

2019

Living Objects Essays: Prologue

John Bell

University of Connecticut - Storrs

Follow this and additional works at: https://opencommons.uconn.edu/ballinst_catalogues



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Africana Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bell, John, "Living Objects Essays: Prologue" (2019). *Living Objects: African American Puppetry Essays*.
15.

https://opencommons.uconn.edu/ballinst_catalogues/15

Living Objects Essays: Prologue

by John Bell

This collection of essays, scholarly studies, artist's statements, and play texts emerges from the *Living Objects: African American Puppetry Festival and Symposium* held at the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry February 7-10, 2019, in conjunction with our *Living Objects: African American Puppetry Exhibition*, which was on display in our museum from October 25, 2018 through April 7, 2019. Just as the exhibition was co-curated by Paulette Richards and John Bell (with the help of an active advisory committee including Nehprie Amenii, Schroeder Cherry, Gabrielle Civil, Frank Mitchell, Valeska Populoh, and Kelly Walters, and Emily Wicks), the symposium and this collection of essays was also edited by Dr. Richards and Dr. Bell. We hope that these writings will be shared widely by students, teachers, puppeteers, and others who wish to better understand the past, present, and future of African American puppetry.

Some of the texts in this online collection (as you will see) are slightly edited versions of papers and talks presented during the symposium sessions. Other writings were solicited and curated by Paulette Richards after the fact, to further elaborate particular aspects of the history, theory, and practice of African American puppetry which our symposium started to map out. If we are lucky, we may be able to add to this online collection in the future.

The process of editing these texts was undertaken by two University of Connecticut graduate students, Dahlia Delahaye and Maggie Flanagan; and Rebecca Rumbo, an adjunct professor in UConn's Department of English. We thank them deeply for their efforts!

We are making this work available online in the summer of 2020, in the midst of a national and international re-awakening about the persistence of racism and the legacies of chattel slavery that have been a part of our national history since its beginnings. The massive, collective response to the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department, and the possible changes that this awakening might lead

to, are, perhaps, hopeful signs for the future. We believe that puppetry in all its forms has and will play an important role in the continuing development of our national identity, and hope that these essays might help us understand how African American puppeteers have and will play a role in that development.

As the director of the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry I would like to thank Emily Wicks, our Manager of Operations and Collections, for her tireless energy, spirit, and generosity in making numerous ambitious projects like *Living Objects* not only come into being, but do so with intellectual and artistic integrity, and grace. I would also like to thank School of Fine Arts Dean Anne D'Alleva for her immediate and vigorous support of this project; my colleagues in the UConn Puppet Arts Program—Bart Roccoberton, Matthew Cohen, and Paul Spirito—who did so much to make *Living Objects* happen; and Michael Bradford, Chair of UConn's Department of Dramatic Arts, and our colleagues in that department. Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Paulette Richards for her tireless energy, inspiration, and patience, especially with those of us just now learning to understand exciting and essential areas of African American culture long in existence, but under examined.

We hope these writings will be helpful to you.

John Bell

June 19, 2020