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# Putting on a show

## Collecting, exhibiting, and performing wayang at the Tropenmuseum from colonial times until the present

SADIAH BOONSTRA

### ABSTRACT

The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam has a rich history in collecting, exhibiting, and presenting wayang performances. This paper traces this history of collection, exhibition, and performance practice of wayang at the Colonial Institute, from 1950 known as Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, from colonial times until the present. It demonstrates the entanglement of colonial and postcolonial power structures, collection, and exhibition legacies of the colonial past. The paper will show that from the moment wayang puppets entered the museum's collection there has been continuous interaction between collecting and exhibition practices and performance practices. The emphasis on tangible elements of performance practice in collection and exhibition practices contributed to a dominant and static understanding of wayang.

### KEYWORDS

Wayang; heritage; collection; exhibition; performing arts; colonialism; Tropenmuseum.

### COLLECTING WAYANG IN THE COLONIAL MUSEUM

The predecessor of the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam was founded as a museum of the East and West Indies Natural Resources in Haarlem in 1864. Soon it was renamed Colonial Museum (Koloniaal Museum) and functioned as a showcase for the colony from 1871 onwards. Its role was to present the riches of the colony, displaying products like coffee beans, wood, rattan, and rice. Initially, ethnographic objects were regarded of less important

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(Van Dijk and Legêne 2010: 9-10). In 1920 the collections in Haarlem and the Colonial Institute Association (Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut), founded in 1910, were merged. The latter also incorporated the collections from the Amsterdam zoological society *Natura Artis Magistra* (Artis). These collections were officially opened to the public in 1926 at the Colonial Institute, the largest building in Amsterdam at the time. Museum curator Janneke van Dijk and historian Susan Legêne interpret the opening of the museum in the context of the Ethical Policy or *Ethische Politiek*. This policy, introduced in 1901, focused on the care, development and education of the local people of the colony, while maintaining their “original” culture (Locher-Scholten 1981: 201). Within this political framework the Koloniaal Instituut “was meant to be a centre of expertise for entrepreneurs and government in the area of colonial trade, tropical medicine and physical and cultural anthropology” (Van Dijk and Legêne 2010: 9-10).

In theory, museums strove to collect “objectively” in line with eighteenth-century rationalist principles, but accidental circumstances usually determined collecting practices in the field (Ter Keurs 2007: 1). Right from the foundation of the Colonial Museum in Haarlem *wayang* puppets entered the collection and were put on display. The collection of the Tropenmuseum seems to have followed this pattern. The earliest *wayang* collection consists of six *wayang golek* puppets donated to the museum in Haarlem by Mrs P. Delprat in 1883.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter puppets (mainly *wayang kulit*, *wayang golek*, and *wayang kelitik*) entered the museum’s collection, usually in small numbers and in most cases donated by individuals. These include some extensive collections of paper *wayang* puppets and even a near complete performance set made out of tinfoil. The order in which the puppets entered the collection, as well as the number of puppets, and various types of *wayang*, suggest that collecting *wayang* puppets happened randomly, rather than systematically.

The museum registration system also shows very little information on other aspects of the puppets. There is hardly any information on the provenance of the collection or how the puppets were acquired. Who were the people involved? How were the puppets obtained and from whom? There is no information known about the local people involved in making the puppets, the transactions or even the puppet characters. In addition, the reasons behind the donation of puppets to the museum are largely unknown, as are the arguments for accepting the puppets that were offered.

Southeast Asian performing arts and puppetry scholar, Matthew Cohen, offers some insight into the circumstances in which the puppets came to Europe. He observed that the puppets and puppet artists, who offered *wayang* puppets for sale, came to Europe and America for colonial exhibitions in the nineteenth century. In addition, many Dutch colonial civil servants and travellers returned from their journeys to “the East” bringing *wayang* puppets as souvenirs (Cohen 2007: 340). Historian Caroline Drieënhuizen argues in her

<sup>1</sup> Inventory nrs. H-751 until H-757. The puppets are identified as Arjuna, Bima, Gatot Kaca, Anjasmoro, and Krata Wyogo. One character remains unidentified.

PhD thesis *Koloniale collecties, Nederlands aanzien* (2012) that the urge to bring home souvenirs from a trip was the result of an increased historical awareness, and of feelings of loss and fear of forgetting that were widely felt at the end of the nineteenth century. Such sentiments stimulated people to collect souvenirs as objects that incorporated the past in the present (Drieënhuizen 2012: 16). The transfer of puppets fitted in this pattern of colonial exhibition practices tied to exploitation. Products from Asia, including wayang puppets, were transported to Europe as a display of the colony, stripped of direct connections to the people and cultural conditions from which they arose (Cohen 2007: 350).

The conclusions Drieënhuizen draws provide a valuable insight into larger patterns of collecting and donating objects, including wayang puppets, from the colony. She argues that new networks and knowledge were created by the Dutch elite through the collection of tangible objects. The relation between objects and people and the exchange of objects in colonial networks illustrate how colony, motherland, and other regions were linked in an imperial space. Collecting tangible objects provided an opportunity for collectors to gain and maintain a certain social standing in both the colony and Dutch society.

During World War II (1940-1945) many Dutch citizens had loaned objects to the museum hoping that the museum's storage spaces would be a safer place for their treasure than their homes (Frank 2012: 69). The wayang collection did not benefit much from this sense of preservation. During World War II the collection was supplemented with fifty-eight puppets from G. Tillmann (1882-1941).<sup>2</sup> The Tillmann collection was given on loan before the war and turned into a gift after the war. In 1976 the museum acquired a new *wayang golek* set from Bandung. In the twenty-first century, the Tropenmuseum has applied an active acquisition policy of wayang puppets. One of the most recent acquisitions was a set of puppets by Enthus Susmono purchased in 2009, which will be discussed more in depth further on. After this the wayang collection of Tropenmuseum, since 2015 Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures), incorporated 288 puppets from the collection of Nusantara Museum in Delft that closed its doors in 2013.

#### EXHIBITION PRACTICES

Like the collection practices of the museum, the display of wayang in the early museum history seems arbitrary too. The earliest photograph of an exhibition in the collection of the Tropenmuseum is a display of *wayang golek* puppets in Batavia in 1883. They were presented among *krisses* [ritual daggers], rattan, and *angklung* (a musical instrument made of bamboo).<sup>3</sup> In the same year puppets were displayed in the Bali section of the International Colonial and Export

<sup>2</sup> These wayang puppets in the Tillmann collection can be found in the museum registration system TMS under inventory nrs. TM-1772-439; TM-1772-465; TM-1772-528; TM-1772-562; TM-1772-613; TM-1772-614 until TM-1772-616; TM-1772-692 until TM-1772-717; TM-1772-775 until TM-1772-784; TM-1772-866 until TM-1772-872; TM-1772-2360.

<sup>3</sup> Inventory nr. TM-60023370.

Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883.<sup>4</sup> Another photograph shows a room in the Bataviaasch Genootschap in Batavia in 1896.<sup>5</sup> Two panels of *wayang kulit* puppets hang on a wall in three rows one above the other. The room is further filled with coins in table showcases and weapons on the wall. In these early displays wayang puppets were decontextualized and presented as just one example among many others of what the colony had to offer, as a product of craft, without any relation to the performance practice.

In 1915 a display of wayang was temporarily mounted in the Reading Room of the new City Museum in Amsterdam. Thereafter the display was set up at the Colonial Museum in an identical manner, where it remained unchanged for view to the visitors first of the Colonial Museum and subsequently of Tropenmuseum until the 1960s. During this period the set up travelled to various places. It was displayed at the Dutch exhibition in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1922, and a few years later in Arnhem, the Netherlands, in 1928. In 1931 it travelled to the Colonial World Exhibition in Paris, in 1939 it was exhibited at the World Exhibition in New York, and in 1941 at the Indische Exhibition of the Colonial Institute at the Provinciaal Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen in Noord-Brabant. In 1950 it was part of the TISNA exhibition (Tentoonstelling Indonesië, Suriname en Nederlandse Antillen) in Zaandam and in 1952 part of “Tropenkracht en Tropenpracht”.

Collecting wayang meant a focus on the tangible side of the performance practice, the wayang puppets. Displaying the tangible puppets reinforced the focus on the tangibility of the practice resulting in a static representation of a dynamic performance practice. This museum practice did not offer much room for change in four decades of display. The result was a set image and fixation of the wayang performance practice. The Dutch public was presented with a permanent and unchanging image of wayang that did not allow for change.

The wayang display was incorporated in the Java exhibition on the ground floor of the Afdeeling Volkenkunde, popularly known as Volkenkundig Museum or Ethnological Museum, which was one of the galleries of the Colonial Museum and opened to the public on 18 October 1926. The archivist C. Lekkerkerker (1931) meticulously described the display in *Gids in het Volkenkundig Museum V; Java en de Koperkamer*.<sup>6</sup> Showcase 1, showed Theater and Music dedicating a large part to wayang. Showcase 1 was divided into two distinct parts: the left part showed a life-size arrangement of a *wayang kulit* performance; the right side displayed *wayang golek* puppets in five rows of ten to eleven puppets above one another. These rows of *wayang golek* puppets were in turn surrounded by *wayang kelitik* (flat wooden) puppets. Lekkerkerker describes the display as follows:

On the right side of the showcase a row of flat wooden puppets is on display on the extreme right and left, these are the *Wayang kelitik*. The remaining puppets are

<sup>4</sup> Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. RV\_A52-1-20.

<sup>5</sup> Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-60025176.

<sup>6</sup> Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-10036000.

the round wooden puppets, the *Wayang golek*. In front are the puppets representing the *panakawans*, in the middle are the demons with their big heads and at the top are the royal princes and the monkeys, like Hanuman. These puppets come from Western Java and the northern coast of Western Java. In the front are also the models of the *Gamelan* instruments. Next to the *Dalang* to the left stands the *rebab*, a string instrument, and to the right the *kendang*, the drum. On both sides of them stand the *bonang*, a rack with pots. To the right under the *Wayang golek* puppets stands a large gong with a *gong agung* and a smaller gong, the *kempul*. Between these hanging gongs stand two *kempul*, two large gongs on a rack. To the far right stands the *gender*, a xylophone like instrument with copper keys. To the left of the rack stands the *gambang*, a similar instrument with copper keys. (Lekkerkerker 1931: 32).

Lekkerkerker explains the function and use of the puppets and attributes as displayed in the showcase, and briefly describes the role and function of the *dalang* (master puppeteer) in the performance. In addition, he gives an impression of the wayang show:

Using these the *dalang* gives his performance, which begins at sunset and continues through the entire night, yes sometimes they last two or three consecutive nights. The audiences come and go, watch or sleep and have themselves awoken for their favourite passages. One must imagine that the screen is set up between the open "*pendâpâ*" (reception porch) in front of the house and the interior of the dwelling or in the "*pendâpâ*" itself (Lekkerkerker 1931: 33).

Lekkerkerker's description relates to the current wayang discourse which focuses on religious, ancestral, and mythical elements of wayang: "As is the case with all expressions of the Javanese spirit where mythological figures and ancestors play a role, the *Wayang* is also subject to religious representations and rites" (Lekkerkerker 1931: 32).

One paragraph explained what is shown on the right side of the display case. The archivist briefly introduces *wajang kelitik* and *wajang golek* and their repertoires to the reader. Lekkerkerker is appreciative of wayang, especially *wayang golek*. "The most elaborate repertoire counts over a 100 puppets. [...] One could argue the Golek is the most complete staged representation of all stories that existed amongst Javanese people until the time of the Islamisation of Java". He continues: "This *Wayang* is the youngest and has been subject to the greatest amount of external influence: and 'for the sake of completeness' he sums up other *wayang* forms, like *wayang klitik*" (Lekkerkerker 1931: 39-40).

The display of wayang puppets and the museum displays discussed above present a static and ahistorical image of wayang to the Dutch public. The museum guide by Lekkerkerker contextualizes and describes the performance in an attempt to balance this static display. Unsurprisingly, the text is unable to fully reflect the dynamics of a wayang performance; this is partly the result of the focus on the tangible and visual side of wayang. Lekkerkerker seems to be familiar with wayang discourse among experts when he briefly points to religious and ritual roles and the function of wayang. The wayang showcase



and Lekkerkerker's description demonstrate that the museum indeed served as a showcase of the colony and did not incorporate the voice of the *dalang* or academic discourses.

On the photograph of the display we can discern a clear addition to the stage setting. Five separate scenes are depicted with children's wayang puppets that would not be on the screen during a wayang performance. The museum display is thus a distorted representation of the wayang performance practice. It is not only the addition of the depicted scenes that causes this detachment from reality. As Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, scholar of Performance Studies, points out, objects become special when placed in a museum setting. At the same time, the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 51). In other words, what is presented in museums becomes a model for reality. The museum display might suggest the reality of a wayang performance but reduces the multisensory nature of the performance by representing and showing only the visual and tangible element. This choice for display is ideologically charged by the colonial context in which it is mounted. The display at the Colonial Museum presents wayang in a static and ahistorical manner, suggesting that it contains a fixed and unchanged meaning or value that has been there from the moment of its origin.



Picture 1. The Java department in the museum of the Colonial Institute 1935. (Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-10036000).

The detachment from reality reinforced the static and ahistorical aspect of the display in the museum. The wayang display case remained largely unchanged from 1915 until the 1960s when the Tropenmuseum was refurbished

(Picture 1).<sup>7</sup> The museum display represented the wayang performance in a tangible way. Focusing on the tangible aspects of the practice resulted in a set image and the fixation of the wayang performance practice. In turn this was reinforced by the fact that the display remained hardly unchanged for forty years. The Dutch public was then presented with a static, permanent, and unchanging image of wayang, which did not allow for change.

The idea of a static and unchanging museum display at the colonial museum was also observed by Van Dijk and Legêne in a political context. They note that “Regardless of developments overseas, the building and exhibitions contained a reassuring message of great things to be achieved in the sphere of economic and cultural knowledge, development, exchange and progress” even when the Netherlands was confronted with an emerging and growing Indonesian nationalist movement both in the colony and the mother country in the early twentieth century. The Ethical Policy adopted a conservative and more openly repressive nature, but nevertheless persisted in being the dominant discourse, and continued to be appealing to Dutch audiences (Van Dijk and Legêne 2010: 10). While the political contexts in both the colony and at home were changing drastically, the Colonial Institute continued to organize activities such as lectures, publications, movie screenings, gamelan performances, and museum courses.

In 1940 the Germans occupied the Netherlands and two years later colonial Indonesia was occupied by the Japanese army as an ally of the Germans. Despite these drastic changes, the Colonial Institute tried to keep the colony alive for the Dutch public through its activities. Maintaining contact with the Netherlands East Indies, Suriname, and Curaçao became so difficult that contact was lost entirely. Alternatively, the Colonial Institute sought to collaborate with organizations within the Netherlands that housed knowledge and information on various areas in the Netherlands East Indies. However the occupying German forces gradually increased control on cultural life in the Netherlands with the establishment of the Kultuurkamer in 1941 that had the task to control, and if necessary suppress cultural life in the Netherlands. In 1942 this led to the decision that “exhibitions, lectures and performances, displays of East- and West-Indian films and lantern plaques, that aimed at focusing attention on the spread of knowledge regarding the overseas areas – to the extent they were not covered by the general educational system – should be omitted” (Jaarverslag Koloniaal Instituut 1942).

Despite the increasing control, in 1943 the Colonial Institute managed to stage a *wayang wong* performance, the genre which makes use of human actors. It was entitled “The capsized boat (Tangkoeban Prahoe)” and was based on a Sundanese legend. The performance was an initiative of the “Bureau Pers en Propaganda”, the Bureau for Press and Propaganda, of the Institute and of the writer Dr C.W. Wormser (1876-1946). Eight “young Indonesian intellectuals”, who were involved in the performance, came from various regions in the Netherlands East Indies, such as Aceh, West-Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi.

<sup>7</sup> Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-10021976.



None of them had ever before performed. The performance aimed at bringing the activities of the Colonial Institute to a broader audience and impress that audience in order to generate awareness and glory for the Colonial Institute. Another rationale for staging the play was that “All that reminded us of and connected us with the very important Dutch-Indies had to be kept alive and strengthened where possible” (Steinmetz 1943). In addition, the performance aimed at establishing a closer relationship and collaboration with Indies people in the Netherlands, which, according to the Institute, had not occurred enough in the previous years.

The play was staged on 5, 10, and 12 August 1943 in the Amsterdamse Stadsschouwburg (Amsterdam Municipal Theatre) and was considered an enormous success in terms of audience numbers and reception. In a letter to the Colonial Institute a former planter and official, J. Sibinga-Mulder (1866-1944) expressed how he had had a nostalgic experience; the performance had given him the feeling “of being back in that beautiful country” (*terug te zijn in dat heerlijke land*). The performances were a failure from a financial point of view, because the whole enterprise ended making a loss of f 6418.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the overall feeling was one of success, which led to the decision to produce a commemorative medal that was presented on 19 June 1944 at the Colonial Institute. Fifty-one gold-plated and silver medals were distributed to participants and contributors.<sup>9</sup>

C. Steinmetz (1884-1953), archivist in the Colonial Institute from 1941 to 1949, reviewed the performance in Institute’s journal *Cultureel Indië*. Steinmetz drew a parallel between the Dutch adaptation of “Tangkoeban Prahoe” by Wormser and Greek and Roman mythology in its topic and style: “The tragedy of the catastrophe invoking passion between son and mother that can also be found in the classic example of the Greek King Oedipus” (Steinmetz 1943: 200), and in terms of vocabulary and style the play reminded the spectator of “the enduring language of Virgil’s Aeneid” (Steinmetz 1943: 205).

According to Steinmetz, the success of the performances was twofold in nature. First, it was a welcome distraction in war time, because “In times of a western grim mood and scant rations it is good to be relocated to a colourful eastern world of unrestricted possibilities, prosperity and peace, even though in a legendary and imaginary world” (Steinmetz 1943: 198). Second, it was valued as a hybrid cultural expression, as a Dutch adaptation of a Javanese story. The attitude of the Colonial Institute, as well as the positive reception, reflected the attitude of the Dutch audience at large: a longing to hold on to something that was changing. The show enabled the audience to imagine being back in the Dutch East Indies and perhaps even escape the war for a brief moment. In a way, the performance reflected the inability to deal with the changing and changed political scenes both in Indonesia and the Netherlands. The performance acknowledged change by seeking to adapt an Indonesian story for a Dutch audience and establishing cooperation with the Indonesian

<sup>8</sup> Archive of Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, inventory nr. 2901: R. Slauerhoff, map 4.

<sup>9</sup> Archive of Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, inventory nr. 2901: R. Slauerhoff, map 5.

community in the Netherlands; but at the core of its success and the rationale behind the production of the commemorative medals lay the longing for fixation, preserving and conserving of something that no longer existed.

Legêne and Waaldijk (2009) observed the same sentiment in their analysis of texts and cultural performances related to the Netherlands East Indies and produced from the 1910s onwards in the Netherlands. In these cultural productions the link with the colony was represented in metaphors of childhood and youth. The Netherlands East Indies were seen as the childhood of the Dutch, of a period of growing up and having to leave. This period was associated with homesickness and youthful fascination. There existed a Dutch self-image that consisted of interest in and knowledge of the cultures of Indonesia linked to a sense of responsibility and good intentions of the Ethical Policy to uplift the indigenous people. This rhetoric and self-image was completely detached from political reality and as we saw in the case of the "Tangkoeban Prahoe" continued to exist even after the Japanese occupation of the colony in 1942 (Waaldijk and Legêne 2009).

#### WAYANG SUPERSTAR

The museum's exhibition practice followed political relations with Indonesia. The wayang display that had been used since the 1910s was changed only in the 1960s, when the Tropenmuseum embarked on a complete refurbishment. This resulted in a modernized Tropenmuseum in 1979 that presented information about developmental processes and the frictions and tensions in societies in what was then called the "Third World". The renovation of the museum had ignored the colonial reliefs, murals, motifs, and ornaments that were part of the building and an integral part of the context of the museum's display as well. The museum's exhibitions were now displaying a story about change around the world. Visitors could walk around in a slum in Delhi, a house in the *desa* (village/countryside) in Indonesia and visit an African market (Van Dijk and Legêne 2010: 2).

The Java Department, which contained the static wayang display, was incorporated into a department on Indonesia. The familiar display case representing a wayang performance disappeared to the museum's storage spaces, never to return. As a result of the shift in museum exhibition practices colonial ideas and values disappeared from sight, which made revisiting the objects and their assigned meanings impossible. The colonial image of wayang and its performance practice thus remained fixed as it was, and continued to slumber out of sight in the storage rooms.

A new approach to the presentation of wayang tradition in the Tropenmuseum was explored with an exhibition on puppetry in Africa and Asia in 1995 entitled *The distant friends of Punch and Judy. Puppets in Africa and Asia* (*Verre vrienden van Jan Klaassen. Poppenspel in Afrika en Azië*) curated by ethnomusicologist E. den Otter. The Tropenmuseum had just started a large refurbishment in 1994, the second in its history, and sought to revisit its colonial history by rethinking its collection formation through a

reappraisal of its colonial collections. From the 1990s onwards, the museum took up issues of globalization and the rise of cultural diversity within Dutch society. International cultural policies developed from a focus on top-down development cooperation to a discourse on shared Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development and climate control, as well as common heritage and cultural exchange (Van Dijk and Lêgene 2010: 14).

One of the main issues discussed was the question about authority in museum displays. The question who is authorized to speak for whom, and with what means, was explored in the context of the museum's ambition to create new connections between the institute, the building, its collections, Dutch society, and people of the communities from where the collections came and continue to come. The question was to what extent the museum is authorized to represent people and communities with objects that have been acquired during colonial times (Van Dijk and Lêgene 2010: 16).

The publication that accompanied the exhibition *The distant friends of Punch and Judy* reveals its goals: to explore the multicultural influences in Dutch society and show that traditional puppet theatre is not just a continuation of a tradition, but truly alive. It specifically hoped to contribute to a greater sensitivity and knowledge about the richness of puppet theatre (Den Otter 1995: 5). The publication shows an attempt to balance the discourse of wayang developed in colonial times as an "elevated" and "high" art with its current popular forms that emphasise the roles of the clowns, and non-classical forms, such as the Islamic story-cycle of Amir Hamza. To show the liveliness of the wayang tradition, the famous *wayang golek* puppet master Ki [the Honourable] Asep Sunandar Sunarya (1955-2014) was invited to perform at the Tropentheater. This announced a new, more dynamic approach to the display of wayang in the Tropenmuseum, which combined a presentation of both tangible and intangible aspects of the wayang performance tradition.

The approach to focus on conveying the liveliness and multi-sensoriness of the wayang performance practice, which is also discernible in current scholarly discourses of wayang, was continued in the twenty-first century. The exhibition *Wayang Superstar. The theatre world of Ki Enthus Susmono* was opened on 29 January 2009 in the Tropenmuseum. The exhibition was curated by P. Westerkamp, curator of the Department for Southeast Asia. Fifty-eight of Enthus's puppets were put on display in the Parkzaal, along with additional information in audiovisual interviews with the *dalang*, and audiovisuals of (fragments of) his wayang performances. Of the fifty-eight puppets on display, the museum purchased forty-three to complement the collection,<sup>10</sup> two *wayang golek* puppets were a gift from Enthus.<sup>11</sup>

The exhibition showed Ki Enthus Susmono (1966-2018) as a Javanese artist who enjoyed the status of a superstar in Indonesia. The focus of the exhibition lay specifically on the individual *dalang*, Enthus Susmono, and highlighted his innovative puppet creations: his puppets of film, television, and cartoon

<sup>10</sup> Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-6630-1/6630-43.

<sup>11</sup> Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nrs. TM-6331-1 and 6365-1.

characters, such as Batman (see Picture 2), the Teletubbies, and Harry Potter, and his puppets of politicians, George W. Bush, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden. Modernizing elements in Enthus's wayang were emphasized by contrasting innovative and modern aspects in his work with information on what was called "traditional" or "classical" wayang. The "classical" and "traditional" wayang was represented in the exhibition through the display of puppets from the museum's collection, the majority of which were acquired during colonial times.



Picture 2. Batman designed by Ki Enthus Susmono. (Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-6330-24).

The exhibition had four layers: one text banner introduced the exhibition to the visitors with a text on the theme of the exhibition (O-text) on Enthus Susmono and his modernising elements, with a special focus on his puppet creations. The exhibition theme was presented through six sub-themes (A-texts) in the second layer which consisted of the person of Enthus Susmono; the performance; new creations; wayang genres, stories, and characters; Enthus and Islam; and the world and Ki Enthus Susmono. The third layer provided deeper insight (B-texts), putting into perspective Enthus's wayang practice by confronting his innovations and adaptations with "conventional"

and “traditional” forms and ideas of wayang. The theme Ki Enthus Susmono presented the *dalang* and the making of puppets. The structure of wayang performances was explained in texts on the traditional performance structure and the story *The dying Jatayu*, part of the *Mahabharata* story-cycle. Enthus’s new creations were presented through a scene from the *Ramayana*: Hanuman with the monkey army. Information on wayang genres, stories and characters was given in a general text on wayang stories, information on the Mahabharata, six wayang genres, and some introductory information on different wayang characters. Islam was discussed in a text on the Wali Songo and the last judgment. Finally, Enthus and the world informed the visitor of the role of the clowns in a performance in their appearance as Teletubbies (see Pictures 3 and 4). In addition, each theme displayed audio-visual interviews with Enthus on the matter discussed. For example, the museum presented information about Ki Enthus Susmono (A-text) as a *dalang* and his puppets (B-texts), and Enthus’s view on the theme in question in audiovisuals.



Picture 3. Teletubbies Dipsy designed by Ki Enthus Susmono. (Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-6330-31).





Picture 4. Bima with a human fact resembling Ki Enthus Susmono. Designed by Ki Enthus Susmono. (Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inventory nr. TM-6330-8).

The aim of the exhibition was to demonstrate innovation in wayang, showing that it is difficult to discuss innovation alone; to explain change a point of reference is needed. The B-texts explained in which elements Enthus's work was innovative, and thus had to say something about "conventional" or "traditional" wayang to which his work could be contrasted. Examples from the museum's collection were displayed as representation of "conventional" or "traditional" wayang, puppets in museum collections and their display in museum exhibitions have added to the standardization of wayang discourse. What exactly the "conventional" or "traditional" wayang entailed remained insufficiently explained. The exhibition did not problematize or criticize the existence of the idea of a "conventional" or "traditional" wayang directly. By presenting puppets from the museum's collections acquired in colonial times, the exhibition suggested that innovation cannot be understood without a point of reference, in this case the "conventional" wayang. As a consequence, the acknowledgement of a "conventional" wayang form, perhaps unintentionally, affirmed these conventions and traditional ideas of wayang that go back to colonial discourse. The exhibition thus conveyed the idea of wayang as static,

but set in motion by Enthus through the addition of contemporary elements.

The audio-visual interviews with Enthus however, made the exhibition by providing a real glimpse of his ideas and wayang performance practice. Through giving Enthus a voice, the “conventional” or “traditional” wayang was indeed challenged. Interestingly, Enthus himself also uses the “conventional” or “traditional” wayang standard as a point of reference. He interprets the classical style as the style from Surakarta,<sup>12</sup> and also admits the authority of the classical Surakarta style. In this interview Enthus speaks about his cooperation with Dedek Wahyudi (born 1960) for the creation of innovative musical accompaniment for Enthus’s performance. He says: “Someone from Solo said that our meeting was like a hat-pin with a hat, a bottle with its cap. Well, if someone from Solo says so, they are the wayang experts!”<sup>13</sup>

In collaboration with other organizations the museum organized side programmes, such as a wayang workshop in collaboration with KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) on 30 January 2009 and two performances in the Light Hall of the Tropenmuseum in collaboration with Tropentheater. Enthus performed the story *Dewa Ruci*, which relates the quest for perfect knowledge. Enthus used the Indonesian language for both these performances on 19 and 20 June 2009. There were no simultaneous translations, but a flyer with a short synopsis of the story was handed out to every spectator. The show was adapted for foreign audiences. The most obvious intervention was a substantial shortening of the performances. The performance was shortened from the usual seven to eight hours to just one and a half hours. The show started at 8.30 p.m. and was scheduled to end at 10 p.m. Another intervention was the downsizing of Enthus’s *gamelan* troupe for budgetary reasons. The troupe was reduced from over twenty musicians to just eight, among them the composer Dedek Wahyudi, who had also composed new arrangements especially for the occasion.

Before the show started the curator of the exhibition, Westerkamp, gave a short introduction to the Dalang Enthus, his wayang innovations, as well as a synopsis of the story. The audience responded with laughter when Westerkamp showed them the Teletubby clowns. Both performances were a mix of *wayang kulit* and *wayang golek*. The main story was played with *wayang kulit*, and for the fighting scenes in the forest between the good knight and the helpers of the bad characters, *wayang golek* was used. After this scene the play was finished with *wayang kulit*. The performances were both well attended<sup>14</sup> and can be considered a great success when taking the satisfaction of the audience as a criterion. I carried out research among the audience to examine existing ideas of wayang by handing out questionnaires consisting

<sup>12</sup> Audiovisual interview, scene 1, take 4.

<sup>13</sup> Audiovisual interview, scene 2, take 2. “Ini kata orang Solo mengatakan Dedek Wahyudi ketemu dengan Enthus Susmono itu seperti sumbu ketemu kutub, seperti botol dengan tutupnya. Kok orang Solo mengatakan pada pakar-pakar wayang!”

<sup>14</sup> The capacity of the Tropentheater was 512 seats of which 321 tickets were sold on June 19th, and 354 on June 20th (information obtained from Tropentheater).

of four questions. It asked spectators about their expectations: whether they knew what wayang was. How familiar the audience was with wayang: whether they owned something that related to wayang. Whether they had visited the exhibition, and finally, whether the show and the *dalang* had met their expectations.<sup>15</sup> Forty-nine out of fifty-eight respondents on the first night indicated that they were satisfied with Enthuis's show. On 20 June, sixty-four out of seventy-two respondents were pleased; eight others confessed that they were positively surprised since they had come without expectations.

The answers to the questionnaire also revealed that most spectators regarded wayang mainly as tradition, art, and cultural heritage, while respondents hesitated to classify wayang as modern, popular, contemporary, or entertainment. Most respondents however classified wayang as folklore (fifteen), closely followed by art (fourteen), and tradition (eleven). Respondents were divided about the question of wayang's modernity. On a scale of one to five, only nine respondents rated wayang as a four on modernity, whereas another seven respondents gave it a rating of five. This shows that the prevailing idea of wayang performance practice among the audience was that wayang was folklore, art and tradition at the same time. It left little room for modernity and contemporaneity. This discourse can be traced back to the discourse established in colonial times which in the Netherlands came to a halt with the loss of the colony.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this rather static image the audience had of wayang, spectators were very satisfied with Enthuis's shows. Even though the majority of the audience did not understand the Indonesian language. Enthuis was capable of making his shows appealing and understandable enough to gain the audience's full attention and maintain it throughout his performances. Many respondents gave positive reactions, and two of them even spontaneously called the performance "spectacular" (*spectaculair*). Enthuis's trademarks such as the incorporation of impressive elements in his performances, like the light show, the maximization of humour and minimalization of formal interchanges were applied in his performances. Enthuis stretched the limits of humoristic elements on the first night; he pulled out everything in the repertoire at his disposal. He tried to speak some English and Dutch words and sentences. He even wrote a Dutch greeting "Good afternoon!" (*Goedemiddag!*) on one of his puppets in order not to forget it. This effort to actively establish a relationship with his Dutch speaking audience worked well, and he succeeded in immersing the audience in his performance. The audience laughed at his obscene jokes, including bringing on stage a puppet that kissed his own genitals, and his drunken puppet Mabuk, who pees in an empty bottle, forgets about it and then drinks from the bottle. Enthuis also composed a song for his hosts at the

<sup>15</sup> On both evenings 100 questionnaires were distributed among the audience. The response rate on June 19th was 58% and on June 20th it was 72%.

<sup>16</sup> On how this discourse continues to influence the way in which wayang is perceived today, see "Defining wayang as heritage; Standardization, codification and institutionalization" (Boonstra 2015).

museum and theatre. In the second performance, Enthus made an interesting dramaturgical intervention. After two *wayang golek* puppets that were Enthus's mirror images had not succeeded in conquering the demon, Enthus stood up from his seat to enter the story and fight the demon puppet himself.

It all worked out extremely well, the audience went wild, and Enthus got carried away and the schedule overran by almost an hour on the first night. He did what he knew best: he catered to his audience by applying innovation and improvisation. He shaped his performance in reaction to his audience, improvising to entertain his spectators, and causing his hosts and the organizers a lot of stress by finishing almost an hour late. Enthus managed to enthrall an audience of foreigners who had only a minimum and conventional understanding of wayang, who could not understand his language, and only had a synopsis of the story as support material. Enthus's performances in the Tropenmuseum showed that the wayang performance practice is innovative and improvisational. What happened at these performances was special. In the former colonial institute, where wayang discourse had been shaped and authorised in colonial times, the discourse of a static and unchanging wayang performance practice had been confronted first through the exhibition, and then smashed into pieces by Enthus in his performances.

## CONCLUSION

This article shows how at the Colonial Museum/Tropenmuseum, collecting, exhibiting, and presenting wayang was highly influenced by the political relationship between the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia. The museum went through various stages, from Colonial Museum showcasing products from the colony, to the Tropenmuseum where the "Third World" was displayed, to the Tropenmuseum as a museum trying to present wayang as contemporary, alive and performance practice.

Analysis of the wayang collection of the Tropenmuseum, shows that the collection was initially put together rather randomly. It showed the diversity of forms and materials in which wayang puppets could be found, mainly in Java. The exhibition practice during the colonial period was static and remained unchanged for decades, influencing the way in which museum visitors perceived the performance practice. The performance "Tangkoeban Prahoe" was an attempt to keep the memory of the colony alive during the turmoil of World War II. In the twenty-first century, the Tropenmuseum applied a new approach, emphasizing innovation and performative elements of the practice focusing on the puppeteer behind the wayang performance practice.

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