

Ki Anom Suroto demonstrates how he brings the wayang to life. Performance elements include the screen and screen frame, banana logs, wayang kulit, the puppet box and box lid, a light source, and gamelan instruments. Photograph by the author, Solo, June 2007.

Performance

Wayang kulit performances are grand events that last throughout the night, accompanied all the while by a live gamelan orchestra. Hundreds of people gather to watch and enjoy these traditional theatrical performances.



Elements of Performance

The fundamental components of the performance include the *dhalang* himself, *wayang kulit* figures, a *kelir* and *gawang* (screen and frame), a *blencong* (light source),³⁹ *gedebog* (banana logs), a *kothak* (the puppet box), and a gamelan orchestra. The gamelan performers include *pesindhen* (singers—usually female) and *gerong* (a male chorus).

The screen is the main focus of the performance area, with stationary *wayang kulit* figures flanking the right and left sides of the screen in the arrangement called the *simpingan*. The middle of the screen is the actual performance area. The *dhalang* sits front and center, directly facing the screen, and he remains in this spot throughout the performance. An assistant may be employed by some *dhalang* who sits behind and serves the *dhalang* by handing him puppets that are needed in each scene. The gamelan orchestra is set up behind the *dhalang* and the *pesindhen* sit beside him facing the audience.⁴⁰ An electric lamp, the *blencong*, is wired (into a light socket) and set up so that it hangs from a point above and behind the *dhalang* and hangs down into the screen's space. When the *dhalang* holds the shadow puppet in front of the screen, the light projects onto the puppet, passes through hundreds of perforations in the hide, and results in gloriously ornate shadows. The patterns of light and shadow show clearly against the screen and the audience can see also the shadow, or silhouette, of the *wayang* figures on the opposite side of the screen (referred to as the "shadow side of the screen" as opposed to the "*dhalang*'s side of the screen"). A hint of color from the painted puppets can usually be seen through the screen as well. Shadows are manipulated by moving the *wayang kulit* to and from the screen and the light: shadow puppets touching the screen create a dark, well-defined, puppet-size shadow; while pulling the puppet away from the screen, towards the light source creates a very large, ethereal shadow.

In the past, the audience typically watched the show from the shadow side of the screen; spectators viewed the shadows, not the physical *wayang* figure, nor the performers. For many viewers the shadows are the most dramatic visual aspect of the *wayang* performance. But traditional performances were often informal, and audiences would walk around the screen to see all the action that took place behind the scenes—the *dhalang*, the *wayang*, and the gamelan musicians. However, this practice changed around 1945, the year when Sukarno (Indonesia's first president) took office. Sukarno encouraged the audience to watch *wayang* performances from the *dhalang*'s side of the screen—the puppet side.⁴¹ This remains the standard practice today. In fact, sometimes the screen is actually pushed up against a wall and the audience is prevented from watching the show from the shadow side.

Some see this shift in preference (the shift away from watching performances from the shadow side to watching performances from the *dhalang*'s side of the screen) as an indication of serious philosophical changes in society. The shadow has traditionally been seen as a reflection, or shadow, of life—and some may say that the shadow is the soul. Today's preference to watch from the puppeteer's side, that is, to watch the performance of the physical puppets instead of only watching the shadows, may reveal a modern tendency to see, or a desire to experience, the immediate physical world, rather than an interest in reflecting on some deeper concept, like the state of the soul.⁴²

Happily, the soul of *wayang* has not been completely lost, for there are still viewers who enjoy watching the shadows. Only nowadays, as mentioned, the majority of the viewers watch the performance from the *dhalang*'s side of the screen, and those who wish to view the dancing shadows without the distraction of the *dhalang*, the *wayang*, and the gamelan

Fig. 36

Ki Enthus Susmono brings the puppet closer to the screen to produce a smaller, finer shadow. Photograph by the author, Patih, June 13, 2009.



Fig.36

Fig. 37

Ki Seno of Yogyakarta performs in Bantul. He creates grand, striking shadows by holding the wayang figure close to the light (away from the screen). Photograph by the author, Bantul, June 20, 2009.



Fig.37

must walk around to the “shadow side of the screen.” Plus, the shadows are still an integral part of the performance, and still a prominent feature, even if the audience can only see them from the dhalang’s side of the screen.

Occasions for Performance

Wayang kulit performances may occur for many reasons. They may be sponsored by an individual, a family, an organization, or by the government, as part of a broader celebration or ritual event.⁴⁵ Examples of the occasions for performances are almost limitless. Wayang performances can commemorate an important event: for example to honor the marriage of one’s

son or daughter; to commemorate a boy's circumcision;⁴⁴ to celebrate a new entryway to a neighborhood; to celebrate a village harvest; to kick off a political campaign; to promote social service programs; to celebrate Indonesia's Independence Day; or simply to entertain an audience.

The particular *lakon* (story-episode) presented and the messages conveyed are often, but not necessarily, relevant to the celebration or commemoration.⁴⁵ For example, a performance celebrating a birth might tell the story of the birth of a heroic or admired character.⁴⁶ Special scenes such as the *gara-gara* and *limbukan* (described further below) may make reference to the occasion, or to the honorees and their families. A sponsor may request a particular story, or may request that the dhalang choose the story. However, it is not considered appropriate for a dhalang to have one favorite story, or a favorite character, because he is expected to view and treat each *lakon* and each wayang character with equal attention and equal favor.⁴⁷ In practice, the dhalang usually chooses the story from a broad repertoire that seems most appropriate for the event.

Performances that are sponsored for ritual celebrations are not a part of the actual ceremony. For example, wayang kulit would not be performed during a wedding ceremony; instead, the performance might occur before or after the primary event. But performances of wayang kulit are not required for such ritual celebrations: performances are elaborate and expensive affairs, and not everyone has the financial means, the time, or the space to sponsor such an event. Therefore, the ability to hold a wayang kulit performance for such occasions usually reflects the high social status of the sponsors.

Performance for "Protection"

In the past, another occasion for wayang kulit performance may have been to offer a community protection: that is, an audience might feel a sense of safety and well-being when they attend a performance. The performance itself might be perceived as a "ritual defense" during times of crisis, and the audience might believe that, during the performance, the shadow puppets and the dhalang are charmed by protective or magical spirits.⁴⁸ Today, although some may still hold these traditional beliefs, most contemporary audiences see the dhalang as a human being who is capable of mistakes. Ki Enthus Susmono explains that audiences may feel protected for logical reasons; perhaps they feel connected to the philosophies presented by the dhalang or they relate to the story, but that it is not his practice as a dhalang to offer "magical" protection. Wayang kulit may also be performed for exorcism rites (*ruwatan*), which are very serious and specialized performances that are not part of this discussion.⁴⁹ But whatever the attitude of the puppeteer towards magic, people in the audience have their own perceptions and ideas. So even when a dhalang, such as Ki Enthus, explains that he does not have special powers, some in the audience may still believe otherwise.⁵⁰

Ki Purbo Asmoro offers further insight into the issue of protection and wayang. He confirms that in the past, the dhalang was believed to have supernatural power (and he adds there are still some dhalang today who are thought to have special powers to ward off rain and the like). But today, according to Ki Purbo, performances are more about the dhalang's ability to perform wayang well and to "win the hearts of the spectators." In other words, it is the show itself that enraptures the audience to the point where those attending may feel hypnotized and safe or protected. At the same time, Ki Purbo notes that although wayang kulit performances attract large audiences (sometimes numbering thousands of people) very rarely do riots or acts of violence occur at these performances—as they might at other large events such as rock concerts. Ki Purbo speculates that this is likely in line with the character



Fig.38

Fig. 38
A performance as seen from the "dhalang's side of the screen," which is the more popular side for spectators. Performance of dhalang Ki Anom Dwijo Kangko. Photograph by the author, Jebres, Solo, June 15, 2009.



Fig.39

Fig. 39
A performance scene by dhalang Ki Enthus Susmono, as seen from the "shadow side of the screen." Spectators still enjoy the tradition of watching shadows. Photograph by Honggo Utomo, Manyaran, June 23, 2007.

Fig. 40
The "shadow side of the screen" of this performance by dhalang Ki Enthus Susmono faces a parking lot as most spectators today choose to watch from the "dhalang's side of the screen." Photograph by the author, Patih, June 13, 2009.



Fig.40

of the spectators, who are perhaps influenced by the philosophy and perspective of the dhalang. It is not "magic," but perhaps the personal aura and authority of the dhalang are not irrelevant. It is possible that the relatively calm atmosphere at wayang kulit performances is due to the dhalang's positive influence and the example he sets for the community.⁵¹

Performance Setting

Although traditional performances for specific events may be sponsored by individuals, particular organizations, or the government, when these performances take place in a village, everyone is invited to watch. Regardless of who sponsors the performance or the elaborateness of the staging (as in gold-leafed palace-style wayang, or special lighting effects), these performances remain very much an art of and for the people. As such, wayang kulit performances can take place anywhere people are found—from a royal palace to a small village.



Furthermore, modern wayang performances that are staged at more elite venues are often broadcast on radio or television— providing an even greater number of people with access to this art form.

The milieu of a village performance is always lively. Crowds of people gather to watch the performance and to socialize. The performance area is usually set on a platform, and the approaches to this area are full of vendors selling souvenir shadow puppets, books on wayang, balloons and toys, coffee and tea, noodles, peanuts, satay, soups, electronics and more. Games, including gambling games, are also common. Unlike formal, sit-down performances in the West, audiences of wayang kulit are not expected to remain seated throughout the performance. People get up, walk around, view the performance from both sides of the screen, talk to one another, eat, drink coffee or tea, smoke cigarettes, nap, send text messages, leave, and come back. The majority of viewers are not “tuned in” for the whole night-long performance, nor are they expected to pay attention throughout the entirety of the show. Instead, audiences depend on cues from the dhalang (for example, his language or tone of voice, special musical compositions or songs, a joke, or the entrance of a particular character onto the stage). These cues pull the audience’s attention back to the performance for important scenes or for important messages.

Fig. 41
Performances occur for a wide variety of reasons. In this picture, people gather to watch a performance in Solo by Ki Anom Dwijo Kangko that was sponsored by a neighborhood cooperative to celebrate the new entry-way to their neighborhood. These fancy gates are painted with batik motifs that are special to Central Java. Photograph by the author, Jebres, Solo, June 15, 2009.



Fig. 42

The general atmosphere at typical wayang kulit performances. Photographs by the author.

Symbolism in Performance

Wayang kulit performances are highly symbolic and are sometimes considered a mystical representation of the universe. For example, the wayang kulit figures themselves may represent humanity; the wayang shadow is a shadow of life, a dreamlike or illusionary world, connoting the soul; the screen may be viewed as heaven or the universe; the gedebog (the banana log puppet base) may be viewed as the physical earth. The dhalang may symbolize the "Creator" in the world of wayang; a Great Authority who draws on his spiritual beliefs and his knowledge of humanity to bring the wayang and the story to life.⁵²

Within each performance, there are three distinct acts, symbolizing an individual's life cycle. The first act symbolizes youth and immaturity; the second act corresponds to middle age and one's search for the right path in the face of temptations; and the final third act connotes old age, the defeat of enemies, and the achievement of inner peace and enlightenment.⁵³ These acts will be discussed further below.

The Gamelan Orchestra

The gamelan orchestra is indispensable to wayang kulit; without gamelan there is no wayang kulit performance. Music supports the all-night performance almost non-stop, though the number of instruments that play at a given time within the performance may vary.⁵⁴

The music plays a vital role in punctuating the dhalang's narration, emphasizing the puppets' movements, aiding transitions between scenes, and generally stimulating the audience's imagination and encouraging an emotional connection to the story. In essence, the gamelan orchestra helps to set the mood for various scenes. Music creates intensity during battles; levity and excitement during humorous and spirited scenes; an atmosphere of romance during love scenes; and sadness during more tragic scenes.⁵⁵

Different *gendhing* (gamelan compositions) may be suitable for different types of action in the performance. For example, some compositions may signal the entrance and exit of particular characters to the set, while other compositions may be played during battle scenes and journeys.⁵⁶ Hence, the gamelan musicians follow the show very closely in order to sup-

Fig. 43
The bonang section of a gamelan orchestra. Photograph by Honggo Utomo, Manyaran, June 23, 2007.



port dialogue and action with their musical performance: for example, by playing loud and lively music in some scenes and quietly providing soft background music (or no music) in others. Furthermore, certain modes of music are related to a character's childhood, youth, or old age and those modes are played in the corresponding acts (*pathet*).

Some people believe that gamelan orchestras serve a higher purpose as well. Similar to the belief that wayang kulit performances offer the audience "protection," there is also a belief that gamelan music itself could ensure the safety and well-being of those in attendance.⁵⁷ Historically, gamelan instruments (particularly palace collections of instruments) and wayang orchestras were believed to be magically charged.⁵⁸ Though today this belief may not be as widespread, people are still expected to act politely towards a gamelan orchestra; the physical instruments are highly valued by the culture and even considered by many to be sacred objects, treated with great care and respect.⁵⁹

Performance Structure

The manner in which all wayang performances unfold is strictly structured and follows a standard outline. This is not to say that wayang kulit performances remain static over time; that is far from the case. However, the traditional structure of performance is maintained for most stories, despite the infusion of unique practices, interpretations, and personal innovations that each dhalang brings to his performance. So although the plots, characters, themes, and morals may differ from lakon to lakon, the way in which the story progresses is formulaic, and remains more or less the same. This also helps explain why an audience familiar with the performance structure can drift away and then be drawn back for important or favorite scenes.

The three acts of wayang kulit performance are known as *pathet*, a term which refers to the modes of music that characterize the different acts; they are: *Pathet Nem*, *Pathet Sanga*, and *Pathet Manyara*. Each act is broken down into distinct scenes, interspersed with smaller transitional and/or sub-scenes, all of which have specific names and functions. The following is intended to provide a general idea of how a plot progresses, and summarizes only some of the main events of the three main acts and a few entertaining scenes that have become a popular part of today's performances.

When the dhalang sits before the screen, the first puppet he uses is the *gunungan*, also known as the *kayon* (a cosmic mountain or tree of life figure). This mountain-shaped puppet is manipulated to flutter and "breathe" before the screen. The *gunungan/kayon* begins and ends every performance, and marks the beginning and end of each plot division and scene. It can also be used to represent the natural elements (fire, water, earth, and air), natural storms, special places or physical elements within a scene, and strong emotions. Only one *gunungan/kayon* is required, but the current trend is to utilize at least two or three of these puppet types (and often more are used) to create very beautiful and dramatic shadow imagery. (see figure 37)

Pathet Nem

The first act (*Pathet Nem*) is always set in a particular kingdom. The opening scene, called the *jejer* scene, takes place in the king's main audience hall of a *kraton* (royal palace). The central plot of the story is revealed through dialogue between the king and his princes, chief ministers and military personnel—all of whom make grand and elaborate entrances. Following a discussion of important matters, the king either appoints a messenger to carry out

his wishes or assembles an army to do so. The king then usually enters the private chambers of the palace to relay information to the queen, and to have a feast.⁶⁰ *Pathet Nem* symbolizes the hero's youthful innocence as he begins his life journey.

LIMBUKAN: The *limbukan*, a scene that often occurs in the second scene of the first act, involves two comedic ladies-in-waiting. The characters (*Limbuk* and her mother *Cangik*) come onto the set and engage in a dialogue, which in a modern performance is usually unrelated to the main story. In this part of the show, the *dhalang* typically introduces the gamelan musicians, the *pesindhen* (singers), the sponsors, the honorees, and the occasion for the performance. This marks a great departure from the *dhalang*'s relationship with his audience during the rest of the performance—in other parts of the performance the *dhalang* does not address or present himself to the audience. The *limbukan* is different; the *dhalang* has a more direct relationship with his audience. The *limbukan* is presented as a comedy routine with much witty banter, especially between the *dhalang* and the singers.

Originally the *limbukan* may have been a scene in which a newborn baby was nursed by *Limbuk*, and past *dhalang* did not always include a *limbukan* in their performance.⁶¹ The *limbukan*, as it is known today, was popularized by *Ki Nartosabdo* (1925–1985), one of the most influential *wayang* performers of the late twentieth century, a man who made numerous innovations that have become standards in today's *wayang* performance. It was *Ki Nartosabdo* who transformed the *limbukan* scene from a short dialogue between mother and

Fig. 44
Pesindhen (singers)
performing with *dhalang*
Ki Anom Dwijono Kangko.
Photograph by the author,
Jebres, Solo, June 15, 2009



daughter palace servants to a whole comedy routine complete with contemporary music, special guest stars, and other trendy, cutting-edge attention-grabbers.⁶² Today the *limbukan* is typically pure entertainment and it is one of two special humorous scenes. The other, the *gara-gara*, is discussed below.

THE ARMY DEPARTS: After the *limbukan*, the performance returns to the main story line, which is now set in an army camp. The army receives orders and departs from the kingdom. This departure scene, which always includes a soldier who leaves on horseback, is particularly captivating. Two separate puppets (a soldier and a horse) move gracefully and simultaneously, to create the impression that the character is riding a horse. After the departure scene, the army eventually arrives in a foreign, enemy kingdom. The scene is presented from the perspective of the antagonists; discussions take place between the enemy king and his entourage in the main audience hall of this king's palace. The enemy dispatches its messengers and sends its army (usually the giants) into battle. The opposing messengers or armies meet and engage in a battle (in which there are never any casualties) before the first act ends.⁶³

Pathet Sanga

In traditional all-night performances, the second act, *Pathet Sanga*, usually coincides with the midnight hour. Two especially popular scenes occur during this act. One special scene is the *gara-gara*, in which the *punakawan* star (the *punakawan* are clown-servants to the gods and to royalty). The other special scene is the *perang kembang* (the "flower" or "blossom battle"). *Pathet Sanga* symbolizes middle age and the search for meaning in life.

GARA-GARA: The *punakawan* characters are uniquely Javanese and do not appear in the original Indian versions of the epics *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*. The servants of the protagonists may meet up with the servants of the antagonists to relay messages from their overlord(s). Although the *punakawan* may appear in various scenes, the *gara-gara* is a scene specifically for these figures; today the *gara-gara* is most commonly presented as a separate scene, unrelated to the rest of the story.

Each *punakawan* character has a personal history and set of family relationships, and these figures are often the audience's favorite characters. The character Semar, for example, is loved for his wisdom, compassion, and his sound, balanced advice (despite his homely physical appearance and his uncontrolled flatulence). In fact, Semar is so highly revered that even the gods come to him for advice, for he is actually a manifestation of the high god, Sang Hyang Ismaya.⁶⁴ Semar is usually followed onstage by his three sons Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong, in that order.

The word *gara-gara* refers to a temporary disturbance of world order caused by the distress of a hero.⁶⁵ Formerly, at least in Solo, the *gara-gara* would only occur when a prince or hero was in a tumultuous state of mind, or if there was chaos in the natural world. The *punakawan* figures would make their appearance in this period of disorder (of mind or of nature), and with their antics and poignant words, they would help the hero refocus and bring order back to the world.

Today, in essence, the *gara-gara* is a narrative digression that can function as exuberant comic relief or may, at least, provide mental respite by bringing the audience back to reality from its immersion in the profound story line of the performance. In this scene, the *punakawan* might discuss the plot of the story from a philosophical perspective, but more often they have a story of their own to tell, or have matters to discuss that are unrelated to the



Fig. 45
Punakawan, Semar (left) and his sons during the *gara-gara* scene as seen from the shadow-side of a performance by Ki Enthus Susmono. Photograph by the author, Patih, June 13, 2009.

rest of the story (such as current events, politics, or other contemporary issues). The dhalang often uses this scene to interject his personal commentary and introduce novel practices, such as the use of contemporary popular music. In fact, during the *gara-gara*, some dhalang even include a drum kit and keyboards in their orchestras, which are not traditional gamelan instruments.⁶⁶ If a performance is sponsored by the government, the dhalang might be asked to disseminate some information to the audience about government programs: for example, information on reforestation or family planning. In such cases, the dhalang would present the information using neutral characters such as the *punakawan*.

Certain rules that govern the ways in which wayang characters may move about onstage and the ways in which the figures may be positioned on the *gedebog* are relaxed during this scene.⁶⁷ These rules are otherwise highly regarded and are usually closely observed, even by those dhalang who push the boundaries of convention.

The presentation of this scene in its current format (that is, somewhat of an interlude, unrelated to the main story) is a relatively recent innovation. The development of the *gara-gara* likely comes from the Yogyakarta performance tradition, which was incorporated into Solo-style performance in the early part of the twentieth century.⁶⁸ This style of presentation is now the norm in what is generally accepted as “Solo-style” performance, and the *gara-gara* is expected by most audiences. (It should be noted, though, that other regional performance styles may not follow this practice)⁶⁹ Although *gara-gara* existed in traditional Solonese performances in the past, today’s performances of *gara-gara* are distinguished by the scene’s inclusion in every performance, and, even more so, by the length of the scene. In the past, the *gara-gara* may have only lasted a half hour, but today the scene can go on for two or more hours.

The end of the *gara-gara* scene brings the play back to the main story line, where a hero confers with someone considered judicious, such as a respected seer, or a priest. These figures are usually hermits. They discuss best tactics for overcoming evil and finding peace, and the philosophies that underpin these quests.⁷⁰

PERANG KEMBANG/CAKILAN: Later in the performance, but still in the second act, as the characters continue on their journeys another battle is portrayed: this is the *perang kembang* (the “flower” or “blossom battle”). Despite the reference to a flower, this is not a dainty battle; characters smash into each other and flip one another around the set. The *perang kembang* is perceived as “a spiritual battle within man between good and evil”.⁷¹ The flower connotation refers to the blossoming of the characters’ lives on their journey towards their temporal and spiritual ideals.⁷² The hero (for example, Arjuna or Abimanyu) is referred to as a *bambangan* character; the term *bambang* implies hope or expectation, and the young hero is expected by his elders to overcome hurdles in life and achieve something great. In every wayang performance, the refined, noble hero (the *bambangan* character) fights the antagonist forces in the *perang kembang* scene. These enemy forces consist of the ogre character, Buta Cakil, and his “mafia” of other enemy ogres, giants, and demons—who together represent obstacles to spiritual goals. The *perang kembang* scene (also referred to as the *cakilan* because Buta Cakil is inevitably involved) occurs in every performance and is the tipping point between positive and negative forces. The hero always wins—he defeats the buta characters, which means he overcomes those (spiritual) obstacles and continues on his journey towards enlightenment. The *perang kembang* is usually a favorite battle scene with the public, for audiences enjoy watching the intense action and the elaborate movements of the puppets in combat. These maneuvers are often considered some of the most beautiful and compelling movements in the performance.

Pathet Manyura

Finally, events in the third act, *Pathet Manyura*, may vary according to the specific *lakon* performed and the interpretation offered by the dhalang. Nevertheless, towards the end of the act, characters come on the set as they prepare for the final battle. After a gory and brutal battle scene, the heroes (usually) win and either Bima or Anoman (depending on the story) will dance around the screen in full glory. The problem is resolved and the heroes return to the kingdom of the victor. The king meets with his entourage for a final concluding scene in which the characters discuss the events that transpired and the goals that were achieved. The performance concludes with one last appearance of the *gunungan/kayon* figure, which at the very end is stabbed into the gedebog by the dhalang, in the center of the screen. Pathet Manyura symbolizes older adulthood, enlightenment, and one’s triumph over enemies and obstacles.

The Dhalang

As the star artist of a wayang kulit performance, it is the dhalang who makes the wayang figures and the story come alive, and it is the dhalang alone who manipulates each character. The dhalang also conducts the gamelan orchestra. The art of the dhalang is usually passed from generation to generation, and today many dhalang enhance their traditional artistic training by attending a formal art school. In fact, the most renowned art schools of Indonesia offer degree programs in dhalang studies.

Dhalang (who are commonly, but not exclusively, male) must develop a wide range of complex skills in addition to their innate talents. Characteristics that define an effective and successful dhalang include possession of a powerful speaking and singing voice and the ability to express a shadow puppet’s personality by using skillful sets of movements (*sabetan*) and by using a distinctive voice for particular characters. The dhalang must have a good command

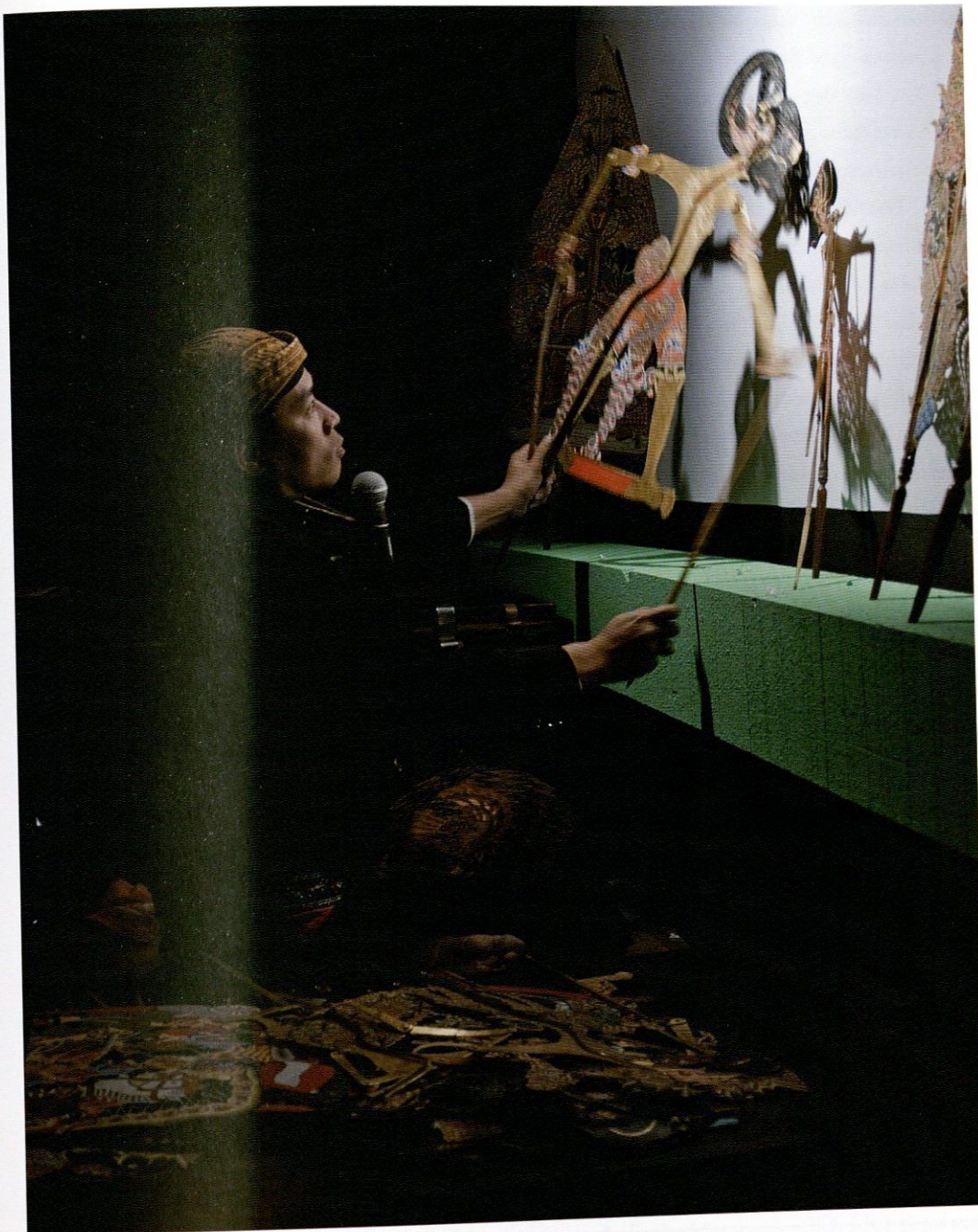


Fig. 46
Dhalang Ki Purbo Asmoro
conducts a demonstration
performance at the Museum of
International Folk Art. Photograph
by Blair Clark, Santa Fe, NM,
August 29, 2009.

of the complex story lines and the elaborate, poetic language used in wayang performances; further, the dhalang must be able to clearly communicate intellectual concepts and philosophical ideas, while also showing a strong sense of humor and knowledge of politics and current affairs. The puppeteer presents serious ideas about the state of the world, human nature, and the like—but he also deftly intersperses such serious material with jokes and silly songs to provide lighter moments for the audience in what would otherwise be a long night of heavy philosophical contemplation. In addition, the dhalang must have the ability to conduct the gamelan orchestra and direct the *pesindhen* (singers) throughout the performance.

Some dhalang themselves also have the skills and knowledge to carve and paint wayang figures, although a dhalang with an active performance schedule rarely has the time to do so. Therefore, he may commission the figures. If other artists make the puppets, the dhalang might oversee the work, to ensure that the puppets meet his artistic standards. The dhalang is also usually responsible for the complicated task of organizing the wayang venue: for example, by

coordinating the supporting artists (musicians and singers) and the sound and light engineering, especially if the setting is particularly elaborate, or hiring someone to handle these logistics.

A dhalang can draw on over a hundred episodes (*lakon*) for his wayang kulit performance. A dhalang can (and usually does) add his own innovations, interpretations, humor, and commentary, yet he must also be careful to maintain the integrity of the story and the art form. Therefore, the dhalang must have a firm grasp of the stories he presents so that he does not stray too far from the story line (which he narrates in his own words, from his own perspective, and usually without a written script).

Singing is a major part of a wayang performance. The many song interludes, together with the extensive sections of gamelan music, are responsible for the many hours required for traditional performances.⁷³ The dhalang sings different types of songs to mark different events, to communicate a mood, or to augment the overall feeling of a particular scene. One type of song is the *sulukan*—a general term referring to different types of phrases sung, or chanted, by the dhalang.⁷⁴ The *sulukan* musically describes the setting and atmosphere of a scene—although the lyrics of the individual song might not relate directly to what is happening. That is, the text of a particular *sulukan* might include quotations from ancient literature that have little to do with the events taking place in the scene, but the music supporting the *sulukan* conveys the mood.⁷⁵

As a storyteller, the dhalang must be able to present a story with great detail and clarity. Wayang kulit performance can be understood as an “art of speaking” that is accompanied by the physical appearance of wayang kulit.⁷⁶ As with song, different types of narration serve different purposes. Only a few examples are given here. *Janturan* is a narration that describes what is happening in the moment and involves slow, soft background music: the *janturan* may describe a particular scene, introduce the characters, and explain the characters’ personalities. *Pocapan* is a narration that describes past, present, or future events or situations with minimal music (perhaps only the *gendér*—a metallophone used in gamelan orchestras—is played). These types of descriptive narration enhance the audience’s experience by providing the viewers with information to help them visualize a more detailed scene, especially since the only objects on set are the wayang figures performed against a standard white screen.

The dhalang further shows his vocal and narrative skills in the dialogue between the wayang characters (called *antawecana*). He demonstrates a character’s unique personality and status by using different voices and dialects, and by choosing the most suitable language (perhaps Old Javanese or Modern Javanese) and language level (formal, middle, or informal) for particular characters in given situations.⁷⁷ Some characters have such a distinct voice that the sound is recognizable in all performances, by all audiences, regardless of the dhalang. The character, Buta Térong (see plate 23 in the Dhudhahan I section of the catalog) is known throughout Java for his mumbled, nasal voice caused by his eggplant-shaped nose (*térong* means eggplant). Male or female, rude or polite, high-ranking or common—each wayang figure has a different personality and the tone, dialect, and pitch of the dhalang’s voice changes for many of the characters.

At the same time the dhalang gives the wayang kulit performance, he is also conducting the gamelan orchestra without using eye contact or obvious verbal signals. Through practice and experience with a particular dhalang, the musicians often know what music to play and when to play it. Nevertheless, gamelan musicians also follow certain musical and verbal cues embedded within the performance: for example, they listen for certain words or phrases from the dhalang, or for special percussive effects when the dhalang strikes the hammer-like *cem-pala* or the metallic *kepyak* plates.⁷⁸

The way in which wayang kulit are placed, handled, manipulated, and put into motion during a performance by the dhalang is called *sabetan*. The greater the ability of the dhalang to make the puppets walk, dance, prostrate themselves, show fear, and (perhaps most importantly) to battle one another, the more the performance, the story, and the characters come to life for the audience. And to make all of these actions conform with the tempo of the music, as the dhalang is required to do, requires a high level of skill.

As with many aspects of wayang kulit, there are special guidelines for *sabetan*. The movement and handling of the wayang may vary according to the personality of a particular character. Though there are many fascinating aspects of these rules for moving the wayang during a performance, only a few examples are presented here. There is a precise way to place the wayang on the *gedebog* during a performance: this affects the physical stance or posture of the wayang figure and its communication and interaction with the other characters. There are also specific guidelines for the way a character enters and exits a scene, and standards for how a particular character moves, behaves, and speaks. All of these guidelines help the dhalang to best show the personality and disposition of the wayang figure. For example, a bumbling giant will move and speak differently than a sophisticated and gracious knight. In other examples, some wayang characters walk with a permanent limp, some characters are infamous for suffering from chronic gas, and yet other characters exude confidence and strength in their gait.

The last aspect of *sabetan* to be touched on is battle. Battle scenes feature exciting action onstage as the opponents fight fiercely, thrashing and tossing one another across the battlefield. The dhalang physically batters the puppets against each other and flips them so they seem to do somersaults in the air. However, even here there are limitations to the actions that can be taken. For example, royal characters who wear a crown can never be turned upside down, unless that royal figure is a demon. Another interesting example is that low-ranked characters can never touch the head of a higher-ranked character (as determined by the age and status of a character in wayang society).⁷⁹

One final requirement for a dhalang is that he must have the physical and emotional strength to give an entire wayang performance. As previously mentioned, traditional wayang kulit performances last all night, without any intermission or break. The dhalang remains seated, in a cross-legged position through the night; he sits facing the screen in front of him and does not even take a break for the restroom. During the whole performance, the dhalang's voice must remain strong and clear to hold the audience's attention. The work is not easy, especially when performed for such long stretches of time. The ability to simply get through the performances—let alone to perform the final scenes with as much gusto as the beginning scenes—demonstrates the stamina and strength of the individual dhalang. The eighth-generation Solo-based dhalang, Ki Anom Suroto, explains that because he has had so much experience watching performances and has been performing himself since he was fourteen years old, he is simply accustomed to enduring traditional all-night performances. In fact, Ki Anom says it is more difficult to present a short two-hour show when he performs abroad, because he has to summarize the story, the setting and the atmosphere—whereas a traditional show is less restricted with more room for interpretation and allows him to communicate the many layers of meaning inherent in wayang.⁸⁰

Because of their abilities and philosophical insights, dhalang are highly respected within their own culture. A performance by an expert dhalang is focused and profound, embedded with “esoteric knowledge about God, the world, and nature.”⁸¹ It is no wonder that dhalang are looked upon as especially spiritual individuals. Truly, the dhalang is a mas-

ter. He is a master of puppets, of shadows, of music, and of literature and linguistics. He is also a leader who has the ability to manage his own tasks and to oversee the work of others. However, the dhalang's most important role is that of teacher; his foremost responsibility is to educate people about wayang kulit—for example, the symbolic characteristics of the puppets, the philosophy embodied within the stories, Javanese cultural values, and prescriptions for a moral, ethical life.

In Java, wayang kulit is not a theater specifically designed for children, as puppet shows often are in the West. In contrast, wayang audiences are made up of people of all ages. However, performances may be best understood and appreciated by elders because the philosophies and moral dilemmas that are presented are sophisticated; “these stories and the performance of these stories speak to a lifetime of experience.”⁸² Nevertheless, it is the duty of the dhalang to reach all audience members, in various stages of life, so that youth, as they mature, can draw on the lessons of wayang to learn Javanese virtues and to lead lives enriched by the tradition of wayang. It is the dhalang's ability to bring the wayang and their stories to life (and to make innovations without ignoring respected traditions or changing the story line) that gives the dhalang the power to captivate his audiences and to ensure that the totality of the art form remains relevant to all generations.

Wayang Purwa: History and Repertoire

Wayang purwa refers to traditional Javanese plays that are often considered a continuum: a series of epics. The two most popular and commonly performed wayang purwa epics are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

History

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are clearly literary products of India's ancient Hindu culture, and the epics may have emerged in India as far back as the eighth century BCE. These epics appeared in Java around the ninth century CE and were recited in the form of wayang kulit as an established court-based form of theater.

In Java, despite the great importance of Islam (the country is home to the world's largest Muslim population), the Indian epics have retained an essentially Hindu character and have remained a popular and significant part of Javanese art and culture.

This relationship between Javanese culture, Hindu stories, and the Islamic religion developed gradually over time. The origin of wayang kulit is unclear, but shadow puppetry may have developed in Java in pre-Hindu times for ancestor worship and animist rituals, or the art form may have originated in China or India.

Hinduism spread to Indonesia from India through trade around the beginning of the current era and remained a predominant religion of Java for a number of centuries. The Hindu stories merged with local shadow puppet traditions and created a uniquely Javanese art form. The Javanese versions of these epics are distinct and differ in numerous ways from the original Indian texts. For example, there are no comic *punakawan* characters in the Indian version, nor are there special characters like Buta Cakil or Buta Térong; *buta* and *punakawan* characters are indigenous to Java and typically appear in every performance. The names and life stories of a number of epic characters in Java differ from their Indian counterparts (sometimes the difference is slight and sometimes great). Furthermore, in the Javanese versions, the Indian stories were assigned a Javanese setting: for instance, in Java, the

Ramayana and the *Mahabharata* are closely tied to legends about the history of Java and the ancestry of the Javanese people. The wayang epics are filled with ideas specific to Java and suggest that important characters (including gods) lived in specific places in Central Java.⁸³

Muslim traders brought Islam to the Indonesian region, and the religion slowly spread throughout Indonesia between 1200 and 1600 CE. Islam grew in popularity and became stronger, particularly in the northern coastal regions of Java after the fall of the Majapahit Empire (the last great Hindu empire in Java) and with the rise of the Mataram Empire (between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).⁸⁴ However, many Javanese people held onto certain Hindu and animist traditions that were intertwined with Javanese culture. Conflict emerged between those followers of Islam who stayed close to the religion's Middle Eastern roots, and those who wanted to maintain elements of Javanese cultural traditions. The Nine *Wali* (Muslim saints who helped spread Islamic teachings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) sought to resolve the issue.⁸⁵ One of these saints, Sunan Kalijaga (also known as Raden Mas Said), a prominent *Wali* from Java, drew on established elements of Javanese art and culture in order to encourage the spread of Islam on the island. Wayang kulit was accepted and used as one way to convey Islamic teachings, allowing Javanese people to convert to Islam without losing their heritage.⁸⁶

It is likely that during the period of Islamization in Java, wayang kulit took on their current physical form. In their original form, the Javanese figures may have resembled the relatively realistic relief sculptures on Hindu temples in East Java, which date between the tenth and fourteenth centuries or the wayang kulit figures found today in Bali, where Hinduism is still the main religion.⁸⁷ After Islam became the predominant religion of Java, the puppets' appearance changed to the stylized version used today, in order to avoid cultural and religious restrictions on the representation of the human form.⁸⁸

In addition to the physical appearance of wayang, Islam also influenced the wayang stories. Wayang stories in contemporary Java, though Hindu in nature, include values and philosophies that are important in Islam. And, according to Ki Purbo Asmoro, in some contemporary wayang scenes (in certain *lakon*), the Hindu gods are not presented as godlike, sacred figures, but are merely special figures who "reside in heaven." Ki Purbo further points out that the Hindu gods are not always portrayed in the best light. That is, they scheme, they have faults, and they sometimes behave like children—behaviors that are not associated with God.⁸⁹ Moreover, today, in Java, the stories are generally appreciated not as a religious text, but rather as important legends and valued literature; the Hindu gods are viewed as cultural icons and heroes, not as holy figures to be worshipped. Therefore, the wayang stories (that include multiple Hindu gods) do not conflict with the core Islamic belief in one God.



Fig. 47
Dhalang and wayang kulit maker, I Wayan Tunjung, SSN showing the author his collection of Balinese wayang kulit. The Balinese form of wayang more closely resembles human form than their Javanese counterpart. It is possible that Javanese wayang figures had a similar, more realistic look before Islam became Java's predominant religion and wayang kulit became more stylized to avoid cultural and religious restrictions on the representation of the human form. Photograph by the author, Mas, Bali, June 6, 2007

Literary Cycles

The wayang epics comprise well over one hundred *lakon* (distinct and self-contained, yet related episodes). Each episode is presented in a single nine-hour performance in Central

Java. Wayang stories are characteristically about the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by heroes and their antagonists in love, in war, and in the greater journey of life. To say the subject of the stories is good versus evil is true—but it is also a great oversimplification. The epics explore the existential struggle between right and wrong with great sophistication and in great depth. The stories consider the ways to live a virtuous, noble life and they search for the meaning of life. But the plays do not give clear cut solutions to these classic human philosophical challenges. Because good characters may possess negative traits and because not all bad characters are entirely immoral, we sometimes empathize with the villain; and we are sometimes disappointed in the behaviors and decisions made by the hero. Whatever the circumstances of the characters, wayang stories always ask compelling truth-seeking questions.

Wayang purwa is considered the “first generation” of epics.⁹⁰ As noted above, the most commonly performed cycles of wayang purwa are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The latter is more frequently requested for wayang kulit because it includes the most lakon, and the great number of episodes offers many choices and allows more room for interpretation by the dhalang. The following paragraphs are only very simple summaries of these very complex epic stories.

The *Mahabharata* is a complex story full of family feuds, political action, love triangles, gruesome battles, and terrible wars that occur over many generations. Throughout this epic tale, heroes and villains seek truth and face major moral dilemmas. In the course of the story, the characters have great adventures and learn important life lessons.

The *Mahabharata* focuses on the lives of the five righteous Pandhawa brothers and their erring cousins, the hundred Kurawa brothers. The Pandhawa heroes are the sons of Pandhu Déwanata, King of Hastina, who died young; they are the rightful heirs to the Hastina Kingdom. The antagonist characters in this story are the Kurawas, the children of Drestarastra (Pandhu’s blind brother) who succeeded Pandhu as King. When both groups of brothers came of age, King Drestarastra was supposed to give the crown to Puntadéwa, Pandhu’s eldest son. However, Drestarastra unjustly gave his hundred impetuous children control of the Kingdom of Hastina, naming his eldest, Duryudana, the king.

Although they are the villains of the story, not all of the Kurawas (or the characters who side with them) are entirely bad or immoral characters—and a number of these characters find themselves in rather tragic situations. As a whole, the Kurawas represent the flaws of humankind. The cousins’ hostility and aggression towards each other—and their dispute over power in Hastina—culminate in a great war, called the Bharatayuda. In the end, the Pandhawas prevail. It is because they are symbols of justice, virtue, and spiritual purity that the eventual victory of the Pandhawas is assured: it is the will of the gods.

The *Ramayana* is a story about a kidnapping that involves romance, adventure, battle, and swashbuckling heroism. Prince Rama is the hero of this morality tale. The hero was banished from his kingdom, Ayodya, to the forest for fourteen years, along with his wife, Sinta, and his half-brother, Laksmana. Rama’s father was manipulated by his secondary wife to order this exile. While living in the forest, Rama’s beloved Sinta was tricked and abducted by Rahwana, the Demon-King of Alengka, a character despised for his greed, insatiable lust, and vicious disposition. The kidnapping begins Rama’s great quest to find and rescue his wife—a period of many years that is filled with numerous trials and tribulations. Rama is aided by his loyal brother and faithful companion, Laksmana, by the brave and devoted white monkey-hero Anoman, and by an army of monkeys. In the story, during Sinta’s captivity, Rahwana repeatedly tries to seduce her, but the villain is always unsuccessful. As the story progresses, the villains are defeated, the evil Rahwana is killed, and Sinta is freed. The

heroes return to their kingdom and Rama becomes King of Ayodya. But although Sinta is reunited with Rama, her fidelity is questioned. She must undergo numerous trials to prove her chastity. Like *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* also involves numerous generations, and provides the audience with insights into the background of the characters, from a time before Rama was born. In this way, the audience comes to understand the motives of (and maybe even feel some sympathy for) the villain, Rahwana.

Another epic cycle comprises a “second generation” of wayang known as *wayang madya* or middle-period stories. This cycle of stories is about the Javanese kings that ruled after the eras of the *wayang purwa* tales. The kings are believed to be descendents of characters from wayang purwa, particularly the descendents of the virtuous Pandhawa family. The “third generation” of stories is known as *wayang gedhog*. These tales originated around the sixteenth century and tell the story of twelfth-century Javanese heroes such as Prince Panji.⁹¹ Today, the second and third generations of wayang stories are hardly performed as wayang kulit. Instead, the stories are kept alive through other modes of performance—such as dance, *wayang beber* (illustrated scrolls), or other puppet forms (for example, flat, wooden puppets called *wayang klitik*).⁹²

The Collection at the Museum of International Folk Art

In 2007, the International Folk Art Foundation purchased a set of classical Surakarta court-style wayang kulit for the permanent collection of the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico (MOIFA). This set includes approximately 230 individual shadow puppets, made with gold and bronze leaf, which had been used in hundreds of wayang performances in Indonesia. This collection is considered a full performance set of wayang kulit by the puppeteers from whom the pieces were purchased. Although this is a contemporary set, some individual pieces are quite old. For example, the oldest shadow puppet in the collection, Bathara Indra (the god of sky and winds; see plate 2 in the Dhudhahan II section of the catalog), is from the Kartasura Era (1680–1755).

The set was assembled primarily by dhalang Ki Purbo Asmoro of Surakarta, and the framework of this catalog relies heavily on the detailed and valuable information that he provided with the collection. This information includes a character list, a basic description of the characters (identification of *wanda*; familial or political relationships; interesting comments about the character; etc.), special notes about individual wayang figures (including the names of the artists who made the puppets; place and date of manufacture; names of puppeteers who previously owned or used specific shadow puppets; and commentary on special characteristics of the wayang figure), as well as examples of lakon in which a particular character would appear (not to be read as a comprehensive list of lakon for each character).⁹³ The following catalog is also structured around Ki Purbo’s preferences in the organization of the figures.

A modest selection of wayang kulit from the collection of dhalang Ki Enthus Susmono of Tegal is also included in this set. These pieces were all designed and performed by Ki Enthus, and he too provided information such as who made the piece, where, and when. The wayang by Ki Enthus complement Ki Purbo’s collection and include some of the main characters from the *Ramayana*, popular Buta (ogre) characters, and two classic *kayon/gunungan*. The selection of these wayang figures from Ki Enthus’s collection were based on Ki Purbo’s original character list and his advice.

One extraordinary piece, a *kayon/gunungan* with a contemporary theme, was purchased directly from the wayang maker (who also performs as a dhalang), Ki Sukasdi of Sukoharjo,



Fig. 48
Kothak designed by Ki Purbo
Asmoro (FA.2007.40.217v). Photo-
graph by Blair Clark.



whose work is in high demand by dhalang in Central Java (see plate 34 in the *Dhudhahan II* section of the catalog).

This assemblage includes the wayang figures that these contemporary Central Javanese puppeteers believe are necessary to perform a significant and diverse repertoire of stories. In addition, the two dhalang (Ki Purbo Asmoro and Ki Enthus Susmono) drew on their own professional and aesthetic judgment to incorporate into the set interesting or unique wayang figures that reflected their own personal preferences. Some of the shadow puppets are unusual and rarely seen in other sets; some figures were made by well-known artists for important wayang performers. Completing the set is a beautifully hand-carved *kothak* (puppet box) in which Ki Purbo Asmoro stored his wayang kulit. Ki Purbo personally designed the motif that adorns the puppet box.

In the end, the collection presented here was put together by acclaimed Javanese dhalang—seasoned “performer-maker-scholars” with a deep knowledge of the art form as a whole. The wayang kulit in this collection were not created for outsiders, as tourist or collectors’ items, but for wayang practitioners who live and breathe wayang. These experts have



Fig. 49
Ki Purbo Asmoro. Photograph
by the author, Surakarta, 2007.

compiled the figures for specific purposes, and for the most part the shadow puppets have been heavily used. This factor adds immense cultural value and significance to MOIFA's collection. In addition, with so much input from the artists, MOIFA's wayang kulit collection is both a beautifully crafted set of figures and an important source of information for researchers.

The Collectors

Dhalang Ki Purbo Asmoro

As noted above, the majority of wayang in this set were acquired from the popular Surakarta-based dhalang, Ki Purbo Asmoro (b. 1961), who is known for combining an intellectual approach and traditional style of performance with humor and innovation, particularly in the clown scenes. In addition to his heavy performance schedule, Ki Purbo is an esteemed Professor in the Puppeteering and Wayang (*Pedhalangan*) program at *Institut Seni Indonesia*, Surakarta (the Arts Institute of Indonesia, Surakarta).

Each wayang kulit figure in Ki Purbo's collection was handpicked, or was personally designed and commissioned, over the course of almost twenty years. Most of the shadow puppets in Ki Purbo's collection were purchased in Central Java from other dhalang or from families of deceased dhalang. Ki Purbo carefully recorded this provenance for MOIFA. One shadow puppet in Ki Purbo's collection belonged to the late Ki Nartosabdo (1925–1985), one of the most famous and respected dhalang of all time in Indonesia (see the character, Bima, in his *wanda* Jagur; (plate 6 in the *Simpingan Kanan* section of the catalog).

For the wayang kulit he designs or commissions, Ki Purbo Asmoro uses a signature logo at the puppet's foot—his own name in red and green, framed by yellow scrollwork patterns.

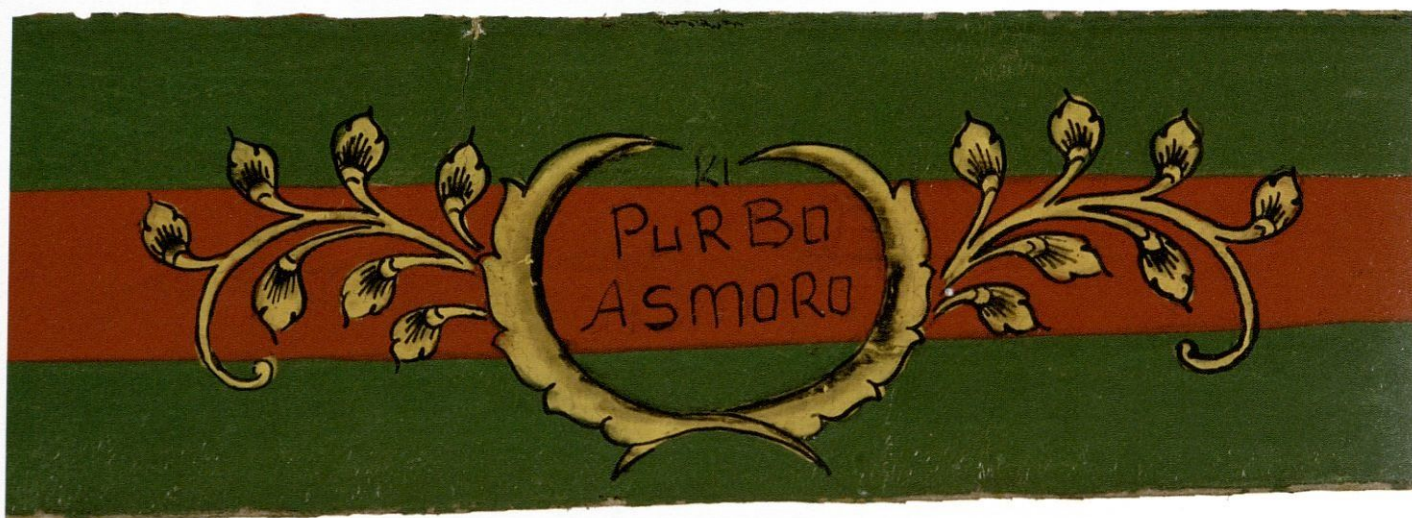


Fig. 50
Detail of Ki Purbo Asmoro's signature logo. Photograph by Blair Clark.

The hand-carved pattern of Ki Purbo's *kothak* (see Figure 48) bears the same scrollwork motif he uses in his logo and is also found in the architectural details of his home in Solo.

According to Ki Purbo Asmoro, it is the overall form and the detail of the carving that are the most important characteristics of high quality wayang. The fineness of the painting (though important) is not as crucial to him as the form, the posture, and the way in which the characters' personalities emerge in the rawhide puppet forms. That is, even if the paint wears off a shadow puppet, the figure can still provide a spectacular shadow. In this collection, it is the shadow puppets' balance—the shape and proportions, the detail, and the weight—that satisfies him. For Ki Purbo, even the way the horn-support bends around a character's body contributes to a character's look, the way a personality is portrayed, and the feel (the balance) of the wayang in his hands.⁹⁴

Regarding his position as a dhalang, Ki Purbo says that he most enjoys the endless opportunity to learn about wayang kulit and its performance—in fact, he says everything about the art form is interesting. The dhalang explained that even after years of study and practice, one might only partially understand an individual character (each character can involve years of exploration). There are so many aspects to wayang (the gamelan orchestra, dramatic technique, aesthetics, iconography, politics, literature, and philosophy) that Ki Purbo believes it is impossible to become bored with the art form. But beyond his scholarly interests, this puppet master is also interested in the important role a dhalang plays in society. Ki Purbo explains that a dhalang is a teacher, an entertainer, an actor, a painter, and a vocalist with a responsibility to offer moral values to his audience—even if those values are not applied to individual lives, and even if those values are not acted upon by the broader society. As he sees it, the most important aspect to being a dhalang is that he offers, or communicates, those values to society.⁹⁵

Dhalang Ki Enthus Susmono

Also included in the set presented in this publication are pieces from the collection of the famous dhalang from Tegal, Ki Enthus Susmono (b. 1966). Ki Enthus is known throughout the archipelago for his contemporary approach to performance. His performances sometimes radically depart from tradition by mixing wayang kulit, *wayang golek* (rod puppets), dancers, and actors—sometimes Ki Enthus even reveals himself to the audience as the puppeteer or

as a character in the play. Ki Enthus is also well known for his unique, contemporary style of puppet-making (for example, puppets in his series, *Wayang Orang Rai* have humanlike features, rather than the highly stylized features found in classical examples). He is sometimes referred to as *dhalang gila* (the crazy dhalang) for his many innovations—a term that was also applied to preceding wayang innovators whose performance styles gradually became the norm. Ki Enthus also performs classical wayang kulit, and it is from his classical collection that MOIFA acquired several figures that serve as complementary pieces to Ki Purbo Asmoro's collection. Ki Enthus designed and drew these meticulously executed, gold leaf pieces for his own personal use. The pieces are of extraordinary artistic quality.

In addition to his classical wayang examples, the Museum also acquired two of Ki Enthus's contemporary innovations (*kreasi baru*) from what he calls his *Wayang Planet Series*. These include George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein puppets that were made in 2001 and used in numerous performances that questioned the effectiveness and consequences of war.

As a dhalang, Ki Enthus believes that all his artistic skills are equally important for puppeteering: for him being a dhalang is an organic whole that requires knowledge, experience, and practice. One of the aspects that Ki Enthus most appreciates about puppeteering is that it serves as a platform for expression. For this dhalang, expressing his own views or revealing his own perspective sometimes presents problems, particularly when he finds himself challenging the government or the conventions of traditional wayang.⁹⁶ Ki Enthus Susmono has his share of critics because he pushes boundaries, yet he is a true artist with a creative vision and a master performer with clear respect for wayang. He sees his role in the world of wayang as one of motivation—of moving with the times and encouraging audiences to think while maintaining the integrity of Javanese values.

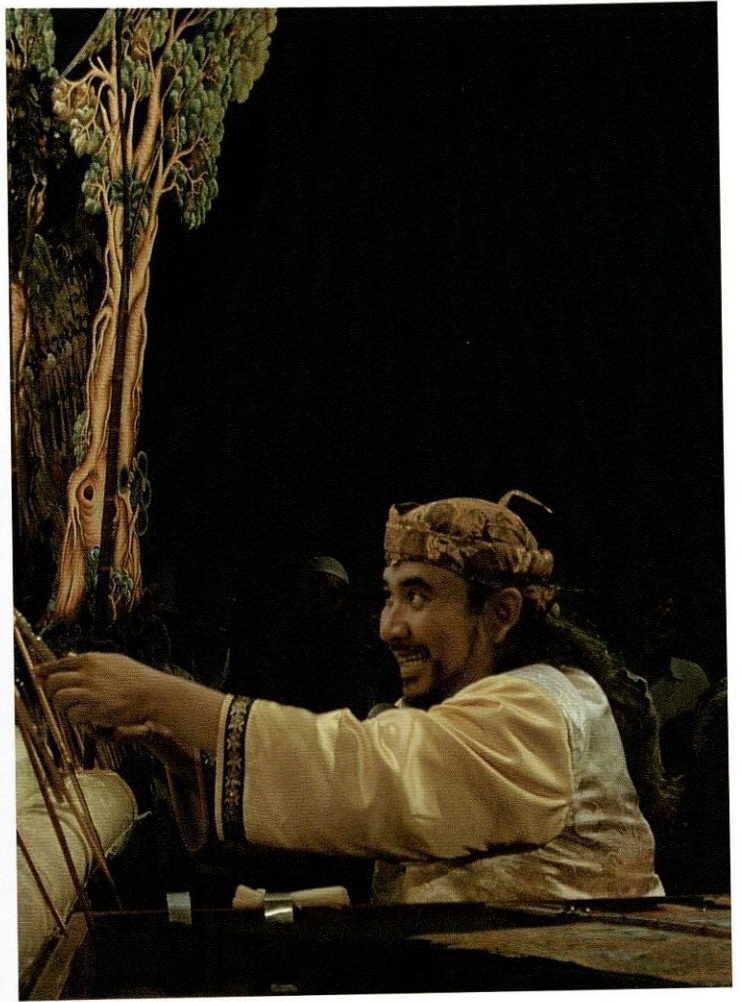


Fig. 51
Ki Enthus Susmono. Photograph
by Honggo Utomo, 2006.

A Peek Inside the Box

The wayang kulit in the collection of the Museum of International Folk Art are not only stunning artistic creations, but comprise one of the most comprehensive and documented collections of contemporary Surakarta-style wayang in American museum collections. Because of its detailed provenance information, this acquisition holds great research potential for scholars who are interested in wayang kulit or related topics. The collection, as a whole, reflects contemporary notions of, and standards for wayang kulit, and its performance history represents important and beloved dhalang in Central Java.

Staying true to a dhalang's organization of characters, this catalog presents the wayang kulit in this particular set based on their position in the *simpingan* (that is, their position on the banana log, as they are arranged for a performance) according to Ki Purbo Asmoro.⁹⁷

Fig. 52
George W. Bush and Saddam
Hussein wayang kulit figures, from
the series, Wayang Planet by Ki
Enthus Susmono (FA.2007.17.1;
FA.2008.4.1). Photograph by Blair
Clark.



That is, this presentation follows Ki Purbo's organization of the wayang kulit in this set. The plates are grouped as *Simpingan Kanan* figures (those displayed to the dhalang's right); *Simpingan Kiri* figures (displayed to the dhalang's left); and the *Dhudhahan* groups (figures that are typically placed within easy arm's reach during a performance, not displayed on the banana log).

It should be noted that all sets of wayang (that is, the characters found in any given set) vary with the individual needs and unique interests of the dhalang who assembles and uses them. For instance, this set does not include figures that other puppeteers may consider essential and does include figures deemed unnecessary by others.⁹⁸ Therefore, this presentation is not intended to be definitive of wayang kulit collections; rather it serves as an example of a set used by a practicing dhalang. Furthermore, this presentation is not in any way intended as an encyclopedia of wayang characters, but merely an introduction to the characters that these figures portray; it is an overview of the characters that are found in this set.

This is, in essence, a peek inside a puppet box.

Notes

1. A gamelan includes a variety of instruments such as gongs, drums, metallaphones, xylophones, stringed instruments—and vocalists as well.
2. In the Javanese language (which is distinct from Bahasa Indonesia), *wewayangan* means "shadow"; *wewayanganing urip* means "the shadow of life."
3. Surakarta is a city in Central Java, commonly referred to as Solo; the two names are used interchangeably.