

The Newsletter

UNIMA PUPPETEERS TRUST - INDIA



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UNIMA BOARD 2025-2029

Source: [UNIMA Internationale](https://www.unima-internationale.org/)

From the Managing Trustee

Greetings,
 Congratulations to the new Newsletter team: Maneesh Pachiaru, Dr Moushumi Bhattacharjee, Subhasis G. Neogi, Dharanya, Choiti Ghosh, Padmini Rangarajan, Rahul Aggarwal, Ridhi Aggarwal and Rinti Sengupta.
 Collaboration is the way forward!

Ranjana Pandey

RANGAPUTHALI PUPPETEERS

M. R. SRINIVAS, BENGALURU

THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF RANGAPUTHALI PUPPETEERS

Rangaputhali Puppeteers have actively promoted India's traditional puppetry art through a series of impactful performances, workshops, and recognitions in early 2025. Beginning in January, they showcased mythological stories like Ramayana and Narakasura Vadhe in Coimbatore, followed by performances on Swami Vivekananda's life during World Youth Day celebrations in Tumkur and Bangalore.



Their Makara Sankranti-themed show at Prestige Falcon City drew an audience of over 1000 people, receiving highly positive feedback. They further presented Sri Krishna Parijatha during the golden jubilee celebration of Akhila Karnataka Brahmana Mahasabha, earning praise from community leaders and swamijis.

RANGAPUTHALI PUPPETEERS

M. R. SRINIVAS, BENGALURU



In February, the troupe performed shows on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, including their first Hindi-language presentation at Kendriya Vidyalaya. Their contributions were recognized with prestigious awards, including the Karnataka Bayalata Akademi Award for M. R. Vijay and the Vishwanatha Samskruthi Puraskaram for M. R. Srinivas. Additionally, their work gained international attention through coverage by Singapore-based Mewatch.

The group continues to expand its reach by collaborating with institutions to conduct puppetry workshops, ensuring the preservation and evolution of this traditional art form for future generations.

PUTUL NACHER ASHOR

SUBHASIS G. NEOGI, CHANDIGARH

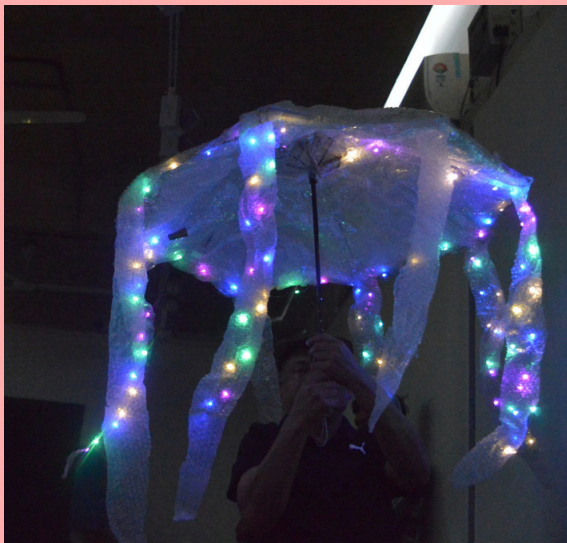
World Puppet Day Carnival

The World Puppet Day Celebration by PNA (Putul Nacher Ashor - The Puppet Theatre from Chandigarh) was marked with a vibrant 4 Day Puppet Festival from 20th to 24th March 2025, showcasing the creative and educational potential of puppetry.

On 20th and 21st March, a Giant Puppets Exhibition was held, highlighting three major themes: Puppets for Health Awareness, Puppetry in Education, and Puppet Theatre as a Performing Art. Both days also featured live puppet demonstration sessions aimed at engaging students and the general public. Additionally, interactive workshops were conducted - on 20th March, a Stick Puppet Workshop involving 100 school students and 15 teachers, followed by a Shadow Puppet Workshop with the same number of participants on 21st March. Puppet theatre performances was also staged to promote the art form.

PUTUL NACHER ASHOR

SUBHASIS G. NEOGI, CHANDIGARH



On 23rd March, an Online Puppet Bash was held, featuring storytelling sessions with puppets by Ms. Lipika Sarkar, Founder of DANA (Development And Awareness Need Art), Kolkata, and Dr. Neeza Singh, Librarian at T S Central Library, Chandigarh. The celebration concluded on 24th March with a Finger Puppet Workshop for community children at New Chandigarh, aiming to spread joy and creativity through hands-on engagement with puppetry.



PUTUL NACHER ASHOR

SUBHASIS G. NEOGI, CHANDIGARH

ACHIEVEMENT:

Subhasis Guha Neogi was honored with the 1st Kala Pratibha Puraskar for Allied Activities in Theatre, 2024 by the Chandigarh Sangeet Natak Akademi. The award was presented on 26 February 2026 by Honorable Governor of Punjab Shri Gulab Chand Kataria at the Rani Lakshmi Bai Auditorium in Chandigarh.

He received this recognition for his outstanding contributions to theatre, puppetry, and visual arts. As the founder of 'Putul Nacher Ashor - The Puppet Theatre', Subhasis has directed over 90 plays and staged more than 600 performances. He has also played a major role in theatre education, conducting over 2,450 offline and 900+ online workshops, mentoring and inspiring numerous aspiring artists.



SUROJIT ACADEMY

BINITA DEVI, ASSAM

SUROJIT ACADEMY USES PUPPET THEATRE TO RAISE AWARENESS AMONG TEA TRIBES

In an initiative aimed at spreading awareness among the tea tribe communities of Assam, Surojit Academy, in collaboration with Sewa Sanstha of Dibrugarh, has launched a special campaign using traditional puppet theatre. Beginning on July 12, puppet plays are being performed across tea gardens in Upper and Lower Assam and the campaign ran for around two months.

Surojit Academy Uses Puppet Theatre to Raise Awareness Among Tea Tribes. Puppet theatre is a rich folk tradition of Assam. In an effort to preserve and promote this art form, Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar awardee Binita Devi and Ministry of Culture Senior Fellowship recipient Simanta

Sharma have been actively conducting workshops, discussions, and performances across various regions of Assam. Their goal is to familiarize the general public- especially children and youth - with this traditional art. The themes of the puppet plays are deeply rooted in social awareness, focusing on issues such as education, health, hygiene, superstition, and substance abuse, particularly relevant to workers in tea plantations.

SUROJIT ACADEMY

BINITA DEVI, ASSAM



The plays have been directed by Binita Devi, while the concept and planning have been led by Simanta Sarma. Puppet performances were presented by Hemen Senapati, Dhruvajyoti Kalita, Pranab Jyoti Rabha, and Manoj Nath. The puppets and technical support had been provided by Trishna Kalita, Hardik Sarma, Kritya Rajbongshi, Deepa Mahanta, Ganesh Boro, Palak Koiri, Kritarth Sharma, and Himanshu Das.

After the conclusion of this campaign in Assam, similar puppet theatre performances will be held in tea gardens of Kolkata as well, Simanta Sharma confirmed as their future endeavours..

PUPPET DANCE AT COOPERATIVE FAIR 2025

The “Fourth Cooperative Fair 2025,” organized by the Cooperative Department Government of Assam, was held from December 13–15 at the playground of Assam Engineering Institute. As part of the cultural programme, Surojit Academy from the Assam Engineering College campus staged a compelling puppet drama titled “Cooperative Principles: The Spirit of Cooperation, Working Together for Progress.”

Directed by Binita Devi and planned by Simanta Sarma, the play was written by Rajesh Patra, with music by Hardik Sarma and song composed by Atiqur Rahman.

SUROJIT ACADEMY

BINITA DEVI, ASSAM

The production highlighted key cooperative principles through the story of a farmer, illustrating how unity and shared efforts can transform rural life. It also showcased modern reforms like digital support for PACS and expansion of MPACS.

Blending humour with meaningful storytelling, the puppet performance captivated audiences with its expressive presentation. The show received widespread appreciation from officials, artists, and attendees, who praised puppetry as an effective medium for promoting social awareness and government initiatives.

The performance enriched the cultural evening, leaving a lasting impression through both education and entertainment.



RAWAN BADH SUCCESSFULLY STAGED AT DIMAPUR

Binita Devi successfully presented the puppet show Rawan Badh at the Festival on Vanishing Folk and Tribal Arts organized by The North East Zone Cultural Centre, under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

The play received significant appreciation from the artists and dignitaries present at the festival. The puppeteers skillfully handled the puppets, bringing each scene to life. The play successfully incorporated the nine rasas of Indian classical drama.

The music composition for the play was done by Papu Gohain. The blend of spiritual music, folk music, and Western music in the play mesmerized the audience. The puppets were operated by Binita Devi, Pranab Jyoti Rabha, Hemen Senapati, Karishma Talukdar, Simanta Sarma, Palak Koiri, Dhruba Jyoti Kalita, Hardik



A CLIP FROM THE PLAY RAWAN BADH

ZIG ZAG TO EARTH

V AARTI, ANKIT RAVANI & ADHEEP DAS, NEW DELHI

ZIG ZAGS TO EARTH - MOSCOW PERFORMANCE REPORT, SEPTEMBER 2025



This year, our show Zig Zags to Earth had its international debut as it was performed at the XIII International Festival of Puppet Theaters named after Sergey Obraztsov in Moscow, Russia. For a small, 3 person production created in a Puppet Lab in 2023 to be a part of one of the most prestigious festivals in the world felt almost surreal. We performed the show in English, with live translation by an interpreter during the show. We were a bit skeptical, but as we heard the laughter and gasps of the audience at all the right places, we were relieved to realized that it worked, and we ended up having a wonderful collaboration with our interpreter.

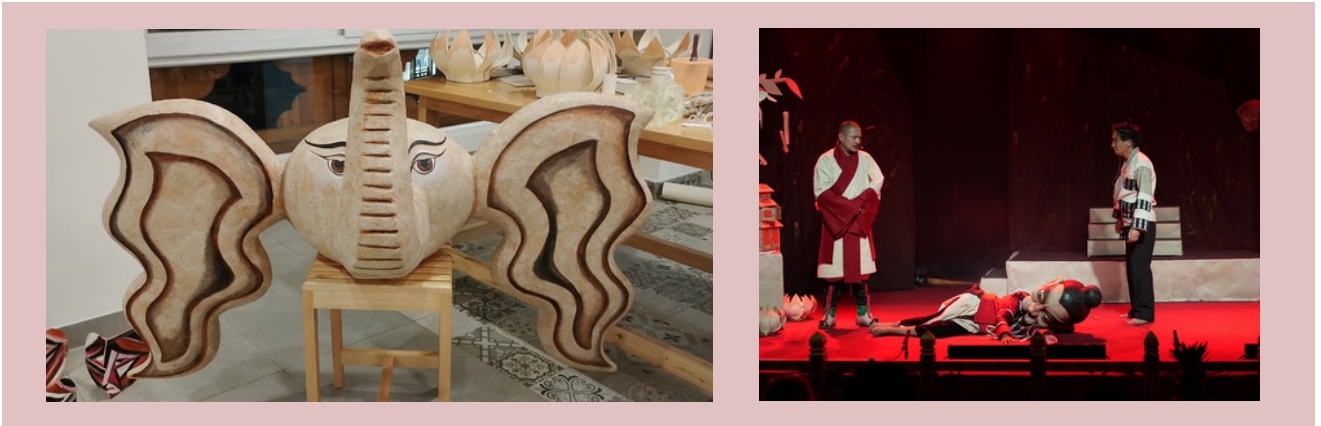
We had a few points of interaction in the show, in fact, it kicks off with the audience, where we ask them to make spaceship sounds to 'fuel' the spaceship and start the show. We were nervous about these bits of interaction and asked the Obraztsov team if things like this were normal, or if the audience might find it too strange and not participate. The team assured us that they wanted to see the show exactly how we'd do it in India, and that they were confident the audience would engage. And they were right! The audience was very enthusiastic and had endless questions for us backstage, and it felt amazing to have a group of people take such a generous, curious interest in our work.

The rest of the trip was great fun, from a song and dance welcome at the airport to a special performance of 'Jimmy Jimmy', and tearful goodbyes at the end to our wonderful guide Ms. Khalisya. We felt truly enriched watching the performances from Belarus, St Petersburg, China, Iran & Russia, and came back thoroughly inspired.

ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF BHUTAN

KAPIL DEV, MUMBAI

PUPPETRY ACROSS BORDERS: A CREATIVE JOURNEY IN BHUTAN



A three-month artistic journey in Bhutan turned into a remarkable exploration of puppetry, collaboration, and cultural exchange for Puppet artist Kapil Dev. Invited by Charmi Chheda and the Snow Leopard Theatre Repertory, the visit brought together innovation and tradition in theatre-making.

The first phase in September focused on the production *Sangay Sidhartha*, written and directed by Charmi Chheda. The process involved creating masks and developing Bunraku-style puppets, with valuable assistance from Kinzang Dorji, a talented and quick learner. The play was staged at Royal University of Bhutan, with five successful performances - two for school students, two for the general public, and a special show for the Royal Family, who were deeply impressed by the production.

The second phase featured a new production, adapted from *The Raven Tells a Story*, written by Her Highness Sonam Dechan Wangchuck. What made this project unique was the participation of individuals with no prior theatre background. Through two months of intensive training, they learned puppet-making and Bunraku-style manipulation, ultimately delivering a powerful performance.

Reflecting a journey similar to earlier work with Salaam Baalak Trust, the experience in Thimphu reaffirmed the transformative power of puppetry. With such promising talent, Bhutan's future in puppet theatre looks exceptionally bright.

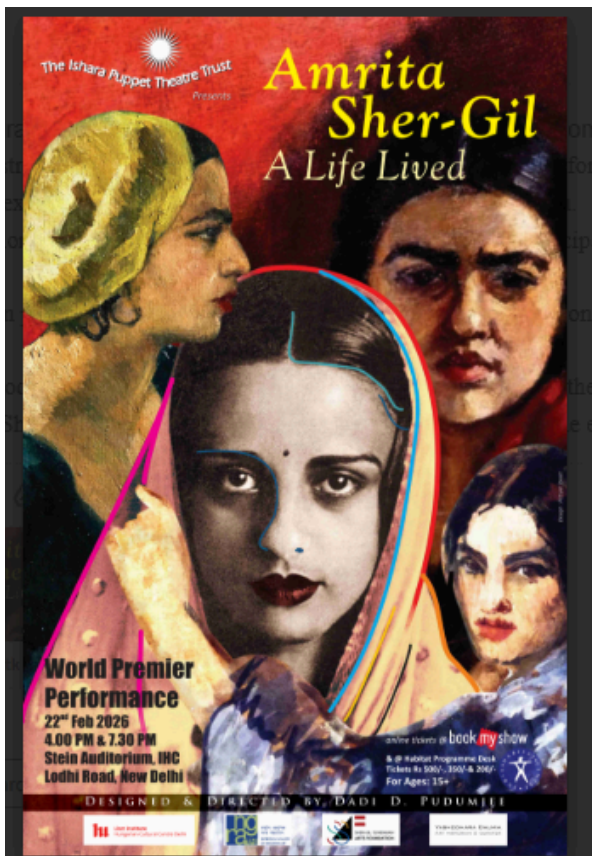


ISHARA PUPPET THEATRE TRUST

DADI D. PUDUMJEE, NEW DELHI

22ND ISHARA INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FESTIVAL

A magical journey across cultures - where strings, hands, shadows, and imagination come together to create unforgettable memories. Whether you are a lifelong lover of puppetry or discovering it for the first time, it offers a unique experience. It is a vibrant celebration of talent, storytelling, and tradition that captivates and inspires every time. Performances from Albania, Bhutan, Italy, Korea, Turkey. And from India artists from Kerala , Chandigarh, and Delhi participated in the festival.



The Postal Department released 8 stamps on puppets of India, on the opening day of the festival an honour to puppeteers of India. Ishara puppet theatre premiered its latest production Amrita Sher-Gil A life lived, on the final day of the festival, a performance celebrating the life of one of India's national treasures; Indian/Hungarian artist Amrita Sher-Gil, through puppets,actors, objects, paintings and the echoes of the times she inhabited, 1913 to 1941.



TRIPURA PUPPET THEATRE

PRABHITANGSU DAS, TRIPURA

TRIPURA PUPPET THEATRE CONTINUES TO INSPIRE THROUGH TRADITION AND INNOVATION

With a rich legacy spanning over 52 years, the Tripura Puppet Theatre stands as one of the oldest and most prominent puppet theatre groups in Northeast India. Known for its dedication to both traditional and contemporary forms of puppetry, the organization continues to play a vital role in preserving and promoting this unique art form.

Marking the annual celebration of World Puppetry Day on 21st March, the group carried forward its tradition of engaging young minds through creative expression. For the past four years, Tripura Puppet Theatre has been actively training children in various puppetry techniques, nurturing a new generation of performers.



This year's celebration was held at Jawaharlal Nehru Balika Abas, an orphanage in Agartala, where young trainees took center stage. The children showcased their self-created puppet production titled "Raja o Kathbirali" (The King and the Squirrel). Their performance not only entertained the audience but also sparked curiosity and enthusiasm among the children of the institution, encouraging a deeper appreciation for puppetry.

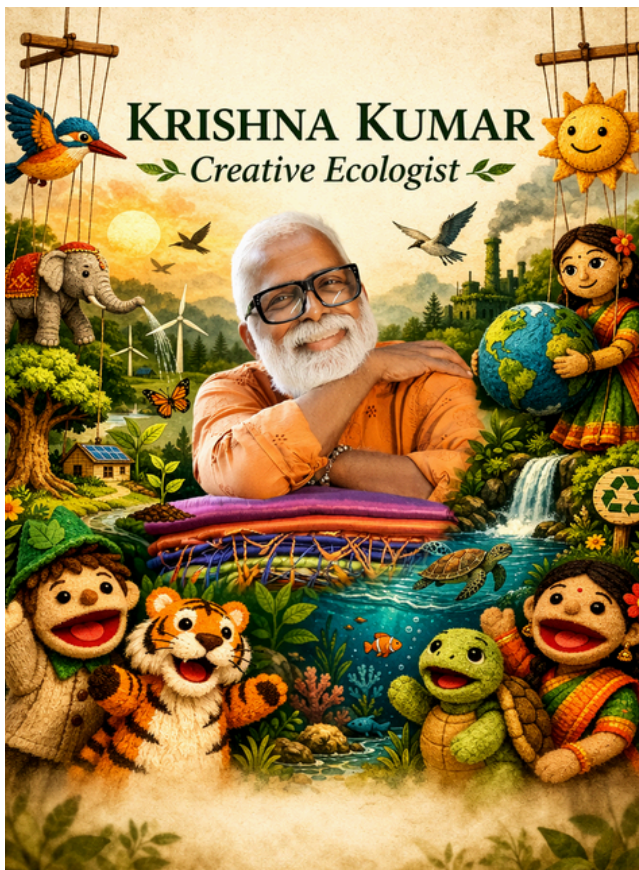
Beyond local initiatives, Tripura Puppet Theatre has also made a significant mark on the national stage this year. The group presented Bisarjan by Rabindranath Tagore at the prestigious Bharat Rang Mahotsav, organized by the National School of Drama in New Delhi.

In addition, they performed "Rani Lakshmibai" at the "Putul Yatra" festival hosted by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in Shillong, further showcasing their artistic excellence and versatility. Through its consistent efforts in education, performance, and cultural participation, Tripura Puppet Theatre continues to uphold its legacy while inspiring communities and keeping the timeless art of puppetry alive.

PUPPETRY FOR CREATIVE ECOLOGY

KRISHNAKUMAR A K, KERALA

‘Puppetry for Creative Ecology’ is an approach that combines art, storytelling, and environmental awareness to make learning engaging and meaningful. It uses puppetry as a creative tool to explore ecological themes such as biodiversity, sustainability, and the relationship between humans and nature.



Instead of traditional teaching methods, it encourages interactive and emotional learning through stories and characters, making complex issues like climate change easier to understand.

Puppetry is effective because it fosters creativity, participation, and emotional connection, allowing both children and adults to engage deeply with environmental topics. The concept of ‘creative ecology’ emphasizes interconnectedness and promotes innovative thinking about environmental challenges by blending art, education, and sustainability.

BURDWAN THE PUPPETEERS

PARTHA PRATIM PAUL/AMIT SADHUKHAN, BURDWAN (WEST BENGAL)

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: BURDWAN THE PUPPETEERS CHAMPION YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Burdwan The Puppeteers continues its artistic journey through numerous shows across India, including notable performances such as Sapling in Mysore and Ranga Bhanga in Banipur. While these engagements reflect our growing national presence, our true commitment lies in nurturing the future through our Sunday Classes, where children from diverse communities are introduced to and trained in the art of puppetry.

This year's World Puppetry Day celebrations commenced at their Putul Ghar, with the reading of the official message of Unima. The program was followed by a lively performance of Dustu Bagh, presented by our students under the direction of Partha Pratim Paul. The event also featured Jhora Patar Golpo, performed by students of Jaugram High School and directed by our member Tandra Kundu, with the support of fellow members Anuradha Paul and Sourav Nandi.



BURDWAN THE PUPPETEERS

PARTHA PRATIM PAUL/AMIT SADHUKHAN, BURDWAN (WEST BENGAL)

Their endeavour to provide a meaningful platform for emerging talent got reflected in the reconstruction of *Shadows of Valmiki*, directed by Anuradha Paul.

By actively engaging young individuals from diverse backgrounds and encouraging student-led creative direction, they are ensuring that the art of puppetry continues to thrive as a vibrant, inclusive, and enduring legacy for generations to come.



Z.P. UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL ETALCHERU

KHURSHID SHEIKH. MAHARASHTRA

INNOVATIVE LEARNING THROUGH PUPPETRY AT ETALCHERU SCHOOL

At the Government-run Z.P. Upper Primary School, Etalcheru in Aheri Block of Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra, Khurshid Sheikh the Principal of the school demonstrated how innovation can bridge even the most remote regions with the wider world.

Despite being located in a predominantly tribal and geographically isolated area, the school is actively fostering creativity and global exposure among its students.

On the occasion of World Puppetry Day 2026, the school organized a vibrant and engaging celebration. The event featured a series of interactive and creative activities designed to introduce students to the art of puppetry while encouraging expression and participation.

Key activities included a paper puppet-making workshop, where students crafted their own puppets, followed by puppet presentations that showcased their creativity. Students also enjoyed puppet video screenings, and participated in lively talk-and-dance sessions with puppets, making the learning process both fun and meaningful.



Z.P. UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL ETALCHERU

KHURSHID SHEIKH. MAHARASHTRA

The celebration saw enthusiastic participation not only from students and teachers but also from parents and villagers, turning it into a true community event. The initiative highlighted the school's commitment to holistic education, cultural engagement, and community involvement.

Overall, the event successfully used puppetry as a tool for learning, creativity, and connection, reflecting the vision of the school leadership in empowering students in even the most remote settings.

CLIPS FROM THE WORKSHOPS...



EDU PUPPET RESEARCH CENTRE (EPRC)

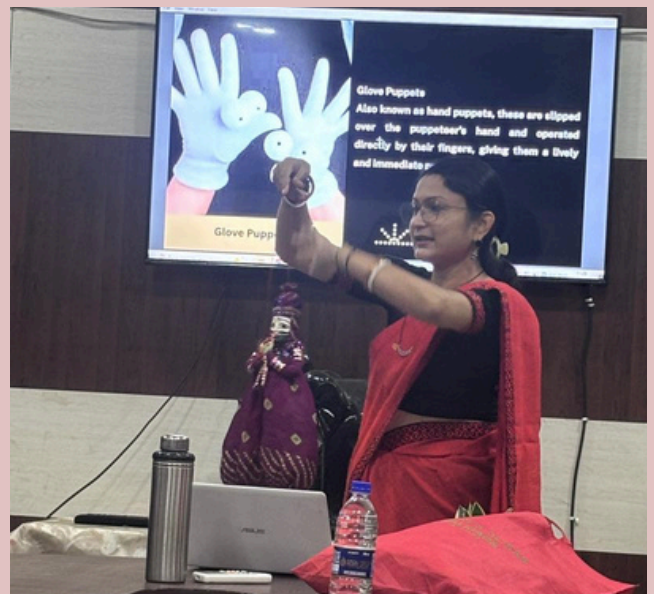
DR. MOUSHUMI BHATTACHARJEE, ASSAM

PUPPETRY AS A POWERFUL DEVELOPMENT TOOL

On the eve of World Puppetry Day, an interactive session on “Puppetry as a Development Tool” was conducted by Dr. Moushumi Bhattacharjee, Director of the Edu Puppet Research Centre (EPRC), for the students of the Department of Communication and Journalism at Pragjyotish College, Guwahati.

The session aimed to introduce students to the dynamic world of puppetry and highlight its significance as an effective medium for development communication. Dr. Bhattacharjee explained how puppetry goes beyond entertainment and serves as a powerful tool to simplify and communicate complex social issues to diverse audiences.

Students actively participated in the session, making it both engaging and insightful. A key highlight was the screening of digital puppet shows addressing important themes such as human trafficking, responsible mobile phone usage, healthy dietary habits for children, and water conservation. These presentations demonstrated how storytelling through puppets can create awareness in an impactful yet accessible manner.



Dr. Bhattacharjee while interacting with the students.

EDU PUPPET RESEARCH CENTRE (EPRC)

DR. MOUSHUMI BHATTACHARJEE, ASSAM

PUPPETRY AS A TOOL TO FIGHT CHILD TRAFFICKING IN ASSAM

An initiative of NEDSSS under Suraksha Project supported by CRS in collaboration with ARMT and Sagarika Puppet Theatre was headed by Dr. Moushumi Bhattacharjee in the month of July 2025. It was a culturally rooted community outreach initiative that made use of puppetry to address critical social issues such as child trafficking and child marriage in vulnerable areas of Assam. Conducted from 25th to 30th July 2025 across Sisupani and Sarupani Gaon Panchayats in Golaghat district, the project leveraged traditional storytelling to create awareness, inspire dialogue, and encourage behavioral change.

A total of 17 puppet shows were performed, reaching an estimated 1,325+ participants, including children, adolescents, families, educators, frontline workers, and local stakeholders. The performances effectively communicated complex social messages through engaging narratives that blended humor, drama, suspense, and educational content, making them accessible across different age groups and literacy levels.



EDU PUPPET RESEARCH CENTRE (EPRC)

DR. MOUSHUMI BHATTACHARJEE, ASSAM

The initiative aimed to educate communities about the risks of child trafficking and early marriage, while empowering children with knowledge for self-protection. It also created safe spaces for community interaction, enabling participants to share concerns and aspirations.

The final performance, held on 30th July 2025 to mark the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, took place in front of the Golaghat DC Court. The event saw participation from key officials, including representatives from district administration, child protection services, and social welfare departments.

Overall, the project received strong appreciation for its innovative communication approach.



RUBY PUPPET THEATER

ABANI KANTA SARMA, ASSAM

CELEBRATING A MASTER OF PUPPETRY



Sri Abani Kanta Sarma

Abani Kanta Sarma stands as a visionary artist who has made remarkable contributions to the art of puppetry in Assam. In 1974, he founded the renowned Ruby Puppet Theater, which has recently completed an inspiring milestone of 50 years, marking half a century of dedication to this traditional art form.

Sarma's journey into puppetry began in 1972, when he learned the craft from the "Santoshi Maa Putul Theater," a troupe that had come to Assam from West Bengal.

Inspired by their performances, he started his own venture just two years later and soon emerged as a master puppeteer.

A defining feature of Sarma's performances is his exceptional ability to voice both male and female puppet characters with remarkable flair and expression. This rare skill adds a unique charm and element of surprise, captivating audiences across generations.

Recently, Sarma and his troupe performed at Putul Yatra - a festival of puppetry held at Shillong. They presented Swahid Kanaklata, a compelling production that brought alive a powerful story through the evocative medium of puppetry.

With five decades of artistic excellence, Sri Abani Kanta Sarma continues to inspire and preserve the rich heritage of puppetry, leaving a lasting imprint on Assam's cultural landscape.



**Snippets from the Play
Swahid Kanaklata**

NATARAJ PUPPET THEATER

AJOY KUMAR SARMA, ASSAM

ENGINEERING CREATIVITY INTO PUPPETRY

Ajoy Kumar Sarma, a Diploma holder in Mechanical Engineering from Nagaon Polytechnic, has carved a unique niche for himself in the world of puppetry since 2004. Blending technical knowledge with artistic passion, he entered the field as a producer of the Nataraj Puppet Theater Group and has since been actively involved in multiple aspects of the craft.

Sarma's contributions extend beyond performance, encompassing puppet making, conducting, decoration, as well as stage design. His multidisciplinary involvement reflects a deep commitment to the art form and highlights the intricate work that goes into creating a compelling puppetry production.

Recently, he showcased his talent at Putul Yatra, a puppetry festival held from March 30 to April 2 in Shillong. At the festival, his troupe presented Lachit Borphukan, a powerful production based on the life of the legendary freedom fighter Lachit Borphukan. Directed by Ajoy Kumar Sarma, the play vividly brought to life a heroic narrative through the expressive medium of puppetry. Through his innovative approach and dedication, Ajoy Kumar Sarma continues to contribute significantly to the promotion and evolution of puppetry, bridging tradition with modern creativity.

At present, they are using this art form to raise awareness among rural communities about the importance of voting and the value of every single vote.



**Snippets from the Play Bir
Lachit Borphukan**

HANDS AND STORIES

RINTI SENGUPTA, MUMBAI

PUPPETRY AS A POWERFUL PEDAGOGICAL TOOL



Over the past few months, my work has focused on exploring puppetry as a powerful pedagogical and expressive tool across diverse platforms. On 21st December 2025, I conducted a puppet show on managing emotions at the Pune Book Festival, organized by NBT. This was followed by a performance on the theme Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam at the Bhopal Story Fest on 18th January 2026, along with a teacher training session on The Art of Engagement - integrating stories, puppets, voice, and sound for DPS educators in Bhopal on 17th January 2026.

Continuing this journey, I led a puppet workshop at FEEP, Pune on 14th February 2026, focusing on differentiated pedagogies through puppetry and voice. On 7th March, I conducted a session on Puppetry in Education for Teacher Trainees at Bombay Teachers' Training College. I also presented a research paper on 28th March at Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, titled "Puppetry as a Pedagogy for Enhancing Sustainable Traditional Foods."



PUPPET SHOW ON CULTURAL ICON ZUBEEN GARG

GITIMA DAS. ASSAM



The North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Dimapur, organized the "Folk and Tribal Dance and Puppet Show under Vanishing Arts Festival" (Vilupt Lok Evam Janajatiya Kala Uthan Mahotsav) on December 5, featuring the puppet show "Iswarputra Zubeen Garg" directed by Gitima Das. The show was a tribute to the rich cultural heritage of Assam, showcasing the life and work of Zubeen Garg, a prominent singer, music composer, actor, and filmmaker from Assam, often called the "Heartthrob of Assam."

The puppet show, performed using rod puppets, brought the story to life. The script of the play was written by Hriday Deep Gogoi. The show received significant appreciation from the audience and dignitaries present at the festival. The puppeteers skillfully handled the puppets, captivating the audience with their performance.

The show highlighted how Zubeen Garg started his career on his own and became a renowned singer in Assam. Zubeen Garg has contributed significantly to Assam's film industry and is a social worker, always trying to help others.

The puppet show featured his famous dialogue, "I am not a child of humans, I am a child of nature", which had a great impact on the audience. The show ended with one of Zubeen Garg's popular songs, mesmerizing the audience. Through this puppet show, we tried to present Zubeen Garg's life and musical journey in a new way.

The puppets were operated by Gitima Das, Himakshi Das, Rimpi Das, and Bhitali Das. The costumes were designed by Hiya Das and Gitima Das.

REFLECTIONS ON MY EXPERIENCE: FOUNDATION COURSE 2.0

TANDRA KUNDU, BURDWAN (WEST BENGAL)

With a decade-long dedication to puppetry, my journey reached a milestone through the UNIMA Foundation Course (January 2025). This intensive program offered me the privilege of learning under legendary masters. I gained expertise in sketching, mold-making, and thermocol carving from Kapil Dev, followed by intricate lessons in puppet color design and shading from Dadi Pudumjee.

My technical skills were further refined by Anurupa Roy, who taught me Japanese Bunraku technique of puppet manipulation, wood carving, and glove puppet manipulation. Storytelling sessions with Ranjana Pandey added narrative depth to my craft. A transformative session of 15 days Togalu Gombeyatta masterclass with Gunduraju Sir in Hassan introduced me to the history and making of traditional leather shadow puppets, culminating in the production Ahalya. Additionally, Asha Didi mentored me in modern shadow puppetry for the play A Little Girl Story.

Further training in lighting design by Miliand Srivastava. Basumatary and puppet acting/monitoring by Sylvie Baillon (France) led to the creation of Frozen of Melody, which was showcased at the Crafts Museum in New Delhi, the International Puppet Film Festival, and the Bulbule festival organised by team Swatantra Talim.

Following an internship as a light technician for Anurupa Roy's Orange Juice, I collaborated with Art Medium Circle to direct Jhora Patar Golpo - a Theatre in Education project with school students. This course has been a definitive seal on my artistic identity, empowering me to carry this legacy.



PUPPETOSCOPE 2.0

KATKATHA PUPPET ARTS TRUST, (NEW DELHI)

PuppetOscope: An International Puppet Film Festival (2nd Edition) to Enchant New Delhi



The vibrant world of puppetry came alive at the second edition of **PuppetOscope: An International Puppet Film Festival**, organized by the **Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust** and supported by the **Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan**. The festival took place at the prestigious India International Centre, offering an enthralling experience for audiences **from April 3 to 6, 2025**. **Featuring an impressive lineup of 20 films from 10 countries**, the festival stood as a celebration of puppetry's magic across various mediums, exploring its role in cinema, performance, and storytelling.

PuppetOscope emerged as an extension of the seminar titled "Out of the Shadows," which delved into the plurality of shadow puppetry and its significance across cultures and mediums. The discussions explored the dynamic relationship between India's rich tradition of puppet theatre and its intersections with cinema, television, animation, and mass communication. The seminar also reflected on how evolving media forms influenced and reshaped puppetry's narrative potential.

The heart of PuppetOscope 2025 lay in its screenings, which featured a diverse range of films, critical discourse around cinema and puppetry, and lecture demonstrations that brought puppetry to the forefront of storytelling. The films were categorized into Documentary, Children's Film, and Fiction, representing a vibrant blend of cultural heritage and creative innovation from across the globe. The curated selections engaged audiences of all ages, successfully bridging traditional and contemporary approaches to this timeless art form.

A unique highlight of the festival was the Shadow Puppet Festival, which brought together tradition and modernity through a series of performances and screenings. **An all-night performance of Togalu Gombayatta, the traditional leather shadow puppetry of Karnataka, was presented, showcasing the intricate craftsmanship and enduring cultural significance of this ancient practice; the all-nighter emerged as the festival's biggest highlight, with 151 tickets sold online and an additional footfall of over 30 attendees on arrival.** Shadow puppeteers from Theni district, Tamil Nadu, delivered compelling performances alongside a screening of *Nee Engey*, directed by R. V. Ramani. Contemporary shadow puppet performances by Indian artists further demonstrated how the traditional form continued to evolve in response to present-day narratives and aesthetics. On Sunday evening, "*Frozen Melody*", a glove puppet theatre performance directed by Tandra Kundu, was staged by Tandra Kundu and Kuldeep during the closing ceremony at the venue.

An interactive exhibition of puppets allowed attendees to engage directly with the artistry and technical ingenuity behind puppet creation. This hands-on experience deepened the audience's appreciation of puppetry as a multifaceted art form. Additionally, a cutting-edge VR experience titled *The Infinite Libraries* transported visitors into immersive, puppet-inspired digital worlds, blending technology with storytelling and offering a glimpse into the future possibilities of puppetry.

The festival also featured a parallel programme for university students, which included a series of interactions and talks. These sessions enabled students to explore the interplay of puppetry, dramaturgy, form, narrative, and the historical evolution of puppet theatre. The initiative aimed to inspire a deeper understanding and appreciation of puppetry among the next generation of artists and scholars.

PUPPETSCOPE 2.0

KATKATHA PUPPET ARTS TRUST, (NEW DELHI)

The seminar segment of the festival unfolded across three sessions, bringing together distinguished practitioners and scholars to explore the intersections of puppetry, cinema, and performance traditions. Session 1 featured Prof. Kaushik Bhaumik on early Indian cinema and performing arts, Prof. Peter W. Marx on pre-cinema objects and their connections to European puppet theatre, and Sylvie Baillon on the evolution from shadow puppetry to animation in Europe, while Sessions 2 and 3 were moderated by Shankhajeet De and included Prof. Gouranga Charan Dash on the state of Odisha’s shadow puppetry, Gunduraju on Togalu and its collaborations with animation and VR, Ranjana Pandey on applied puppetry in film and television, and Dr. Atul Sinha on animation and puppetry in relation to his work and earlier traditions such as the Ramayan, Mahabharat, and Gul Raman’s contributions.



The festival witnessed significant engagement from educational institutions, with participation from seven schools, including Cambridge School Indirapuram, Ganga International School, Cambridge School, Prakriti School, Jaspal Kaur Public School, Bluebells School International, and The Heritage School. This strong institutional presence reflected the festival’s commitment to cultivating young audiences and introducing students to the art of puppetry and its cinematic expressions.

In terms of student attendance, **a total of 128 children visited the festival on Friday, while the number increased to 190 on Saturday**, indicating a growing interest and positive word-of-mouth among school groups. Additionally, a segment of attendees participated across both days, further strengthening engagement levels.

The festival also recorded a substantial open footfall on **Sunday, with 160 visitors attending independently**. This demonstrated the festival’s wider public appeal beyond organized school visits, attracting general audiences and enthusiasts of puppetry and film. Overall, the attendance patterns highlighted a balanced mix of institutional participation and independent viewership, contributing to the festival’s vibrant and inclusive atmosphere. Ten young and enthusiastic filmmakers, puppeteers, and interdisciplinary artists participated in the **“72hrs Puppet Microfilm Challenge.”** The participants included Debosmita Dam (Karnataka), Hitesh Nalwaya (Rajasthan), Ahmed Sherrif (Karnataka), Malvika Jha (Gujarat), Priyanka Kotwal (Maharashtra), Akshata Sawant (Mumbai), Soumita Kundu (Tripura), Garima (New Delhi), Dharanya (Chennai), and Yogesh (New Delhi). Debosmita Dam’s film *Shadows of Mischief* emerged as the winner of the 72hrs Challenge, while Soumita Kundu’s film *Mera Chaand* received the First Runner-Up award from the jury. All the short films were screened and shared on Katkatha’s official Instagram page, @kathapuppetry.



PUPPETSCOPE 2.0

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PuppetOscope 2025 was made possible through the collective efforts, dedication, and creative vision of numerous individuals and collaborators, whose contributions were integral to the festival's success.

The festival was led by the core organising team of Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust, comprising Anurupa Roy, Asha, Avinash Kumar, Bharavi, Mohd. Shameem, Maneesh Pachiaru, Umesh Kumar, Preet Kaur, and Shilpi Goswami, who worked tirelessly to conceptualise and execute the festival.

The film programme was thoughtfully curated by Ranjana Pandey, Sanjana Kapoor, and Shankhajeet De, ensuring a rich and diverse cinematic experience. The jury panel, consisting of Paulina Karczewska (Poland), Saba Niknam (Iran), and Parshmita Kashyap (Assam), brought critical insight and discernment to the selection and recognition of films.

The festival's screenings and discussions were further enriched by film presenters, including Kaushik Bhaumik, V. Aarti, Menaka Rodriguez, Shabani Hassanwalia, and Subhashim Goswami, who facilitated meaningful engagements with audiences.

The seamless functioning of the festival was supported by a dedicated team of volunteers—Rahul Aggarwal, Chandan, Shivam, Vijay, Sachin, Saumya, Kabir, Aakash Kumar, and Deepali Tiwari—whose enthusiasm and commitment were invaluable throughout the event. Festival documentation was undertaken by Adheep Das and Arijit Das, whose work ensures that the spirit and experiences of PuppetOscope 2025 continue to be shared and remembered. The organisers also expressed their deepest gratitude to all individual and anonymous donors whose generous support played a crucial role in making the festival possible.

(A report by Maneesh Pachiaru)



[YouTube](#) [CLICK HERE TO WATCH TRAILER](#)



[FOR MORE INFO CLICK TO FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM: @katkathapuppetry](#)

THE KATKATHA PUPPET FRINGE FESTIVAL 2.0

The Katkatha Puppet Fringe (A Festival of New Experiments) **10th-12th April 2026 held at Goethe Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan New Delhi**. The Katkatha Puppet Fringe Festival grew out of the Puppet Incubation Lab, launched in 2023 to mark 25 years of Katkatha's work in bringing puppetry to the forefront in India. Conceived as a space for experimentation and collaboration, the Lab brought together emerging puppeteers and artists from across the country to create new work. Through an open call and interview process, 12 participants were selected for an intensive two-week programme in January 2026. The Lab combined improvisation, masterclasses in dramaturgy, writing, puppet-making, and performance, along with mentorship from experienced practitioners. From this process, **four original puppet performances have emerged, supported with seed grants towards full productions**. The Foundation Project is implemented by India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) under the Arts Practice programme.

OBITUARY

UNIMA PUPPETEERS TRUST - INDIA

REPORT BY PADMINI RANGARAJAN

FAREWELL TO PADMA SHRI MAHIPAT KAVI: GUARDIAN OF PUPPETRY ARTS



The puppetry fraternity bids a heartfelt farewell to **Padma Shri Mahipat Kavi (1931-2026)**, a visionary who transformed *puppetry arts* into a medium of education, social awareness, and cultural dialogue. Born in Jinej, Gujarat, Mahipat ji devoted nearly a century to puppetry, elevating it from folk tradition to a global stage.

Together with his wife, **Leela Kavi**, he founded the *Puppet Natak Sanstha* in Ahmedabad. For over five decades, their home became a sanctuary for artists—renowned and unsung—who found in Mahipat ji not only a teacher but a mentor who believed in the power of puppets to speak truth.

Guided by Gandhian ideals, he chose simplicity over commerce, khadi over luxury, and art over business. His turning point came

at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, where under the mentorship of Meher Rustom Contractor (Mehrbehn), he mastered glove, rod, shadow, and string puppetry, blending Indian traditions with international techniques.



Across his lifetime, Mahipat ji and Leela ji created more than **150 puppet plays**, weaving together epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* with contemporary themes such as family planning, health awareness, and environmental conservation. His work with **ISRO's SITE project** brought puppetry to television audiences, with series like *Hu Ane Mari Bhuri* and *Gamdu Jage Che*, which gave villagers a voice through art.

A true polymath, Mahipat ji was a puppeteer, musician, writer, researcher, and educator. He authored over a hundred plays, curated exhibitions, produced films and serials, and established the **Puppet Academy in 1987**, ensuring that children, teachers, and students could learn the craft. His lifelong devotion was recognised with the **Padma Shri Award in 2023**.

Despite hardships, he never abandoned puppetry. He believed puppets carried human values, capable of expanding awareness and preserving culture. His legacy lives on in the countless artists he trained, the audiences he touched, and the values he upheld.

Mahipat Kavi's voice will continue to resonate through the puppets he animated. His art was more than performance—it was a language of education, culture, and humanity.

REPORT BY PADMINI RANGARAJAN

UNIMA HERITAGE AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



In May 2025 six Indian puppeteers—Bhaskar Kogga Kamath Yakshagana Puppetry (Karnataka), Gunduraju Togalu Gombeyatta (Karnataka), Lakshman Pulavar-Tholpavakoothu (Kerala), Puran Bhatt-Kathputli (Rajasthan), Sinda Chithambara Rao-Tholubommatala (Andhra Pradesh), and Sadanand Pulavar-Tholpavakoothu (Kerala) have been honoured with the prestigious UNIMA International Heritage Awards, recognising their lifelong contributions to preserving India’s puppetry traditions. Purpose: To honour individuals who have dedicated their lives to conserving, documenting, and transmitting puppetry traditions worldwide. Cultural recognition—Highlights India’s diverse puppetry traditions—string, shadow, and ritual forms.

- **Global visibility:** Places Indian puppetry alongside world heritage practices, strengthening advocacy for preservation.
- **Educational impact:** Encourages younger puppeteers and institutions to continue these traditions.
- **Community pride:** Validates the work of families and communities who have safeguarded puppetry for centuries.

Honours from India

Awarded to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to puppetry and UNIMA’s mission globally. Karen Smith: Member of Honour 2021, Dadi D Pudumjee: President of Honour 2021, Ranjana Pandey: Member of Honour 2025. Significance for India. These recognitions highlight India’s strong presence in global puppetry leadership. Dadi D. Pudumjee’s presidency and subsequent honour position underscore his role in expanding UNIMA’s reach and inclusivity. Karen Smith and Ranjana Pandey’s honours reflect India’s contributions in both practice and scholarship, strengthening the country’s voice in international puppetry discourse.

UNIMA HERITAGE AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



BHASKAR KOGGA KAMATH - KARNATAKA - STRING PUPPETS

He has started a small museum on the premises of his traditional Yakshagana Gombeyatta string puppets and a small theatre where he not only introduces his style and technique, but also attracts other young youth, dancers and musicians to perform. His tradition is acclaimed in his state and beyond, his style and tradition is rare as of now we only know of 2 families of his tradition and this is the older lineage.

UNIMA HERITAGE AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



CHITHAMBARA RAO - THOLUBOMMALATA - SHADOW PUPPETS

He has been working on the preservation and dissemination of the unique Tholubommalata traditional Leather Puppetry art through his shows and workshops to spread the leather puppetry art in and out of the country.

UNIMA HERITAGE AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



GUNDURAJU - KARNATAKA - SHADOW PUPPETS

He is a traditional leather shadow puppeteer from Karnataka is a master orator and storyteller. He is a repository of non mainstream versions of the epics and stories that have no written source but are carried only in the oral or performed form. He has also trained many non traditional puppeteers through various workshops including UNIMA India's masterclasses, thereby passing on the stories and the performing form, leather making techniques and paint making techniques to also those who are not within his community.

UNIMA HERITAGE AWARDEE

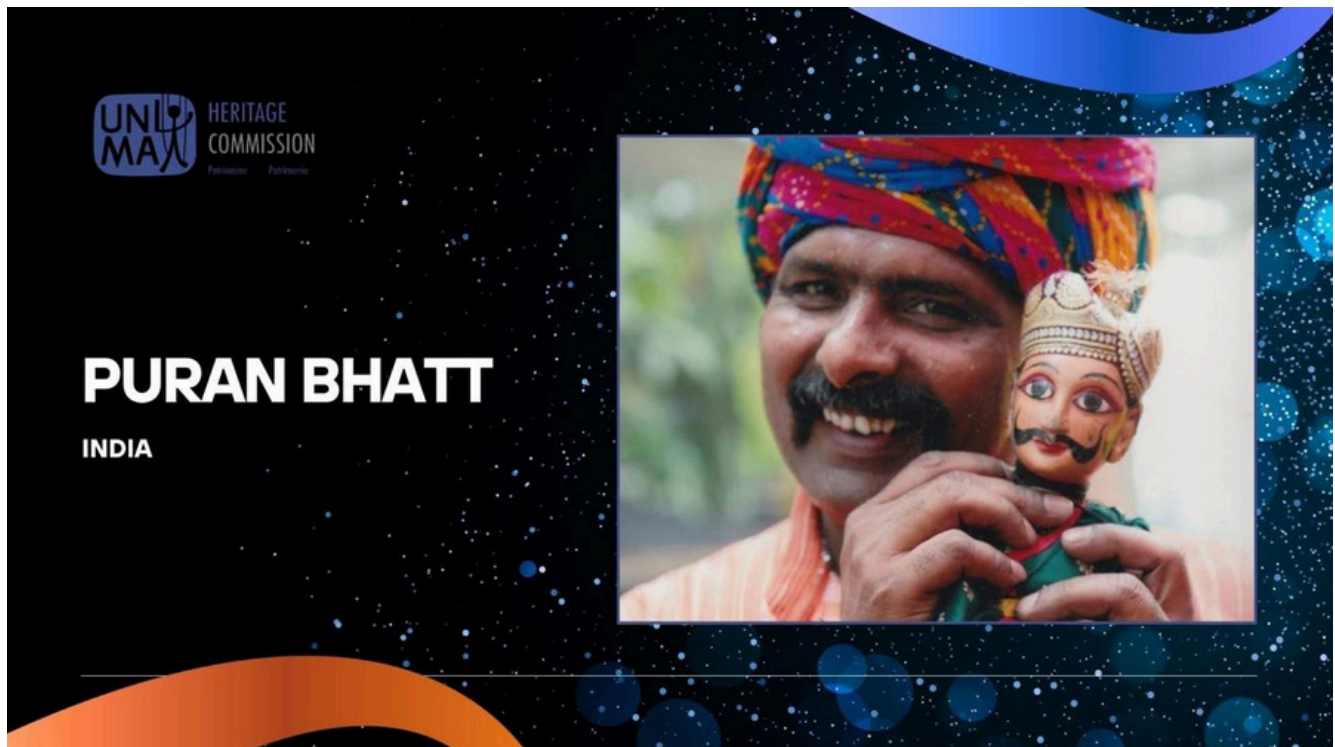
UNIMA INTERNATIONAL

**LAKSHMANA PULAVAR M - THOLPAVAKOOTHU - SHADOW PUPPETS**

He is a Puppet making, manipulating, puppets, performing, teaching, puppetry, research in new puppets. He belongs to the traditional Tholpavakoothu (Shadow puppetry) family with a rich historical background in a remote village koonathara Kerala State he had studied Tholpavakoothu by his great guru and father from the age of six. Lakshmana Pulavar, is a performer of puppets and is passing on his form to his sons and nephews. He is a regular performer at the temple festival held from February to May in Kerala.

UNIMA HERITAGE AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



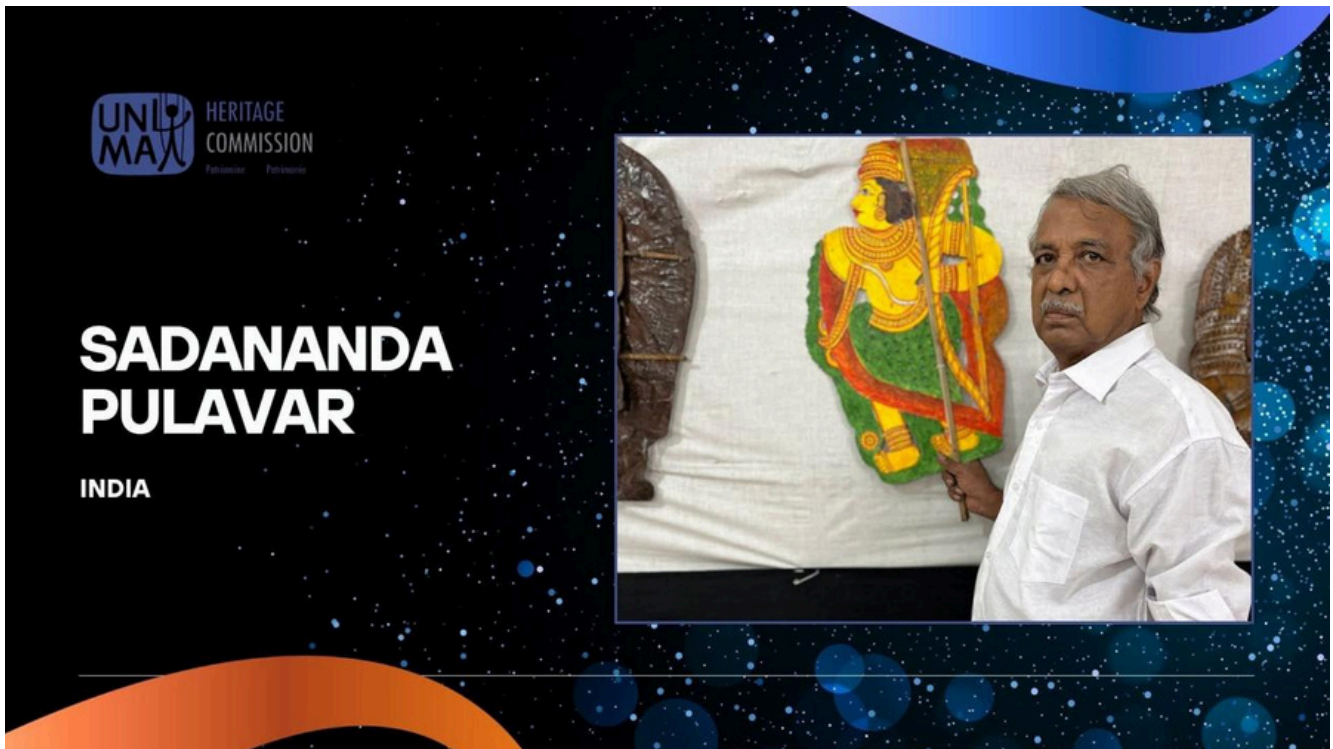
PURAN BHATT - KATHPUTLI - STRING PUPPETS

Amongst many of the Kathputli tradition of Rajasthan, he stands out in his very high quality of his puppets, manipulation techniques and production values, as is normal his whole family sons and daughters are also involved in their tradition, besides this Puran holds workshops and training programs of his tradition and innovations in taking it forward to a larger audience, with youth, children as also foreign participants.

His work is acclaimed in India and abroad, his linear family tree goes back many generations, he has taken his tradition to new heights and amongst many stands out with his thought on his tradition, is both traditional and bridge creations in modern techniques.

UNIMA HERITAGE AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



SADANANDA PULAVAR - THOLPAVAKOOTHU - SHADOW PUPPETS

He hails from a family with expertise in traditional shadow puppetry art form for over six generations back. He has in his possession valuable manuscripts along with the puppets of the art obtained ancestrally. The manuscripts are old which were composed around two centuries ago. The manuscripts of Kamba Ramayana written in Tamil language are the basics of shadow puppetry art. As a part of the revival of Leather Puppetry Art, he is presently making new leather puppets and composing scripts that enable future generations to learn and understand much about 'Shadow Puppetry Art'. He is recovering old manuscripts that are in palm leaves, publishing them, enabling the next generation to easily access and perform the text.

UNIMA HONORARY AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



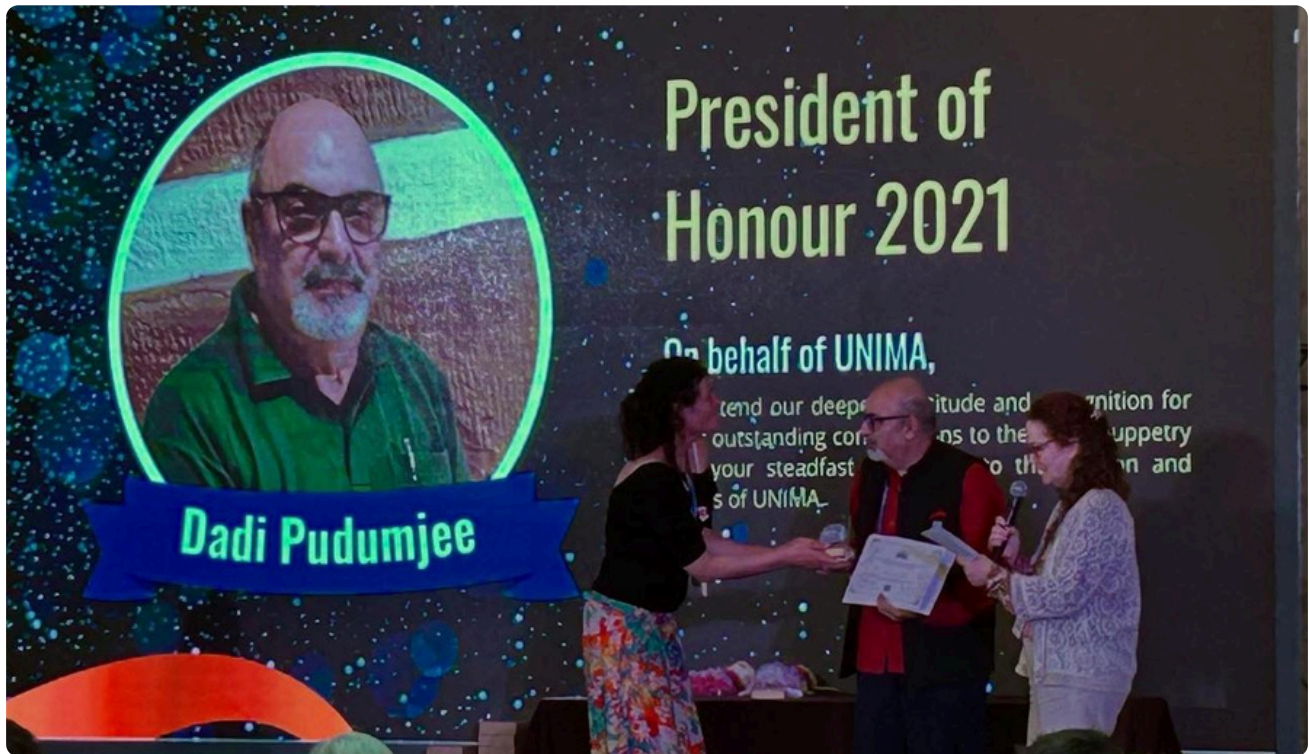
KAREN SMITH

Karen Smith served on UNIMA International's Executive Committee (2012-2025), as Vice President and President. She was president of UNIMA's Publication Communication and a member of the North America Commission and Research Commission. Currently, she is a member of UNIMA's Asia-Pacific Commission and Heritage Commission. As co-president of the Publication Commission, she is back overseeing the second update of the trilingual online World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts (wepa.unima.org), to be ready for UNIMA's centenary in 2029.



UNIMA HONORARY AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



DADI D PUDUMJEE

Dadi Pudumjee is a leading puppeteer in India and the founder of The Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust. He has studied puppetry under Meher R. Contractor at Darpana academy of performing arts Ahmedabad ,and Michael Meschke from the Marionette Theatre Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. Alumni of NID national Institute of Design Ahmedabad. In 1979, he was a drama and puppetry pedagogue at Vår Theatre, Medborgarhuset, Stockholm, Sweden and later a guest director at the Puppentheatre, Berlin GDR. In 1980, he founded the Sutradhar Puppet Theatre at the Sri Ram Centre for Performing Arts Delhi and was its Artistic Director until 1986. He was UNIMA Internationale's first Asian President. Previously President UNIMA India and President UNIMA Asia Pacific Commission Dadi has won various awards including Sangeet Natak Akademi Award 1992 and the Padmashree award in 2011 Today he is Honorary President UNIMA international

UNIMA HONORARY AWARDEE

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



RANJANA PANDEY

Ranjana Pandey is a puppeteer and a writer-director. She trained in Europe with several Puppet Theatres. She has written, designed and directed several Puppet performances and a T.V. serial for children: *Khullam Khulla*. She is also a co – founder of Jan Madhyam, a CSO working for the Inclusion of challenged and economically disadvantaged children. Ranjana has taken training in Puppet Therapy and practices regularly in Jan Madhyam. She introduced and taught Puppetry in many Masters programs in Mass Communication and Development Communication at universities, including MCRC, Jamia Milia, Delhi. Ranjana is on the faculty of many Teacher Training Institutes. She is the founding Trustee of Puppeteers Trust India. She curates and organises professional training programs for Puppeteers. She is the Founder Editor of “*Sutradhar*”, the only magazine on Puppetry in India. For the last decade, Ranjana has been exploring intimate storytelling with puppets on video.

UNIMA CONGRESS 2025

REPORT BY PADMINI RANGARAJAN

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



[Source: UNIMA Internationale](#)

NEW EC PANEL OF UNIMA INTERNATIONAL

Louise LAPOINTE - President (Canada), **Fabrizio MONTECCHI** - Gen. Secretary / Europe Commission (Italy), **Annette DABS-BAUCKS** - Vice President / Constitution & Strategy Commission / Happiness Commission (Germany), **Anurupa ROY** - Vice President / Asia-Pacific Commission (India), **Clément PERETJAKO** - Treasurer / Constitution & Strategy Commission (France),

See above the image of 18 members panel

AGUILAR, Kembly / Communications Commission (Costa Rica), **ALVAREZ, Omar** / Latin America Commission / International Festivals Commission (Argentina), **ASTLES, Cariad** / Professional Training & Research Commission (UK), **BADRISSA, Soro** / Africa Commission (Ivory Coast), **CSATÓ, Kata** / Humanitas and Cooperation Commission (Hungary), **HORA, Jakub** / International Festivals Commission (Czech Republic), **KYALO, Fedelis** / Africa Commission (Kenya), **MAZA MORGADO, Erduyn** / Latin America Commission / Professional Training & Research Commission (Cuba), **MOHSENI ARDEHALI, Salma** / Humanitas and Cooperation Commission (Iran), **SI PENG TAN, Terence** / Applied Puppetry Commission (Singapore), **GUOLIANG, Tang** / Asia-Pacific Commission (China), **MIRAÇ ÜMİT, Nazli** / Heritage Commission (Türkiye), **YOUNGE, Janni** / Professional Training & Research Commission (South Africa)

UNIMA CONGRESS

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



THE 24TH UNIMA CONGRESS AT CHUNCHEON SOUTH KOREA

Asia Pacific Commission

- Anurupa Roy is the president of the Asia-Pacific Commission,
- Maneesh Pachiaru is the representative from UNIMA India National Centre in the Asia-Pacific Commission.
- Padmini Rangarajan, along with Maneesh Pachiaru, as the councillors attended the UNIMA Congress online in May 2025, representing UNIMA Puppeteers Trust - INDIA

Next Congress and 100 years of UNIMA

The next UNIMA Congress will be held in 2029 in Prague, Czech Republic, marking the 100th anniversary of UNIMA's founding in the same city in 1929. This 25th Congress will be both a centennial celebration and a global gathering of puppeteers, scholars, and educators.

Why This Matters for India

- ☑ Visibility for Indian puppetry: With six Indian masters recently honoured with UNIMA Heritage Awards, the centennial Congress offers a platform to showcase India's diverse traditions.
- ☑ Youth empowerment: International workshops and exchanges during the Congress can strengthen your goal of involving young puppeteers in global learning.
- ☑ Advocacy: Participation can amplify your sustainability and heritage education mission, linking puppetry to contemporary issues like waste management and inclusion. The UNIMA 2029 Congress in Prague is not just a centennial celebration—it's a historic convergence of heritage and innovation in puppetry. For Indian puppetry advocates like you, it's a chance to connect tradition with modern educational and sustainability goals, ensuring that puppetry remains a living, evolving art form.

Passport Programme UNIMA International

The PASSPORT program aims to help young puppeteers or puppetry students, who are UNIMA members, to attend puppet festivals and increase their knowledge of the organisation and programming of an international event. Each participating festival in the PASSPORT program offers free accommodation and tickets for shows on the program. Each recipient of a PASSPORT is responsible for the travel costs to the selected festival, for providing for their own food, and visa fees (if applicable). For more details

CLICK HERE. <https://www.unima.org/en/useful-information/unima-grants/passport-program/>

WPD 2026 / MESSENGER - ARTIST BIO

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



Yaya Coulibaly is a Malian puppeteer, storyteller, magician and musician, born on 26 April 1959 in Koula, in the Koulikoro district. His birth was a special day, marking the Jo ceremony. The power of the ancestors was thus passed down to him, even though he was not the eldest to deserve it, as tradition dictates. A direct descendant of Biton Coulibaly, King of Ségou, he was initiated into mystical knowledge at a very young age and inherited from his father a vast knowledge of puppetry, which plays a central role in the initiation rites of secret societies.

Later, Yaya Coulibaly enrolled at the Institut National des Arts (INA) in Bamako for a basic classical training. After this initial period, he studied in France, notably at the Institut International de la Marionnette (IIM) followed by further training at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts et de la Marionnette (ESNAM) in Charleville-Mézières.

During his studies in Europe, he interacted with ethnologists and actively contributed to the development of Western knowledge about traditional West African societies. He also participated in scientific research related to these societies.

For several decades, Yaya Coulibaly, heir to a very old puppet collection, has been a fervent guardian of the Bamanan tradition, one of the oldest and richest in Africa. His collection, which currently numbers nearly 25,000 puppets, is constantly growing with new creations of various kinds. Thanks to his extensive traditional training, Yaya Coulibaly has created a dynamic and contemporary new puppet theatre, with which he now tours the world. Indeed, in 1980, he founded the Sogolon troupe, named after the mother of Emperor Sundiata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire. The first of its kind in Mali, the company has, since its inception, worked to promote theatrical creation influenced by the Bamanan, Somono and Bozo cultures, through the art of puppetry in Mali, Africa and beyond. It creates shows, tours them internationally, participates in major festivals, and trains Malian, African, European, American and Asian professionals, including artists and academics.

In 2006, his collection was exhibited at the Gold of Africa Museum in Cape Town, South Africa. This exhibition included a collection of antique and contemporary puppets of various types (glove puppets, string puppets, shadow puppets, as well as masks and statues). That same year, he participated with the Handspring Puppet Company in the exhibition "At Arm's Length: The Art of African Puppetry" at The Africa Centre in New York. He has also been featured in numerous other prestigious events and venues around the world, including the Galerie Echomusée in Paris's 18th arrondissement, Les Halles de Schaerbeek in Brussels, Documenta in Germany, Galerie Le Manège in Dakar, La Rotonde des Arts and MASA in Abidjan, MAPAS in Spain, and the Journées Théâtrales de Carthage (JTC, Carthage Theatre Days) in Tunis. Drawing inspiration from tales and moral lessons from African oral tradition, Yaya Coulibaly highlights the values he holds dear: courage, love and prosperity. A man of conviction and a staunch defender of individual and collective freedom, he tirelessly condemns war and the extremism he calls the scourge of our time. Eternal child and tireless traveller, he bestows a thousand and one hats upon puppeteers: scientists, historians, therapists, geomancers, sorcerers, healers, trainers, teachers of life in the service of life. A family man, this puppet magician has also made time to pass on his knowledge to his children, ensuring the future of the art: "I consider puppets to be valuable objects that must be passed on to younger generations," he confided. After several decades dedicated to the art of puppetry, Yaya Coulibaly felt it was necessary to establish a festival that would serve as an annual celebration of puppetry: the Sogobô International Festival of Bamako, whose first edition will take place in May 2024, and of which he is the honorary president of the steering committee.

Download the poster from the link below:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/12bV9ss8cc83UwtQaieZVt6TtOpGZoKxE>

WORLD PUPPETRY DAY MESSAGE/POSTER 2026

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL

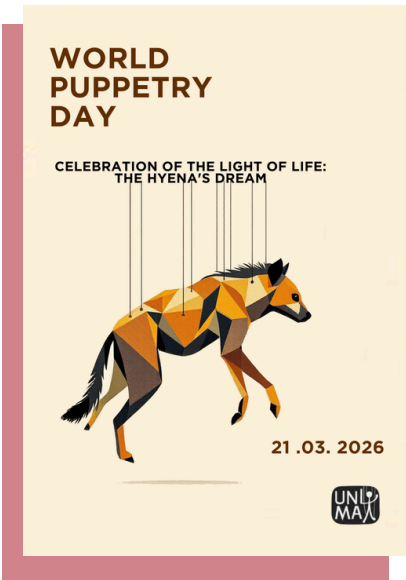


CELEBRATING THE LIGHT OF LIFE / THE HYENA'S DREAM

My Dear Compatriots,

UNIMA Puppeteers, Inhabitants of the Earth:

The Bamanan people of Mali, like other peoples of the world, have a concept of continuous creation, where things emerge successively from the voice of the Creator God, in swirling, spiralling words. The spirit of the first volcano dropped to earth "Meren", the first (Deity), a puppet to govern this still chaotic world. This first puppet, in the image of a woman, gave birth to plants, animals, and humans (Jiriw, Sogow ani maaniw). Reviving our past, showcasing puppetry, an important element of the world's cultural heritage, is not only a scientific endeavour, but also a testament to intelligence and self-love. The subject is not new, but it remains a powerful one. In this kind of theatre, where everyone plays a double game, even a man from an excellent social background cannot escape the moral consequences of the puppet's actions. The play of the puppets offers a fascinating glimpse into the spirit of the times: the people are the true heroes of this theatre, embodying the joy of living and simple pleasures.



The unique beauty of the puppet, its rich and varied theatre and music, its songs and dances—reflecting an authentic civilization and ancestral beliefs—constitute an enormous source of inspiration for theatre professionals, and especially for young people engaged in the process of developing a universal culture.

The education of youth is a constant concern for the people of Mandé and the rest of the world. Therefore, the council of elders strives to provide young people with the most favourable conditions for their full physical, intellectual, and moral development through the practice of puppetry in its diverse forms of expression.

Never in our past has adult and elderly society allowed youth to act as it pleases, without guidance. Adults must not abandon young people to their own devices. The wise person must also be a perfect example in the eyes of the young. To make people laugh while correcting morals. The puppet that moves by moonlight, in the puppet theatre or not, like a caravan, is a village.

This is my village; this is where I live. "When the vulture goes to the horse fair, it is to prepare for its future", for it is going to face hunger. This enigmatic language of the Bamanan puppet from Mali teaches young people to cherish the development of new fields each year and the preservation of tradition.

World Puppetry Day is a celebration of the light of life.

Thus, within the most significant institutions of world culture, we find puppets—we find UNIMA. Primarily religious in nature, puppets, they are at the heart of life, in terms of artistic, political and social relationships. We obey the spirits of the puppets when they speak to us. The puppet is like the sun; this sun must warm us with the heat of love and understanding. This is UNIMA, like the Love of an eternal sun. UNIMA is a lifelong commitment. UNIMA is a high-level political and cultural institution that the people of the world must no longer do without. An instrument of awareness, an expression of solidarity and communication, puppets, in their current evolution, deserve special attention in their conception, their creation and their popularization throughout the world. The puppet is a mirror of our cultural identity, a springboard for the blossoming of our art and culture, an irreplaceable framework for the affirmation of our creative genius. This is why the Art of puppetry must be shared. The legendary beauty of the puppet commands everyone's admiration. Puppetry has been, and will remain, a practice of the peoples of the world since the dawn of time. To define, in effect, is to draw boundaries, limits. The puppet is the rejection of boundaries, it refuses limits. The puppet pervades everything, it extends to everything. It is the most sovereign expression of the soul of people. In the past, people were educated through stories, entertained with representations of small humans or animals wandering about, suspended from strings, or not, and manipulated by humans.

WORLD PUPPETRY DAY MESSAGE/POSTER 2026

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL

When does the history of puppetry in Mali begin? It's difficult to answer this question. For many historians, the story begins in the 9th and 12th centuries... (to be continued...).

The puppet theatre of Mali occupies an exceptional place in the history of African puppetry. "Discovered" in 1878 by Paul Soleillet, it was the first among African puppet theatres to become known outside of Africa. (Soleillet, P, Les voyages et découvertes dans le Sahara et dans le Soudan, Paris, M. Dreyfous, 1881, cited by Olenka Darkowska-Nidzgorski, Théâtre populaire de marionnettes en Afrique Sud-saharienne, 1980.)

At the crossroads of African arts, the puppet in Mali is a great canoe, with or without a sail, needing only the sway of the waves to set sail. The rivalry between communities is resolved through alliances via the art of puppetry. Puppetry has been able to consolidate and transform conflicts into alliances. UNIMA, or the puppet and art form, is undoubtedly the dream of the hyena (a totemic animal).

The story of the hyena, representing strength and impetuosity, carries us away into its dream, a dream of the future, a dream where humankind is wise and in perpetual harmony with its body and mind. A dream of communion, a dream of sharing, a dream where the hyena confronts different situations to create a tomorrow, and, hopefully, a better tomorrow. I have no trouble establishing contact with the Bamanan farmers of Mali; because when you don't know where you come from, you don't know where you're going. And in Bamanan country, if you don't know where you come from, all the spirits come one by one to spit the kola nuts they were chewing in your face.

I inherited my genius from my father, who in turn inherited it from his own father. My father wanted me to embody the image of the Bamanan world house and its traditions.

What's happening to me is fabulous. I'm giving my father new ideas.

Dear fellow puppeteers around the world: the puppet is the instrument that transmits the voice of the ancestors. Its power makes it the quintessential instrument of command and the authority of chiefs. But everything depends, of course, on the region you are in. Traditional within modernity. My principal objective is to promote traditional puppetry and ancestral practices—from sculpture to manipulation techniques—throughout the world. And then also to learn about traditional African and world theatre, the unique style of mask and puppet performance, which is based on music, dance and song.

For the children of Mali, the children of Africa, and for children everywhere in the world, I hope you will all develop a taste for this vast social memory that constitutes our universal cultural heritage.

I strive tirelessly for the Art of Traditional Puppetry to be fully recognized for its originality, its traditions and its richness.

Finally, I must express my profound gratitude to the members of UNIMA and to all those who believe in the Art of Puppetry and puppeteers worldwide. I would also like to thank the UNIMA 2025 World Congress for services rendered that cannot be quantified. Thank you for the wonderful collaborations and expertise that have been so beneficial to all.

May BA FARO (Goddess of Water) be my country, until my country can be truly mine.

A Good and Happy New Year 2026!

Ten kola nuts for you! - Dix noix de kola pour toi !

Long live UNIMA! Long live World Puppetry Day 2026!

Long live Charleville-Mézières!

Bamako, 10 December 2025

Yaya COULIBALY

President, Compagnie Sogolon

Knight of the National Order of Mali

UPCOMINGS...!

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



**OPEN CALL FOR THE
LIVING PUPPETRY
HERITAGE QUESTIONNAIRE**

PHOTO: Nilufer Göl

Living Puppetry Heritage Questionnaire by UNIMA International Heritage Commission aims to collect information on living puppetry heritage worldwide, with a particular focus on puppet forms that are little known and/or underrepresented in academic research and documentation.



<https://www.unima.org/en/open-call-for-the-living-puppetry-heritage-questionnaire/>

UPCOMINGS...!

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



**CALL
A SONG
FOR UNIMA!**

Deadline: March 21, 2027
Winner announced: November 2027

UNIMA invites composers worldwide to create a song for its 100th Anniversary (2029). The song will be performed in Prague by the UNIMA Choir and the winner will be invited to the UNIMA centenary in Prague in June 2029



Apply now: <https://www.unima.org/en/happiness-commission/>

<https://www.unima.org/en/open-call-a-song-for-unima-2/>

UPCOMINGS...!

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL

UNIMA PROFESSIONAL TRAINING & RESEARCH
COMMISSION
Formation professionnelle et recherche - Formation professionnelle et recherche

CALL FOR PAPERS

UNRULY OBJECTS: PUPPETS, OBJECTS, MATERIAL AND TIME

A special issue of Critical Stages in collaboration
with the UNIMA Commission for Training and Research

Deadline: 30 September 2026

Submissions should align with the academic and critical scope of Critical Stages and reflect the international and interdisciplinary nature of the journal. Contributions that combine theoretical reflection with artistic practice are especially encouraged.

MORE INFO AT : www.unima.org

PHOTO: Théâtre Sans Toit

<https://www.unima.org/en/call-for-papers-unruly-objects-puppets-objects-material-and-time/>

UPCOMINGS...!

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



Open Call: Puppetry and Multimedia 2

 October 13-15, 2026 |  Bratislava, Slovakia |  Deadline for abstract submission: May 15, 2026

The Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava – Theatre Academy, Department of Puppetry, in collaboration with the KEGA – Cultural and Educational Agency of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, and the Commission for Professional Training and Research of UNIMA International, cordially invites you to participate in the international conference Puppetry and Multimedia 2.

<https://www.unima.org/en/open-call-puppetry-and-multimedia-2/>

UPCOMINGS...!

UNIMA INTERNATIONAL



UNIMA COUNCIL 2027, MONTRÉAL

2-6 March 2027 | Montréal, Canada

Official Announcement - UNIMA Council 2027 & Extraordinary Congress

Dear friends,

In these challenging times, marked by repeated tragedies, it is not easy to be a bearer of hope and, consequently, of good news. Nevertheless, we remain on course, convinced that keeping a democratic and inclusive association like ours active and functional is a way of resisting the uncertainties of our time.

It is in this spirit that we proudly announce that the **UNIMA Council 2027**, and therefore the **Extraordinary Congress**, will take place in **Montréal, Canada**, from **2 to 6 March 2027**.

The difficult international context has unfortunately delayed the decision of the Executive Committee, and we are aware that only eleven months remain before this important event. We therefore rely on your full cooperation to ensure the highest possible level of participation.

This event holds **historic significance** for our association, as new Statutes and new Rules of Procedure will be submitted for approval.

From today until the Montréal Council/Congress 2027, we will direct our efforts toward building, structuring, and strengthening our association for the years to come, in service of the art of puppetry and those dedicated to it.

<https://www.unima.org/en/council-2027/>

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For previous newsletters: <https://www.unimapuppeteertrust.in/newletter>

Ms. Ranjana Pandey (Managing Trustee), Mr. Dadi Pudumjee & Ms. Anurupa Roy (Trustees)

Executive Committee: Sri Gunduraju (President), Mr Subhasis G Neogi (Secretary) & Maneesh Pachiaru (Treasurer)

Councillors: Ms. Padmini Rangarajan, Mr. Maneesh Pachiaru

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