PUPPETS AND PERFORMING OBJECTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

John Bell

Recent markers of the increased visibility and popularity of puppet theatre have been the three International Festivals of Puppet Theater presented by the Jim Henson Foundation in New York City since 1992. At each of the biannual festivals there has been a related exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. In 1996 the exhibition was titled “Puppets and Performing Objects in the Twentieth Century,” and it chronicled the Euro-American use of puppets, masks, and other objects in performance over the past hundred years. Conceived and designed by Leslee Asch, the Executive Director of the Jim Henson Foundation, the exhibition was co-curated by Asch, Barbara Stratynner (the Library’s Curator of Exhibits), and myself.

“Puppets and Performing Objects in the Twentieth Century” differed from previous Puppet Festival exhibits in that it sought a broad overview of the western rediscovery of objects in performance. That historical phenomenon, by tapping into the non-realistic, anti-logical, and even fetish roots of puppets, masks and other performed materials, was an antithetical response to the development of European tenets of positivism, rationality, and realism. Our exhibition began with a focus on Alfred Jarry’s Ubu Roi, whose performance in 1896 marked a beginning of this rediscovery, and it followed major developments of the performance form to the present, including European and American object performance from the worlds of theatre, dance, performance art, film, and computer graphics. What follows are texts written by me for the exhibit installation, and photographs of the exhibit by Richard Termine.

Exactly one hundred years ago the course of modern theatre was changed when Alfred Jarry’s Ubu Roi brought the world of puppets, masks, and other performing objects onto the centerstage of western theatre. Over the past century Jarry’s seed has blossomed in the appearance of puppet theatre in all forms of performance. The performing object, whether it appears as one of the traditional forms of puppet theatre, or as a new form of abstract, found-object, or mechanical theatre, has proved central to the development of twentieth century performance. This exhibition
unites examples from the various fields of puppet theatre, avant-garde performance, visual arts, and projected and broadcast media to examine what they all have in common: the performing object.

The most concise definition of “performing objects” is by Frank Proschan. In 1983 he described them as “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance.” Performing object is a descriptive term for all material images used in performance, and puppets and masks are at the center of performing object theatre around the world. But the term performing object has a broader scope and includes techniques of performance not normally labeled puppetry which nonetheless share the same basic approach.

**UBU ROI AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN THEATRE**

In the late 1880s an eccentric French youth named Alfred Jarry got together with his school-boy friends in Brittany to perform an outrageous and absurd puppet epic in their homes. These shows, featuring a bizarre king named Ubu (a satirical caricature of the boys’ teacher), were performed with marionettes characteristic of centuries-old northern French puppet traditions. By the time he was twenty-three, Jarry had migrated to Paris, where he became involved with the Théâtre d’Art, dedicated to the new movement of Symbolism, and its concrete representations of abstract ideas. Théâtre d’Art director Aurelien Lugné-Poë produced all kinds of new plays, from Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* to Maurice Maeterlinck’s brooding, puppet-influenced gothic dramas. Symbolist painters and poets made theatre there as well, combining paintings, music, and poetry into new forms of performance art. Jarry, still obsessed with his puppet play, persuaded Lugné-Poë to direct a new production of it, and on December 10, 1896, *Ubu Roi* was performed. In the puppet tradition of comical satire, Jarry’s Ma and Pa Ubu are an amoral and ruthless, but also comic and human, couple who take over Poland in the manner of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The manner in which *Ubu* was performed, rather than its plot, riveted Parisian attention. The actors wore masks and rode hobby horses, objects were endowed with symbolic powers, and the whole play took place in a single, surrealistic landscape that included a bed and a fireplace through which characters made their entrances. Before the show, Jarry himself addressed the audience to prepare them for the experience. “A few actors,” he said, “have agreed to lose their own personalities during the two consecutive evenings by performing with masks over their faces so that they can mirror the mind and soul of the man-sized marionettes that you are about to see.” While most of the spectators, accustomed to symbolist productions incorporating poetry, dance, painting, and music, relished the show, some audience members were shocked and outraged, perhaps most of all by Jarry’s puppet-based aesthetics: objects on stage were as important as human actors. The English critic Arthur Symons described *Ubu Roi*’s attraction by writing that

a generation which has exhausted every intoxicant, every soluble preparation of the artificial, may well seek a last sensation in the wire-pulled passions, the wooden faces of marionettes, and by a further illusion, of
marionettes who are living people; living people pretending to be those wooden images of life which pretend to be living people. . . . These jerking and hopping, these filthy, fighting, swearing “gamins” of wood bring us back, let us admit, and may legitimately bring us back, to what is primitively animal in humanity. . . . *Ubu Roi* is the brutality out of which we have achieved civilization, and those painted, massacring puppets the destroying elements which are as old as the world, and which we can never chase out of the system of natural things.

Although the precedent-setting production of *Ubu Roi* was only performed twice, its influence was, and still is, remarkable. Jarry continued the *Ubu* cycle with a marionette theatre he made with his artist friends, and a hand-puppet version of *Ubu* he made for Émile Labelle, one of the most active turn-of-the-century puppeteers in Paris. In succeeding decades *Ubu Roi* has maintained its influence, inspiring many remarkable productions.

**Puppets and Masks by Michael Meschke, built for *Ubu Roi*, Stockholm, Sweden, 1964.**

Michael Meschke began creating puppet theatre in Stockholm in 1958, using a wide variety of puppet techniques to perform plays from a repertoire including Pinter, Shakespeare, Shaw, Chekhov, E. T. A. Hoffman, Stravinsky, and Aristophanes. The *Ubu Roi* Meschke created for the Marionetteatern of Stockholm in 1964 followed Alfred Jarry’s predilection for using a variety of different performing object forms. In Meschke’s *Ubu Roi*, life-sized performers played Ma and Pa Ubu, while the rest of the play’s characters were represented by smaller, flat cutouts of different sizes, some manipulated directly by performers, some operated as rod puppets, and some mounted on wheels.

**Ubu Roi by Amy Trompetter, New York, 1996.**

Amy Trompetter’s *Ubu Roi* combines over-life-sized masks, rod puppets, and other objects in a production featuring Steve Friedman’s new translation of Jarry’s text. “I want to strike something deep in the spirit,” Trompetter has said about the striking designs of her puppets and masks. “If it’s not refined, there’s room for the eye and the soul to respond, the way you see a ruin.” Trompetter’s *Ubu Roi* was premiered in 1995 at the Barnard College Theater Department, where Trompetter works as a Visiting Associate Professor. Performances at the 1996 Edinburgh Fringe Festival of the Arts in Scotland celebrated the centennial of Jarry’s play. The figures on display include Pa Ubu, Ma Ubu, and three Partisans.
The Spanish artist Joan Miró (1893–1983) was noted for his abstract, surrealist paintings, which he began to create both in Paris and his native Catalunya in the 1920s and 30s. Miró said his art emerged from “a state of hallucination, provoked by some shock or other, objective or subjective, for which I am entirely irresponsible.” Such a statement parallels quite closely the aesthetic approach of Alfred Jarry, and it is not surprising that Miró would find an affinity with the world of puppets, masks, and objects. In 1926 he designed a production of *Romeo and Juliet* with Max Ernst for Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, but it was not until late in his career, in 1975, that Miró undertook another major theatre collaboration. He chose to work with a young Catalan theatre company—Joan Baixas’s Teatre de la Claca—which had emerged in the liberated atmosphere of Spain following the death of Francisco Franco. Baixas writes:

After the experience with the Ballets Russes at the beginning of his career Miró had received many offers of theatrical collaboration, but he had always refused. If his choice fell on us, it was because we were Catalan, because we were young and because we used, among other techniques, those of the “gigantes” (giant puppets) and the “cap-grossos” (giant masks), which are so important to Catalan popular art. And it is precisely this technique which we chose for our work together. . . . We had started [our collaboration] by speaking of the illustrious and despicable Monsieur Ubu, whom Miró had met in Paris. He loved this extravagant character so full of energy and ridicule. . . . He considered Jarry one of his masters.

*Mori el Merma*, the production which grew out of this collaboration, was based on Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*. But Jarry’s monstrous, despotic king soon became ineluctably combined with the character of the recently deceased dictator Franco, and *Mori el Merma* became a effort to reject the legacy of Franco. However, it was not a direct political satire. “We wanted,” Baixas writes, “to approach this theme in a sensitive manner, without making political analyses and without presenting the actual historical character. We wanted to provoke the rejection of all the sensations left by Francoism.”

**VISUAL ARTISTS AND PERFORMING OBJECTS**

Artists breaking out of the nineteenth-century focus on realism found common interests in performing object theatre. They sought influences from various cultures throughout the world, and were inspired by abstract design and the idea that
machines could be models of beauty. In the 1920s artists across Europe continuing on the avant-garde path started by turn-of-the-century Symbolism were attracted to Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and other ways of seeing which, in general, rejected realism as a goal. Coupled with this general sense of rule-breaking innovation was a questioning of the limits of art. Should artists’ works exist simply to be displayed in a gallery or museum, or should they be made to work in other contexts as well? One of those other contexts was theatre, and when artists brought their paintings and sculptures onstage, to move and transform with live performers, they knowingly or unknowingly duplicated the traditional combination of object and performer which has defined puppet and performing object theatre.

When he created a masked farce entitled *The Ox on the Roof* (Le Boeuf sur le Toit), artist and poet Jean Cocteau consciously thought of his work as a rediscovery of older forms. “I treated myself,” he wrote, “to rejuvenating the antique mask.” In a somewhat different approach, Fernand Léger took a broader view of the possibilities of material objects, recognizing their historic function as masks and puppets, but also opening his horizon to consider the theatrical potential of material objects in general, and especially the manufactured objects which were more and more obviously the symbols of the modern age. Léger wrote that he wanted “to conceive of objects as the pivot of interest, objects so beautiful that they have enormous spectacle value.” Count Étienne de Beaumont, who organized a series of avant-garde balls in Paris during the 20s, recognized an interest similar to Léger’s in the over-life-size flat cutouts Pablo Picasso created for the 1924 ballet *Mercure.* “The designs dance,” Beaumont wrote, “the lines move, the miracle happens: inert matter lives.”

It is important to note that in these years sculptors and painters became involved in theatre production not simply as accessory designers, but as directors of productions and as theoreticians of dramatic art. They brought with them a confidence in the power of visual means of expression, which on stage translated into an untroubled use of and even reliance on masks, puppets, and other performing objects, as a fitting combination of sculpture or painting with motion.

The innovations of artists in the theatre in the early decades of this century were extended and elaborated in the years after World War II. In some cases, the connections are direct, as in the influence of Bauhaus artists at North Carolina’s Black Mountain College on a whole generation of post-war American art and performance. What the exhibition here shows is the continuity in the work of visual artists in the performing arts, the formation of new, modern ways of performing with objects.

*Form Dance,* costumes and props for Debra McCall’s reconstruction of Oskar Schlemmer’s 1920s *Bauhaus Dances,* New York, 1982.

One of this century’s most insightful thinkers and practitioners of the theatre of objects and humans was Oskar Schlemmer. Schlemmer succeeded Lothar Schreyer.

*Ubu Roi* by Amy Trompetter, New York, 1996.
Teatre de la Claca's *Mori el Merma* by Joan Miró and Joan Baixas, Spain, 1978. From the collection of Joan Baixas.

*Form Dance*, costumes and props for Debra McCall's reconstruction of Oskar Schlemmer's 1920s *Bauhaus Dances*, New York, 1982.
as head of the Bauhaus theatre workshop, and with his students in Weimar designed and created a variety of object theatre productions whose fascination is still strong 70 years later. Debra McCall, in her reconstructions of Schlemmer’s *Bauhaus Dances*, made it possible for contemporary audiences to explore that fascination.

The Bauhaus aesthetic has come to be popularly understood as a cool, geometric, metallic style epitomized by massive glass and metal buildings. But this is only part of the Bauhaus legacy. What makes Schlemmer such an interesting Bauhaus creator is his intense interest in the human body (and the human spirit) in relation to modern society and its technologies. In a diary entry of 1922 Schlemmer wrote

> Life has become so mechanized, thanks to machines and a technology which our senses cannot possibly ignore, that we are intensely aware of man as a machine and the body as a mechanism. . . . Modern artists long to recover the original, primordial impulses; on the one hand they woke up to the unconscious, unanalyzable elements in the art forms of . . . the Africans, peasants, children, and madmen; on the other hand, they have discovered the opposite extreme in the new mathematics of relativity. Both these modes of consciousness—the sense of man as a machine, and insight into the deepest wells of creativity—are symptoms of one and the same yearning. A yearning for synthesis dominates today’s art and calls upon architecture to unite the disparate fields of endeavor. This yearning also reaches out for the theatre, because the theatre offers the promise of total art.

Schlemmer’s *Bauhaus Dances*, as Debra McCall describes them, were studies in color and form combining the organic possibilities of the human body with the rigid clarity of geometry:

> On a grid-patterned white floor, set against a blackened cubical space, were three figures in red, blue, and yellow. Their metallic masks and costumes recalled bulky, padded fencing uniforms. Using basic movements—walking and simple gesturing—and varying time, shape, space, and color, these three representative characters created a series of abstract geometric dances. In certain of the pieces, primary forms such as spheres, poles, and colored cubes were introduced. In one of the dances, a chair, stool, and bench were placed on stage, and glasses, mustaches, and coattails added to the costumes, heightening the sense of social context. In the last piece, a black figure was magically transformed when its limbs were elongated in space by twelve white poles.

For her reconstructions of the *Bauhaus Dances*, McCall referred to Schlemmer’s original notes and sketches, conferring with Bauhaus veteran Andreas Weininger in order to understand Schlemmer’s intentions. Weininger advised her that instead of sharp “militaristic” movements, the dancers should move like Schlemmer’s paintings, “with their figures buoyantly suspended in space. The dancers were to be like puppets—light, soft, and resisting gravity.”

The Swiss artist Paul Klee was strongly influenced by the currents of German expressionist art centered on the Blue Rider Almanac, but developed his own highly individual style of work, first in Munich, and then beginning in 1920, at the Bauhaus, where he taught painting as well as stained glass and textile design. Theatrical themes often marked his work, but a remarkable contribution he made to the world of puppet theatre was a set of handpuppets he constructed for his son Felix. The puppets are noteworthy because while they adhere to traditional aesthetics of handpuppet construction, they also reflect Klee's highly developed sense of modernist, abstract design. Felix Klee writes:

On November 30, 1916, on my ninth birthday, my father gave me a surprise: a puppet theatre. He had not wanted to buy ordinary puppets and had therefore made some himself. He had made the heads of plaster of Paris and added other materials—buttons, pieces of mother-of-pearl, and tin—to the wet plaster, which hardened before our eyes. After the heads had been minutely drawn and painted upon, he went to work on the clothes. The bits of fabric chosen from my mother's sewing box were cut and trimmed and then sewn together on the sewing machine. The dress was stuck to the head with paste and a long thread wound round the join. Klee waited till the paste was dry, took off the thread, and the puppet was ready. And finally he gave it some obscure name. The first stage setting was put together out of little pictures taken from The Blue Rider. Every year, every birthday, fresh puppets were added to the collection, until 1921, when we moved from Munich to Weimar. There I built a large theatre with a proscenium and a backstage, lighting equipment, and several curtains. For this theatre my father painted a series of magnificent sets, all of which have unfortunately been lost.


Ten years after Alexander Calder created the small-scale wire figures for his Circus in 1926, he designed mobile performing objects for Erik Satie's Socrate, in a production presented at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. Calder designed the show as a "ballet without dancers," focusing instead on gleaming, rotating hoops, a brilliant red disc rising and turning, and a monumental flat column tilting and turning, black on one side, white on the other. This is how Calder described the three-part performance:
During the first part the red disc moved continuously to the extreme right, then to the extreme left (on cords) and then returned to its original position, the whole operation taking 9 minutes. In the second section there was a minute at the beginning with no movement at all, then the steel hoops started to rotate toward the audience, and after about three more minutes they were lowered towards the floor. Then they stopped, and started to rotate again in the opposite direction. Then in the original direction. Then they moved upwards again. That completed the second section. In the third, the vertical white rectangle tilted gently over to the right until it rested on the ground, on its long edge. Then there was a pause. Then it fell over slowly away from the audience, face on the floor. Then it came up again with the other face towards the audience; and that face was black. Then it rose into a vertical position again, still black, and moved away towards the right. Then, just at the end, the red disc moved off to the left. The whole thing was very gentle, and subservient to the music and the words.

Originally meant to be moved mechanically, Calder's geometric forms had to be manipulated by ropes when their motors proved to be too weak. Virgil Thomson later wrote that “this mobile sculpture, simple to the eye and restrained in movement, was so sweetly in accord with the meaning of the work that it has long remained in my memory as a stage achievement.” Calder considered Socrate a particularly meaningful moment in his career, when he shifted from smaller studio sculpture to larger outdoor works.

Oedipus and Jocasta, designed by Robert Edmond Jones, built by Remo Bufano for Igor Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex, New York, 1931.

Remo Bufano was born on New York’s Lower East Side, of Italian parents, and one of the early influences on his work was the Sicilian marionette performances of Orlando Furioso in storefront theatres on Mulberry Street. Bufano was associated with the radical New Playwrights Theater in the 1920s, designed puppets for Eva La Gallienne’s 1932 Alice in Wonderland, a 35-foot-tall clown for the 1935 Broadway production Jumbo, and directed the Federal Theater Project’s Marionette Theater. Robert Edmond Jones was one of the most innovative theatre designers and directors of the century, one of the inventors of “new stagecraft” in the United States. In Europe Jones had absorbed the modernist design ideas of Edward Gordon Craig, Adolph Appia and others, and his efforts to create an American art theatre brought him to collaborate in the 1920s with playwright Eugene O’Neill and designer Kenneth MacGowan at the Greenwich Village Playhouse.

Jones’s idea to perform Stravinsky’s opera-oratorio Oedipus Rex with over-life-size marionettes was probably indebted to Edward Gordon Craig. Suspended above singers and chorus, the six puppet characters in the production were each operated
by wires from above and rods from below. According to Bil Baird, puppeteers manipulating the long puppet arms had to run ten feet just to raise one in an impressive curve.

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**Oedipus Rex** by Peter Schumann, figures from the Bread and Puppet Theater production, music by Igor Stravinsky, text by Jean Cocteau, with additional texts by Peter Schumann and Mumia Abu-Jamal, Stuttgart, Germany, 1995.

Peter Schumann’s Bread and Puppet Theater production of Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* was performed with the Stuttgart Philharmonic in the courtyard of the Old Castle in that city. Using life-size and over-size masks, cardboard cutouts, and 14-foot-tall puppets made of papier mâché, sticks, plastic, and cardboard, the Bread and Puppet production interpreted the ancient tragedy of Oedipus as a meditation on the role of economic and political fate in contemporary life: a “single ego’s fate, his karma, his situation.” In a prologue to the show, Schumann compared Oedipus’ classic struggle with fate to that of Mumia Abu-Jamal, a black activist and journalist facing execution in Pennsylvania for the murder of a policeman. Schumann’s Prologue included the following text:

This is the story of a man called Ego
who wants to know who he is.
For this purpose he goes to the Department
Of Interpretation, where he is told he is bad.
He flees and avoids evil, but
Somebody bothers him and he kills him.
He arrives in the city.
Disaster reigns in the city.
Ladies and gentleman, the future conqueror of disaster will now perform disaster.

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Robert Wilson created the *Knee Plays* with musician David Byrne as a series of “brief encounters” to be set between the fifteen fully staged scenes of Wilson’s multi-national opus *the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down*. The first version of the *Knee Plays* was developed in Japan in 1983, and was inspired by Bunraku puppet theatre. A second version was performed in Minneapolis, at the Walker Art Center, in 1984. Wilson and his collaborators devised the whole production on the model of Bunraku theatre, with performers openly manipulating objects on stage and musicians positioned at stage left. The objects presented on stage—a tree, a boat, a bird, a lion, and a golden puppet—were the focus of attention.
Paul Klee's Handpuppets: 
Mr. Drake, Step-Grandmother, and Monk 
by Paul Klee, Germany, 1916. Private collection.

Oedipus and Jocasta, designed by Robert Edmond Jones, built by Remo Bufano for Igor Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*, New York, 1931.

*Oedipus Rex* by Peter Schumann, figures from the Bread and Puppet Theater production, music by Igor Stravinsky, text by Jean Cocteau, with additional texts by Peter Schumann and Mumia Abu-Jamal, Stuttgart, Germany, 1995.
Jun Matsuno, who designed the *Knee Play* puppets, has also designed for the Bunraku Puppet Theater of Osaka and numerous commercial and non-commercial Japanese productions. He utilized bamboo, cardboard, copper, fabric, and papier mâché in his creations, making them a combination of traditional Japanese aesthetics and American minimalist sculpture. The golden puppet was manipulated by three long bamboo control rods operated by three puppeteers dressed in Bunraku-style hooded costumes (white instead of the traditional black). In *Knee Play 1* the golden puppet appeared in a minimalist geometric tree, watching a similarly minimalistic lion. In *Knee Play 4* the puppet, standing on the deck of a cardboard cutout boat, was carried away by a large bird, similarly designed as a pole-operated geometric bamboo form.

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Rose the Dog, designed by Julie Archer, built for Lee Breuer’s *An Epidog*, New York, 1996.

The New York-based theatre group Mabou Mines has been known for over 25 years for its innovative productions, especially Lee Breuer’s *The Gospel at Colonus* and *The Warrior Ant*. Mabou Mines has based its work on the contributions of its members, including Ruth Maleczech, Fred Newman, and Terry O’Reilly, but has also sustained an interest in various forms of puppet theatre including Chinese hand puppets, Bunraku figures, Caribbean-style giant puppets, Javanese shadow figures, and ventriloquist dummies.

*An Epidog* is Lee Breuer’s epilog to two earlier Mabou Mines productions, *The Shaggy Dog Animation* and *A Prelude to Death in Venice*. In Breuer’s conception of his work, these three productions are themselves part of a larger epic including many of Breuer’s other plays. The epic aspirations of Breuer’s work are wholly in line with Asian theatre traditions which have long influenced him and other members of Mabou Mines. Other Asian-influenced elements in *An Epidog* include the Kathak-style makeup and hand gestures of the two narrators, Ruth Maleczech and Fred Neumann, and the Chinese opera performance of Xin Zhang as the goddess Kuan Yin. Rose, the Bunraku puppet who is the heroine of *Epidog*, dies in the play, not once, but three times, undergoing a kind of Buddhist journey through the netherworld before her rebirth as the mother of the Warrior Ant.

In an interview with Stephen Kaplin, Lee Breuer explained his affinity with Bunraku in the following manner:

> When you go back to talk with Bunraku [puppeteers], they want you to understand that it is a dance form, because the three puppeteers have to move in a dance context with each other in order to represent a single unity. It's sort of a collective consciousness of three puppeteers. Now, the great Zen lesson of Bunraku is that, because it has no body, you stick your hand in and life appears—you take your hand out and life vanishes.
Barbara Pollitt, who manipulates the Bunraku-style puppet with Terry O’Reilly and Basil Twist, was the first non-Japanese puppeteer to perform with Bunraku master Tamamatsu.

*Terror As Usual: Episode Seven, Metro Section* by Great Small Works, New York, 1992.

Great Small Works (John Bell, Trudi Cohen, Stephen Kaplin, Jenny Romaine and Mark Sussman) is a small theatre group devoted to “popular” theatre traditions and community engagement, working on both the large scale of giant spectacle and the small scale of toy theatre. Toy theater, a mass-produced home entertainment of the nineteenth century, offered Great Small Works an opportunity to work with a rich array of images on a small proscenium-arch stage. The company has been working with the technique of toy theatre for almost a decade, creating a series of *Terror As Usual* shows based on the appropriation of images and texts from mass media in order, according to the group, “to interpret the news from our own perspective.”

Episode Seven, Metro Section of the group’s *Terror As Usual* was based on local New York City stories, and juxtaposed images from *The New York Times* with texts by David Wojnarowicz, Baudelaire, gossip columns, and straight news stories. The scene portrayed here was based on the discovery of the “Negro Burial Ground.” The text recited during the movement of the objects on stage reads in part as follows:

The burial ground was rediscovered during excavations for a new $276 million Federal office building. Of the estimated 20,000 bodies buried there, 415 remains have been unearthed, many with shackles still attached to their swollen ankles. The General Services Administration at first planned to remove all the human remains, but after protests, offered the African-American community a display in the corridor of the building.


Like many theatre makers focused on the world of objects, Theodora Skipitares came to performance from the art world. She writes:

Inspired by the feminist artists of the 70s, my performing objects began as costume extensions of my own body. Dresses and skirts of unusual materials—3,000 walnut shells, 90 pounds of glass, dozens of fresh fish—became an integral part of my autobiographical solo performances. After a while I became lonely on stage in these solo works, and I began to create small likenesses of myself to take on supporting roles. These were my first puppets. . . . Soon there were so many little Theodoras on stage that I was
Rose the Dog, designed by Julie Archer, built for Lee Breuer's *An Epidog*, New York, 1996.

Terror As Usual: Episode Seven, Metro Section by Great Small Works, New York, 1992.

able to exit, leaving the performance in good hands, and taking over the
director's role outside the frame. . . . As my work became less autobio-
graphical, some of the puppets became less self-referential. Many, like the
Ape, were developed for their specific roles in works that had wide-reaching
themes, such as Empires and Appetites, a history of food and famine.

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Island School of Design. He is a member of the Great Small Works theatre
company.