

Puppets are one of humankind's most compelling and enduring art forms. Part of their allure is that they often show our dramas at a smaller scale. This shift in scale seems to disarm the villains in them. Another important thing that interests us is the power of the puppeteer to animate inanimate stuff. Things that we take for granted, like walking or making facial expressions are incredibly complex and seeing the machinations required by the puppeteer to replicate them underscores that complexity.

In many ways puppets interest us because they get away with things. As long as there have been puppet shows and people to watch them, puppets have been getting into trouble. Puppets are often a way in which we take our own ids out for a walk (except instead of using a leash, we use strings or rods). The excesses of Jim Henson's *Cookie Monster* show an unbridling of appetites that we so often have to squelch. Anyone who has ever seen Robert Smigel perform with *Triumph the Insult Comic Dog* knows that his jibes would be even more inappropriate if uttered by Smigel himself.

In his book *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, editor Robert Bell ends the foreword with an account of events that occurred in Philadelphia in the year 2000 directly before the start of the Republican National Convention. Puppet artist and political street performer John Norris (who was part of *Bread and Puppet* at the time) had been running workshops in which participants created large politically oriented puppets. Philadelphia police had infiltrated the workshops, and a short time before the puppets were slated to be used in a parade, the police officers shut down the workshop and arrested all the participants. Over 300 puppets were summarily destroyed.

Such is the power of puppets. Brief descriptions of puppets

Patrick Pollard's puppets grow out of his work with endearingly mis-proportioned little characters. His small figures draw us in with their cartoonish quality, but also seems to allude to something slightly darker.

Jennifer Trela uses taxidermy forms in her work and re-animates them in the creation of pieces that allegorize human dramas. Her work blends elements of comic book art and circus sideshow.

Pat Keck is an internationally known artist who has been making puppets for the last 20 years. Her work engages the viewer with its drama and incredibly high level of craft. Keck deals extensively with the puppet not only as form but also as subject, she has done numerous works about "puppetness" itself. Keck's work was recently featured in a retrospective show at the DeCordova Museum.

Stacy Latt-Savage is an accomplished figurative sculptor in numerous media. Her work in this show, *Dolly*, is a small-scale self-portrait whose proportions and cool white color give the viewer a disquieting feeling. *Dolly's* ambiguity is perplexing, what kind of story would she be a participant in?

Shane Savage-Rumbaugh's *Puppet Show* is painted on a sideshow like banner. This striking piece has echoes of the hydra from Greek mythology, or it may allude to the various and several personalities in a single individual. The painter's incredible skill with

the medium is also on display here and there are strikingly beautiful passages of paint. Keep an eye out for the chimpanzees in the background; their presence in the piece adds a self-portrait aspect (Savage-Rumbaugh was raised in a household that was home to numerous chimps).

Bonnie Duncan shows one of her puppet/masks in this show. Duncan is an accomplished puppet artist and performer. She has done shows all over the region and her puppets are expertly crafted to elicit a range of emotions from viewers.

Martha Dana is a puppeteer who has performed widely and has a dedicated fan base, especially in the Southern NH and ME. Her puppets show exquisite artistry and personality. Dana has years of experience at making puppets and performing with them.

Nancy-Raen Mendez's puppet is a contemporary take on the ancient image of the Snake Goddess. Her puppet refers us to a time when god was a woman, and she allows us to imagine our own narratives that would place her Snake Goddess in the lead role.

Janet van Fleet is a Vermont artist who works in many media. Her puppet in this show is an interesting assemblage that gives a second life to numerous pieces of discarded wood and metal. The proportions and gesture of the figure create an elegance that belies the commonness of the material.

Rob Millard-Mendez is an artist who is interested in narrative. His puppets in this show use to humor to cloak a deeper set of questions.

It is no exaggeration to say that the work of Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre is legendary. The Glover, VT based troupe has performed in numerous countries and it has spurred innumerable viewers to think of puppets not only as fun, but also as serious political commentators. Bread and Puppet Theatre has produces puppets as big a 30 feet tall, you will be surprised and politically stimulated by the work in this show.