

Women and Puppetry: Critical and Historical Investigations. Edited by Alissa Mello, Claudia Orenstein, and Cariad Astles. London and New York: Routledge, 2019. 242 pp., 35 b/w illustrations. Hardcover \$170, paperback \$49.95, eBook \$49.95.

There is no shortage of women artists who use puppets as their medium, and there are many female scholars. But we have fallen behind in documenting and analyzing women's contributions to puppetry's artistic, cultural, and social efficacies. *Women and Puppetry*, which collects essays from scholars and practitioners, carries out tasks that cannot be delayed any longer. Its well-thought through introduction points out the inadequate recognition of female artists, the underestimation of puppetry as a form, and, yet, a recent growth of interest and scholarship on such pivotal figures as Russian artist-designer-performer-author Nina Simonovich-Efimova (1877-1948) and English puppeteer-actress-playwright Charlotte Charke (1713-1760). Editors Alissa Mello, Claudia Orenstein, and Cariad Astles have collected essays from scholars and practitioners to expand discussion on women and puppetry.

Art by women is the central concept of this anthology and the wide geographical breadth is striking. Each region yields its own social, economic, and religious contexts that women face there. These factors motivate women toward puppetry as their medium, guide their approaches, and inform the reception of their work. The first chapter of the volume, "The Monster and the Corpse" by Laura Purcell-Gates, dismantles the social construction of the female body by analyzing cases of puppets with neutral bodies and without typical gender markers that "read" as male puppets. Another piece that deals explicitly with representation is Kyounghye Kwon's essay on female characters in contemporary performances of the traditional Korean puppet play, *kkokdu gaksi geori*.

Many cases presented testify that puppetry can offer women a creative path, especially where women's onstage performance is frowned upon or prohibited by religion.. Deniz

Başar introduces the Istanbul performance of *Modes of Pleasure*, where puppets made it possible for the Turkish audience, normally dominated by a patriarchal mindset and social structure, to deal with the otherwise taboo subject of women’s sexuality and erotic love. Using a puppet on stage gives the artist a chance to express her desire. Salma Mohseni Ardehali notes that in Iran traditionally there was rarely a place for women to participate in puppet arts. But puppetry is perceived today as child-centric and this means it is no longer a man’s art. Women who have gone through higher education have been able to utilize puppetry for their artistry. Heather Jeanne Denyer presents a new generation of women in West Africa who use puppets to challenge gender norms and promote social change. Claudia Orenstein recounts women’s revival of ritual puppetry in Tokushima Prefecture in Japan. Giving women opportunities to participate in the tradition has also enabled the tradition to continue.

Much of this volume is dedicated to contemporary women practitioners. The only strictly historical case is Naomi Paxton’s research on a 1911 Punch and Judy performed by key British suffragette, Marion Wallace Dunlop (1864-1942). Punch and Judy is often characterized as misogynistic because of the slapstick violence Punch perpetrates on Judy. That a suffragette adapted the genre shows the form is not limited to a certain repertoire and has potential to counter expected gender norms. The archival record of women puppet artists of the past—including Dunlop or women in the puppetry of Myanmar (Burma) analyzed here by Jennifer Goodlander—is slight. Goodlander’s response to women’s erasure from history in Myanmar puppetry is to imagine the past—a method that may have value to generate further investigation. She reminds this reader that we need to dig deeper into archives and diversify sources for research to find the traces of women practitioners before confirming their absence so as to define their places in the history of global puppetry.

In the last section, “Women Practitioners Speak,” artists share their approaches to and experiences creating puppet performances. On the one hand, Chia-yin Cheng of Puppet & Its Double Theater in Taiwan and Maria Tri Sulistyani of Papermoon Puppet Theatre in Indonesia narrate how they have overcome gender restrictions through their

creativity, international networks, and entrepreneurship. On the other hand, we learn that Yngvild Aspeli, artistic director of Plexus Polaire in France, Janni Younge of Janni Younge Productions in South Africa, and Ana Alvarado of El Periférico de Objetos in Argentina, reject categorization as women artists in various degrees. Yet, there is no doubt their work has been influenced by their gender and they have faced prejudice due to the norms of society. Their cases caution that blind spots can occur when gathering diverse artists under the rubric of gender. Nevertheless, this volume makes an important contribution to making women in puppetry visible.

Women and Puppetry does an excellent job in profiling contemporary female artists worldwide and highlighting their approaches to puppetry. It also illuminates puppetry's wide artistic and social range. I hope that this collection ignites interest as further research on historical, cultural, and social aspects of women and puppetry will provide future puppet artists with context for their artistic practice as women and inspired creators.

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