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## ***Shadows and Strings: Puppetry Around the Globe*** **December 6, 2003 – February 29, 2004**

**Bruce Museum of Arts and Science**  
**1 Museum Drive, Greenwich, CT**



*Bima*, Wayang Golek  
Rod puppet  
Java, Indonesia, early 1900s  
29 \_ x 16 x 6 in.  
Private Collection

The Bruce Museum of Arts and Science in Greenwich, Connecticut, presents ***Shadows and Strings: Puppetry Around the Globe*** from December 6, 2003, through February 29, 2004. The exhibition highlights the wide range of styles and cultures where the ancient art of puppetry has emerged and thrived over the centuries. *The Advocate/Greenwich Time* is the media sponsor for the show. Additional support for the exhibition comes from Susan Bevan and Anthony Daddino and Catherine and William Benedict.

As early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Herodotus documented puppetry performances. The exhibition will celebrate this unique art form, exploring its storytelling power and historic role as a means of handing down sacred stories and epics, while defining and preserving cultural and religious heritage.

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Puppetry is, in fact, a fusion of art forms. It incorporates all elements of the visual and performing arts, including painting, sculpture, text, music, movement, and technology. By removing the need for traditional language, the art of puppetry has consistently crossed national borders and bridged cultural gaps through the use of a universal language of movement and emotion. Puppet theater remains a vibrant contemporary art form. Current examples abound from Lincoln Center to Broadway. But, to fully appreciate the contemporary explosion and its international interest, it is helpful to understand some of the powerful origins of this form.

Organized by The Bruce Museum, this exhibition is guest curated by Leslee Asch, a recognized expert in the field of puppet theater. For over twenty years, Asch worked as Director of Exhibitions for the Jim Henson Company and as Executive Director of the Jim Henson Foundation. She was also co-curator and Producing Director of the popular *Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater*. From 1992 – 2000, five successful Henson Festivals were seen in theaters throughout New York City, as well as nationally through the *Festival on Tour*. Asch is now an independent curator, and frequent writer and lecturer on the subject.

As the title suggests, the exhibition features puppets from around the globe - from Africa, China, Southeast Asia, Japan, Egypt, Turkey, Europe and the Americas. An extraordinary example of a **Native American** transformation mask is on loan from the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. In addition, **African** figures include rod puppets from Mali and examples from the Gelede and Yoruba traditions. From **Europe**, the heavily armored marionettes of Sicily and English Punch figures are on display. A large and strikingly elegant Bunraku figure from **Japan** is featured; the four foot high figure requires three hooded operators. These figures are rarely on display outside of Japan.

The **Chinese** shadow figures featured in the exhibition were originally part of Pauline Benton's extensive collection. Chinese shadows are made of treated hide and lacquered with translucent dyes. Their semi-transparent hues allow their brilliant colors to show through the screen. Benton's work inspired others, including Jo Humphrey, whose Yueh Lung Shadow Theater performed from 1975 through 2000. Ms. Humphrey rescued and refurbished the Benton collection, and passed them on to Chinese Theatre Works, led by Kuang-yu Fong and Stephen Kaplin. Examples of Chinese Opera hand puppets and Chinese marionettes are also included.

As early as 200 B.C., leather puppets are mentioned in the ancient scriptures. As old as civilization itself, puppetry in **India** developed six different styles of leather shadow puppets in six different regions - some opaque, some small and colored, and some of the largest colored shadows in the world. The figures included in the exhibition are presumed to be from the central Andhra Pradesh and southern regions. Rajasthani marionettes are also on display.

**Indonesian** puppetry is represented by three forms: Wayang Kulit (shadow puppets); Wayang Golek (rod puppets); and Wayang Klitik (flat, wooden figures). Indonesian shadow puppets are made of water buffalo hide. They are opaque, and the shadow image is seen as black with light passing through intricately cut patterns. According to scholar Richard Brandon, the existence of shadow puppets in Java is first hinted at in two royal charters, establishing freeholds, inscribed on copper plates, dated 840 and 907. In Java and Bali, *wayang* (shadow) *Kulit* (leather) theater is an ancient form, which is still widely performed today. Brandon writes, "It is one of the world's most complex and refined dramatic and theatrical forms, having developed through an unbroken succession of artists, generation by generation, for more than a thousand years."

As Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula are situated along the trade routes between India and China, influences freely traveled back and forth. The forms of the puppets and the characters of the Indian epics took regional names and characteristics as they migrated. The exhibition features a giant Nang Yai figure from **Thailand** and a series of older **Malay** puppets. The figures from **Cambodia** are part of a large collection that was built in 1989 in the Cambodian refugee camp Site 2, on the Thai/Cambodian border. The figures, the only set of its kind in the United States, were based on the memory of the Venerable Pin Sem, head monk of the Prasat Serei Temple. This fifteen-year effort to revive and archive the art form, initiated and directed by the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, is part of an ongoing project within U.S./Cambodian communities in Massachusetts.

Shadow puppetry may have spread from the Far East through Persia into **Turkey**, but once established in Turkey, it took on a completely new form. It is believed that the Karagöz tradition originated in Turkey and spread throughout the Ottoman Empire to **Egypt** and Greece.

Karagöz, the beloved and irreverent shadow puppet clown, was the principal theatrical figure of the Ottoman Empire and the only character to have an entire puppet form named for him. Generally, the figures are one foot high, with strong colors including sienna and earth tones. Like the Chinese shadows, the skin is treated until it is almost transparent and then stained with translucent dyes so the colors seem to glow through the screen. The exhibition features exceptional figures from Turkey and rare Egyptian figures.

Figures for the exhibition are on loan from The American Museum of Natural History, The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, the Jo Humphrey Collection of Chinese Theatre Works in New York, the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, Alan Cook and the Conservatory of Puppetry Arts in Los Angeles, and a number of private collections.

The Bruce Museum of Arts and Science is located at 1 Museum Drive in Greenwich, Connecticut, just off I-95, Exit 3, and a short walk from Metro-North's Greenwich, CT, rail station. Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., and closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission: \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors and students, and free for children under five. Free admission for all on Tuesdays, and members enter free at all times. Groups of twelve or more require advance reservations. Tours of Museum exhibitions held every Friday at 12:30 p.m. are free with admission. Free, on-site parking is available. The Museum Store is open 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday. No admission is charged to visit the Museum Store only. The Bruce Museum is accessible to the handicapped. The Bruce Museum of Arts and Science website is [www.brucemuseum.org](http://www.brucemuseum.org). For information, call the Bruce Museum at (203) 869-0376.

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