



Photos by Daniel Munguia

England's famous Punch and Judy.

# The National Puppet Museum

A beautiful lady, whose almond-shaped eyes and wrap-around costume announce her birth in a far-off land; exotic figures that project their shadows on a white curtain; a tiny army in perfect formation; a circus, complete with fierce lion and brave lion-tamer; the “Catrina” on a bicycle; and many other figures that have been the delight of children of several generations and countries: this is what the Museo Nacional del Títere (National Puppet Museum) holds. Its location in the city of Huamantla in the state of Tlaxcala is not arbitrary: it was there that for more than 100 years the country’s most extraordinary puppets were created.

## THE REASONS

The museum, unique in Mexico and Latin America, was born in August 1991 to honor the most famous, illustrious company of puppeteers in the history of our country, “La Compañía de Automatas de los Hermanos Rosete Aranda” (The Rosete Aranda Brothers’ Company of Automotons). They were not the first to make puppets in Mexico; but, for more than 100 years, different members of this family delighted thousands of Mexicans with their figures’ expressive faces and bodies animated with as many strings as needed to create the most audacious movement.

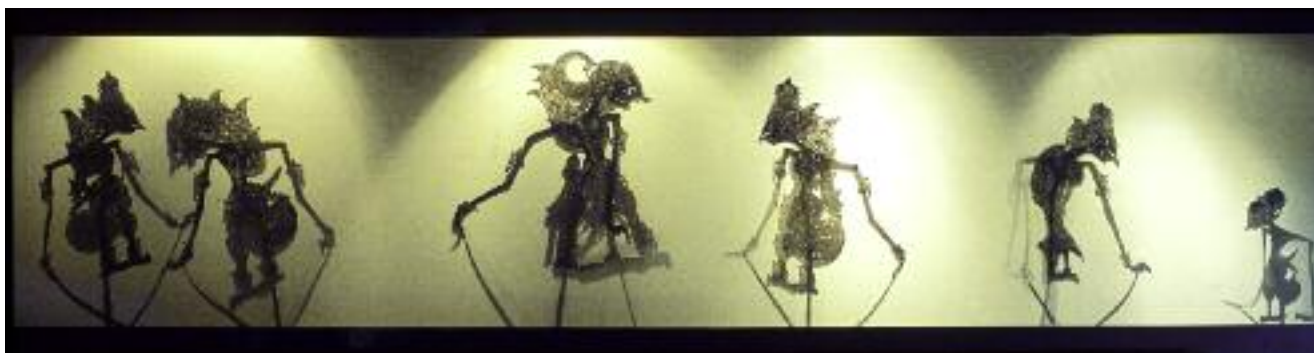
The Aranda brothers and sister (Julián, Herme- negildo, Ventura and María de la Luz) learned the art of puppet-making from an Italian puppet master living in Huamantla around 1830. In 1835, they founded the National Company of Automotons with puppets they had made. After the first two brothers died, Ventura and María de la Luz, together with the latter's husband, Antonio Rosete, continued performing, first in a corral and then in the city's first theater. More than four generations continued and perfected the family's puppeteering tradition, turning their company into Mexico's most famous, a favorite of children and adults, of poets and writers, whose tours included Mexico City, several other cities throughout the country, the United States and Central America. If anything distinguished the Rosete Aranda performances, it was the immense variety of puppets in each show, whether in their classical repertory, opera, zarzuela, or a circus, a *palenque*,<sup>1</sup> a bullfight, or the commemoration of the September 16 Independence Day parade, performing with real scenery and accompanied by orchestra music.

In their heyday, the Rosete Arandas had a collection of more than 5,000 wooden pieces, whose expressive faces and detailed costumes made them worthy of everyone's admiration. Some marionettes had up to 19 strings that, when ably handled, made their movements precise and meticulous. The theater that could be disassembled, with its three bridges for handling

the puppets, gave the performances depth and made it possible to have a great many marionettes on stage at the same time. The company also had its own printing press that produced its tickets, programs and the dialogue used in its acts, sold for only six cents. One of the most famous, "The Speech of Vale Coyote," was the inspiration for actor Mario Moreno to develop his character "Cantinflas." In the early 1940s, more than 100 years after its foundation, the company closed its doors. Later, the puppets were sold to collectors and museums. However, some have been recovered and are on display at the museum together with original scenery, trunks, programs, tickets and other memorabilia of their golden age. Among the most valuable puppet characters in the museum collection are Vale Coyote, Doña Pascarroncita and Pilluelo Dinamita, although they are not on display. Madame Gloppier, Mr. Bell (named in honor of a famous English clown who settled in Mexico) and Mr. Orrins, the last two indispensable characters from the Rosete Aranda cast, are on display, however.

#### THE ROOMS

The museum has eight permanent exhibition rooms that show puppets from around the world. Each room has a description of the puppets' main characteristics, the way they are handled and



Room 1. Shadow puppets from faraway lands.



Doña Pascarroncita still wears her original costume.

the use they were given, whether religious, educational or recreational. Room 1 shows puppets from Asia and Indonesia, with their centuries of puppeteering tradition. Some figures are made of leather or parchment and are to be used as shadow puppets; and there are other tri-dimensional and flat puppets. Room 2 boasts representatives of the history of puppeteering in the West; outstanding among them are ancient European puppets like Maccus and Neuropastas, dating from the third century before Christ, and reproductions of England's famous Punch and Judy. A display shows engravings and brief texts about puppets from around the world and, across from it is a map that at a touch of a button shows the country they are from. Clay figures with moveable parts found in Cacaxtla are part of the collection in Room 3. Rooms 4, 5 and 6 pay homage to the different stages of the Rosete Aranda company. Room 7 holds a small collection of puppets

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Rooms 4 and 5 exhibit the creations of the Rosete Aranda family.

used in what were called the Cultural Missions, which traveled throughout the country teaching people to read in the 1930s. Room 8 is dedicated to the golden age of Mexican Guignol Theater, while the temporary exhibition in Room 9 shows both marionettes and hand puppets created by Donald Codry, an American born in the early twentieth century who knew and loved Mexico's indigenous cultures and their folk expressions, like masks.

#### SERVICES

The museum offers guided tours to schools and groups that request them; each tour ends with a puppet show. It also offers lectures, a documentation center and a library specialized in puppet theaters, advisory services, workshops for making and handling puppets, as well as puppet shows. In August, Huamantla celebrates the international festival of puppet theater, with the participation of puppeteers from the world over. The museum will shortly offer a virtual tour through a multi-media package that will give a general idea in color images of the content of its nine rooms and data about the different puppets either on display or in its warehouses.

*Elsie Montiel*  
**Editor**

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> In Mexico, a *palenque* is a musical sporting event that includes singers of *ranchera* songs, cockfights and betting. [Translator's Note.]

MUSEO NACIONAL DEL TÍTERE  
(NATIONAL PUPPET MUSEUM)  
PARQUE JUÁREZ 15, CENTRO  
HUAMANTLA, TLAXCALA  
OPEN TUESDAY TO SATURDAY  
10 A.M. TO 2 P.M. AND 4 P.M. TO 6 P.M.



Mr. Orrins, an indispensable character in the Rosete Aranda cast.



The entrance to the museum.



CISAN

p u b l i c a t i o n s

***Globalidad y conflicto.  
Estados Unidos y la crisis del  
11 de septiembre***

José Luis Valdés Ugalde and  
Diego Valadés, comp.

The events of September 11, 2001 have prompted the concepts of security and globalization to be posed in different ways and have given them new meaning. This book is the first Spanish-language academic publication in which specialists from different fields analyze these issues.



***La globalización y sus  
manifestaciones en  
América del Norte***

Mónica Gambrill, comp.

In light of the importance of globalization today, scholars from different countries have contributed articles to this book about issues that it affects: the economy, political power, NAFTA, the labor market, drug trafficking, the environment, the judicial branch of government and cultural industries.



***El nuevo norteamericano: inte-  
gración continental, cultura e  
identidad nacional***

Lawrence Douglas Taylor

This book examines the implications of NAFTA and hemispheric integration for the cultural interaction among Canada, the United States and Mexico. It also ponders the demands and effects on these three countries whose future holds similar or greater challenges in the field of cultural unification.



***Las relaciones de México con  
Estados Unidos y Canadá: una  
mirada al nuevo milenio***

Rosío Vargas Suárez,  
Remedios Gómez Arnau and  
Julián Castro Rea, compilers

This work seeks to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the future of the three countries' relations by delving into both current and historical issues: trade integration, drug trafficking and migration, as well as other topics more recently included on the agenda like human rights, democracy and national security.



**For further information contact:**

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# CISAN

p u b l i c a t i o n s

***Desde el Sur. Visiones de Estados Unidos y Canadá desde América Latina a principios del siglo XXI, vol. 1***

Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla, Germán Pérez Fernández del Castillo and Remedios Gómez Amau, compilers

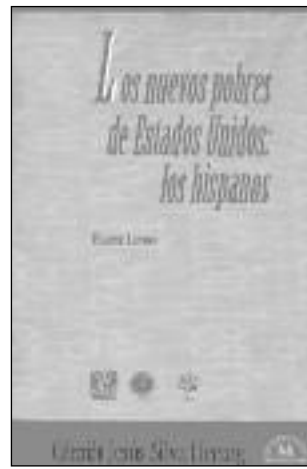
In this volume, Latin American specialists bring their own perspective to a broad spectrum of theoretical, political, social, economic and cultural issues in the United States, including federalism, foreign policy, national defense and security, the environment and the impact of globalization.



***Los nuevos pobres de Estados Unidos: los hispanos***

Elaine Levine

Since the 1980s, Hispanics in the United States, compared with other groups, have dropped back socio-economically in three overall areas: the labor market, the educational system and social security. This book looks at and analyzes this deterioration and its underlying causes.



***El color de la tierra. Las minorías en México y Estados Unidos***

Barbara Driscoll de Alvarado and Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla, compilers.

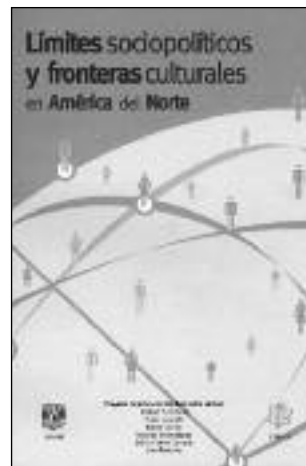
This work looks at diversity from different perspectives: in particular, it deals with the construction of the Afro-American identity and the struggles of this group, the implementation of public policies in support of minority groups and the obstacles to their equal integration into all facets of life in Mexico and the U.S.



***Límites sociopolíticos y fronteras culturales en América del Norte***

Barbara A. Driscoll, Claire Joysmith, Elaine Levine, Antonio Rivera and Mónica Vereá, compilers.

A multidisciplinary group of Mexican and foreign specialists study the growing presence of the Latino community in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the United States.



**Forthcoming:**

*Las políticas exteriores de Estados Unidos, Canadá y México en el umbral del siglo XXI. Desde el sur. Visiones sobre Estados Unidos y Canadá desde América Latina, vols. 2 y 3. East Los Angeles. Historia de un barrio.*