

Pia Banzhaf

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PROFILE

Puppetry artist-researcher working across shadowlight theater, hand-carved marionettes, and object theater. My practice investigates how performing objects create an oscillation between seeing materials as things and as beings—a cognitive process that opens space for new perspectives. Drawing on extensive training with master puppeteers internationally and a PhD in cognitive poetics of puppetry, I develop performances and workshops designed to be participatory and accessible. Building on years of university teaching and research, now launching Pie & Puppets company to bring puppetry to public spaces.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

2018 **Ph.D. Cultural Studies**, Queen's University at Kingston, Canada

Dissertation: *Towards a Cognitive Poetics of Puppetry*. A multi-disciplinary study of the cognitive underpinnings of the perception of inanimate objects.

Dissertation advisors: Dr. Natalie Rewa (chair) School of Drama, Dr. Valerie Kuhlmeier (Department of Psychology), Dr. Allison Morehead (Department of Art History & Art Conservation)

2010 **M.A. German Literary Studies**, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada.

2002 **Teacher Certification**, Bochum, Germany

1999 **M.A. equivalent**, Majors in German Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Anthropology of Textiles, Minor in Psychology. Universität Dortmund, Germany.

Specialized Training in Puppetry Arts

2025 – Academy of the Wooden Puppet Mastermind Fellowship. Online.
Masterclass with Bernd Ogrodnik, Gengenbach, Germany.
Puppet Recipes, classes with Mirek Trejtnar at “Puppets in Prague.”
Ongoing.

2025 Weeklong workshop "Spiel mit der Marionette" with Ralph Mürle.
Figurentheater-Kolleg Bochum, Germany.

2023 - 2024 "Academy of the Wooden Puppet Mastermind Program" (AMP), with Bernd Ogrodnik. Year-long intensive. Online.

2023 Chicago International Puppetry Festival Workshop "Physical Shadow

- Puppetry for the Digital Stage" with Tom Lee and Linda Wingerter.
 O'Neill National Puppetry Conference: Main conference strand "Miniature and Grandiose, Transient and Eternal" with Les Sages Fous.
 O'Neill National Puppetry Conference: Pre-Conference strand "Writing for Puppets: A Workshop in Three Acts with Liz Hara."
- 2022 Shadow Theater Festival Workshop with Hansueli Trüb, Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany.
 Shadow Puppetry Workshop with Manual Cinema, 5th Chicago International Puppetry Festival Workshop.
- 2022 - 2023 "Academy of the Wooden Puppet" with Bernd Ogrodnik. Online.
- 2021 „Puppet Mastery" Foundation Course with Bernd Ogrodnik, Online.
- 2019 „Von der Idee zum Stück" with director Joachim Torbahn, Thalias Kompagnions, Nürnberg, dramaturgy workshop, Bamberg. Germany.
 "7 Expeditions with Light," Exploration into Unknown Territory of Contemporary Shadow Theater with Norbert Götz, Theater des Lichts, Bamberg, Germany.
 Wood Carving & Puppet Design, Assets for Artists-Workshop Residency with David Lane, Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA.
- 2018 Kinetic Objects, Workshop at Peters Valley School of Craft with Ben Pranger.
 "Las bestias danzan o el sigiloso conjuro de lo salvaje," workshop and performance with La Liga-Teatro Elástico, AQM, Montréal, Québec, Canada.
- 2015 "Taming the Light," workshop with Norbert Götz, Theater des Lichts, Bamberg, Germany.
- 2014 "The Power of the Puppet," workshop with Neville Tranter, Figuren-Kolleg Bochum, Germany.
 UNIMA-Canada Immersion Project, with Frank Soehnle, AQM, Montréal, Québec, Canada.
- 2013 New England Puppetry Intensive with members of The Old Trout Puppet Workshop, Williamstown, MA.
- 2012 Marionette Construction Course, at Puppets in Prague with Mirek Trejtnar, Czech Republic.

CREATIVE PROJECTS, PERFORMANCES, COMMISSIONS

- 2023 "12 Days of Christmas", as interrupted by Punch and Judy, and explained by shadow puppets. Southside Community Kitchen, Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Michigan.

- 2022 Gros Morne Residency and Workshop, Bonne Bay, Marine Station, NL, Canada (partly funded by a FOCl: Future Oceans and Coastal Infrastructures grant)
- 2019 Pacey, the Pelican. Commissioned puppet build for Dionne O'Dell's Pond Project, a play for a neurodiverse audience. Co-designed and built with Steve Baibak. MSU.
- 2018 A Panoply of Puppets, RCAH LookOut Gallery Exhibit, co-curated with Steve Baibak, May-September. MSU.
The Three Astronauts by Umberto Eco. Shadow puppet theater with MSU students, MSU Abrams Planetarium.
- 2017 Development of theatrical adaptation of Patrick Süskind's novella *The Pigeon* with David Lane. Residency, Kô-Festival of Performance, Amherst College, MA.
- 2016 "Jack and the Bottle of World's End Water," Illuminated Puppetry Arts Workshop, St. John's, NL, Canada. Producer, workshop facilitator, puppeteer, Newfoundland Puppet Collective. December–August
Artist in Residence, Residential College of Arts and Humanities (RCAH), Michigan State University: Contemporary Shadow Theatre. Co-taught with Steven Baibak in Reclamation Studio.
- 2014–2015 "Jack and the Bottle of World's End Water," 15th Victoria Park Annual Lantern Fest. Creation of multi-media, circus, and physical theatre spectacle. Producer, workshop facilitator, puppeteer, co-founder Newfoundland Puppet Collective, St. John's, NL, Canada.
- 2014 Performance of "Tales from the AGA: The Golden Butter Tart," with puppetry and clowning in a Vaudeville-Dadaist tradition at the Annual Butter Tart Festival, ODD Puppet Collective, Midland, ON, Canada.
Performance of a fragment of "s e a r c h i n g," a work in progress, performed at the POUF during the Festival "Les Trois Jours de Casteliers," Montréal, QC, Canada.
- 2011 Kafka's *The Judgement* as puppet play with marionettes and shadow theatre. Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada.

GRANTS, AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

- 2023 EOTC scholarship for O'Neill National Puppetry Conference \$600
Delia Koo Award, Asian Studies Center MSU, \$4,000
- 2020 #iteachmsu Educator Award
- 2019 100 Years of Bauhaus-Symposium: Campus Weeks. Federal Government of Germany. \$6,000. collaborator

- 2015 Newfoundland Puppet Collective Community Arts Project, Canada Council Community Project Development. \$15,000
- 2014 Research Residency, Institut International de la Marionnette, Charleville-Mézières, France, \$2,800
UNIMA Canada, Immersion Project, in kind \$1,800
- 2012–2014 Doctoral scholarship, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada, \$40,000

PUBLICATIONS

Edited Volume

Banzhaf, Pia. "Puppets, Perception, and the Uncanny: Watching Performances Through a Cognitive Lens." In *Making Meaning with Puppets: Material, Performance, Perception*. Dassia Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and Alissa Mello, eds. Routledge. 2025.

Journals, Conference Proceedings, Other Publications

"La poétique de la marionnette." *Les poétiques de l'illusion*. Théâtre de marionnettes et des arts associés (THEMAA), Institut International de la Marionnette, CNAC, 14:20. 2018.

"Puppets—A Distinct Ontological Category." *Dolls and Puppets: Contemporaneity and Tradition*. Ed. Kamil Kopania. The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw (The Department of Puppetry Art in Białystok). 2018

"A Cognitive Approach to the Poetics of Puppetry." *Puppet Notebook: Puppetry and Science*. Issue 24, Summer 2014. British UNIMA. p10-13.

PRESENTATIONS & LECTURES (selected)

- 2024 "Objects with a Soul: The Strange Power of Puppetry"-Episode 22 in Brainland Podcast with Ana Diaz Barriga, hosted by Dr Ken Barrett, UK.
- 2022 "Disrupting Predictive Processing: Puppets and the Reference Framework (2)." Puppetry and Material Performance Working Session online, American Society for Theater Research (ASTR), New Orleans.
Shadow Puppetry Workshop, Oakdene Center and King's Theatre, Bear River, Nova Scotia.
- 2019 "'The Willing Suspension of Disbelief'- What's in a phrase?" Puppetry and Material Performance Working Session, American Society for Theater Research (ASTR), Arlington.

- 2018 "Puppet Power"-Episode 10 in Collaborative Edges Podcast with Steve Baibak, hosted by Prof. Rocio Quispe-Agnoli.
Show & Tell. Umberto Eco's "The Three Astronauts" shadow theater
RCAH class project, Great Lakes Planetarium Association
Conference (GLPA), Abrams Planetarium, MSU.
"How does it Work? The Cognition behind the Animacy Perception in
Puppetry" Puppet Power Conference 2018, WP Puppet Theatre,
Calgary. (Honarium \$1000)
- 2017 "Light is Life – Lantern Puppets & The Newfoundland Puppet Collective,"
Puppetry and Material Performance Working Session, American
Society for Theater Research (ASTR), Atlanta, GA.

LEADERSHIP & SERVICE

- 2023-present Co-convenor, ASTR Puppetry and Material Performance Working Session
- 2024 Co-led volunteer puppet lab for MSU students in puppet construction
techniques
- 2023 External Tenure Reviewer, Faculty of Arts, University of Calgary
Co-facilitator shadow puppetry, Michigan Opera Outreach, Ingham County
Youth Facility
- 2019 Co-organizer 100 Years of Bauhaus Symposium with workshops by Christian
Fuchs, MSU

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2024—2025 **Academic Director**, Academic Year in Freiburg, Germany.
- 2016—2025 **Assistant Professor, Designation B** (teaching focused), Michigan State
University.
- 2007-2015 **Instructor**, German language and culture courses at University of Manitoba,
Memorial University, Queen's University, Canada.
- 2000–2004 **Teacher**, German, Mathematics, Social Sciences, English as a Foreign
Language, and Art Education. Grades 1-6. Germany.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS

American Society for Theater Research (ASTR); Puppeteers of America (PoA); Association
québécoises de la marionnette (AQM); Union International de la Marionnette (UNIMA)-
Canada; UNIMA-USA

LANGUAGES

German & English (native/bilingual), French (B2/C1), Italian (B1), Spanish (A2)