immersive

environment and a heightened sense of the context of performance within space and society. Exploring toy theater, we have been inspired by the social nature of this art form. Toy theater took place in the living room, the parlor, a familial interior environment. We want to invite people into our living room, the miniature world of a child's imagination.

TOY THEATER MEETS CARTOON

Toy theater, an intimate and imaginative tradition that has been largely lost to the modern world, is consummately concerned with scale. The living room toy of the industrial age, a nineteenth century toy theater replicated familiar large-scale theatrical productions in the same way that a Barbie dream-house mimics a movie star's mansion. Reproducing the conventions of grand theater—sets, costumes, moving scenery—on a small scale, toy theater paid tribute to and gently mocked the grand and the big-budget. This produced a disarming effect; while for children it was practical and enchanting, for adults it functioned as a kind of parody—an absurd simplification of the large-scale event.

Redmoon Theater's productions often play on an audience's nostalgia for old technologies—we use gramophones, cranked machines, gears, ladders and modified bicycles. Here, we have taken as our medium an old technology—toy theater—which speaks to us of



the intimate pleasures of an undigital world: a universe of flat paper surfaces and comprehensible mechanics. Magnifying this mechanical medium with video, we have exploded the form while preserving its nostalgic mystique.

Along the way, something unexpected happened. The big flat faces bounding about the screen reminded us of our own childhoods. Playing with scale and video in an old mechanical form, we discovered we were venturing towards cartoon.

A hundred years after toy theater's heyday, the most popular miniature living-room entertainers were the Warner Brothers and Hanna-Barbera. A juxtaposition of large and small was implicit everywhere in early cartoons. The ironic use of grand music—from big band arrangements to symphonic orchestras, and of course, opera (the “Ride of the Valkyries” rendered as “Kill the Wabbit” is a classic example). Kids felt the pull of the iconic even as adults chuckled at the irony of these tiny flickering shapes conveying big battles and simulating the effects of epic filmmaking and opera. These parents marveling at Mighty Mouse's tenor were essentially the same parents who chuckled at a 19th century child's attempt to produce “Oliver Twist” with paper puppets on a miniature stage. In the end, Saturday morning cartoons replaced toy theater's function. And through this mass medium, a great industry and a great storytelling tradition were born. The best cartoons, like a play made by a child, are surreal, inventive, satirical and earnestly entertaining.

ONCE UPON A PROJECT

Frank Maugeri, the director behind *Once Upon A Time*, was determined to celebrate toy theater's immediacy and homemade quality while employing the contemporary tropes and technologies of cartoon. Smashing the forms together with recklessness, we commissioned Eric Newman, a local furniture maker, to engineer a unique toy theater that could create cinematic and cartoon effects with strings and wood. Drawing on these two great domestic traditions (toy theater and television) we stuffed the epic into a miniature space. Using tricks from Victorian theater—pans, a fly system—we have replicated the effects we've come to expect on our living room screen, and now, with two digital cameras, we project these tiny images at up to twenty times their real size.

The next phase of our collaborative process included writer Joe Meno, designers Angela Tillges, Tracy Otwell and Kass Copeland, and company artistic director Jim Lasko, and involved intense work on storytelling challenges. The issue of narration and show-and-tell demanded nine rewrites of the script.

Certain set pieces that took over fifty collective hours of time from the aesthetics team—builders, interns, directors—were cut completely and redesigned, because they no longer served the story. This process of generation and revision is simultaneously methodical and messy.



Inviting a team into this process demands rigorous care in dialogue and constant reevaluation. In the end, our storytelling issues center on the challenge of scale.

In *Once Upon A Time*, we are working on three scales: toy theater (miniature), the performers (human sized) and the screen (larger than life). These layers of media make layers of meaning. What does the magnification of a toy mean? By projecting, magnifying, exploding, we are valorizing the small and intimate, and enabling a large audience to take in a tiny story. But there are issues: When does the audience look up to the screen and when down to the puppet stage? How can we narrate the story and also tell it through images? How much can the puppeteers develop as characters? How do we balance text with song, action with illustration? In the rehearsal room, we develop a practice of patient experimentation.

STORYTELLING

In the end, we are reliant on Joe Meno's anchoring story *Once Upon A Time*: a tale of small creatures and intimate messages. The basis for our puppet show, it is an adventure narrative starring a brave young girl and a defeated wrestler who wage an epic struggle against a diabolical Bird Thief. In Meno's story, the songs of urban birds provide the people of a Depression-era American city with their dreams. Birdsong acts as a miniature hidden

language of the mysterious life and vitality of the city as imagined by a little girl. The fantastical dreams of city dwellers are represented through cartoon logic: Humongous heads of bakers pop up through clouds while birds wear ties and smoke cigars. Through the metaphor of birdsong, *Once Upon A Time* asks us to pay close attention to the world around us, to hidden dreams, small creatures and their languages. Our story, in other words, seeks the epic in the tiny.

There is a world in the song of a bird and in a tiny image of a little girl. This thematic underpinning focuses our team's efforts; it hones our concentration and enables us to make a show together. Our play with scale is rooted in this essential story of dream and intimate secrets, the kinds of secrets shared in living rooms by children of all times using toys and their imaginations.

In the end, we digitally magnify our toy theater to emphasize what has been made small and delicate. The technology we've chosen simplifies and flattens, but it also has the power to be a window into worlds. The digital medium, ubiquitous now in jeans pockets, on billboards and in our homes, can help us see an old form anew. Our spectacle in miniature, a many-layered, nostalgic and futuristic experiment, hopes to tell a modern fairy tale in a new way, inviting an audience to play in our parlor.

production photos: Sean Williams

postcard photoshop file for sequence above: Kass Copeland



TINY NINJA SHAKESPEARE

Erika T. Lin

Opera glasses are distributed to audience members as they file into the theatre. The show they are about to see—Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*—is the product of an ensemble cast. The company’s motto? “There are no small parts, only small actors.” The lights dim. The action begins. And then it’s clear that the actors are quite small indeed. About an inch tall, to be exact.

The Bard’s greatest works take on an unexpected twist when staged by Tiny Ninja Theater, the creative brain-child of puppeteer Dov Weinstein whose ingenious use of cheap, plastic ninja figurines garnered rave reviews at the 2000 New York Fringe Festival. Weinstein has since performed at festivals world-wide, from the Edinburgh Fringe to the Piccolo Spoleto. His innovative productions were even recently included in the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Complete Works Festival. “It was the first time I’ve ever played in England proper,” Weinstein says. “I was afraid that ‘Uppity American Toy Pusher Thinks He’s Better Than the Bard’ would show up in the newspaper headlines.”

Initially trained as an actor, Weinstein first became interested in Balinese theatre and mask performance, which he studied with Professor John Emigh at Brown University while majoring in Philosophy. After receiving his degree, he performed in the *commedia dell’arte*

tradition in Italy and later in Sweden. “I came to New York,” Weinstein says, “thinking that’s what I wanted to do—group collaborative work, like what comes out of Le Coq. But that didn’t work out at all.”

Then the moment of inspiration struck. “I saw all these little tiny ninjas in vending machines, and I thought, ‘Wow, these guys are so great, and nobody’s doing classical theatre with them.’”

Weinstein’s experience as an actor informs not only his manipulation of the inch-high puppets but also the performance philosophies he brings to Tiny Ninja Theater. I spoke with him recently about his creative processes and goals.

My approach has always been very straightforward.

A lot of it is just problem-solving: “Okay, the text says that this happens, so how does that happen?”

Any director has to deal with those issues. In terms

of editing, it’s very story-driven. The ninjas are really good at telling stories; they’re not so good at long monologues. They’re just like any actors: you

have to play to their strengths! I once had people from a local rep company come to see *Macbeth*. I was talking to them afterwards, and one of the actors said, “It’s so nice to see all of the actors working together.” Usually when you do *Macbeth*, for the guy who plays Banquo, it’s a play about Banquo, and for the guy who plays Macduff, it’s a play about Macduff. Everyone’s playing his own part

so strongly that nobody’s telling the story. When you’re using figures like the ninjas, the story tends to take a more prominent place than it might otherwise. Trying to make it clear who’s talking, where the focus should be, how you move the audience’s attention from one figure to another—that kind of thing becomes more important. The funny thing about puppets and particularly about the tiny ninjas is that there are really only two choices: either you invest in the convention or you don’t. Once you accept the convention, ironically, it’s less distracting if Lady Macbeth is a small plastic figure than it would be if she were a real person. When you have actors, it gets messy, but the ninjas are very clear.

They are what they are.

The heightened language and the really big place that Shakespeare has in our culture—to bounce that off of these tiny, almost disposable figures creates a great tension, a great contrast. My hope is that it tends to make the audience hear the play in a new way. Something that's familiar becomes unfamiliar and then becomes familiar again. I know I'm sounding very "Brechtian theory" here. My intentions, though, are entirely anti-Brechtian. My hope is that this is all just a way to become involved in the characters. A lot of those meta-levels of commentary are entirely in the audience's hands, and I think that's where they belong. We had this great experience where I played in Chicago a little while ago at the Shakespeare Theatre at Navy Pier. They have this pre-recorded, canned announcement that they do before every show; "Please turn off all cell phones and beepers. For the safety of the actors, please refrain from using flash photography"—that sort of thing. I didn't have anything to do with it, but on the first night when they played it, the audience just started cracking up. They saw it as this comment about actors whereas it was actually unintentional on everyone's part.

Weinstein sometimes takes part in his own productions, blurring the boundary between actor and puppet. Audiences responded so well to his brief "cameo" as the Porter in *Macbeth* that he has explored this approach more fully in recent productions.

At the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, there's a moment when Romeo goes down into the grave to find Juliet dead. I have this guitar case, and on top of it is the graveyard. When [the figurine representing

Romeo] goes into the grave, I open up the case, and everyone disappears behind it including me. Then when I come up, I'm holding a little red jewelry box, and I open it up slowly and [the figurine representing] Juliet is lying inside it. *I'm* now Romeo; *I'm* delivering Romeo's lines. When Romeo kills himself, we disappear back under the guitar case, and then come up again with me holding Romeo dead in a cup, which is the cup of poison that he drank. I drink this cup, and then *I'm* Juliet, doing *her* death.

Now in *Hamlet* we're using live video. I have these two small spy cameras, which I move around, and then these two large projection screens where the images are being projected. A lot of times the figures are hidden, so you see *me* and you see the *projection*, but you don't necessarily see the figures all the time. There's a color camera and a black-and-white camera, and the color camera is [the ninja] Hamlet's point of view. So you often don't see Hamlet; you see the scene through Hamlet's eyes. It plays to a much larger house because of the video. *Romeo and Juliet* is very small, about 20-30 people, whereas we play *Hamlet* to 100-200 people. There are scenes where I'll literally go up into the aisles and present the figures to people so they can see them up close. It becomes a little more about the guy doing the show *Hamlet* rather than "just *Hamlet*." It wasn't my intention to begin with, but Hamlet as a character is so self-conscious that it just went that way naturally.

I've also started to do a show based around a *mishnah*, which is a piece of Jewish text. I use figures





and objects not only to tell the story itself but also to show how it is that a guy who does puppeteering for a living started learning this material. It plays in Jewish day schools where kids are studying this stuff anyway and also at young adult mixers and synagogues. It's much like Shakespeare in that, if you know the play, it's a very different experience than if you don't. For me personally, it was a way to combine two interests that seem very, very disparate.

When asked for his thoughts on the future of puppetry, Weinstein reflects on changes in its more recent past.

You can imagine what it's like for me at dinner parties. When people find out what I do for a living, it becomes this involved conversation. To me, it's neither surprising nor overwhelmingly interesting that what I do is perform Shakespeare with inch-high plastic ninjas. That seems to me to be a job on par with "garbage man" or "lawyer." In the time that I've been in New York, people have been saying that adult puppetry is getting big, and that's a change you can definitely see. I still get a lot of, "Oh, what is it you do? Oh, for kids?" When I say "for grown-ups," it's not that weird anymore. Ten years ago it was that much weirder.

You can also see a change on Broadway and in other shows that now use puppets. It sounds kind of trite to say, but I think it's true that theatre is still trying to figure out what it's supposed to do with itself now that there are TV and movies. Puppetry is, in a way, one of the answers to that question. There's something fundamentally theatrical about puppets. That isn't true of just another production of *Three Sisters*. Maybe that's one of the reasons puppets are becoming more mainstream. I know it's heresy to say it, but maybe movies really *are* better at telling stories with people. With puppets—well, this is something real that we can do that nobody else can do better. There's something wonderful about the fact that it's really there. Theatre's very ephemeral—you do it and then it's gone—but here you have the physical thing to hold onto.

For more information, go to www.tinyinjinatheater.com.



Erika T. Lin is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Louisville.

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and eighteen meters high. Exactly one body
 per square meter of space. It's as if he has put
 the human condition under a highly magnified
 microscope. Kind of like an ant farm of people."
 Rich See in *Curtain Up*, 2004.

pictured: David Warrilow
 photo: Richard Landry





BOLEX BROTHERS, THE SECRET ADVENTURES OF TOM THUMB

Comparing this 1993 film that combines stop-motion with human actors, to David Lynch's *Eraserhead* and the work of Czech Surrealist Jan Svankmajer, Richard Scheib calls it "a bizarre work of genius," that is at times "quite terrifying."

It is easy to understand why we relate to this Tom Thumb, a doughy little protagonist in a world of gigantic beings—
infernal machines against which our frail selves seem so powerless.

MABOU MINES SCALES DOWN

Lee Breuer directed the 1974 Obie-winning production of *The Lost Ones*. Mabou Mines commissioned Phillip Glass to compose new music for Debra Cohen's script adaptation of Beckett's novella.

"In *The Lost Ones*, Beckett discusses 200 seekers and non-seekers living in a universe that is a flattened cylinder fifty meters round and eighteen meters high. Exactly one body per square meter of space. It's as if he has put the human condition under a highly magnified microscope. Kind of like an ant farm of people."

Rich See in *Curtain Up*, 2004.

pictured: David Warrilow

photo: Richard Landry





PHOTO: RICHARD TERRINE

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VALSE MATHILDA

CATHERINE SOMBSTHAY

Proust is not the only French artist to have earned his daily bread from a cookie. In Catherine Sombsthay's case it is not the *madeleine*, but the *petit buerre*, or little butter cookie that gives rise to "...an extraordinary piece with no apparent story and few words that fascinates children everywhere."* Having seen the show, that seems to be the case—even very young children sitting in an uncomfortably warm room were mesmerized by Sombsthay's installation. Perhaps its slowly rotating wheels were reminiscent of a mobile hung over the crib—hypnotic, comforting. *Valse Mathilda* was also fascinating for adults in the audience (perhaps, in part, for the same reason).

Shaped like a Christmas tree and encrusted with mirror chips and embossed metal trim like a Pakistani bus or street shrine, numerous bicycle wheels—mounted horizontally—represent future, present and past for the characters pictured at various ages on the popular French cookies. Sombsthay constantly repositions them to create a sort of family tree. Relationships develop and change over time in a natural, if apparently haphazard fashion. Lights projected through the mobile cast glorious shadows on the ceiling and walls. I understand the piece has been controversial in Europe (the predictable "Yes, but is it puppetry?" debate). *Valse Mathilda* is so evocative, however, that I am sure many left the theatre (as I did) pondering their childhood as they nibbled a butter cookie.

*from the company's promotional literature

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THE SHOEBOX WORLD OF ROBERT ANTON



by Jennifer Stoessner

"The visionary theatre event created and performed by Robert Anton is a ritual of transformation and rebirth, an original alchemical allegory enacted in silence by miniature puppet actors against a black velvet landscape" touts a handout for performances by the Robert Anton Theatre.¹ Called alternately a priest, an alchemist, a magician, and a surgeon, Robert Anton established himself as a presence in the off-off-Broadway theatre scene of the middle 1970s. Seen by a comparative handful of spectators in New York and Europe, Anton's work had a magnetism and intensity that was undeniable.



Robert Anton was born in Fort Worth, Texas in 1949. As a child he was entranced by theatre and would reproduce exquisite miniature sets from the professional shows that he had seen with his parents. The settings were functional and involved complex mechanisms to reproduce what the young artist had seen.² A keen eye for detail enabled him to create from memory the automata of the spectacle on a tiny scale. He loved Fred Astaire musicals from the thirties and forties³ and attempted to bring the magic of the stage and screen into his own life. According to childhood friend, Benjamin Taylor, Anton received a puppet theatre at age eight and began to create worlds and narratives of his own shortly thereafter.⁴ Thus the allure of puppetry came to Anton early in life; he reflected on the receipt of his first puppet, saying, "It was a profound experience, because I seemed to recognize that I had the ability to give life to that inanimate object."⁵



These images were extracted from photos taken by Ann Mundy in 1976.
We are still trying to locate her.

The ability of the puppet to allow Anton to disappear into himself and remember a time when he was once very small was remarkably present in the work that he produced. He retained the first puppet he ever made at age five his entire life: a green sock with blue eyes and a red tongue. "As a child, I instinctively created a world to live in to my own measure... I have always dreamed of building a world that I could control."⁶ He used puppetry to make a connection to his peers in school and remembered being happy and confident at that age. As he grew older, he began to use puppets to get to the core of human experience, creating environments for himself in an effort to reclaim the lost innocence and small stature of his youth. "I found I could reduce the scale of my sanctuary and still be able to enter into it. But as we grow, we forget that we were ever small enough to be contained within our own minds."⁷

He left Texas to attend Carnegie Mellon, but he dropped out in favor of moving to Brooklyn, New York, in the early 1970s. In 1971, he was given the opportunity to perform at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in New York's Lower East Side, performing in a puppet interpretation of *The Dybbuk*, entitled *Shekina* or *The Bride*. With this, he created a relationship with Ellen Stewart, La MaMa's founder. As Stewart recalled, "His Lilliputian concept was unique, wonderful—considered a genius operation—but very private. Only 15 people could see the show. The cellar-theater was the smallest space we had. That's where [Anton] wanted to be."⁸ The intimacy and immediacy of his performing style pushed him back into the "shoebox" or inner realm in which Anton was "able to create with [his] hands a world that was safe and pleasurable and entertaining."⁹ On Broadway, Anton did find work as a scenic designer for the 1972 production of *Elizabeth I* and constructed gigantic puppets for *Dude*,¹⁰ a notorious flop in the fall of the same year. The grand scale

of the Broadway stage raised the stakes for the designer in positive and negative ways, though he quickly recognized that he "didn't want to control a space any bigger than that diningroom [sic] table [he] grew up with."¹¹

The shows that Anton produced in the early to middle 1970s were intimate affairs, with no more than eighteen people in attendance. The "visionary" theatre of Robert Anton was akin to a religious rite and Anton wanted audiences to come to his performances without prior knowledge or expectations of his ritual.¹² Thus he did not allow his work to be photographed, filmed or reviewed in any way. He felt to document or photograph a ceremony or ritual would demystify it and give it a sense of permanence or presence outside of the experience. A rare exception to his rule came in the form of a 1975 article in *The Drama Review* by Maurice McClelland that describes the show with a series of photographs of the performance in progress. The article is an excellent resource for anyone interested in the specific incidents from Anton's "New York" show.

In his apartment/studio, Anton had carefully crafted a performance space that was suited to the viewing of his miniscule work. There were eighteen stools, attached to the floor, upon which the spectators sat. The stools were of varying heights, forming three rows of six. People entered in silence, awed by the experience and the solemnity that permeated the space. Anton's performances would utilize various handcrafted settings, placed on a semi-circular playing board. He would make the transitions from one act of the work to the next seamlessly. The performances occurred in silence; there was no dialogue and rarely music. The scale of Anton's work made it feasible to use candles as a lighting source, adding to the feeling of ritual that his performances evoked.¹³ He also incorporated half-inch Fresnel lights and utilized special effects at various points

in the performance, using his feet or knees to throw a switch while his hands were manipulating the puppet.¹⁴

Anton's puppets were very tiny, often with heads measuring three centimeters in height and smaller.¹⁵ The puppets were principally constructed of papier-mâché, with various found and natural objects augmenting their appearance. Their bodies were made of black velvet, lending a striking focus to their highly detailed faces. Anton also wore black velvet, giving his head and hands the same stark spotlight and contrast as the puppets.¹⁶ He looked like a larger version of his creations in his invented environments. The relationship of performer to performing object was very close; Anton's hands directly touched the puppets from the inside as well as the outside.

The viewers' perspective, at eye level to the stage and puppet actors, causes the viewer to become "transformed into a psychic inhabitant of the puppets' miniature landscape."¹⁷ Benjamin Taylor, who is also an author, wrote a book entitled *Tales Out of School* that attempted to explain the effect. "Here was a world of smallness made clear by what it excluded. Simpler than the big world, yes; the big world excludes nothing and this makes the big world hard to see. But here in smallness dwelled the promise of truth."¹⁸ When his performance ended, the stage lights dimmed, the candles were extinguished and a bell sounded. The performance lasted ninety minutes from beginning to end. The experience of the performance was different for each viewer but the evening was "a somber occasion. It was raw, yet veiled in elegance."¹⁹ Robert Bethea, another childhood friend of Anton's, said of the impact of his work, "The audience was sated: moved, exhausted, elated. Everything so tiny...the slightest movement was exaggerated. People would lose concept of time, forget to breathe...*faint*. It happened more than once."²⁰

Through the McClelland article and the word-of-mouth publicity of audience members, Robert Anton achieved the status of a cult figure and his performances began to be frequented by the powerful people in New York theatre, including Harold Prince, Stephen Sondheim, and Stella Adler.²¹ Adler was particularly affected by the work; she would come to the performances and talk to the puppets throughout²² or be overheard to whisper over the lonely, spectral landscape, only six feet wide, "How vast, how vast."²³ His work came to the attention of Susan Sontag who, when asked in a 1977 interview about her most worthwhile experiences in theatre, immediately thought of Robert Anton's puppet theatre.²⁴ It was Sontag who got Anton an invitation to perform in Nancy, France as a part of the International Theatre Festival in 1975.²⁵

In this festival as well as the Festival D'Automne in Paris in 1976 and the World Theatre Festival in Cologne, Germany in 1981, Anton garnered rave reviews, which he permitted for the festival performances. The praise and adoration of his work was unchallenged; one critic called it "technically perfect," and "a revelation," and said in closing "And if you never can see it, may I at least have given you regrets; it is good to know that somewhere, someone of this quality exists."²⁶ The Nancy reviews note for the first time the resemblance between the main character of the work and Anton, calling the face an "analogue of the marionettist's own."²⁷ People often took his work to be autobiographical as a result. "His images could be exquisitely precise, yet multiple," said

Jean-Claude van Itallie. It was partially due to Anton's enabling silence; the audience makes of the images what it will. Shirley Anton, the artist's mother, remembers, "[He] meant for the show to be what each person thought it was; no wrong or right."²⁸

The final piece of theatre that Robert Anton was developing was a return to his childhood fascination with miniature reproductions of stage settings, particularly with the feel of musicals of the 1930s and 1940s. The piece was to be about theatrical space itself; theatre as character. There were no puppets in the developing work, just a "tiny stage set, furniture, like a hotel in Havana or Miami Beach."²⁹ Anton's plan was to manipulate the light in relation to the setting, utilizing color and angle to create life on the stage, sculpting the space just as his hands had the papier-mâché heads in his previous work. He intended to incorporate sound and music for the first time as a major component of the performance. Jean-Claude van Itallie reported, "precious metals—materials—were important, healing through color, shape, sound—he would create exactly what he wanted...have a spotlight...and then you would just *project* Astaire dancing."³⁰ The imagination of the audience was the ultimate resource for the Robert Anton Theatre once again; the ability of a viewer to imbue with life

the inanimate intimacy was Anton's focus. "He had a [final] grand conception for a full evening of miniature theater, to be seen by as many as 60-70 people," Taylor remembered.³¹ Ultimately, that vision was never to become reality.

Robert Anton received the news that he was positively infected with HIV and in 1983, he fell ill. He ended his life on August 29, 1984 in Los Angeles as a result of the ensuing hopelessness that his disease introduced into his life.³² In spite of the brevity of his life, Anton's work was an inspiration to collaborators and theatre artists. Elizabeth Swados, an associate who developed some music with Anton, remembered, "Individuals went away more devoted to precision and spirituality in the work that they did."³³ The delicacy and precision of Anton's performance was the key to his great artistry; one critic said that Anton's performances permitted an audience to admire both the characters and the "profound authenticity of his inspiration and of his goals."³⁴ Anton said of his work, "What I've done is to create a theater I hope allows others that kind of being awestruck and overwhelmed by light and motion and music, as when I first went to the theater."³⁵ Based on the legacy and legend he left behind, he succeeded stunningly.



Jennifer Stoessner is a PhD candidate in theatre history, literature, and criticism at the Ohio State University. Her Master's thesis is entitled, "Infecting the Inanimate: Puppet Theatre Responds to AIDS."



Footnotes and bibliography enhance your reading pleasure.



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— FLORENCE DACEY "THEATRE OF WONDER" (1999)



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Paul Klee Zentrum,

Paul Klee: Handpuppets

Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2006

Massimo Schuster,

Bread & Puppet Museum

Pisa: Titivillus, 2006

Peter Schumann,

Scripts and Scribbles

Glover: Bread & Puppet Press, 2006

Matthew Bernier and Judith O'Hare, eds.,

Puppetry in Education and Therapy

Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2005

Some recently published books on puppetry show the continuing interest in this art and performance form in the twenty-first century, and the consistent, if sometimes obscure, ways that material about puppets finds its way into print.

Paul Klee: Handpuppets is a truly amazing study of modernist puppet work by one of the last century's pivotal avant-garde artists. The expressionist and Bauhaus painter Paul Klee made a series of fifty handpuppets for his son Felix between 1916 and 1925 in Germany, using mostly household materials for their construction, including "beef bones and electrical outlets, bristle brushes, leftover bits of fur, and nutshells," as one of the accompanying essays in this volume explains. The results of this modest endeavor, not meant for gallery exhibition or for sale, but for home performances by Klee and his family, are stunning because of the bold design and color choices Klee made. In some cases Klee designed puppet heads as expressionist portraits (including an astounding one of himself), but he also made the face of a ghost puppet from an electric light socket, which, as the photographs show, was not simply an economical recycling of household trash, but a perceptive statement about the ambivalent function of

machines in modern life: They are not only technological conveniences, but symbols of powers we ultimately do not understand. Above all, this book is an inspiration for anyone involved in puppet theater—as a maker or spectator—because it shows so many examples of simple yet profound lyrical beauty.

Another collection of puppet photographs, on an entirely different scale, is Massimo Schuster's **Bread and Puppet Museum**, which captures not only the spirit of Peter Schumann's decades-long development as a sculptor of performing objects, but also the simple strength and beauty of the 1860s northern Vermont barn in which Schumann and his colleagues in Bread and Puppet Theater created their museum. As Elka Schumann writes in the book, the museum "is a 'theatrum mundi', a unified yet diverse single creation rather than a collection of separate objects." In other words, it is what high-culture art critics would call a "site-specific installation" rather than a typical museum, but the effect of the place, as Schuster's photographs show, is not at all highfalutin'. Instead, the warm simplicity of the post-and-beam barn (just now undergoing substantial renovation) complements the bold strength of Schumann's profound performance sculptures which, while also influenced by the currents of Expressionism that affected Paul Klee, are themselves a significant body of American art that has not yet been fully understood. The experience of the Bread and Puppet Museum can be fully gained only first hand, by stepping into that New England space to be surrounded by puppets both minuscule and gigantic; but Schuster's book is a valuable catalogue of the range and strength of this work.

Besides his sculpture and graphic work, another aspect of Peter Schumann's puppetry is his writing; bold and sweeping political poetry indebted as much to the romantic German poet Hölderlin as it is to *The New York Times* or the daily news on the internet. **Scripts and Scribbles** is a collection of sixteen of Schumann's short performance pieces from 1982 to 2006, from short post-9/11 cantastorias (picture performances) such as *How to Turn Distress into Success*, to last summer's *8 No-No-No Dances against the US-Supported War on Lebanon*. In her afterword to the book, Elka Schumann points out that Bread and Puppet shows "rarely start with a written script," but instead "emerge from a combination of experimental rehearsals" and Peter Schumann's "sometimes murky, sometimes lucid visions scribbled down as sketches and texts." In that sense, these scripts are fascinating as steps in the development of performance.

They are also important as particular examples of the possibilities of text in political performance—not as the dialogue of caricatured politicians or the romanticization of political heroes, but as suggestive poetry which is both abstract and eminently applicable to our present situation, as when “the Populations” ask “the Globe,” (*The Four Stages of the Globe*):

*Please, can we set sail on you
not to go anywhere in particular,
but simply to be taken away
from the unhappiness system
and be embraced by strong wind
and absolutely nothing else?*

A different but equally fascinating aspect of puppet theater is **Puppetry in Education and Therapy**, Matthew Bernier and Judith O’Hare’s anthology of twenty-nine essays on “the power of puppetry to educate and to heal,” as Susan Linn puts it in her introduction. The importance of puppetry for education has been formally recognized worldwide for a century, and hundreds of American puppeteers are engaged in this work. However, the value of puppetry in education is still not universally recognized. As an essay by Sharon Peck points out, despite the fact that the New York City School District encouraged the use of puppets in schools as early as 1947, “now, sixty years later [...] puppets do not have a strong presence in classrooms.”

Likewise, the value of puppets in therapy is often overlooked or ignored. In one of his essays, Matthew Bernier explains how Jimmy, an eight-year-old boy he worked with in a shelter for victims of domestic violence, was able to connect to his life by making a sock puppet, whose arms were marked by red dots. Other children in the shelter suggested that Jimmy’s puppet had chicken pox, but Jimmy explained that the dots were bullet holes, and then used the puppet to tell how his father had menaced his family with a gun. As Bernier puts it, “the unspeakable truths about domestic violence, child abuse, and substance abuse were safely spoken and dramatized through puppetry.” At the end of the session, Bernier says, a shelter staff member saw the children’s puppets and exclaimed “Oh how cute! You made puppets today,” not understanding the profundity and therapeutic value of puppets like Jimmy’s. As Bernier puts it, the children in the shelter “had successfully used their puppets and puppet play symbolically and therapeutically and were able to put closure on that work for now.”



Paul Klee

Handpuppets made for his son, Felix

Bernier and O’Hare’s book is neatly divided in two sections, one focused on puppets in elementary education, the other on puppets and therapy. A real value to the collection (especially considering the obstacles puppetry still faces in these areas) is that the articles are all first-hand accounts of practical experience by veterans in the field, such as Carol Sterling, Hobe Ford, Tova Ackerman and Bruce Chessé. The range of writing here varies, from straightforward testimonies of the writers’ experience, to deep and thoughtful pieces about educational and psychological theories and their applications. Each writer has worked in a specific area of educational or therapeutic puppetry, and the sum total of their experiences offers a rich array of different approaches, different techniques that are clearly of immense value.

None of the above books was produced by a mainstream American publisher, which says something about the continuing low status of puppets, at least in the U.S. And yet, these books are out there for the persistent reader to find, and they each add resonance to the rich documentation of the curious field of puppetry.

—reviews by John Bell

PAUL MCPHARLIN AND THE PUPPET THEATRE

by Ryan Howard

Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006
 ISBN-10: 0-7864-2433-8 (soft cover) \$35.00
www.mcfarlandpub.com

When I obtained my copy of Paul McPharlin's *Puppet Theater in America* at the tender young age of sixteen, I didn't realize how many years it would take me to read it cover-to-cover. I thought of it as an encyclopedia—a magnificent resource for seemingly every aspect of American puppetry, but certainly not something to simply read through for pleasure. Decades later (I'm embarrassed to admit) I finally got around to giving it proper attention; I was stunned by the author's knowledge and the depth of his archival research (the book was based upon his doctoral dissertation and often drew from his own collections). McPharlin's book represents to me a magnificent example of a depth of scholarship I rarely encounter. Almost sixty years later, it remains the most important printed resource of its kind.

The very fact that my statement will be so obvious to many readers testifies to McPharlin's legacy. Many examples of his prodigious curiosity, creativity and scholarship remain, including his book designs in many fields (the "extra-illustrated" editions of the *Puppetry Yearbooks* feature his charming woodcuts), play translations and other publications related to puppetry research. Other than the examples featured in Baird's *Art of the Puppet*, the 1937 Limited Editions Club edition of *Punch and Judy* remains the only place one may see reproductions of Cruikshank's watercolor renderings for the classic Collier text. His 1929 *Repertory of Puppet Plays*, recently reprinted by Edwin Mellen Press, amazingly remains the only English-language historical anthology of international puppet drama available in book form. Luman Coad has beautifully scanned and restored the Yearbooks of the 1930s and early 1940s for a CD-ROM edition. McPharlin, of course, was pivotal in the founding of the first major American puppetry organization, the Puppeteers of America. John Bell's *Strings, Hands, Shadows* accompanied a magnificent exhibition of the McPharlin Puppet Collection at the Detroit Institute of the Arts. He is featured in the documentary film, *The American Puppet*. He was a champion of experimental puppetry for adult audiences, an alternative to the more commercially oriented Tony Sarg-influenced productions of the time. McPharlin's pivotal role in the furthering of an appreciation of the art of American puppetry cannot be overstated. Yet published biographic information has remained difficult to find. How ironic that one of the principal leaders in the early 20th century American puppetry revival would document so many other's work, yet remain largely opaque to future generations.



McPharlin's linoleum-cut poster, made for a performance by Columbia College students.

And now we have Dr. Ryan Howard's *Paul McPharlin and the Puppet Theatre*. This fine volume fills a major gap in our knowledge of this shy, inspiring and complex individual. McPharlin died at the age of forty-five of a brain tumor, soon after his marriage to the late Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin, herself a major figure in the history of American puppetry, and collaborator in both the original and supplemented editions of the posthumously published *Puppet Theatre in America*. Howard began this project over twenty years ago, drawing upon resources from the Detroit Institute of the Arts, the Batchelder-McPharlin collection at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, the Detroit Public Library, and the Center for Puppetry Arts. Howard has written an impeccably researched, exhaustively documented chronicle of McPharlin's professional and personal lives. The latter aspect was only possible because of the cooperation of Marjorie, who provided years of personal correspondence. She wished McPharlin to be profiled in all his complexity, and granted the author almost entirely unrestricted permission to use private information as he saw fit. As her own role within McPharlin's life is examined as well, this was an act of tremendous courage and generosity.

Howard clearly acknowledges that he is an art historian, not a psychologist, and speculations regarding McPharlin's personality must be read with that in mind. I can't say that I normally have much interest in the personal lives of those whose work I admire—I just want to know about the work itself. In this case, there is relevance, and the author presents this material with sensitivity. One of the most interesting aspects of this study is the question of what drives an individual such as Paul McPharlin. By extension, the book causes one to speculate upon so many others who are drawn to this field. Is there a "personality type" that emerges within the puppetry community? Why do certain individuals feel the need to express themselves through such a medium? Why do others passionately create collections? How does maintaining such a strong focus on one's interests affect one's relationships with friends and family?

Paul McPharlin is the subject of this volume, but the author makes clear the importance of Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin as an artist, scholar and teacher in her own right. While she played the (often difficult) roles of friend, collaborator and partner during McPharlin's tragically short life, the reader cannot help but hope that a second biography will eventually help us better appreciate her individual role in the evolution of American puppetry and promotion of increased awareness of international traditions and techniques. (The adaptation of her own dissertation, *Rod Puppets and the Human Theatre*, desperately needs to be reprinted, and her *Puppet Theatre Handbook*, partially produced under the auspices of the U.S. Army, remains an excellent technical and design resource, one of the best ever written).

While the relatively short book should be enjoyable for a general reader, Howard is aware that this will serve as an important resource for future scholars. The need to responsibly present the research and logic behind his conclusions (along with counter-arguments) sometimes interferes with the flow of the text. But that is a minor concern, given that such an approach further validates his arguments. Extensively footnoted throughout, the book also provides appendices that catalog McPharlin's Puppetry Imprints publications and list the original members of Puppetry Fellowship. Two of McPharlin's scripts are included: *The Barn at Bethlehem* and *Punch's Circus*, both of which deserve revival. (I found the latter to be especially fresh and humorous, a worthy addition to the canon.) *Paul McPharlin and the Puppet Theatre* provides a well-researched and long-needed introduction to one of the most pivotal figures of 20th century puppetry and puppetry studies.

review by Brad Clark



SLEPT:

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An experimental puppet show developed by:
Cat Cooper, Alison Heimstead and Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew

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We used cigar boxes as a repetitive organizing principal for our nine-scene experiment. The boxes also highlight our daily experience of living in contained and personal environments with our ipods, cell phones and self adjusted digital nests protecting us from the nightmare of the news from the outside world. As the cell whispers to the next one, the body lets go and the drift of sleep spreads like a wave; just as electricity of fear spreads through a body. Synapses scream. We forget the tiniest connections that make our body (human and nation) communicate to itself.

The nine scenes explore the following images: sleep (as we came to understand it), trying to fall asleep (desperately), sometimes drug-induced lullabies, prolonged state of dreams and war-induced nightmares, and waking up. It concludes with an image from a real dream of Cat: a group of people picnicking on a flat world and a boat fallen off the edge. This is, of course, interrupted by the morning alarm.

—Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew

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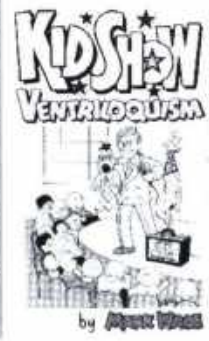
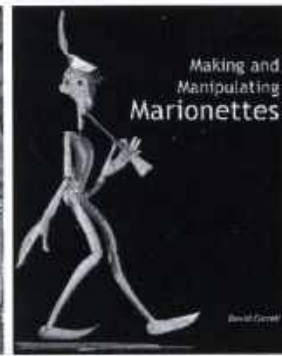
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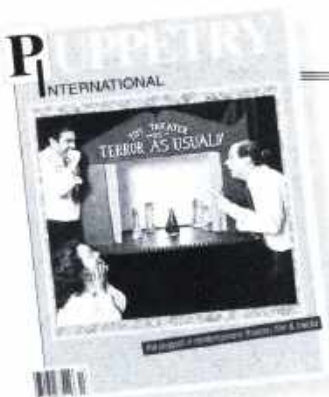
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Great Small Correction



We neglected to properly credit Mark Sussman in *PI*#20, the Puppety Scripts issue. Although it was noted that he was one of the performers of Great Small Works' *Terror as Usual! Episode Nine: Doom*, he was also the show's primary author— *Sorry, Mark.*

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GEORGE LATSHAW

ESTABLISHING A TRADITION OF PUPPETRY IN PUERTO RICO

by Manuel A. Morán, Ph. D.

In Puerto Rico during the 1960s, Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero created a project to take puppet theatre and artistic recreation for children to the rural areas of the country. There was a real need for this because Puerto Rico lacked a tradition in children's theatre, especially puppet theatre. In an interview with Guillermo Villarronda (1968), Santiago Lavandero said: "In Puerto Rico there is not one recorded instance that indicates the presence of puppetry in the past." This is why in 1965, because of the efforts of Santiago Lavandero and the Teatro Escolar program, and by virtue of United States Congressional Law number 89-10, Title I, funds were approved to permit the establishment of an experimental project titled the "MIR—Minit teatro Infantil Rural."

In 1967, two luminaries in the art of puppetry, Ángeles Gasset from Spain and George Latshaw from the United States, were brought to Puerto Rico to lead workshops for fifteen teachers and fifteen high school graduate students in the art of puppetry.

Miss Ángeles Gasset, niece of Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, was directing a private school at the time and had been using puppetry as a medium in teaching elementary education.

Santiago Lavandero was quoted as saying: "The vast experience and talent of these persons make them extraordinary figures for our benefit. We are determined to establish in Puerto Rico the tradition of puppetry as an effective vehicle of elementary education." (p. 18)

I first met George Latshaw in the summer of 1999 at the Puppeteers of America's (PofA) National Puppet Festival in Seattle, Washington. I had recently joined the PofA and was very excited to be part of my first puppet festival that summer. George Latshaw, who was one of the pillars of this organization, was to announce his retirement as the long-time editor of *The Puppetry Journal*, a quarterly magazine dedicated to the art of puppetry in the United States.

[He] started reminiscing and telling all of us stories about his experiences in Puerto Rico. That's when I realized that in spite of the fact that these events had happened more than thirty years ago, they were vibrant and fresh in his mind. It was obvious that the time he spent in Puerto Rico was quite memorable. ...



Photograph of Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero, Ángeles Gasset and George Latshaw, Minit teatro Infantil Rural, 1967 (Department of Education Archives)

The sections that follow are a narrative of the history of the MIR based on archival materials and newspaper articles. Segments of the interview have been structured to supplement and enhance this narrative and enrich it with the unique personal experiences related by Latshaw.

The First Summer in Puerto Rico

Here is how George Latshaw described the beginnings:

Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero invited me down. Now, whether he had been through the gamut of other people, or just what, before I wined up on the list, I don't remember now. So, then also I worked with teachers in the *Programa de Teatro Escolar* and they were being trained to do, you know, in the classroom, teaching. The first year we had a very happy time of Leo and me working with all the puppets and so forth. Antonio Pérez was very impressive. He was young and very handsome and he had the kind of personality that everybody liked. ... Rafael Ruiz was another one. And he was, really, a natural puppeteer. I could not believe, when I saw him, the second summer. Here's a man who really should have been a puppeteer. And it has broken my

heart... that he was not able to pursue that. They were to sleep in the schoolyard. ... Evidently they were a star attraction, for people were peeking in on them. There was one team the first year. And they did both theatre and the puppets. They did two of the Ángeles Gasset shows, *Palos* and *El rey*. Adrián García became a television comedian. ... he stuttered, but never when he was on the stage. He had a different persona and also he had lines so he knew what he was going to say. But I couldn't survive the summer, I think, without Adrián as a translator, ...

Latshaw (1967) described the MIR in his article "Creating a Puppet Theatre Tradition in Puerto Rico," published in *The Children's Theatre Review*:

In the summer of 1966 I made my first trip to Puerto Rico to help launch the Minitatro Infantil Rural, a pilot project which Dr. Lavandero had designed for elementary schools. Minitatro was literally a "rolling theatre" (erected on the back of a six-passenger pick-up truck) that would accommodate the productions of both "live" and puppet plays. A sizable stage deck was cantilevered from the truck bed to give elevation to the acting areas. Performances were to be held in the open air of schoolyards or playgrounds. Scenery consisted of a unit set, which could be converted into a thrust puppet stage with the addition of a wrap-around masking apron. Puppeteers worked overhead, while seated on low rolling stools on the stage deck.

Latshaw commented on this particular in the article published in *The Children's Theatre Review*:

The success of the demonstration year led to the creation of three Minitatro units during the summer of 1967. The "live" play was dropped, in favor of a smaller two-man company, which could travel with a repertory of three puppet plays. Portable puppet booth and gear was designed to stow neatly in a compact International Scout.

More staff was trained in the summer of 1967 in the puppetry seminar, for which the services of George Latshaw and Ángeles Gasset were again retained.

The Second Summer in Puerto Rico

Latshaw described his second summer in Puerto Rico as follows:

The second summer, when Ángeles Gasset was there, we trained three companies, and built all the puppets for them, with the same script. And we used to have staff meetings in Spanish. And I always listened so hard, and Leo would stop every once in a while, and say, "Do you understand where we are?" And I would say, "Oh, I can get it here and there okay." Oh, so fast. The first year, Ruiz was the one who would always say "entonces" "then" and I didn't know what "entonces" was. ... It was very lonely. I had a room out near the place where we had the workshops and lessons and so forth. ... And then the meals were in the kitchen facing the wall and the grandmothers do the cooking. And Puerto Rican rice and beans are like no others in any place in the world. Yeah, I had not been able to find a recipe or anything that would satisfy the *sofrito*. I could sit and eat loads all day. ...

It also impressed me when I occasionally went out to drink with the boys, and the little places where they had a vitrola [jukebox], this is before they had karaoke. A little corner, a little platform and a spotlight, and the boys each had a poem that they knew and would be pleased [to recite], and I said, you know, "Is this from your high school days?" No, no, it was something that each one of them had as an individual... personal and romantic and flowery, you know. I was so impressed.

That summer there was an election and that was quite fascinating to be aware of it, because you did not see any visual signs of the people who would vote for statehood. It wasn't until election night that some people ran with, you know, the "stars and stripes," ...

Then I really began to feel, well, ... I loved the people, they were so warm, so good to me.

According to Latshaw, that second summer in Puerto Rico was difficult for him. While the people treated him well, it was the only summer that he spent in Puerto Rico without his wife and children.

The Third Summer in Puerto Rico

The boys came down and we got an apartment in Hato Rey and that was really quite wonderful, because now we were really in a community, you know, tile floors. So in the third summer, they were training nine troops, that was a factory, you know by that time, in order to build the puppets for all nine companies....

All of the nine companies produced the same puppet show. "La princesa calva." Ángeles ... was not there that summer... and I decided at that time that it was not right to keep using [her] scripts because they were from Spain, and a lot of people related to Spain, but there was no real, well, Juan Bobo [local] stories—the things that would mean something to the people on the island. In that sense I thought I had served my role, which had been to get it started and to train.

A Vision for the Island

As George Latshaw came to the end of his account of the three summers he spent in Puerto Rico, his thoughts turned to the broader picture of the vision and purpose of the educational theatre program:

Leo is a fantastic draftsman. His plans and designs for the first season. I didn't realize what an important step Leo was taking. I mean, I have worked in education, I have worked as a professional performer, and so forth, but he had a vision for the island, in terms of culture and that was why the boys that he drew were graduates from the theatre program in high schools. That was wonderful. It gave them training, it gave them the possibility of a career, and also served the needs that they could go to, you know, all the mountain schools. We didn't see that area, I didn't see that area.

The Puerto Rican people gave me so much—their warmth, graciousness. You know, it's wonderful. Seeing it all taking place, it was very exciting.

After the interview concluded, we continued talking informally. I gave him updates on people in Puerto Rico with whom he had lost touch. Latshaw mentioned to me that after he left Puerto Rico, he continued to keep in



Photograph of Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero and George Latshaw, 1968
(Department of Education Archives)

touch with Santiago Lavandero and his wife in Puerto Rico. When Santiago Lavandero retired and moved to Florida, Latshaw and his wife visited them often.

I also expressed to him that he was instrumental in the development of puppetry in Puerto Rico. He said he was very surprised to hear that comment; he didn't know how much his work and training had influenced and helped in the development of the field on the island.

I had a great affection for the people, and it looked to me like the society of the future, because there were people who were white, or tanned or brown. But it was the whole mix together, you know, which is the way the world should be.

Manuel Antonio Morán is the current Vice President of UNIMA-USA and the Founder and Artistic Director of SEA. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Theatre from New York University (NYU). He is an actor, writer and puppeteer who lives in New York City and maintains a residence in Puerto Rico.

www.manuelmoran.com

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For the complete text of Dr. Moran's interview with George Latshaw, ⇒ [GO TO:](http://www.unima-usa.org/publications/index.html)

WWW.UNIMA-USA.ORG/PUBLICATIONS/INDEX.HTML

Also, check out the George Latshaw tributes, including Michael Nelson's article on the lasting influence of Latshaw's time in Puerto Rico in the winter 2006 issue of The Puppetry Journal, published by Puppeteers of America.

THE MICRO-MACRO PARADOX:

THE UNIVERSE IN A GRAIN OF SAND... OR A BLOB OF CLAY



ISIDOR'S CHEEK

Conceived and performed by Ines Zeller Bass
 Design and Puppets: Jana Zeller
 Direction: Eric Bass
 Music: Peter Tavalin, Eric Bass

"One day, something drives Isidor from out of his little grey existence. His cheek runs away, and Isidor must search around the world to find it again. This is a world of color and beauty, as well as loneliness and even danger... Isidor himself is just over five inches tall, an appropriately little hero for a small story with a big heart."

Sandglass Theater:

From Thought to Image—20 years in Vermont.
info@sandglasstheater.org



photos courtesy of Premaxvision/Clokey Productions

GUMBY



Art Clokey & Co.

Back in the 1950s, our small black & white TV screens offered a place where the inanimate really seemed to spring to life—Howdy Doody, Snarky Parker, Kukla and Ollie... yet, we saw the strings, or sensed the animator's hand beneath fabric bodies. Gumby was something else—he was clearly a "thing," but he moved on his own.

This stop-motion green boy and his pals, created by Artclokey, appeared in 223 TV episodes over 35 years. The simplicity of design and clean lines of the cast (along with his open, trusting nature) has proven to have lasting appeal.



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Great Small Works
The Rapture Project

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It's a Bee Honey
Erin Orr
Photo: Oliver Dalzell

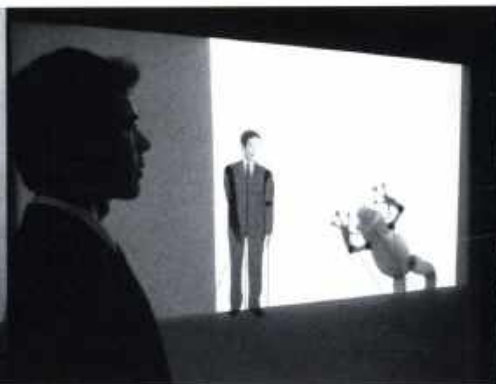


As I Lay Dying
Michael Haverty
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

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Songs from the Yellow Earth
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Once There Was a Village
The Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre
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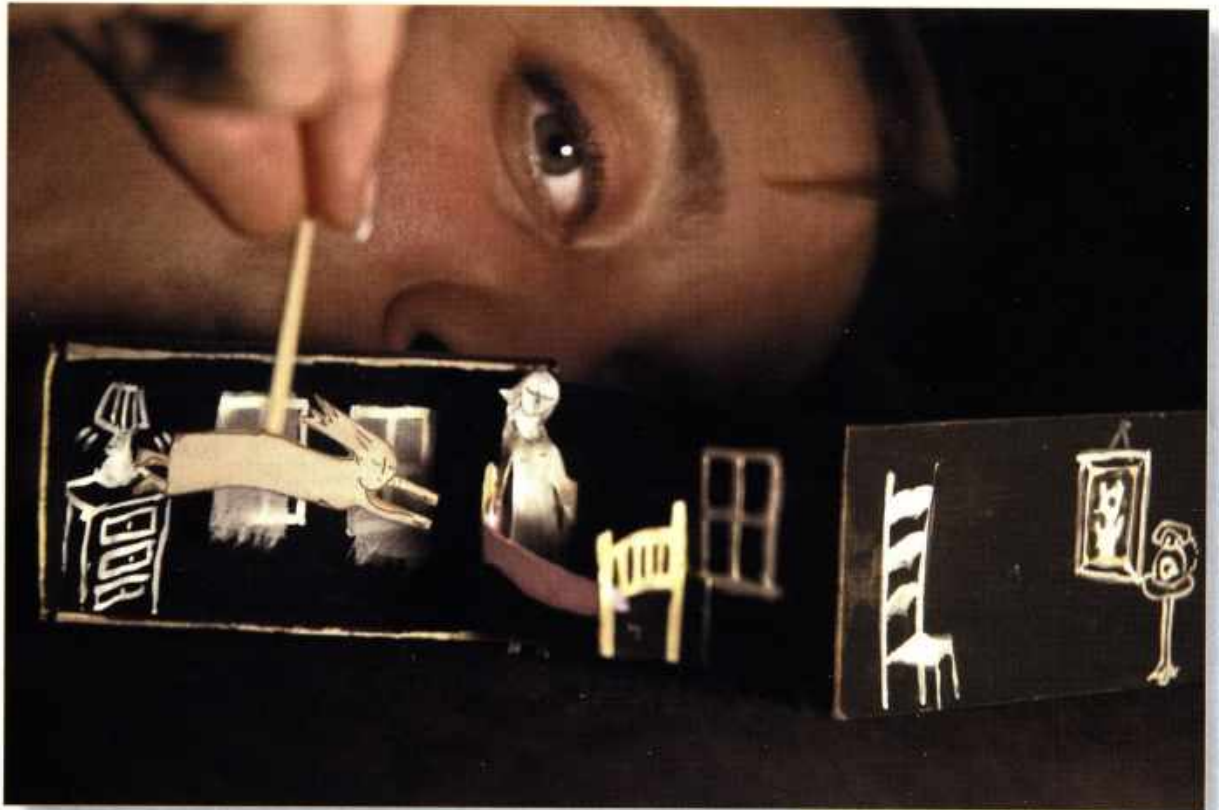
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