THE MAGICAL WORLD OF PUPPETRY, IN PHOTOS

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The Connection between a puppeteer and a puppet runs deep, and the Berlin-based photographer Andrew Mayne-Gonzales has documented this connection in his new project Puppet Masters featuring students from the Academy of Creative Arts Ernst Busch, each accompanied by their own make-believe characters. Some might begin over a teaspoon of tea, while others have a single lonesome companion, but they all emerge from a background of pitch black.

For Gonzales, puppets are never simple inanimate objects. At their best, they become a physical manifestation of controlling unconscious, bringing the shadowy parts of ourselves into the light of day. In contrast, avant puppet and "dark" is the latter. Puppet. And like the dirty we keep in our closets, puppets are not always pretty. Some are ugly, some are scary, some are just, well, strong. Kids can be made to breathe, dark, pump, or kiss. Like mirror reflections, they reveal bits and pieces of our psyche, sometimes they are knocked on bedrooms, and sometimes they turn around.

Gonzales voices most topics, and she spent a great deal of time with her subjects. As a result, her photographs reveal a very vulnerability, and at times, the puppeteers seem to surrender themselves to their puppets. Yet, the puppets are not always what they appear to be, some strange and philosophic survivors, has its own kind of wind seen its master. Perhaps one of the most memorable moments from the project was when one of the female puppeteers told me how she felt her puppet was a part of her, and that she felt sad when she had to put away her puppet, a puppet she worked with closely in the past." Gonzales says. "I then understood the extent of the attachment or "bond" that is formed between the puppeteer and his/her puppet."

We asked her to tell us more about the series, and you can see more images on her website.

What are some of your earliest or most pleasant memories of puppets?
"I was born in the former Soviet Union and the first puppets I learned of were created by Sergei Obraztsov, a famous puppeteer who founded the State Academic Central Puppet Theatre in 1931 (only child, I had a lot of personal space for creativity and experimentation, I worked a lot with my hands, my voice, and my imagination.

I was always felt very attracted to theater and costumes, to notions of personal identity, to drama and to another, and already as a child I used to create and stage performances. I selected the puppets, I made the costumes and decorations, to the content, my first board made puppets were born, into integrated them into our shows."

How did you choose the puppeteers included in the series?
"The selection process consisted of three parts. First I selected the puppeteers based on the brief and when 'neoplasm' that were on file for each student at the academy. As a people and portrait photographer, I have a lot of experience at meeting faces and can often get a good sense of a person just by looking at a snapshot.

I asked looking for 'beauty' not in the popular sense of the word. It was as much about the details of the face as it was about the story it tells in could philosophy. With some faces, you can tell many stories, and with others you can't, but sometimes one story can be more than enough. I select my subjects based on photographic very intuitively. For this project I was mainly looking for certain expressivity not also vanity.

"In the second part of the selection process, I conducted individual interviews with the selected puppeteers. The interviews consisted of about 50 questions related to their personal and to their studies. I wanted to get to know them. Yes, to get an idea of little they know, how they speak, and how they think. I wanted to know what they like and what they hate, what they think about, what most common or profitable profession one can search in this day and age, and most important for me to understand their motivations. We engage to which they feel they model to the type of work, their favorite tales, poetry, stories, their emotional levels of expressions or in depth and off."

How long did each shoot last, and what was the atmosphere like on set?
"Each shoot was different, depending on the mood of the puppeteer and the puppet, and slipped in and out of different roles. I also juggled a lot that, acting as the photographer, stylist, make-up artist and set designer, so it wasn't always easy to keep things from getting a little hectic.

"There were lots of costumes to try on for look and size, puppets and that's why to select Ever (although most were already pre-selected by me). We were also using very heavy fiberoe-like cloth and it was difficult to find the right balance between the cloth and the puppeteer's face, and I didn't make things easier when the flash went off. At the end, the models looked a lot like a war zone."

Did you select the puppets and props, or did the puppet masters?
"With the exception of a couple of puppets that were beneficially for the students or otherwise had a particular meaning for them, I selected the puppets. Regarding the costumes, I selected and I selected by me. I scouted through the contents of three storage rooms (for costumes, puppets and props) located in two separate theater complexes in different parts of the city. I wanted to photograph each model in various roles, alternating costumes and props.

"I'd never forget the preparation, which was quite a rehearsal for the 'grand show.' Setting aside the time and space for the photographs was difficult, and I had to make sure that everyone was cautious with a portions of them, some as light as a feather boys and others as heavy as a metal barrel (large enough to fit a man inside). Were loading them all into my car and transporting them to the location, and then back to the theater was a nightmare."

"In the puppetry department of the historic theater building, I'd prepare little another storage room and hand-pick anything Ever gas masks to Beethoven's stone bust to dozens of marionettes, and I'd carry them up the stairs and into the photo studio. Sometimes I'd have to carry them on a rented van up the swimming conditions, and was loading to the 700 square foot space that was packed with everything, including my studio equipment.

"I remember the team members of the puppetry department looking at me as bafflement, as I passed them in the halls with my puppet 'entourage' in tow. 'Why do you need so many?' But when they saw the photographs, all questions were answered."

What makes puppetry timeless, in your view?
"Where do actor cross his or her roots out as the main 'work instrument' but uses this body to work through the body of a puppet, to project his or her physical and emotional energy into this external lifeless 'other,' he/she is not concerned with place and time.

"I could elaborate on love life and death, among other things, are embodiedin the Puppet and its master, and I could write a book on the subject, but I'm not a philosopher, I'm a photographer, I want to but a puppet on a string. But then we would enter a long philosophical discussion.

"The art of Puppetry is so abstract as it is concrete, as mysterious as it is apparent; it invites contemplation, loops the viewer transcend his own 'earthly' gravione and temporarily rest another step 'out' and more meditative state. The cast by this unique place is paired with 'real' reality, with the 'real' world, and the combination of the two creates a magical, or a supernatural mood. It stimulates the imagination, challenges reality and almost always surprises.

"It captivates with its archaic simplicity and innocence. Things that we are far removed from today. Perhaps this is why the art puppetry is better understood by children whose minds are not yet saturated by the chains of 'sense' and 'reality.'"

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