

Javanese Shadow Theatre – Stories about Life and the World

30 May 2020 – 29 November 2020

The Wayang kulit shadow play is one of the oldest existing theatre traditions in Asia. The exhibition presents for the first time the significant collection of Tina and Paul Stohler, featuring precious and striking figures of gods, spirits, and ancestors. The exhibition focuses on the stories the figures have to tell about heroes and demons, morals and virtues, and the deeper meaning of life.

The term wayang carries the words yang, eyang, or hyang which all mean ancestor or deity. Kulit means “skin”, the material the figures are made out of. Thus, a literal translation of the term Wayang kulit would be the theatre in which the immortalized ancestors and deities appear in the shape of figures made of skin.

The origins of Wayang kulit remain in the dark to this day; it was first mentioned in a javanese poem from the 12th century but it is presumably older than that and emerged in connection with other, similar Asian forms of theatre. We are dealing with a tradition which is of great significance in Java up to this day. The intent and purpose of each and every play is to provide the audience with entertaining, spiritual-moral, historical-political insight and education – at the same time, the emphasis is clearly on the aspect of entertainment.

With the exception of the major Angkor exhibition in 2007, the art of Southeast Asia has not featured prominently at the Rietberg Museum in recent years. This was to change in 2016 when the wife of the late collector Paul Stohler, Tina Stohler, donated the significant collection of Javanese shadow play figures her husband had assembled to the museum. The figures are now presented to the general public for the first time in an exhibition, along with selected pieces from the ethnographic museums in Zurich and Burgdorf.

rietberg.ch/shadowtheatre

What does it need for a theatre performance?

Every performance opens to the sound of a gamelan orchestra which can be heard from afar and attracts the audience. The orchestra consists of roughly twenty-five musicians playing a variety of gongs, metallophones, and xylophones. The old Javanese melodies are accompanied by the voices of a number of female singers. As soon as the story begins, the choice and pace of songs is orchestrated by the puppeteer; he is seconded by an assistant who successively hands him the figures. The shadows they throw are projected by a light located above the puppeteer's head on to a white screen.

The performance commences in the evening and continues through the night until the early morning hours. The venue is either a covered pavilion or a large, free-standing marquee; the physical well-being of all participants is provided for. Depending on a puppeteer's popularity, performances are quite expensive; they are often sponsored either by a company, the respective town, an institution, or a wealthy private individual. Private performances are very rare, since the plays are primarily meant for a large audience.

Traditionally, the spectators were seated on the shadow side of the projection screen – where only the figures' outlines and perforations can be seen – represents a timeless-mystical space. However, today audiences prefer to gather on the side of the puppeteer where they can marvel at the stunning variety of shiny golden figures.

1 + 2 Gunungan

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.601 and 602
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

The figure represents the Gunungan, the tree of life. The tree is recognizable in the upper half; it features numerous types of animals and stands for unspoilt nature, before human beings arrived. In the lower half, the symbolic level becomes condensed. The Gunungan is the paramount figure for it mirrors the universe, the forces of nature, and death. It marks the beginning and end of a performance, thus providing a framework.

3 Gunungan

Java, Yogyakarta, 1996
Völkerkundemuseum Burgdorf, Inv.-Nr. 8163

The reverse of the Gunungan features the element of time, kala, in the shape of a face or orange-red flames. The Gunungan is the only figure that has a differently painted reverse side, but is perfectly symmetrical. It is designed in this way because the figure is frequently turned so that the bright reverse flares up effectively.

4 Semar

Java, Cirebon, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18023

5 Semar

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.561
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Semar is the most popular figure of all: he represents the personification of the god Yang Hyang Ismaya, in other words, a primordial ancestor as well as Java's supreme deity. Semar creates for the audience the link to the present; he is wise, witty, and unconditionally empathetic which makes him especially popular. The figure itself is formless – neither man, woman, nor human.

What kind of stories are told?

Apart from foundation myths and sagas about regional heroes, the Mahabharata provides an almost endless source of stories, and is therefore highly popular. The Mahabharata is an originally Indian epos that found its way to Java along trade routes roughly two thousand years ago. In the process, the epos was adapted to its new cultural environment, in the sense that some of the spelling changed, the main protagonists were given Javanese names, and that all the locations and events refer exclusively to the local landscape and history. The Mahabharata tells of the family feud between the Korawas and their cousins, the Pandawas.

In the story tradition, a distinction is made between so-called stem stories and branch stories. The stem stories provide details concerning the characters' social standing and fate. These are unchangeable. The branch stories, on the other hand, are freely fabricated. They explain how or why some- thing came to pass as it did. The fates of the individual figures are the subject of lively discussions, not least because every puppeteer has his own version and interpretation of the story.

In every story, two sides, the left and the right, fight against each other. The good-natured characters are positioned on the right, the mean-spirited on the left. The mean- spirited include figures who only

think and act for their own benefit and do not shy away from lies and intrigues, while the good-natured always consider their fellow men, practice mindfulness, and act in a way that reflects their affinity with the universe.

6 (Javanisch: Puntadewa) Juddhistira

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.567
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Yudistira (Puntadewa) is the firstborn son of Kunti. He is a Pandawa and therefore the rightful heir to the throne. He is of noble character, modest, virtuous, and honest. His weaknesses include his inability to say no, and gambling. Tellingly, it was through gambling that he lost his kingdom to the Korawas.

7 (Javanese: Werkodara) Bima

Java, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18561

Bima (Werkodara) is Kunti's secondborn son and a mighty warrior with a noble heart. He, too, is a Pandawa. His strength is evident from the size of his body, as in the case of Duryodana (figure 10). His round eyes and nose betray his rough manners but, at the same time, he is extremely loyal and honest. The black hue of his skin suggests that he has tremendous power of concentration.

8 (Javanese: Janoko) Arjuna

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.568
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Arjuna (Javanese: Janoko) is the third son of Kunti, and also a Pandawa. He is renowned for his beauty and regarded as a highly skilled warrior; his magical powers are put down to his tremendous power of concentration. He is recognizable by his strongly inclined head and flat forehead, the black colour of his face – the mark of his power of concentration – the rounded hairstyle, and the absence of any kind of jewellery. Famous politicians, such as Indonesia's first president Soekarno, liked to identify themselves with Arjuna.

9 Kunti

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.564
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Kunti is the loyal and loving mother of Puntadewa (figure 6), Werkodara (figure 7), and Janoko (figure 8). She is a widow. Her bowed head, the stern hairstyle, and her long-sleeved dress are signs of her devote sincerity.

10 Duryodana

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18018

Duryodana is the oldest of the Korawa siblings. He was persuaded by his brother Dursasana and his uncle Sangkuni (figure 16) to unlawfully succeed to the throne. It is for this reason that he is shown wearing a crown and a dorsal wing (mark of a ruler). It seems he is a good character, holds his head

bowed and his legs close together. In the end, he is a pitiable figure not least because the Korawas are doomed to die at the hands of the Pandawas in the war that ensues.

11 Karna

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.569
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Karna is a noble warrior. He is the first son of Kunti and thus a half-brother of the Pandawas. No one, not even he himself, knows anything about his origins. The Pandawas disown him upon which the Korawas, recognizing his skills as a warrior, take him in. Despite meeting all the criteria of a good character, he is much pitied because he gave his loyalty to the wrong side, and for this he is killed by Arjuna (figure 8).

12 Dursasana

Java, Cirebon, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18619

Dursasana is the second oldest Korawa sibling. In terms of character, he is downright impudent and uncouth. Encouraged by his uncle Sangkuni (figure 16), he engages in the worst kind of intrigues. This is signified by his sweeping posture, his wild hair, open mouth, and wide-spread legs.

13 Bisma

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.601; 602
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Bisma was actually the cause of the conflict around the succession to the throne because he renounced to marry and fathered no heir. This is why he is shown in the guise of a begawan (dignitary). He is of noble character; his appearance is age and timeless. Strictly speaking, he is the great-uncle of both the Pandawas and the Korawas.

14 Drona

Java, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18076

Drona is the teacher of both the Pandawas and the Korawas. Although he favours Arjuna as his most able student, he sides with the Korawas. As far as his character is concerned, he fits in well on the left-hand side; he not only overestimates himself but also lies. Still, the Pandawas respect him as their teacher. His appearance is disfigured resulting from a beating he once received as a young man.

Can the characters of the figures be read from their appearance?

There are several features that reveal the nature of heroes: fine and noble characters are indicated by almond shaped eyes, a narrow, closed mouth, an elongated forehead, a pointed nose, a narrow waist, and legs held parallel. A black-hued face or body is a sign of high self-control. The smaller the figure, the more exalted its state of consciousness. In contrast, we have large, mighty figures which are prone to excessive violence. These characters are often ill-behaved in the classical sense, they have loud voices and act rashly and impudently. Self-control and focused concentration are beyond them. They tend to have round, protruding eyes and noses, a knobby forehead, and a large open mouth with conspicuous lips. The red colouring of the body or face is a sign of their unrestrained impulsiveness, often expressed in fits of rage.

In Java, the model of a noble character is a human being who rests in himself and acts compassionately. Attaining this state requires taming the passions and overcoming selfishness. Still, the Wayang kulit makes no clear distinction between good and evil. Figures that do not try to give their best may be despised but they are still accepted socially, for there is no “good” without “evil”.

15 Kresna

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.566
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Kresna is a deity in human form and therefore enjoys special status. His features, including a narrow waist, parallel legs, and pointed eyes and nose, suggest that he possesses exceptional spiritual power. However, the protruding forehead also reveals that he is not a model of modesty. Nor does he consistently tell the truth, but always with the aim of achieving the good.

16 Sangkuni

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.578
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Sangkuni possesses the worst of all character traits: he is a liar and interested only in his own benefit. He is the matrilineal uncle of the Korawas (figures 10, 12) and despises the Pandawas (figures 6, 7, 8), to the effect that he plots against them all the time. Politicians who, for instance, exploit religion for their own purposes, are likened to Sangkuni to this day.

17 Setyaka

Java, East Java, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18014

Setyaka is member of the Pandawas. He is the son of Kresna (figure 15). The shape of his body reveals that he follows the path of virtue. He has a black face, a narrow waist, a pointed nose, small eyes, and a closed mouth. The forward pointing face and the wide spread legs suggest that he also possesses somewhat coarser traits. His clothing is a regional speciality; the batik pattern is of Chinese origin and a reference to the figure's former owner.

18 Lesmana

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.576
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Lesmana is a Korawa. He is Duryodana's son (figure 10). He is said to be rather stupid. He prefers the easy life, instead of trying to become a good warrior, he spends his time eating, gambling, and chasing women. His body form suggests that he does not practise the virtues. He is pot-bellied, has a wrinkly nose and forehead, and round eyes.

19 Jembawati

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.565
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Jembawati is Kresna's principal consort, a woman of gentle, quiet, and loving disposition. She is the epitome of the good wife, modest but endowed with unyielding inner strength which is indicated by her black facial hue. The way she carries her hair and the way her sarong folds at the back are a speciality of the city of Surakarta (compare Yogyakarta: figures 36, 37).

20 Arimbi

Java, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18094

Arimbi is a female giant. Despite her good nature, she has quite rough facial features. Like her brother (figure 22), she stands as an example that a figure's character cannot always be deduced from its outer appearance.

21 Gatotkaca

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.584
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Gatotkaca is the son of Bima (figure 7) and Arimbi (figure 20). He entered the world as an adult and possesses special skills: he is without fear, has a skin as hard as steel, and can fly. He uses his powers to fight injustice and evildoers and is, consequently, very popular among the audience, a bit like Superman. Like his father, he is honest and unfailingly faithful.

22 Kalabendana

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.593
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Kalabendana is Gatotkaca's uncle (figure 21). Although he is a giant, he is endearing and faithful, albeit a bit stupid. For instance, he unthinkingly once revealed a secret, much to his nephew's anger. Subsequently, Gatotkaca hit Kalabendana on his head, killing him accidentally.

23

Buto Terong

Java, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 8522

Buto Terong is from a very distant country across the sea. He is the epitome of greed, never satisfied, always wanting more. No one expects a giant to have a noble disposition; in this case, the deformity of the body is particularly pronounced.

Do the characters always look the same?

The characters can look quite different. For instance, they can look different owing to an altered state of consciousness (such as anger). Moreover, figures also tend to change their appearance as they come of age; they are given a different hairstyle and new attributes to indicate their changed social role.

Thus, for instance, free-falling hair is a sign of youth. When reaching adulthood, a figure may take on new social tasks which is then indicated by a specific token: royal regents wear a crown with pointed diadems while landownership is indicated by a wing on the back. Some protagonists not only change their appearance in the course of life but also their name.

24 (Arjuna) Cekel Endralaya

Java, early 20th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18106

Cekel Endralaya is no other than Arjuna (figure 8) dressed as a monk; the narrative that goes with the figure is a so-called branch story. During his absence, his principal consort is abducted by the Korawas since one of the brothers has set his eyes on her. The story receives an added twist because Baladewa (figure 29), Sembrada's elder brother, gave the Korawa in question his consent to marry her.

25 Kresna

Java, early 20th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18011

This version of Kresna with a black body is very popular these days. In former times, the figure only entered the stage in special scenes at the end of the story when the conflict was about to be resolved and a very intense form of concentration was required. Usually, Kresna is shown with a black face and a golden body (figure 15).

26 (Kresna) Brahala

Java, Surakarta, 19/20th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.599

Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

When Kresna is particularly angry, he transforms into a terrifying giant, generally referred to as a Brahala. This figure with its fourteen heads is an exceptional interpretation of Kresna. Today, a furious Kresna is depicted with a large black body and flaming hair.

27 Baladewa

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.585

Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Baladewa, who rules over a kingdom, is Kresna's elder brother. His red face suggests that he is not good at controlling his feelings and emotional reactions. The forward-facing face indicates that he cannot compete with Arjuna (figure 24) when it comes to modesty.

28 Jaladara

Java, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18092

Jaladara shows Baladewa in his youth. His open hair falls down to his shoulders and his body is completely red, a sign that he angers quickly. This feature becomes slightly less pronounced the older he grows.

Advisers and clowns

In the world of Wayang kulit, it is assumed that in order to act well, people need advice. Acting correctly is no easy matter because often the passions tend to take over and distort judgement. Good advisers remind their clients of the importance of man's connection with the universe, which also connects people with each other.

Semar and his brother Togog are deities who travel the world as wise servants and give counsel to noble lords. In all the stories, Semar provides guidance to the good-natured on the right-hand side, while his brother Togog counsels the figures on the left. The good-natured are grateful to Semar and draw comfort from him, while the mean-spirited ignore Togog's advice throughout, at the price of death.

The two advisers Semar and Togog rarely enter the stage together, but usually in the company of their respective sons. All these figures represent the voice of the common people in their dealings with privileged nobles. They address issues that are of relevance to the audience and draw many laughs thanks to their specific quirks. In addition, they speak common Indonesian – instead of noble Javanese.

29 Semar

Java, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18543

Semar's original name is Sang Hyang Ismaya. He ranks as one of Java's primordial ancestors, which is why his becoming human is of special significance. Semar's wisdom exceeds that of other characters. Everyone knows how important he is, despite that he never stops farting. He cares for his masters and shows them understanding all along. He comforts them, makes them laugh but, at the same time, constantly admonishes them with his raised finger.

30 Petruk

Java, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18520

31 Garèng

Java, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18554

Petruk and Garèng once used to be noble warriors who fought against each other. But since they were equal in strength, the combat never ended. Semar came around to see them and ended their conflict; he then convinced them to follow him and named them his sons. Due to their continuous fighting, their bodies look rather battered. Petruk is particularly clever. He is excellent in arguing and criticising. In some stories, he features as the main protagonist. Garèng is a much more cautious character; he keeps his head bowed all the time lest he see something bad, hereby mirroring a character trait of politicians.

32 Bagong

Java, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18071

Bagong is Semar's firstborn son. Some stories claim that he emerged from one of Semar's farts, others say from his shadow. In terms of body shape, they certainly look similar. His behavior tends to be rather childish. Bagong says what he thinks straight out, which often makes him look impudent and

ill-behaved. During Dutch occupation, the figure was banned from performing in some cities because he always spoke his mind openly.

33 Geroeleok

Java, Cirebon, 19th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.562

Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

This figure is peculiar to the region of Cirebon. Geroeleok is a son of Semar and replaces Bagong in the respective plays. The shape of his body indicates that he is there to make the audience laugh. He has a face full of pimples, a hump in the shape of a bosom, and his kris has a peculiar shape. By pulling a cord, the dalang is able to move his lower jaw, emphasizing that the figure never stops talking.

34 Togog

Java, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18495

Togog was originally called Sang Hyang Tejamaya. He is Semar's (figure 29) elder brother but a distinctly less important figure. He usually appears shortly before his masters set out to attack. He will try to stop them, well knowing that the enemies are stronger than his masters but the latter constantly overestimate their own strength.

35 Bilung

Java, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18623

Bilung was chosen by Togog to accompany him on earth as his son. He is witty and clever and is able to support his father's arguments in a provocative way. He believes he is even clever enough to instruct Semar's sons but they just respond by poking fun at him. This makes him cry and, in turn, the audience laugh.

What are the stories about?

The stories tell of the ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil. They deal with life and death, self-knowledge and the becoming of self, but also about love and the inevitability of fate. In the end, they are about the search for the secret of life and ultimate wisdom.

The heroes are faced with unsolvable challenges; danger awaits them in form of mean, aggressive giants, while false friends and advisers attempt to deceive them. But the stories also deal with the fact that every "good" person has to conquer his own weaknesses and that many "bad" people also carry in them a trace of goodness.

The battle scenes are especially popular because they offer the puppeteer the chance to display all his skills. The figures are whirled through the air and crash against the screen while drum beats and special light effects add to the drama.

36 Srikandi

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18491

Srikandi is Arjuna's (figures 8, 38) fourth principal consort, however, she fails to bear him children. They became closer, whilst Arjuna was teaching her the art of archery. She was trying to defend her father's kingdom that was being threatened by dangerous giant because of her. She is an exceptionally dynamic woman who knows what she wants, and for this she is quite famous. In Java, she stands for the ideal of the adventurous, emancipated woman. In one story, she transforms into a man all of a sudden, one reason why individuals with a transgender identity like to identify with her.

37 Panawoti

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18492

Banowati is the wife of Duryodana (figure 10) which means she actually belongs to the lefthand side faction, the Korawas. But she is deeply in love with Arjuna and also becomes his wife after the untimely death of Duryodana in the great family war. Banowati and Srikandi are similar in body as well as nature. Both are smart and courageous. The long hair that falls down the back and the sarong that folds to the front are features specific to the region of Yogyakarta (compare Surakarta: figure 44).

38 Arjuna

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.570

Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Arjuna is said to be invincible. His power of concentration is so strong that no one is able to distract him, an ability he owes to the power of the universe. He is considered as one of the characters who have found the way to themselves and discovered the secret of the universe.

39 Cakil

Java, Cirebon, 19th c.

Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18080

Cakil is considered a very unpleasant character, as his course facial features, his upturned, thick nose, the thick lips, and the sharp teeth insinuate. He is from a foreign land and often travels with Terong (figure 23). He always appears at the beginning of a story in the role as Arjuna's opponent who then goes on to kill him. On this figure, the kris (object 54) is clearly visible unlike in Arjuna's case (figure 38) where it is wrapped in cloth.

40 Narasoma

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.575

Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Narasoma is a young and successful warrior who, as a fighting man, is not allowed to marry the daughter of the giant Bagaspati (figure 41). However, in order to make this love come true after all, Bagaspati allows Narasoma to kill him. But in the moment of death, the giant utters a curse condemning Narasoma to a horrific death. Why he initially agrees to the marriage but yet goes on to curse Narasoma, is the topic of lengthy discussions.

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41 Bagawan Bagaspatia

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.598
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Begawan is the title bestowed on a wise man, priest, or king who engages in meditation practices. In Java, Bagaspati is considered a descendant of Ismaya who steps into the world as Semar (figure 29). It is extremely unusual that a giant, whose body is always made to look so coarse, possesses such noble and fine qualities as Bagaspati.

42 Bima

Java, Surakarta, 19th c.
Ethnographic museum, University of Zurich, Inv.-Nr. 18666

Here Bima is dressed as a butcher; in this guise he is referred to as Djagal Abilawa. He carries his hair open but his posture is definitely more composed than that of Rajamala (figure 43). Like his brother Arjuna, Bima, too, discovered his inner connection with the universe in the course of his life which lent him a stable, inner power. This figure was made around 1860 and belonged to Mangkunegara, the viceroy of Surakarta.

43 Rajamala

Java, Yogyakarta, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.595
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

The malevolence of this character is unmistakably recognizable by his wide-open, round eyes, his thickset nose, and the shape of his mouth with the sharp teeth and bulging lips, complemented by his wild hair, his wide-spread legs, and his enormous size. His hip wrap bears the batik pattern parang rusak (broken dagger), which indicates a high social standing. Rajamala challenges Bima to a fight and is consequently killed in a brutal combat. The dramatic scene gives a dalang the chance to display his entire range of skills.

Outlook

The shadow theatre continues to develop to this day. A number of dalang have succeeded in expanding the classical art tradition by advancing new stories and figures.

An impressive example of this development is Dalang Ki Entus Susmono (1966–2018) who gained international acclaim with his Wayang Rai Wong figures (rai = face, wong = human). With the aim of reaching a younger audience, he had figures made whose faces looked more humanlike. In addition to the old narratives, he created new stories, for example, about the futility of war, featuring figures such as Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush. But he also did things such as replace famous traditional advisers with Teletubbies or Gatotkaca with Supermann – to name but two examples.

A further example is Dalang Ki Sukasman (1943–2009), who studied Decorative Art and Graphic Design at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. After attaining his degree, he lived in Rotterdam for many years where he worked as a stage designer and found inspiration in European art forms. In his opinion, the design of the figures was not meant to go unchanged forever, so he began producing his own figures with an individual, avantgarde touch to them.

44 Srikandi

Java, Yogyakarta, 21th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2019.557

45 Kunti

Java, Yogyakarta, 21th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2019.556

46 Kresna

Java, Yogyakarta, 21th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2019.555

47 Udawa

Java, Yogyakarta, 21th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2019.558

44, 45, 46, 47: Here we have four examples from Ki Entus Susmono's Wayang Rai Wong figures. Their aesthetics follow the classical templates so that the well-known characters remain recognizable (compare: Kresna, figures 15, 27; Kunti, 9; Srikandi, 36).
Purchased from Dalang Ki Catur Kuncoro, 2019

48 Udawa

Java, 19th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.583
Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

This is a classical representation of Udawa (figure 44). Udawa is the younger brother of Kresna (figures 15, 25) and Baladewa (figure 27), and a minister at Kresna's court. His pointed nose, the narrow eyes, small mouth, and narrow waist indicate that he is one of the good characters and a sturdy warrior. On the other hand, the raised head, the widespread legs, and the red body colour suggest that he also possesses less noble traits.

49 Garèng

Java, Yogyakarta, 21th c.
Völkerkundemuseum Burgdorf,
Inv.-Nr. 8164

This version of Garèng (figure 31) is an original creation by Dalang Ki Sukasman. It was purchased in Yogyakarta in 1996.

50 Togog

Java, Yogyakarta, 21th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2019.560

51 Bilung

Java, Yogyakarta, 21th c.
Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2019.561

50, 51: These two figures of Bilung and Togog are examples of new creations inspired by works of the famous Dalang Ki Sukasman.
Purchased from Dalang Ki Catur Kuncoro, 2019

The dalang

In Indonesian, the puppeteer is called dalang. Colloquially he is often also referred to as Mastermind owing to the tremendously wide range of knowledge he has to command. In total there are around 500 characters whose traits and features he must be familiar with in order to convey to the audience the wisdom of Javanese ethics and moral, while recounting each figure's fate. Thus, the dalang is a performer, poet and philosopher in one. He knows all the stories by heart and needs no script. And since every performance is an event to itself, no story is ever told in the same way, instead it is always reinterpreted and adapted to the specific occasion.

Famous dalang usually come from old dalang families. Javanese values and beliefs are imparted to them from childhood on and they begin to practise the voices and movements of the various figures from early on. Since the mid-20th century, the art of puppeteering is also taught at colleges of art in central Java, but until now the schools have failed to produce any really famous dalang.

Every dalang has to be officially registered; at present there are roughly 5,000 practising dalang in Java. Each generation yields a handful of famous and three to four super dalang. Owing to their popularity, they, at times, are asked to put on a show just about every evening, certainly every weekend. In central Java shadow plays are scheduled every weekend, at times with several plays being performed on the same night.

Making of the figures

The figures are made out of animal skin, with the best quality traditionally coming from ritually slaughtered water buffaloes from Sulawesi. After prolonged drying, a specialist thins down the skin and carefully removes the remaining fat layer and hairs, leaving a roughly 1mm thick parchment; this is then sold to a Wayang kulit workshop where the figures are punched, painted, and gilded.

The punching and painting are done according to traditional methods that vary in detail from region to region. The painting is identical on both sides. The colours of the face and body provide clues as to the figure's character. Many figures are also gilded; the gold enhances a figure's durability and value, but says nothing about its character. The main rod and hand sticks made of horn, wood, or plastic are produced by a different artisan and fastened to the figure afterwards.

In the course of the 1990s, the composition of the paints changed. Instead of colours based on fish glue with pigments and extenders, artisans began using acrylic paints. The fish glue-based paints create a slightly thicker layer which is why older figures tend to have a smoother surface. In Java, many of the really old figures have no colour at all, since all the paints have flaked off through use. The figures held in European collections bear evidence of this ancient painting technique.

52 Kris, damascened dagger

Java, Surakarta, 19/20th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2005.610

Gift Brigitte Werner

53 Kris, damascened dagger

Java, Yogyakarta, 19/20th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2005.620

Gift Brigitte Werner

The dalang, as well as the musicians of the gamelan orchestra, wear special traditional costumes along with specifically regional headgear and corresponding kris. The kris is worn tucked in a belt at the back. Since the musicians as well as the dalang play with their backs turned to the audience, the

daggers are well visible; they are highly charged with meaning, since they are believed to forge a link with the powers of the universe.

54 Oil lamps

Java, On loan

Oil lamps like this one used to cast the flickering light of a flame on the centre of the screen; today, electric lights do the job. The lamp has the shape of the Garuda bird, as also found in many of the figures' hairstyles. The oil lamp used to be positioned above the dalang to prevent his shadow from falling on the screen. Together with the light, the dalang is regarded as the creator of the performance, it is he who brings the figures to life and decides on their fate.

55 Wayang golek figure, female dancer

Java, Yogyakarta, 19/20th c.

Museum Rietberg, Inv.-Nr. 2017.657

Gift Paul and Tina Stohler

Wayang golek is a theatre form which is popular above all in western Java and along the island's north coast (golek means "puppet"). Traditionally, a three-dimensional figure in the shape of a female dancer used to appear at the end of a shadow play to mark its close. Today, other figures are also used for this purpose, in some cases this final act is simply omitted. In Yogyakarta, the dalang Ki Catur Benyek Kuncoro, for instance, had a figure made representing the present Indonesian president, Joko Widodo.

56 Figures in the making

Java, Yogyakarta, 1960

Völkerkundemuseum Burgdorf, Inv.-Nr. 8161-70

For perforation, the parchment is processed on a wooden block. A skilled artist knows all the shapes and forms by heart. He uses a metal pin to make the incisions on the parchment's surface. Finished figures are hung up for up to a year before the layers of paint are applied: first the figures are primed; in this case the primer is yellowish in colour, on older figures it is often white. The gilt layer is applied at the end, before adding final details with the aid of a small black brush. The pupil is the last item to be added to the finished figure.

57 Perforating tools + blobs of glue

Java, Yogyakarta, 20th c.

Völkerkundemuseum Burgdorf,

Inv.-Nr. 20234 + 20232

The shape as a whole as well as the perforations are punched and not cut out. The punches are turned by 90 degrees after every hammer blow, producing a small incision each time. Even the smallest hole requires at least three blows. The most important thing is that the apertures have neat and smooth edges so that the light can pass through unhindered. It takes a skilled artisan up to three months to produce a large figure. The blobs of glue were dissolved in water and mixed in with the pigments and extenders; the paint had to be applied the same day, otherwise the binder lost its adhesive power.