SHELBURNE, VT — They seem to be everywhere. They are in top-grossing films and commercials, on television and on Broadway. They have prominent roles in protest marches and in religious festivals. They set the tone of grandeur and spectacle at the opening ceremonies for the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. They are the giant inflatables that steal the show in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. These inert objects come alive for us as finger, hand or rod puppets, or as shadow theater. They have the capacity to be irascible, irreverent and violent — but also politically savvy, poetic and profound. And sometimes, as Finn Campman, a Vermont puppeteer who has worked and toured internationally with the Sandglass Theater, notes, we can be simultaneously captivated and unnerved by them.

“Having been a puppeteer for many years I’ve found some people are naturally comfortable and drawn to having experiences with puppets…while others recoil from it. I think it has to do with being forced to believe in something that isn’t alive. You are actively participating in a manipulation. There is a purity to it, from the ways that often-mundane materials take on metaphoric qualities,” he explains.

On view at the Shelburne Museum through June 3, “Puppets: World on a String” features a gallery full of these objects. The show organized by Carolyn Bauer offers a broad-brushed exploration of this theater art, drawing upon works from the permanent collection as well as many objects on loan.

The writer Kenneth Gross has suggested, “There is something in the puppet — in its paradoxes of scale and weight — that ties its dramatic life more to the shapes of dreams, the poetry of the unconscious, than to any realistic drama of human life.” Perhaps because of this, when we encounter a Nineteenth Century giant-sized Punch, once employed as a prop at a cigar shop, we accept this classic anti-hero on his own terms. Punch exists under many names and guises and in many countries, with his evil temper and his penchant for violence, intact. He thumbs his nose at authorities and whacks his wife, Judy, with his slaphack. Yet when he takes on the devil, we cheer for him. As the consummate bad boy he is very good at hawking tobacco, or British holiday crackers, for that matter.

Diametrically opposed in tone, scale and style are a pair of the late Frank Ballard’s masterfully carved and appointed marionettes. These two, the Queen of the Night and Prince Tomi-Rose from What the Moon Saw, Sarah Frechette, 2014. Mixed media. Courtesy Sarah Frechette. —Jessie Forand photo


(continued on page 12C)
Produced about 1997, this cased pair of 20-gauge sidelock ejector shotguns was made by London maker Purdy's to Woodward pattern specifications. Purdy's bought the name, and the patents, of the Woodward firm in 1846, but did not produce any of these until 1997. The pair went for $120,750.

Jack Bivens, the maker of this contemporary flintlock Kentucky rifles, should be familiar to many furniture collectors. Bivens wrote the three-volume set of books on North Carolina furniture and has also written on long rifles of North Carolina. His Kentucky rifles are considered very fine and this one sold for $5,750.

A group of ten Winchester model 1894 carbines in the original factory crate earned $120,750. It has been speculated that these early 1920s vintage carbines were part of a post-War World I United States government effort to restock its military arsenals and stockpile civilian firearms. It is thought that this crate, along with two or three others in this particular number range, were part of that government stockpile. These government stockpiled arms remained in storage until the outbreak of World War II when the United States shipped tens of thousands of government-owned and donated civilian arms to England for the British Home Guard.

The Bryan collection will be dispersed over several auctions. 'Ray Bentley's Antiques and Collectibles' will move on his last. 'It will take some getting used to. I know that life will change. It's programmed into my head and I've tried not to think about it. Auctions are emotional events for me. Their exhibitions, and I'm surrounded by my friends.' When the auction is over, the crowds are gone, the hoopla is gone, so it's depressing for a period of time. But it's time to move on. 'I've been thanking everyone that's helped me: my staff, my friends and everyone. I'll continue to buy and sell antiques and my executive assistant, Nancy Nonnan, will stay on and so will one another person. I won't be involved with auctions, except to man the podium at Guyette and Dextor decay auctions. The transition feels good now. It's the right thing to do and will allow me to spend time with my wife. I'm also pleased that Tony Wilson, who now runs the firearms division, will move to Pennsylvania and work with Morphy's firearms team.'

Jim Julia has been a fixture on the New England auction scene for more than years. It is truly the end of an era.

All prices cited include the buyer's premium.

For additional information, www.jamesdjulia.com or 207-453-7125.

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Like a cooked goose will help illustrate the theme of hunting. In the fishing section, a silver sea turtle tureen will swim serenely near a dish in the form of a bucket of codfish. A ben- chmarked shape vessel will help illustrate the availability of meats from domestic ani- mals, and dishes in the forms of melons and cauliflower will remind visitors to "eat their fruit and vegetables."

The next portion of the show will cover the fact that, after tableware and food were acquired, there still were many decisions to be made before one’s dinner guests arrived. Cookbooks offered both advice on the preparation of different dishes for the meal and instruc- tions, sometimes in the form of illustrations, on how to set the table. A dramatic display in the Rogers Chinese export porcelain will reproduce a banquet plan from a mid-1700s cookbook. Nearby, a vignette of the tortoise and the Hare. Adam and Eve will appear in the earliest garden of all, Eden. Not far away, a pyra- mid of centerpieces formed of dozens of seashell-shaped dishes will entice the viewer's eye. Beyond this, a pastoral scene filled with animal-shaped ves- phor Columbus. Other plates and dishes have a realistic, caricatured imagery copied from important natural history books or prints. Some designs for the whole family celebrated famous dis- plays at zoos, while animals on alphabet plates encouraged children to learn to read. Next, visitors will see a gal- lery filled with nature designs created in Western (primarily European) styles. Ancient pat- terns portrayed Bacchus, the god of wine, and grapevines, symbolic of fertility and autumn. Also from antiquity are Aesop's Fable patterns, such as The Tortoise and the Hare. Adam and Eve will appear in the earliest garden of all, Eden. Not far away, a pyra- mid of centerpieces formed of dozens of seashell-shaped dishes will entice the viewer's eye. Beyond this, a pastoral scene filled with animal-shaped ves-