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Abstract

Title:

Lightning Talk - Crazed Puppets: New materials in Taiwanese puppetry

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Abstract:

Golden Ray puppet theatre (金光布袋戲) evolved from the reinvention of China's 2000-year-old puppet theatre traditions in 1950s Taiwan. Blockades with Mainland China cut off puppeteers off from the long-established exchanges of expertise and refinement of traditional fabrication skills, materials, techniques and puppets, forcing autonomy and innovation. Imaginative and dynamic Taiwanese dramas incorporated novel characters and special effects, which were to later characterize the Golden Ray style, as puppeteers experimented with new puppet designs and materials. Gaudy, elaborate and sometimes shocking puppets competed with pop culture to keep audiences engaged – and succeeded, with over 200 contemporary theatre companies still performing in Taiwan today, surviving past government censorship and bans on puppetry.

Newly available commercial paints, polyesters and resins, artificial textiles, and bright pigments expanded the puppeteer's toolkit beyond traditional materials such as wood, silk or cotton. The use of glitter polymers and fluorescent pigments may be unique to Taiwanese puppets, but also comes with a new range of conservation challenges for the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum, whose collection of Golden Ray puppets is starting to show signs of deterioration. Crazing, cracking, discolouration, and other alarming symptoms threaten the collection in unprecedented ways. This lightning talk introduces how the TAPTMs conservation department is equipping itself with the knowledge to survey, treat and protect these unapologetically flamboyant treasures of modern Taiwanese identity.

Brief Biography of the Author(s):

Melbourne-based conservator Rosie Cook's long-term commitment to Asian culture and heritage began 15 years ago with a degree in Asian Art & Archaeology and Mandarin studies. She recently completed fieldwork in Java, Indonesia for her Master's thesis on the role of community collaboration in conserving a rare traditional musical instrument.

Kim Siebert's circuitous career since 1985 embraces curation at the South African National Gallery, conservation practice for Sub-Saharan museums launched by ICCROM PREMA 95 (PREvention in Museums in Africa) training, working with national collections including the UNESCO Heritage Site of Robbin Island, and independent museums in USA and now Taiwan.