Puppet theatre presents the entire cosmos through character, color, story, sound, and movement. Distinct traditions are found throughout the Asia Pacific region, many of which have been influenced by shamanism, animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Local folklore is also incorporated and puppet performances are closely related to human dance-drama and mask dances. In many Asia Pacific cultures, puppeteers are associated with unseen, mystical, and divine powers as they animate a whole world created in miniature. This exhibition focuses on the three-dimensional wood puppets that demonstrate the following techniques: string puppets (marionettes), rod (stick) puppets, and glove (hand) puppets.

Through these performance forms stories come to life including the Hindu epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, Buddhist Jataka stories, and the chronicles and well-known Monkey King novel found in Chinese theatre traditions, as well as local folk stories. Indonesian puppetry also tells the arrival of Islam to Indonesia through the story of Amir Hamzah. Many of these puppet traditions are historically related to the royal courts, while other performances are derived from village performances. Even with roots in the royal courts, puppet performance is intended for the common people, instilling, re-informing, and enriching their lives with locally-based cultural values and beliefs. Puppet performance in Asia is appreciated and enjoyed by diverse audiences — from children to elders — with entertaining elements ranging from slapstick humor to deep, rich life philosophies and religious teachings.

More than 10 unique traditions from India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan are displayed. To honor our host culture, Hawaiian puppets are featured. These performance traditions are a place of intersection — a bridge between the past, present, and future — where the divine and human worlds meet and ancient stories are made relevant for the contemporary experience.
The wood puppet traditions featured in this exhibition include rod puppets, string puppets, and glove puppets. With rod puppets, one central rod connects to the head of the puppet and the arms are often connected to additional rods so that the puppeteer can animate those limbs independently. String puppets, otherwise known as marionettes, are puppets whose head, shoulders, arms, and legs are connected to strings that are manipulated from above, so that each of the character’s extremities can be moved independently by the puppeteer. When using glove or hand puppets, the puppeteer inserts a hand directly into the puppet’s body with individual fingers moving the arms and head like a glove.

**TECHNIQUES**

In this exhibition, South Asia is represented by puppets from India and Sri Lanka, including *kathputli* string puppets from Rajasthan in North India, *gombeyyatta* string and rod puppets from Karnataka in South India, *pavakathakali* glove puppets from Kerala in South India, and *rukada* string puppets from Sri Lanka. The Rajasthani puppets of North India are the oldest and simplest form represented in this exhibition. The puppets were historically performed by nomadic, itinerant performers for villagers. The puppets featured are local street entertainers, including dancers, snake charmers, animal riders, and trick puppets. The tradition is aesthetically influenced by the Mughal culture found in North India.

The *gombeyyatta* string puppet tradition found in the villages surrounding Mysore uses both strings and rods to animate the puppets. The puppeteer places a hoop on his head. Two strings are then attached to the hoop and to the puppet’s head. The puppeteer holds a rod in each hand which attach to the puppet’s hands and as the puppeteer dances and moves, the puppet mimics the puppeteer’s movements. Hindu epics, Puranic episodes, and local heroic stories are brought to life through this form, historically performed at temple festivals.

*Pavakathakali* glove puppets were likely innovated in the twentieth century. This tradition uses glove puppets to imitate the well-known Keralan *kathakali* dance theatre performance. This performance is accompanied by professional *kathakali* musicians and singers and the repertoire is based on the characters of the Hindu epics.

*Rukada* string puppets from Sri Lanka seem to be influenced by both Indian and Portuguese forms. The stories retell adventures that reflect South Asian typologies including kings, dancing girls, clowns, and demons.

**Southeast Asia**

In this exhibition, Southeast Asia is represented by *yokthe pwe* string puppets from Myanmar, *hun krabok* glove and rod puppets from Thailand, *wayang golek* rod puppets from Sunda in Java, Indonesia, and *mua roi nuoc* rod puppets performed on water from Vietnam. Stories involving the king, the palace, and the court are elements that are reified in Southeast Asian performance. *Yokthe pwe* are the most complicated marionettes found in Asia using up to 24 strings per puppet. The theatre was originally part of the royal court but after the overthrow of the monarchy by the British, the puppets were diffused throughout upper and lower Burma for general
audiences. The performances include a series of scenes with popular characters: the prince and princess, ritual dances for local spirits, forest scenes, and other character dances. Customarily, these episodes were followed by a longer play often inspired by Buddhist Jataka tales.

With hun krabok glove and rod puppets of Thailand, the Hindu epic of the Ramayana is brought to life in performance. The puppet performance is based on the masked khon dance-drama performance and was performed almost exclusively in the royal courts and was not diffused in Thailand as the shadow puppets were.

Indonesian wayang golek rod puppets retell unique local versions of the Hindu epic Mahabharata. This complex theatre form is performed by one puppeteer called a dalang who has mastered the art of storytelling, improvisation, dance, music, and ritual. The puppets seen here are from the Sunda region on the island of Java.

The mua roi nuoc rod puppets from Vietnam are performed on water. The water creates a unique backdrop and hides the long bamboo poles that control the puppets. There is a direct connection between Chinese and Vietnamese cultural elements and the character types of Vietnamese water puppets often reflect common typologies found in China. Water animals, spirits, and vocations are distinctly Vietnamese.

In this exhibition, East Asia is represented by tiezhi kuilei iron rod puppets from China, budaixi glove puppets from Taiwan, in hyong guk glove and rod puppets from Korea, and bunraku puppets from Japan. Iron rod puppet theatre is a style from Guangdong and Fujian provinces is Southern China. The puppets are manipulated by metal rods and the heads are made of fragile clay while the body, feet, and hands are made of wood. These puppets are often animating the popular characters of the Monkey King as well as other characters typical of Chinese theatre including the scholar, royal characters, and warriors. Puppet theatre in China is performed as urban entertainment.

The Taiwanese budaixi puppets are delicate and refined hand puppets and continue to be a popular form in Taiwan. These puppets came from China to Taiwan in the 17th century and many of the puppets have characteristics of those found in Chinese puppet theatre.

The in hyong guk glove and rod puppets of Korea tell the story of the vanquishing of a serpent and includes other popular characters such as the monk, old man, and the leper. The stories are full of ribald puns. These puppets are small in size because they were traditionally performed by itinerant performing troupes that also included a variety of performers such as singers, dancers, and acrobats.

The bunraku doll puppets of Japan uniquely originated in shamanic tradition and transformed into a bourgeois performance form. The bunraku puppets are animated by three puppeteers visible to the audience: the principal puppeteer animates the head, while the other two puppeteers animate the legs and arms.
The East-West Center promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options. The Center is an independent, public, nonprofit organization with funding from the U.S. government, and additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, foundations, corporations, and governments in the region.

The East-West Center Arts Program for nearly 40 years has enriched the community through concerts, exhibitions, and community engagement focused on arts of the Asia Pacific region, and by arranging cultural and educational programs by artists who are skilled in bridging cultures.

EWC Arts Team: Karen Knudsen, director, Office of External Affairs; Eric Chang, arts program coordinator; Michael Schuster, Ph.D., curator; Annie Reynolds, arts program assistant; William Feltz, adjunct arts specialist; Carolyn Eguchi, Jeffrey Reynolds, arts program assistant; William Feltz, Karen Smith, Gayle Goodman, Matthew Sison, and oriana Filiaci, Cultural Surveys Hawai'i Inc.


Special Events

In the EWC Gallery with free admission, open seating, no reservations
Guided exhibition tours will be offered Sundays at 3:00 p.m.

Sunday, January 20, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Exhibition Gala Opening including reception, gallery walkthrough with the curators, and special Wayang Golek Panji performance by Dr. Kathy Foley and music accompaniment by I Made Widana and Oriana Filiaci

Sunday, January 27, 2:00–3:00 p.m.

Sunday, February 24, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “45 Years as a Puppeteer” by Dr. Michael Schuster, East-West Center Gallery Curator

Sunday, March 31, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “Puppetry in Iran” by Maseeh Ganjali

Sunday, April 7, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “Holding Infinity in the Palm, Wayang Poterehi: Chinese Glove Puppet Theatre in Indonesia” by Yuan-Hsin Tung, PhD Student in Ethnomusiology, UH Mānoa, EWC Student Affiliate

Sunday, April 28, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “From Stage Adaptation to Educational Outreach: Balinese Shadow Theatre Performance in Hawai‘i” by Dr. Kirstin Pauka, Professor of Theatre, UH Mānoa; Nezia Azmi, Affiliate Consultant, CSEAS; and Dr. Annie Reynolds, EWC Arts Program Assistant

Saturday, May 4, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Puppet Making Workshop (inspired by bunraku Japanese doll puppets) with Dmitri Carter. Director, Northwest Puppet Center; registration required, inquire for details at arts@eastwestcenter.org

Sunday, May 5, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “An Introduction to Festival Karakuri in Japan” by Dmitri Carter

East-West Center Gallery
John A. Burns Hall, 1601 East-West Road (corner Dole St. & East-West Rd.)

Gallery admission is free
Hours: Open Weekdays 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. and Sundays Noon–4:00 p.m.
Closed Saturdays, and Jan. 21, Feb. 18, Apr. 21
Parking on the UH Mānoa campus is normally free and ample on Sundays.
Free school & group tours available.

For further information: 944-7177
arts@EastWestCenter.org
http://arts.EastWestCenter.org


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