

Wayang revolusi: exhibition

Art in the service of freedom

- Initial idea: Bronbeek Museum (Arnhem, The Netherlands, 2009).
- Texts in the publication Wayang Revolusi. Kunst in dienst van de vrijheid 1948-1949: Hans van den Akker © and Marthe Gaspar-Raven © (Arnhem, 2009).
- Graphic design of the Dutch brochure/PDF file: O.K. PARKING © (Arnhem, 2009).

Acknowledgement

- Realisation of the Wayang Revolusi kulit figures/Puppetry Museum collection: Ki Ledjar Soebroto © – dalang and puppeteer (Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2011).
- Animation and video: ‘Wayang Revolusi – Agresi Militer Belanda 2’ + video ‘Wayang Revolusi’ and video ‘Wayang Willem van Oranje’ + ‘Wayang Animasi Willem van Oranje’. Animation film maker: Ananto Wicaksono © – dalang and graphic artist (Yogyakarta, 2008 and 2011). Performance: Ledjar Soebroto.
- Exhibition concept, documentation and texts: Otto van der Mieden © (Vorchten, 2013).
- Illustrations: Hetty Paërl © (Amsterdam) and Elsje Zwart © (Haarlem).
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- Additional documentation: postcards, placemats, Puppetry Museum Pamphlet No. 143e (Dutch/English), Doepak (educational Puppetry Museum newsletter and scribblings), and the Dutch ‘Wayang kulit. Javaans poppenspel voor massa en elite’ monograph. Author: Rien Baartmans (1937-1993), puppeteer and dalang from the Dutch city of Haarlem. Imprint: Oostelijk Kunstbedrijf (Vorchten, 1988). ISBN 90 71704 20 3.
- Under the motto Try it yourself? (DIY), museum visitors will be able to touch and handle several wayang figures.

Wayang revolusi

On 27 December 1949 Indonesia obtained sovereign power. The exhibition presents how the Indonesian nationalists used this traditional wayang art form as a means of propaganda in their fight against the Netherlands. In 1947, Wayang Revolusi originated as a special variant on wayang theatre. In an era that media such as radio and television were not very common, the popular wayang play was the ultimate means for addressing large groups with the message of the revolution. The spectators could easily identify with the recognisable, standard and less standard characters of noble heroes and their evil opponents. Wayang Revolusi’s main characters are politicians and servicemen of both parties that were engaged in combat with each other during the fight for independence. Well-known characters include Dutch generals Spoor and Van Mook, the Indonesian President Sukarno and Vice President Mohammed Hatta.

Dutch Jan Klaassen and Katrijn and the Javanese clown Semar

The exhibition is based on about twenty kulit characters from the Wayang Revolusi and Katrijn and Jan Klaassen (Punch and Judy in England) as wayang kulit puppets (shadow puppet theatre). Of course, the punakawan – comical characters from the wayang stories, such as Nala Gareng, Petruk and the wise fool and divine clown Semar – are also represented. All puppets and characters were specially made for the Puppetry Museum by dalang and puppet maker Ki Ledjar Soebroto. He gave Jan Klaassen, the main character from traditional Dutch puppet theatre, a typical Javanese-style moustache.

Wayang kulit: theatre form from Indonesia

Exhibition and film

By means of turning panels the kulit puppets on exhibition can be viewed both in real – in colour – and as shadows. In addition to the figures created by Ledjar, a work by visual artist Mella Jaarsma is exhibited, as well as various other kulit characters and forms of wayang theatre (golek, klitik, topeng) and their related artefacts (objects, attributes, photographs, prints, books, batiks, gamelan instruments, and paraphernalia from the museum collection). In addition, video recordings of wayang kulit performances can be seen. In a computer animation film produced by Ananto Wicaksono, wayang puppets can be seen fighting for independence. The film shows how Indonesian people nowadays look at the central figures of the historic events that led to their country’s sovereignty.

Rod puppet and shadow puppet theatre

Wayang kulit is a form of theatre from Indonesia and Malaysia for which colourful, jointed flat figures are used that are made from buffalo hide (kulit). They are painted on both sides and usually adorned with a delicate pattern of holes, through which the light can shine. The performance involves rod puppet and shadow puppet theatre simultaneously. Along its entire length, the puppet is clamped between a split rod, while another rod under the puppet serves as a handle. The puppet’s arms are jointed at its shoulders and elbows and two thin rods are attached to the hands to control the arm movement. The dalang (puppet player) moves the puppets against a tightly stretched, elongated play screen, which is usually white with a red rim. A burning lamp is mounted between the puppeteer and the screen. Along the bottom of the screen is a banana tree log, into which the puppets that are not in motion are stuck: the noble characters to the dalang’s right and the evil ones to his left. In contemporary forms of kulit play the ‘shadow screen’ serves as a background/backcloth.

Gamelan orkest

The gamelan orchestra is an indispensable musical component of wayang performances. The orchestra consists of gongs, xylophones, flutes and several stringed instruments. Vocal voices also play an important role. The sound of the gamelan can be heard far afield and everybody knows what this means: the dalang is about to start his performance. While the spectators flock towards the performance they are welcomed by the delicate garlands of sound produced by the xylophones: the gambang, the gender and the saron.

Lakons

The lakons (stories) presented by the dalang are partly spoken and partly sung. During dialogues, he will give each character its own voice. The stories performed are based on the Hindu epic stories Ramayana and Mahabharata that originate from India. The audience can be seated on either side of the screen. On the dalang’s side they will see the painted and gilded puppets, while their shadows can be seen on the other side. Colours do not or hardly shine through the screen. Performances usually commence shortly after sunset and end at sunrise. ‘Sampai jumpa lagi’ (goodbye). Applause!

Pictures: Logo Poppenspel(e)museum with Jan Klaassen and Semar; Sukarno (first president of the Republic of Indonesia) and General Spoor (commander of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army – KNIL). Realisation of the wayang kulit figures: Ledjar Soebroto; Two equal horizontal bars – red (top) and white: the flag of Indonesia.

Extra information: www.poppenspelmuseumbibliotheek.nl/pdf/Pamflet143e.pdf.



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