

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL PUPPET THEATER FESTIVAL

2022 Festival Report

Chimpanzee by Nick Lehane. Photo by Richard Termine.

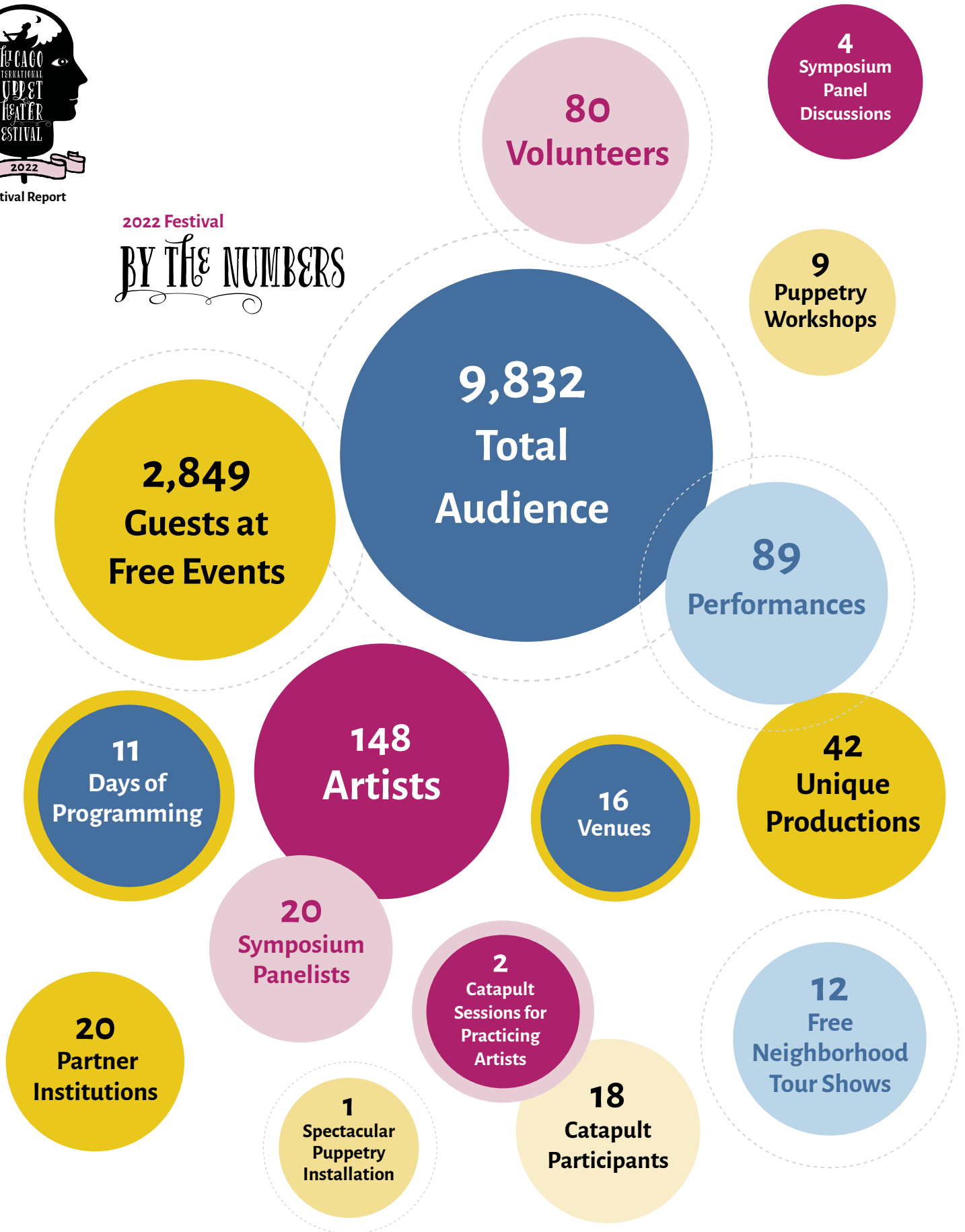


CONTENTS

1	.....	By the Numbers
2	.....	Letter from Artistic Director and Festival Founder Blair Thomas
3-5	.....	Summary
6-11	.....	2022 Festival Activities
12-13	.....	The Plastic Bag Store
14	.....	Press
15	.....	Partners
16	.....	Team and Operations
17-18	.....	Looking to the Future
19	.....	Lead Sponsors
20-21	.....	Supporters
21	.....	Board of Directors + Committees



2022 Festival
BY THE NUMBERS



DEAR COMRADES IN THE ARTS!

A Letter from Artistic Director and Festival Founder Blair Thomas

Pandemic disruptions and cultural awakenings have challenged our values.

What is the role of art, when sickness, upset and death are so prevalent, we ask? And we have answered—art's presence provides meaning for us as individuals and our collective spirit. This is especially true when we reciprocate by bringing our own physical presences to the art. We share a moment and place together. Our Festival of Puppet Theater is a front row seat to just such an experience, transcending the real and aggravated shortcomings of daily life.

See the puppet there, standing just on the periphery of our human world. There in its spot, though surrounded by our world of turmoil and uncertainty, the puppet has been waiting. Waiting for us, its audience. And the audience was waiting too! It was a marvelous welcome back to the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival! Thank you for what turned out to be an outstanding return to the warmth of connection, of insight, of humor, of astonishment and... delight!

Blair Thomas

Artistic Director & Festival Founder



Artistic Director & Festival Founder,
Blair Thomas. Photo by Saverio Truglia.



Chimpanzee by Nick Lehane. Photo by Nick Zoulek.

SUMMARY

January 20–30, 2022, the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival made its triumphant and safe return. Even while the pandemic continued to disrupt cultural life in Chicago and internationally, Festival fans, artists, and staff were thrilled to return to live theater. Enthusiastic audiences showed up vaccinated and masked, packing many houses to capacity. Dozens of performances, workshops, panel discussions, and family-friendly events astonished and delighted guests at theaters, community organizations, museums, and clubs all around Chicago. Puppets of every possible variety took over Chicago for 11 amazing days and nights of inspiration and invention. For thousands of local and national patrons, the Chicago Puppet Fest was an oasis of fascination and artistry showcasing a distinctive breadth of style, quality of work, and depth of artistic achievement. The largest and most ambitious puppetry festival in North America, the Chicago Puppet Fest again presented a slate of unforgettable experiences and celebrated its status as a beloved and respected cultural institution, locally and globally.

Highlights of the 2022 Chicago Puppet Fest included: **a performance from Bread & Puppet Theater** (VT), the 50-year-old company widely credited as the creators of American puppet pageantry; *The Bluest Eye*, a staging of Toni Morrison's debut novel adapted by Margaret Laurena Kemp (CA) and Janni Younge (South Africa); and *Chimpanzee*, an exquisite bunraku puppetry performance about a chimpanzee raised in a human home from Nick Lehane (NY). A centerpiece of the Festival was *The Plastic Bag Store* by Robin Frohardt (NY), an uncanny grocery store occupying a street-level storefront in The Wrigley Building that



From *The Plastic Bag Store* by Robin Frohardt.
Photo courtesy of Robin Frohardt.

featured thousands of items—fruits, vegetables, sushi, deli meats, and more—all crafted by hand from single-use plastic trash. Several times a day, the Store transformed from an installation into a microcinema, screening a series of dynamic puppetry films that transported audiences to a dystopian future.

The Persians by Bread and Puppet Theater.
Photo by Nick Zoulek.





SUMMARY CONT.

Organization Background

The Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival advances the art of puppetry by presenting sophisticated programs vital to the cultural life of Chicago. Engaging and inspiring the largest and most diverse audiences for puppetry possible, the Festival also nurtures the development of puppeteers and deepens the field locally, nationally, and internationally with the goal of promoting peace, equality, mutual understanding, and justice locally and globally.

Before launching the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival, puppeteer, director, and educator Blair Thomas founded Blair Thomas & Company in 2002 as a platform for his original, highly-awarded puppet theater productions. Thomas established the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival as a project within Blair Thomas & Co. in 2014, uniting a dozen major Chicago institutions in a citywide celebration of the art. Originally a biennial event, the Festival inspired and delighted in 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2022, sharing the best puppetry of our time with upwards of 50,000 guests. During that time, the Festival highlighted over 400 artists from Argentina, Chile, Israel, Iran, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, and South Korea as well as from Europe, Chicago and across the U.S. Feature coverage of the Festival in American Theatre Magazine, The New York Times, the Associated Press, and dozens more outlets has elevated the dialogue surrounding contemporary puppetry and drawn international attention to Chicago.

In one of the Festival's proudest recent achievements, it now moves from a biennial event to an annual one beginning in 2022.





New Money! by Maria Camia. Photo by Nick Zoulek.

Values

We believe:

- *The art of puppetry is a universal language.*
- *Puppetry nourishes our sense of wonder.*
- *The art of puppetry is as much for adults as it is for children.*
- *Puppetry is positioned uniquely to illuminate the shared human experience and create community.*
- *Puppetry disarms and opens minds, bridging differences in culture, age, education, class and perspective to connect diverse people.*
- *A multiplicity of voices and offerings is key to developing excellence in the field.*
- *Educating and cultivating puppeteers and audiences increases respect and appreciation for the form.*



- *Presenting world-class puppetry at citywide scale places the art of puppetry as a jewel in the center of Chicago's cultural landscape.*

Sea Change by Cabinet of Curiosity. Photo by Nick Zoulek.



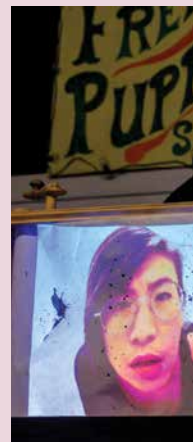
2022 FESTIVAL ACTIVITIES

The fourth Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival ran January 20–30, 2022. Several mutually supportive programs support the Festival to transform the contemporary notion of the art form.

KEY GOALS

Performances at the flagship Chicago Puppet Fest cultivate imagination and broaden perspectives by highlighting world-class puppetry traditions and contemporary practices. The multi-day Festival cements Chicago as an international center for the art and brings artists from around the U.S. and the world together to inspire and learn from one another.

- 42** Unique Productions
- 12** Free Neighborhood Tour performances
- 2** Three-day Catapult Artists' Intensives
- 4** Volkenburg Puppetry Symposium Panel Discussions
- 9** In-person Workshops
- 3** Living Room Tour Events
- 1** Festival Celebration



(above) Blair Thomas, Ty Defoe, and collaborators after a workshop performance of **Skeleton Canoe**. Photo by Yvette Marie Dostatni.

(top right) **"Inked"** by Myra Su. Photo by Yvette Marie Dostatni.

(right) **Object of Her Affection** by Marsian De Lellis. Photo by Yvette Marie Dostatni.





TIMBER! by Rootstock Puppet Co.
Photo by Nick Zoulek.



The Bluest Eye by Margaret Laurena Kemp and Janni Younge.
Photo by Yvette Marie Dostatni.

Mainstage Productions

The 2022 Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival presented 42 unique productions in 16 venues citywide:

- **The Plastic Bag Store** by Robin Frohardt (NY) at The Wrigley Building
- **Sea Change** by Cabinet of Curiosity (Chicago) at the Museum of Contemporary Art
- **Eagle Dance** by Ty Defoe (NY and WI) during the Free Neighborhood Tour
- **I Am the Bear** by Jerrell L. Henderson (Chicago) during the Free Neighborhood Tour
- **The Joshua Show** by Joshua Holden (NY) during the Free Neighborhood Tour
- **I, OBJECT: 30 Neo-Futurist Puppet Plays** by The Neo-Futurists (Chicago) at The Neo-Futurist Theater
- **Nasty, Brutish & Short: A Puppet Cabaret** featuring Maria Camia (NY), Samuel J. Lewis II (Chicago), Abandoned Ships (NC), Kate Marie Smith (IL), Basil Twist (NY), Kevin Michael Wesson (Chicago), Steven Wideman (Chicago), Ty Defoe (NY and WI), Bonnie Kim (HI), Amy Liou (NY), Andy Manjuck (NY), Jaerin Son (Chicago), Transit-Theater-Berlin (Germany), and Vanessa Valliere (Chicago) at Links Hall
- **New Money!** by Maria Camia (NY) at Chopin Theatre
- **Chimpanzee** by Nick Lehane (NY) at Instituto Cervantes Chicago
- **Bill's 44th** by Andy Manjuck and Dorothy James at Chopin Theatre
- **Object of Her Affection** by Marsian De Lellis (CA)
- **The Joshua Show** by Joshua Holden (NY) at Chopin Theatre
- **The Persians** by Bread & Puppet Theater (VT) at Epiphany Center for the Arts
- **The Bluest Eye** by Margaret Laurena Kemp (CA) and Janni Younge (South Africa) at The DuSable Museum of African American History
- **Skeleton Canoe** by Ty Defoe (a free work-in-progress performance) by Ty Defoe (NY and WI) at the American Indian Center
- **TIMBER!** by Rootstock Puppet Co. (Chicago) at Instituto Cervantes Chicago



Bill's 44th by Andy Manjuck and Dorothy James.
Photo by Mikayla Delson.



ACTIVITIES CONT.

Free Neighborhood Tour

January 21–22 and 28–29, 2022, the Free Neighborhood Tour reached over 400 guests with 12 performances in four locations:

Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center (Hermosa), Art on Sedgwick at Marshall Field Garden Apartments (Old Town), Navy Pier (Streeterville), and 345 Art Gallery (Humboldt Park).

Programs featured: **Ty Defoe** (NY and WI) in *Eagle Dance*, a performance stemming from Anishinaabe traditions; *I Am the Bear* by **Jerrell L. Henderson** (Chicago), about his experience being racially profiled by police; and the joyful, family friendly act *The Joshua Show* from **Joshua Holden** (NY). Defoe also offered a special community engagement event with a workshop about traditional birch bark etching techniques, underwritten by the JKW Foundation.



Jerrell L. Henderson in talkback after Free Neighborhood Tour. Photo by Evan Barr.

KEY GOALS

Free Neighborhood Tour

Festival Neighborhood Tour is a critical vehicle for the company's mission of promoting peace and cross-cultural understanding in Chicago and globally.

- *The program: Highlights expert work from artists reflecting a plurality of perspectives and experiences*
- *Facilitates entry into puppetry performance community for new voices by inviting audiences of many genders, races, abilities, ages, sexual identities, and economic circumstances to see themselves in the stories onstage*
- *Partners with community organizations in pursuit of a mutual desire to provide recurring, free, safe, culturally-enriching activity for youth and families*
- *Offers not-to-be-missed programs that lure theater fans to unfamiliar venues in culturally and geographically isolated Chicago neighborhoods*



"Eagle Dance" by Ty Defoe, part of the Free Neighborhood Tour. Photo by Evan Barr.



Catapult

January 21–23 and 28–30, 2022, the Catapult offered two, three-day sessions, welcoming practicing artists to immerse themselves in the Festival experience. Each weekend included seven performances over three days, a workshop, a panel discussion during the Volkenburg Puppetry Symposium, most meals, and local transportation as well as opportunities to network over coffee or backstage.

Reflecting the pluridisciplinary foundations of puppet theater, the Catapult focuses on the dynamic relationship and shared language of puppetry and related disciplines. Cultural worker, puppet designer, and Chicago Puppet Lab Coordinator **Grace Needlman** guided the first Catapult weekend while puppeteer and musician **Samuel J. Lewis II** led the second.

Workshops

In addition to the birch bark etching workshop, 8 additional workshops inaugurated use of the Festival's new studio space in The Fine Arts Building. Festival artists lead groups of artists and audience members in building puppetry expertise.

Workshops included: *Puppetry Masterclass* with **Nick Lehane**, *Making Parades: Experiments in Processional Performance* with **Clare Dolan**, *Many Hands Make Life Work* with **Janni Younge**, *Cantastoria* with **Bread & Puppet Theater**, *Table Top Puppetry* with **Robin Frohardt**, *Isadora: Introduction to Puppetry and Technology* with **Tom Lee**, *16 Tons: Limberjacks and American Folk Puppetry* with **Paulette Richards**, and *Physical Shadow Puppets on the Digital Stage* with **Tom Lee and Linda Wingerter**.

KEY GOALS

The Catapult

The Catapult fills a vacuum for professional puppetry training outside U.S. academic institutions, and encourages artists from diverse fields to make a move into professional puppetry practice, sparking conversation and innovation in the field.



Workshop — "Making Parades: Experiments in Processional Performance with Clare Dolan."
Photo by Yvette Marie Dostatni.



Workshop — "Many Hands Make Life Work with Janni Younge."
Photo by Yvette Marie Dostatni.



ACTIVITIES CONT.

Volkenburg Puppetry Symposium

Founded in 2015 alongside the Festival as a critical supplemental program, the Volkenburg Puppetry Symposium reveals how the theory, practice, and philosophy of puppetry can catalyze creativity in the arts, humanities, and sciences. In 2022, the Symposium moved online in partnership with the nonprofit theater industry platform HowlRound and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was co-curated by Paulette Richards, Independent Educator and Puppetry Scholar, and Blair Thomas, Adjunct Associate Professor, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

January 22 and 29, 2022, the Symposium offered four panel discussions:

- ***Staging the Non-Human Character: Animal, Alien, or Architecture*** with moderator **Dr. Paulette Richards** and panelists **Maria Camia, Nick Lehane, Marsian De Lellis, and Basil Twist**
- ***What We Leave Behind: The Plastic Object Geological Layer*** with moderator **Julie Moller** and panelists **Dr. Sasha Atkins, Robin Frohardt, and Dr. Sarah Newman**
- ***Race & Representation in Puppetry*** with moderator **Dr. Paulette Richards** and panelists **Torry Bend, Ty Defoe, Margaret Laurena Kemp, and JaMeeka Holloway**
- ***How Objects Make Meaning on Stage: New Perspectives*** with moderator **Dr. Dassia N. Posner** and panelists **Ana Diaz Barriga, Jess Bass, Marissa Fenley, Skye Strauss, and Kezia Waters**

KEY GOALS

Volkenburg Symposium

An ancient form that often exists at the margins of dominant culture, puppetry has unique power to spark insights and upset entrenched perspectives. The Ellen Van Volkenburg Puppetry Symposium brings together practicing Festival artists, scholars, and the general public to consider the intersection of puppetry with other disciplines and ideas.



Exterior of the Wrigley Building during The Plastic Bag Store.



Kerry James Marshall and Blair Thomas at the Fall Living Room Tour. Still from video by Theodore Phillips.

KEY GOALS

The Living Room Tour

The Living Room Tour cultivates deep community support for the Festival and creates opportunities for guests to encounter puppetry in an up-close-and-personal way.

Living Room Tour

The Chicago Puppet Fest hosted three intimate benefit events in private spaces November 11–13, 2021, kicking off the runup to the January 2022 Festival. The Tour featured top Chicago talent **Vanessa Valliere** and **Cabinet of Curiosity** alongside an exclusive preview of *Chimpanzee* by **Nick Lehane**, who came in from New York for the occasion. Events allowed the Festival to host several new supporters and prospective Board members and introduce audiences to **Manual Cinema's** new studios. 2021 Living Room Tour Co-Chairs: **Maureen Mizwicki**, **Kim Ohms** and **Jackie Zydeck**.



Blair Thomas with Manual Cinema Co-Artistic directors Julia Miller and Sarah Fornace at the Living Room Tour at Manual Cinema. Photo by Theodore Phillips.

Festival Celebration

The 2022 Chicago Puppet Fest launched with a special pre-show reception made possible by leadership from Board Members Julie Moller, Kristy Moran, and Chair, Kim Ohms with lead artists and VIPs at The Nature Conservancy before the opening presentations of *Sea Change* at the MCA Chicago and *The Plastic Bag Store* at The Wrigley Building.

KEY GOALS

Festival Celebration

Receptions gather the Festival's fans, supporters, partners, and artists in a genuine celebration and help the Festival to cultivate a broad base of support.



(above) Board Chair Kim Ohms points out the fantastic creations on display at the Prelude reception.

(right) Jes Sherborne, Sandy Gerding, and Julie Moller at The Plastic Bag Store.





THE PLASTIC BAG STORE

In the most ambitious production the Chicago Puppet Fest has presented to date, *The Plastic Bag Store* filled a street level storefront in The Wrigley Building, delivering a cautionary and exceptionally vibrant spectacle from Robin Frohardt, one of the leading puppetry artists of our time.

Open for the duration of the Festival, *The Plastic Bag Store* attracted a walk-through audience of 1,800 and 750 additional guests during ticketed film screenings. One in three admissions to the 2022 Chicago Puppet Fest was for *The Plastic Bag Store*, making it the most-seen production of the event by far.

Both provocative and visually stunning, *The Plastic Bag Store* was also a favorite feature in local and national press, receiving significant preview and review coverage.



Exterior of the Wrigley Building during *The Plastic Bag Store*.



Still from **The Plastic Bag Store** by Robin Frohardt.



Still from "What We Leave Behind" at the Ellen Van Volkenburg Puppetry Symposium.

While in town for the production, Frohardt participated in a discussion during the online Ellen Van Volkenburg Puppetry Symposium on January 22. In ***What We Leave Behind: The Plastic Object Geological Layer***, environmental advocate, philanthropist, and Chicago Puppet Fest Board member Julie Moller moderated a panel including Frohardt and two others: Dr. Sasha Atkins, lecturer at the School of Environmental Sustainability at Loyola University and Dr. Sarah Newman, assistant professor of anthropology and social sciences at the University of Chicago. Presented in partnership with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the highly trafficked online platform HowlRound, the conversation was broadcast live online and is now publicly archived at HowlRound.



Still from **The Plastic Bag Store** by Robin Frohardt.



The Plastic Bag Store by Robin Frohardt. Photo by Nick Zoulek.

The Chicago presentation of ***The Plastic Bag Store*** was made possible by generous support from:





PRESS

As usual, the Chicago Puppet Fest received abundant coverage in local and national press, along with extended features on ABC7 Chicago, WGN, WTTW, and WBEZ. In all, the Festival saw 57 placements in media over a six-week period. In a welcome surprise, Chicagoans voted the Chicago Puppet Fest one of the Best Performing Arts Festivals in Chicago Reader's Best of Chicago issue, second only to Ravinia Festival.

From CS Magazine, December 2021

8 Chicago Tribune | Section 6 | Sunday, January 2, 2022



The Puppets by David La Tourette, coming to the 2022 Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival. JESSICA KAMLER

Chicago's Puppet Theater Fest returns with old favorites and the wildly new, broadening what you expect from a puppet show

Beyond expectations

By David George | Chicago Tribune

For all the things Chicago is famous for, let puppetry be the one and puppetry's biggest event on the calendar is the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival.

The fourth edition of the Puppet Theater Fest will be back in early 2022, with some 100 performances at 15 venues around the city. The International Festival will fully be ready to return after the second year of COVID-related travel restrictions, but you can expect puppetry to be a part of the city's recovery in the coming year.

"The Puppet Theater Fest" is a series of events, including puppetry, theater, and dance. The festival is a celebration of the art of puppetry and the power of storytelling. It is a chance for puppeteers to showcase their work and for audiences to experience the magic of puppetry.

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Wills acts by David La Tourette and David La Tourette, coming to the 2022 Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival. JESSICA KAMLER



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2 | Wednesday, January 19, 2022 | The Chicago Sun-Times | Section 6

TOP STORY

'People are hungry for puppetry'

Cancelled last year due to COVID, the Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival is back

By David George | Chicago Tribune



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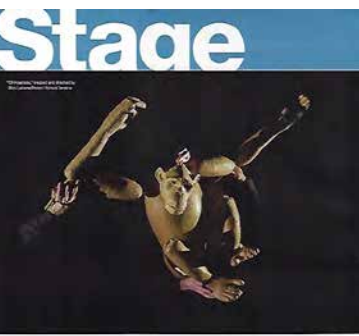
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(top) From Chicago Sun-Times, January 19, 2022

(bottom) From Newcity, January 2022



PARTNERS

The Chicago Puppet Fest thrives due to the collaborative approach made possible by robust partnerships, many of which involve the exchange of non-cash resources with presenting partner organizations. Presenting partners provide a varied combination of elements key to the successful running of the Festival for example, performance space, shared marketing, production staffing, PR assistance, or artist immigration support. The Festival seeks partner organizations situated in the arts life of Chicago as well as in geographic communities outside the city center, in particular those institutions that share the Festival mission of uniting and enlivening distinct communities through art (American Indian Center, Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center) and cultivating peace and cross-cultural understanding (Goethe-Institut, Instituto Cervantes, Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States). All together, the Festival's collaborating partners contribute and exchange the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars in services, staff, and in-kind working hours with the Festival. The Festival enriches all involved with increased audience, new clientele, media attention, interdisciplinary cooperation and compelling puppetry programming in the heart of Chicago's winter when it's most needed. This is in addition to a range of support provided by the Festival like visas, legal help, lodging, artist fees, per diem, marketing, and more, making the programs possible.

Partners during the 2022 Festival were: **345 Art Gallery, American Indian Center, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Chopin Theatre, The DuSable Museum of African American History, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Navy Pier, The Neo-Futurists, Rough House, Loyola University School of Environmental Sustainability, Epiphany Center for the Arts, The Field Museum, Instituto Cervantes Chicago, Links Hall, Art on Sedgwick, Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Warwick Allerton Chicago, and The Nature Conservancy.**





TEAM AND OPERATIONS

Leadership & Staff

Blair Thomas
Sandy Smith Gerding
Dominique Atwood
Taylor Bibat
Mark Blashford
Tom Lee
Blair Thomas
Grace Needlman

Artistic Director & Festival Founder
Executive Director
Engagement Coordinator
Festival & Education Coordinator
Studio Coordinator
Chicago Puppet Studio & Puppet Lab Co-Director
Chicago Puppet Studio & Puppet Lab Co-Director
Chicago Puppet Lab Coordinator

Admin & Consultants

Jess Mott Wickstrom
Cameron Heinze
Deidre Huckabay
Jay Kelly PR
Andy Wickstrom

Graphic Design & Website
Business Management / Finance
Grant Writing Consultant
Public Relations Consultant
Video Editor

Festival Production

Margaret Nelson
Frank Rose
Julie Moller
Margaret Nelson
Kat Phillips
Michael Reed
Joe Vonderhaar
Ocie Spruill
Mikayla Delson
Nick Zoulek
Yvette Marie Dostatni
Evan Barr
Kelley Dorhauer
Emani Drake

Festival Production Manager
The Plastic Bag Store Production Manager
The Plastic Bag Store Advocacy Lead
Free Neighborhood Tour Production Manager
Free Neighborhood Tour Stage Manager
Free Neighborhood Tour Technical Director
Logistics and Transportation
Logistics and Transportation
Photographer
Photographer
Photographer
Photographer
Box Office Support
Box Office Support

Paulette Richards
Blair Thomas

Symposium Co-curator
Symposium Co-curator

Grace Needlman
Samuel J. Lewis II

Catapult Facilitator
Catapult Facilitator



The Joshua Show entertains a captive audience at 345 Art Gallery. Photo by Evan Barr.



Volunteers enjoying the shows at Instituto Cervantes of Chicago.

And special thanks to the numerous individuals who volunteered their valuable time and expertise.



GETTING HERE AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Mounting the 2022 Festival in the face of the Covid Omicron variant stands as a benchmark success for the organization. The Chicago Puppet Fest is led by Artistic Director & Festival Founder Blair Thomas and Executive Director Sandy Gerding (promoted from Managing Director in 2021).

Having carefully managed spending and new project development during the pandemic, the Chicago Puppet Fest created and filled three new staff positions as in-person programming ramped up: Chicago Puppet Studio & Puppet Lab Co-Director, Chicago Puppet Lab Coordinator, and Studio Coordinator. The Festival was also able to invest in audience development and digital engagement at the onset of the Festival supporting two more roles: Engagement Coordinator and Festival Coordinator.



The Strategic Plan: 2021-2026

During the quarantine and epidemic, the Festival remarkably achieved the goal of creating a comprehensive 5-year Strategic Plan. The Festival's Strategic Planning Committee comprised 53% non-White leaders, including several highly awarded local and national puppetry artists and two prominent figures in the international puppetry community from Indonesia and Canada. The Committee convened eight focus groups, conducted six interviews, and surveyed the company's followers, engaging a total of 403 artists, audience members, and other constituents over a period of one year to shape a vision for the organization's future.

Key commitments in the resulting Strategic Plan include achieving an ideal 50% international artists on each Festival roster, continuing to highlight diverse U.S. artists, supporting puppeteers, and BIPOC artists in particular, to develop excellent new work, and ensuring teaching artists and workshop participants represent a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. The Strategic Plan also outlined the creation of the Chicago Puppet Lab, which the Festival promptly launched. Further directives of the Strategic Plan include moving from a biennial Festival to an annual one beginning in 2022 and increasing workshops into year-round offerings. The development of a new Curatorial Committee is also underway.

As part of the planning process, the Festival collected hundreds of surveys from audience members, artists, supporters, and other constituents. Several responses showed that one of the Festival's strengths is its capacity to inspire its followers to take up creative practices in their everyday lives.



"[M]y son wants to be a puppeteer, something he's said for the past four years now," one respondent wrote. "He's just seven, but he's serious about it, and started saying this after one of your Festivals. [...]. Artist is a possible career choice in his mind, and that is in large part because of you." Another wrote, "I appreciate the opportunity to exercise my imagination!" Still others wrote that they "learned so much," "continue to be inspired," and experience the Festival as a "necessary pilgrimage for [the] soul, imagination, brain, and heart."

Another outcome of the Strategic Plan was that the Festival moved into a large office and workshop studio in the historic Fine Arts Building in downtown Chicago, where it had been headquartered since 2017. The Festival's previous one-room studio had simultaneously served as an office, a meeting space, a reception area, a donor cultivation site, and a puppetry workshop—all in fewer than 800 square feet. Now, its new facilities are fundamentally transforming the Festival's capacity at a time when demand for its workshops, artist development programs, and for-hire puppetry design work is precipitously increasing.

Now the organization prepares for the return of the Festival January 19-29, 2023. Programs have tentatively been curated from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Indonesia, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and South Africa as well as acts from Chicago and across the U.S.

As the Festival moves from a biennial event to an annual one, the volume of programs presented are effectively doubling. All the while, recent global events are resulting in continually increasing costs for shipping, airfare, space and visas, at the same time underscoring the critical need for international and cross-cultural understanding. The Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival needs generous, multi-year support and partnerships now more than ever. With solid support, The Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival will continue to exceed expectations, bringing puppetry programs that astonish, delight, and ultimately promote peace and understanding.



Entrance to the **Puppet Fest Headquarters** in The Fine Arts Building, Chicago.
Photo Phillip Solomonson.



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(top) **The Bluest Eye** by Margaret Laurena Kemp and Janni Younge.
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(above left) **Sea Change** by Cabinet of Curiosity.
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(above right) **Skeleton Canoe** by Ty Defoe.
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Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival

410 S. Michigan Ave, Studio 310
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