

Tony Sarg

America's Puppet Master

Commerce and Fantasy in Twentieth
Century American Popular Culture

Lenore D. Miller

Director, University Art Galleries and Chief
Curator, Luther W. Brady Art Gallery
George Washington University



Sea Serpent, Nantucket



The Sea Serpent in Summer of 1937, Nantucket



The broader topic is how material culture (ephemera, illustrated books, photographs, commercial endeavors) is reflected in design and puppetry. The engagement of commerce, specifically Macy's holiday marketing, and fantasy is exemplified in the work of Tony Sarg. It is a model that has become increasingly effective in our own times with animated films and their spinoffs. This artist's fascinating career sheds light on the power of one individual's creative imagination, and how this multi-faceted designer marketed his creations to become the legacy of popular culture. Research is ongoing toward an exhibition and catalogue.





Tony Sarg (1882-1942)

- Who was Tony Sarg?



**COMING
EVENTS**

Management Ernest Briggs, Inc.
TIMES BUILDING, N. Y.

**COMING
EVENTS**

TONY SARG

{ HIMSELF }

Father of the Marionette
Theatre in America
Creator of the Tony Sarg
Marionettes
Originator & Creator of the
Monster Street Parades

Illustrator
Artist



IN

A screamingly funny, riotous original sort of program by this world
celebrated artist who is probably the world's most diverting entertainer.

"AN EVENING WITH TONY SARG"

Management
ERNEST BRIGGS
Representative
TIMES BUILDING, N. Y.
CELEBRITIES
for Educational and
Entertainment purposes for
COMING EVENTS



"A Glimpse of the World" by Tony Sarg
When Tony Sarg is the Drawing Artist, Tony Sarg is
Doing Draw the World.

Tony Sarg's lecture is a unique affair. He brings
a new stage and a number of marionettes of var-
ious kinds, presenting each in an amusing little act
of a minute or two. . . . He tells about the marionette
business which he originated. . . . He reads his
audience with many amusing anecdotes in his very
interesting career. . . . Perhaps the most entertain-
ing part of his program is the drawing colored
lightning sketches of members of the audience.
These sketches, drawn on large sheets of paper,
are given to the audience to do with as it pleases.

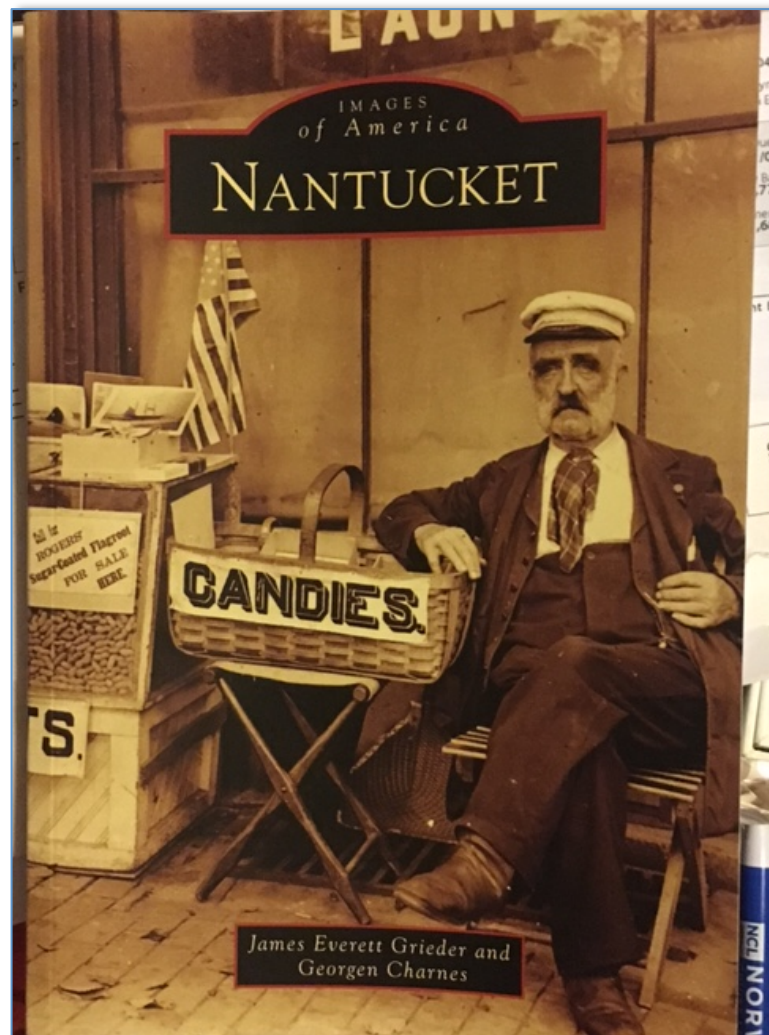




Tony Sarg (1880-1942) was a prominent puppeteer, designer, and illustrator. Born in Germany, he immigrated and married American, Paula Eleanor McCourt. Tony Sarg was a

NHA Sea Serpent video



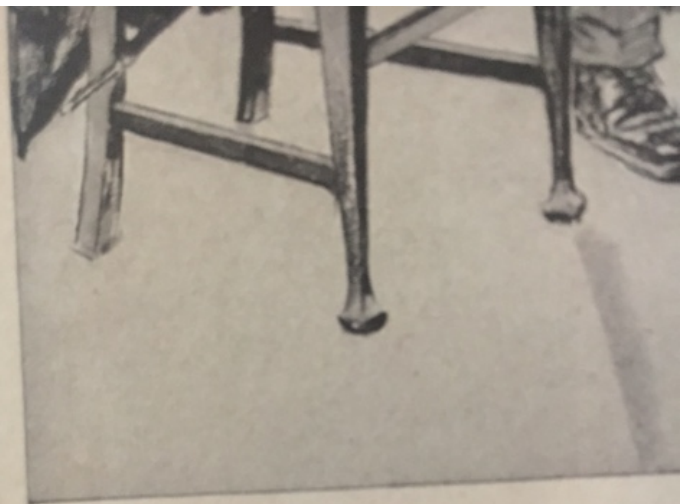


"SPEAKING of OPERATIONS—"



IRVIN S. COBB





APPARENTLY THERE WAS NOBODY
AT HOME

"Speaking of Operations—"

CONTENTS

Mainly My Own

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

TO TWO CLASSES:

THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN OPERATED ON
THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET BEEN OPERATED ON



The Waldorf Astoria

STATIONER IN THE
TOP FLOOR CASE



8
7
6
5
4
3

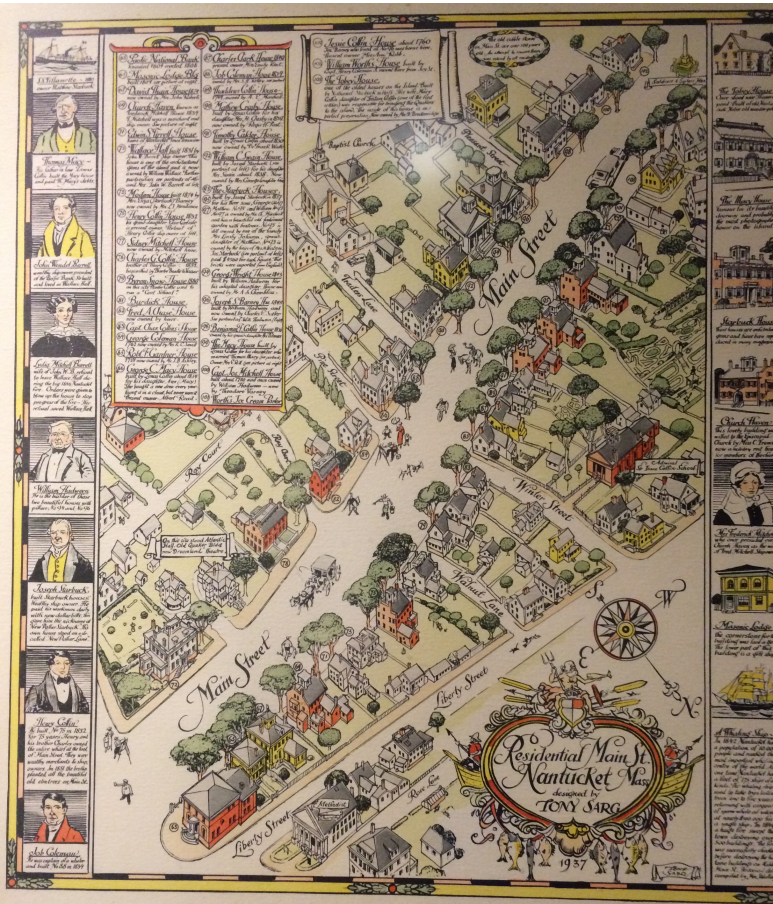


Finger-puppet
SARG





Map of Nantucket





Linen Towel

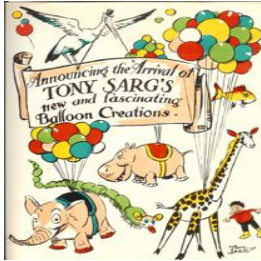
American History

Building the Modern Parade | National Museum of American History

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/holidays-on-display/building-the-modern-parade>

appear to hover just above the street.

Tony Sarg



Leaflet, "Announcing the Arrival of Tony Sarg's New and Fascinating Balloon Creations," undated, lent by George Korn

Macy's held its first Thanksgiving Day parade in 1924. Balloons debuted in the line of march in 1927. The first of their kind, the balloons were the brainchild of Tony Sarg, the celebrated children's author and designer of marionettes.

Faculty & Staff



John Bell

Museum Director

john.bell@uconn.edu

Dr. John Bell is a puppeteer and theater historian who began working in puppetry with Bread and Puppet Theater in the 1970s, and continued as a company member for over a decade. He studied theater history at Columbia University, and has since taught at New York University, Rhode Island School of Design, Emerson College and other institutions. He is a founding member of the Brooklyn-based theater company Great Small Works, and the author of many books and articles about puppetry, including *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, *Strings, Hands, Shadows: A Modern Puppet History*, and *American Puppet Modernism*. His wife Trudi Cohen is also a puppeteer and member of Great Small Works. Their son Isaac is studying at Massachusetts College of Art and Design.









Views of the Macy [N. Y.] Parade
Courtesy Nantucket Historical Association
Tony Sarg's Balloons



IN THIS BUILDING
R. H. MACY

HOME FROM THE SEA,
IS SAID TO HAVE
EMBARKED
UPON HIS
MERCHANDISING
CAREER



ROWLAND HUSSEY MACY

BORN - NANTUCKET
AUGUST 30, 1822

DIED - PARIS, FRANCE
MARCH 29, 1877

— • —
MURRAY'S TOGGERY SHOP

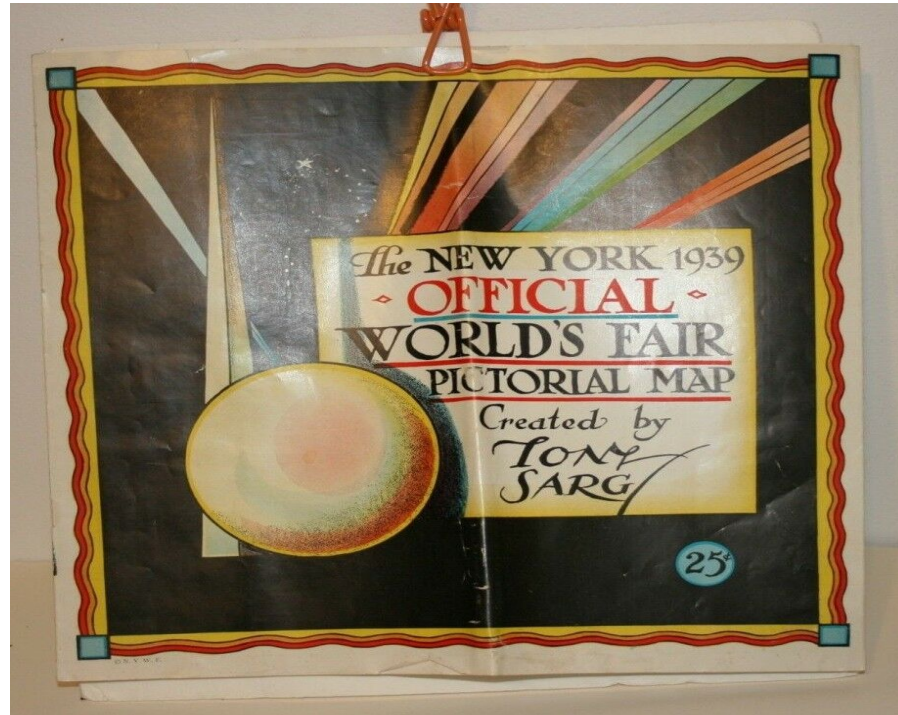
Looking at Sarg's Map of World's 1939 Fair



Sarg Judging Poster Contest



Pictorial Maps



Andy Warhol (1928-1987)



© ANDY WARHOL



© ANDY WARHOL

TONY SARG'S TREASURE BOOK



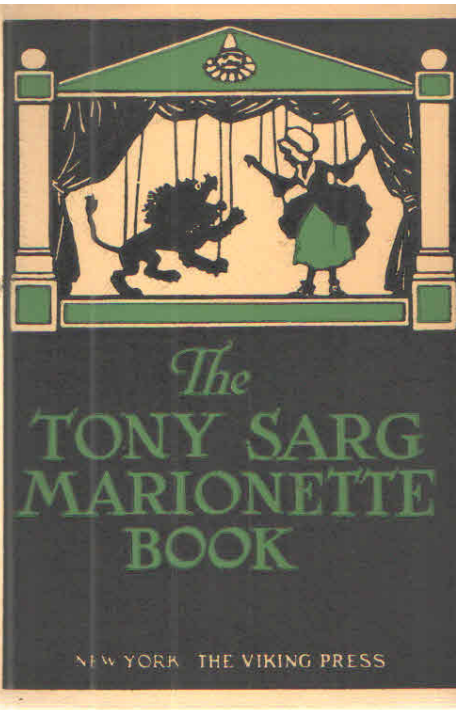
Featuring
ALICE IN WONDERLAND
TREASURE ISLAND
RIP VAN WINKLE

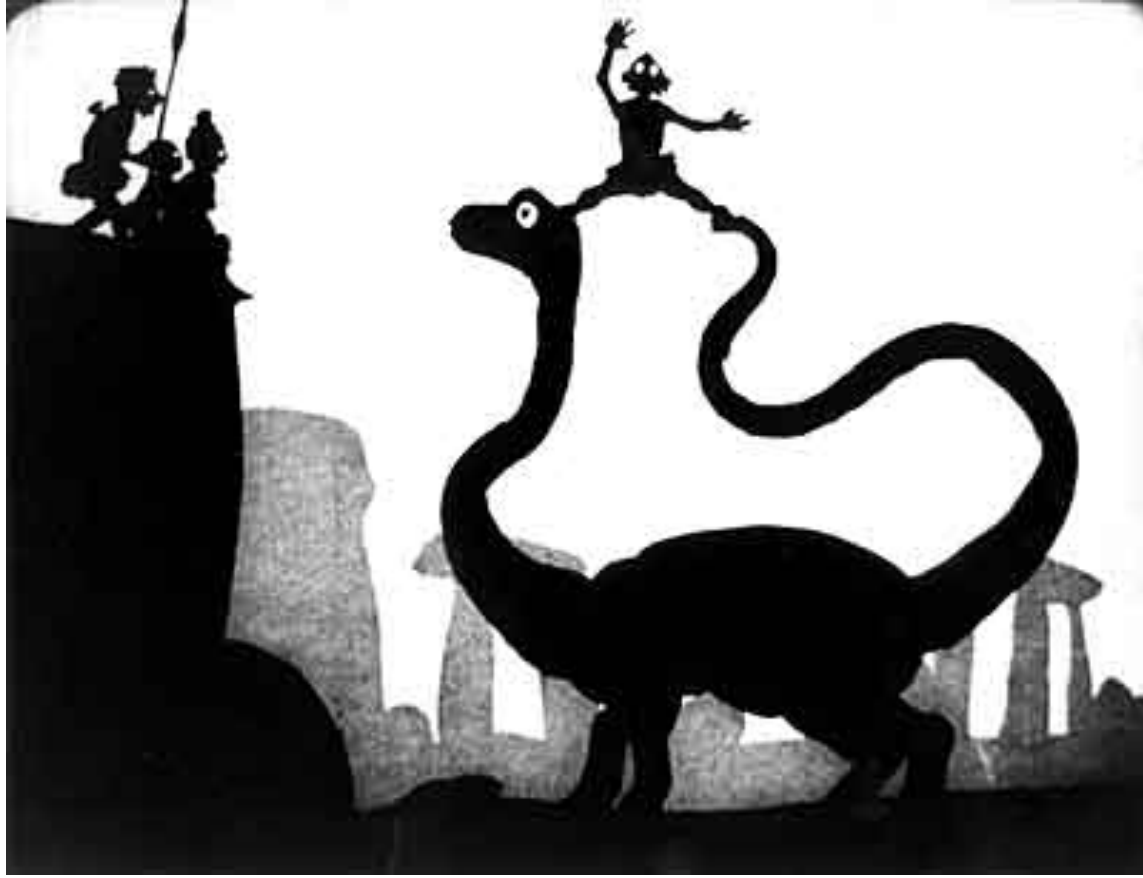
All of the scenes and characters are animated and come to life.
This is the same real treasure for the reader!

TONY SARG'S TREASURE BOOK



Rip van Winkle
Alice in Wonderland
and Treasure Island





Shadowgraph, Variations on Ancient Chinese Art Form

For Immediate Release. Exclusive to
From Tony Sarg Company, Inc., 1400 Broadway, New York City.

VICTOR HERBERT AND TONY SARG COLLABORATING ON MARIONETTES

Story of The Chinese Willow Plate Inspires Marionette
Master and Foremost American Composer

PREMIERE AT BELASCO THEATRE

New Production Like Huge Animated Stained Glass Windows
With Life-Size Marionettes in Modernized
Chinese Art

So far as the records show, Victor Herbert has never been asked to act as Official Timer at any track meet, but "I'm surely qualified," says the composer and director.

"The movies trained me to use a stop-watch. Timing has to be so exact that adequately prepare the scores to accompany moving pictures is to sit in front of the picture, watch it as it is run off, make sketches and punch the stop-watch at the same time. Then, when some official takes liberties and cuts the film after the music is ready, there's trouble. Music written to fit steer roping hardly matches a delicate love scene."

Mr. Herbert's work in this connection comes in very nicely while he is preparing the music scores for the orchestra which is to accompany Tony Sarg's new Marionette production of "The Chinese Willow Plate Story." He sits in Mr. Sarg's studio on West Ninth Street, music sketches and stop-watch in hand, and watches the unfolding of this delightful and ancient love story of the Chinese Mandarin's daughter who fell in love with her father's secretary. Mr. Sarg, playing the part of the Mandarin Announcer, gives the story as it will be told on the stage, and a few days later examines the music score.

"It is one of the most interesting things I have ever undertaken," says Mr. Herbert. "Mr. Sarg and I had often talked of the possibility of working my music into his unique Marionette

presentations, but we never quite saw really desirable combinations until he decided upon this new Shadowgraph variation of the Marionettes, based upon the ancient Chinese art. But here was a story of great possibilities, with musical appeal of decided novelty. The pentatonic scale, much used throughout the Far East, is even used in some ancient Irish music, so I was ready at once for "The Chinese Willow Plate." As soon as I saw the preliminary showing of figures and the marvellous lighting arrangements perfected by Mr. Sarg, I could only say, "When do we start?"

As was true of David Belasco, at whose theatre Tony Sarg's latest production is to be shown in early December, Mr. Herbert was delighted with the fact that these Marionettes are life-size and of such coloring as to resemble huge, animated stained glass windows. In fact, his curiosity as to how the figure could be made of a colored, yet transparent, material, and how they could be so manipulated as to bring about the effects presented, often interfered with his use of the stop-watch as the scenes passed before his eyes.

When the heroic-sized goldfish of the Oriental Subterranean Gardens appeared before Mr. Herbert, he interrupted all proceedings, forgot his music, and called:

"Say, Tony, you didn't warn me that I had to write fish music. How the kids will like that—and the music will have to be as good!"

Victor Herbert. Willow Plate Suite



In music and video, Victor Herbert, (1924) *The Willow Plate*, marionette play by Tony Sarg
(1924)

- [http://www.violinman.com/Violin_Family/history/composer/biography/HERBERT,%20Victor/HERBERT,%20Victor%20%20\(1859-1924\).htm](http://www.violinman.com/Violin_Family/history/composer/biography/HERBERT,%20Victor/HERBERT,%20Victor%20%20(1859-1924).htm)

Review of Rip Van Winkle



**TONY SARG'S
MARIONETTES**

**ONCE AGAIN
WELCOME TO**

NICHOLAS VEDDER, the Landlord of the King George Inn
DERRICK VON BOMMEL, the Teacher of the Village School
RIP VAN WINKLE, Poor Rip! He did the best he could
WOLF, Dog that loved his Master well
DAME VAN WINKLE, Rip Van Winkle's Scolding Wife
JUDITH, Rip Van Winkle's Little Daughter
HENDRIK HUDSON AND HIS CREW, who played a trick on Rip
THREE MUSICIANS, who played and sang a Christmas Hymn
And Many Others—all old friends—and the old story told in a new way by
Tony Sarg's Puppeteers

ROLL BACK THE YEARS,
WIN CHILDHOOD'S
HAPPY HOUR AGAIN

**TONY SARG'S
MARIONETTES.**



TRAVEL THE
BLISSFULLY JOYOUS
ROAD IN THE LAND OF
MAKE-BELIEVE

A DREAM COME TRUE

REDFERN MASON, of the *San Francisco Examiner*, says:

In the beginning, the good God made the Hudson River Dutch; Washington Irving dreamed about them; Joseph Jefferson put them on the stage—and now Tony Sarg has made marionettes of them. You know how a child always loves best the raggedest doll. Well, there was something of that feeling in the hearts of tots and grown-ups toward this marvellous make-believe. The figures were uncannily human, yet they moved and gyrated with a motion of their own that suggested the world children would create if they could be God for half an hour. It was illusion without disillusion. I proved it to the hilt, for I stole behind the scenes and saw the puppets being dangled by strings by nice boys and nice girls. But that was more wonderful, if possible, than what we saw from the front.

I was watching Jupiter and Pallas Athene rehearsing life's comedy for the Olympians. Every now and then one is privileged to see something which beggars words. It may be Yvette Guilbert, or Fritz Kreisler, or Pavlova, or it may be this novelty of the marionettes which is older than the Pyramids.

Here was something in which folk can rejoice as intellectuals, and, like children, be blissfully happy between laughter and tears.

You may think you know your Rip Van Winkle well; but you will never appreciate half the wonder of it until you see Tony Sarg's Marionettes. The man is a benefactor to his species. No pallid movie act this, but childhood's dream come true.

Gentle Elia would have loved them, and cynical old Voltaire would have written a scene for them. We forgot that the figures were but two feet high, and when at the conclusion a human figure came on the scene, it was as though we had suddenly been transported to Gulliver's Lilliput.

If I were a millionaire I would have these marionettes play Rip Van Winkle in every school and in every hospital in the land.

It would be a re-birth of wonder to a generation starved of God's gifts by our soul-killing materialism. For this is the land of dreams, and it is so marvellous that when you know how it is done you are not disillusioned.

It was the happiest audience I ever set eyes on and I don't know which enjoyed it the more—youths or elders.

The Dutch Treat Club Rube Goldberg, Don Marquis, John La Gatta, Ogden Nash, Clarence Buddington Kelland, Otto Soglo, Corey Ford, Russell Patterson, Dean Cornwell, James Montgomery Flagg, Jack Cosgrove, **Tony Sarg**, Percy Waxman, Conrado Massaguer

- The club is still in existence, started in 1905. **Tony Sarg** was in touch with this creative group in New York, where socially and creative interactions took place. **Norman Rockwell** was a member, too.
- DTC Code Book 1934 refers to The Dutch Treat Club, a social club in New York

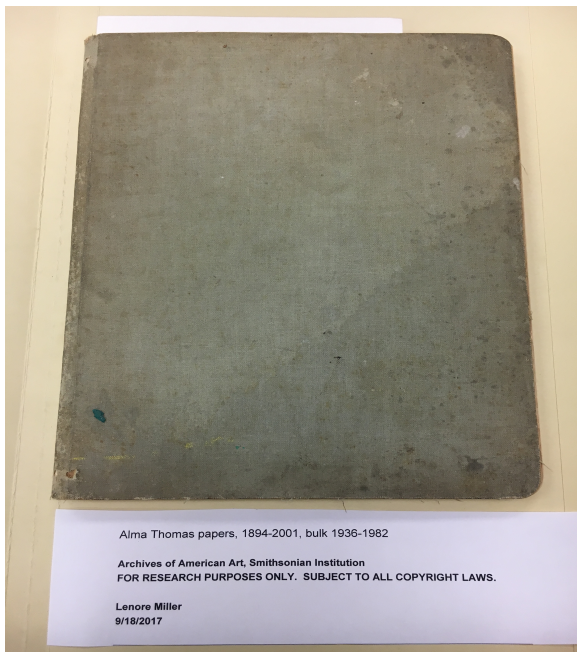
Tony Sarg at Columbia, Teaching

- Educating teachers in summer courses
- Using puppetry in teaching
- Connection to Alma Thomas, famed Color School painter in Washington, D.C.
- Original material at Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

Alma Thomas

Nature's Red Impressions (right)





Alma Thomas papers, 1894-2001, bulk 1936-1982

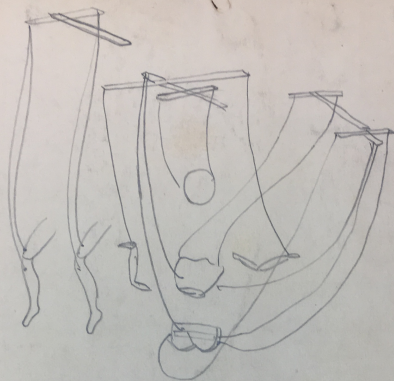
Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
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Lenore Miller
9/18/2017

Frank Portillo
"The Children's Clown"
Punch and Judy & Marionettes

Mr. Punch says, "I'm still the best
clown"





Alma Thomas papers, 1894-2001, bulk 1936-1982

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Lenore Miller

9/18/2017

Children Shown Marionettes



Miss de Graffenried Woolley of the Junior League shown yesterday at Friendship House, 224 Virginia Avenue southeast, presenting a marionette show to the children of the community. —Star Staff Photo.

Alma Thomas papers, 1894-2001, bulk 1936-1982

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Lenore Miller
9/18/2017

Compare the two “Mad Hatter” marionettes

- Same words on hat, “In This Style 10/6”
- Costume is different
- Does not appear that jaw is hinged
- Altogether, a less threatening and softer image, as well as a more abstracted

Compare marionettes with Tenniel Illustrations

Alice in Wonderland







**Alma Thomas, Mad Hatter
marionette, 1930s**



Comparison



Contemporary puppet theater

Experience viewing *My Father's Dragon*
at Synetic Theatre, Arlington, VA
December 4, 2018 – January 6, 2019

Based on the children's novel by Ruth Stiles Gannett, illustrated by Ruth Chrisman Gannett



Handler and large boar puppet

Small Mouse that was jointed

The audience was invited to see the handler and the manipulation of the puppet up close



Borrowed From Childhood Fantasy

Contemporary artists use the concept of puppetry to create surreal effects or perhaps suggest a version of reality through manipulation of viewers' perceptions.

Description of *The Marionette Maker*

- *The Marionette Maker*, which exhibited at [Luhring Augustine](#) in 2014. It is an 11-foot caravan is parked in a darkened gallery. Perched atop the isolated trailer sit giant megaphones: from one side, a tiny opera singer and pianist burst into song, from another, a looping soundscape of animal calls fades into thunderclaps and the patter of rain on a tin roof. If you peer into the window you see a tiny robot-controlled puppet show suspended over a life-size wax figure of a woman sleeping in a white slip. The marionettes, which range from a tiny fidgeting sketch artist at a desk to bulbous, anthropomorphic globs of clay, bounce up and down above her, raising the question of who is in fact pulling the strings. Did the sleeping woman (who bears an uncanny resemblance to Cardiff) dream the scene or is the little puppet toiling at his desk the true architect? It's enough to make anyone jittery.

***The Marionette Maker* (2014), Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller.**

Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, *The Marionette Maker* (2014). Image: ©Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller; Courtesy of the artists, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.

Cardiff and Miller



Dear Mr. C. L. Adams
I have just received
your letter of the 10th
and am glad to hear
that you are well.
I am also well and
hope this finds you
the same. I have not
much news to write
at present. I am
still in the same
place and doing the
same work. I have
not much time to
write at present.
I am, dear Mr. Adams,
very respectfully,
Yours,
C. L. Adams

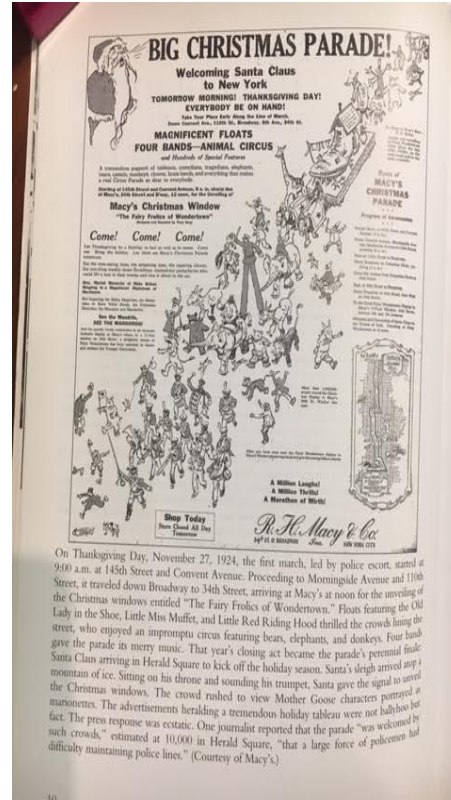
Parades and the Circus



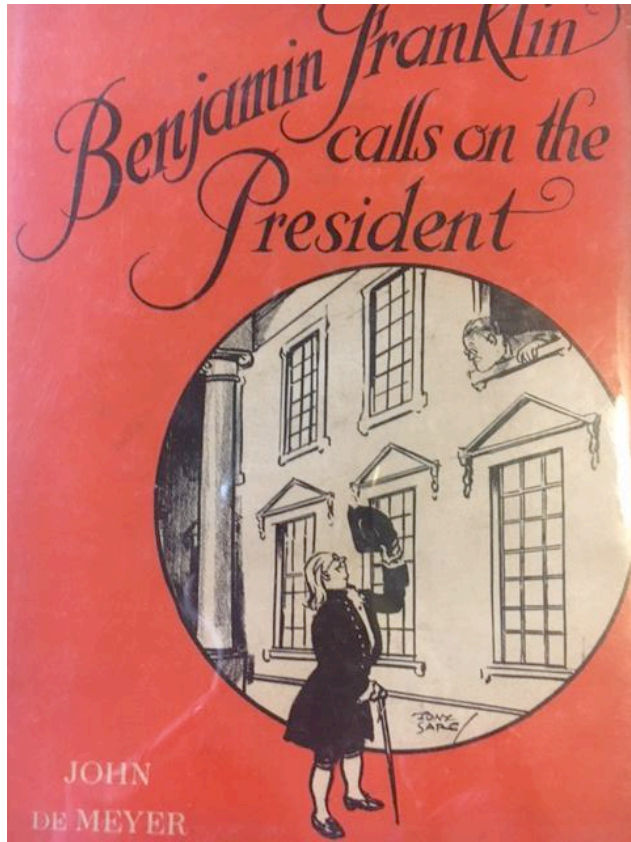
Mother Goose float from Circus World Museum



Origins of Parade sponsored by Macy's



On Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1924, the first march, led by police escort, started at 9:00 a.m. at 145th Street and Convent Avenue. Proceeding to Morningside Avenue and 110th Street, it traveled down Broadway to 34th Street, arriving at Macy's at noon for the unveiling of the Christmas windows entitled "The Fairy Frolics of Woodentown." Floats featuring the Old Lady in the Shoe, Little Miss Muffet, and Little Red Riding Hood thrilled the crowds lining the street, who enjoyed an impromptu circus featuring bears, elephants, and donkeys. Four bands gave the parade its merry music. That year's closing act became the parade's perennial finale: Santa Claus arriving in Herald Square to kick off the holiday season. Santa's sleigh arrived atop a mountain of ice. Sitting on his throne and sounding his trumpet, Santa gave the signal to unveil the Christmas windows. The crowd rushed to view Mother Goose characters portrayed as marionettes. The advertisements heralding a tremendous holiday tableau were not half-boosed fact. The press response was ecstatic. One journalist reported that the parade "was welcomed by such crowds," estimated at 10,000 in Herald Square, "that a large force of policemen had difficulty maintaining police lines." (Courtesy of Macy's)



Jacket Illustration by Tony Sarg

To Baird
from

Franklin D. Roosevelt.

CENTER FOR PUPPETRY ARTS

The Center for Puppetry Arts is grateful to museum founder, Nancy Lohman Staub, for her continued support of the Center for Puppetry Arts Museum.

Special thanks to museum advisors Mary Jo Arnoldi, John Bell, Eileen Blumenthal, Fan Pen Li Chen, Kathy Foley, Jane Marie Law, Kerry McCarthy, and John McCormick

Executive Director: Vincent Anthony

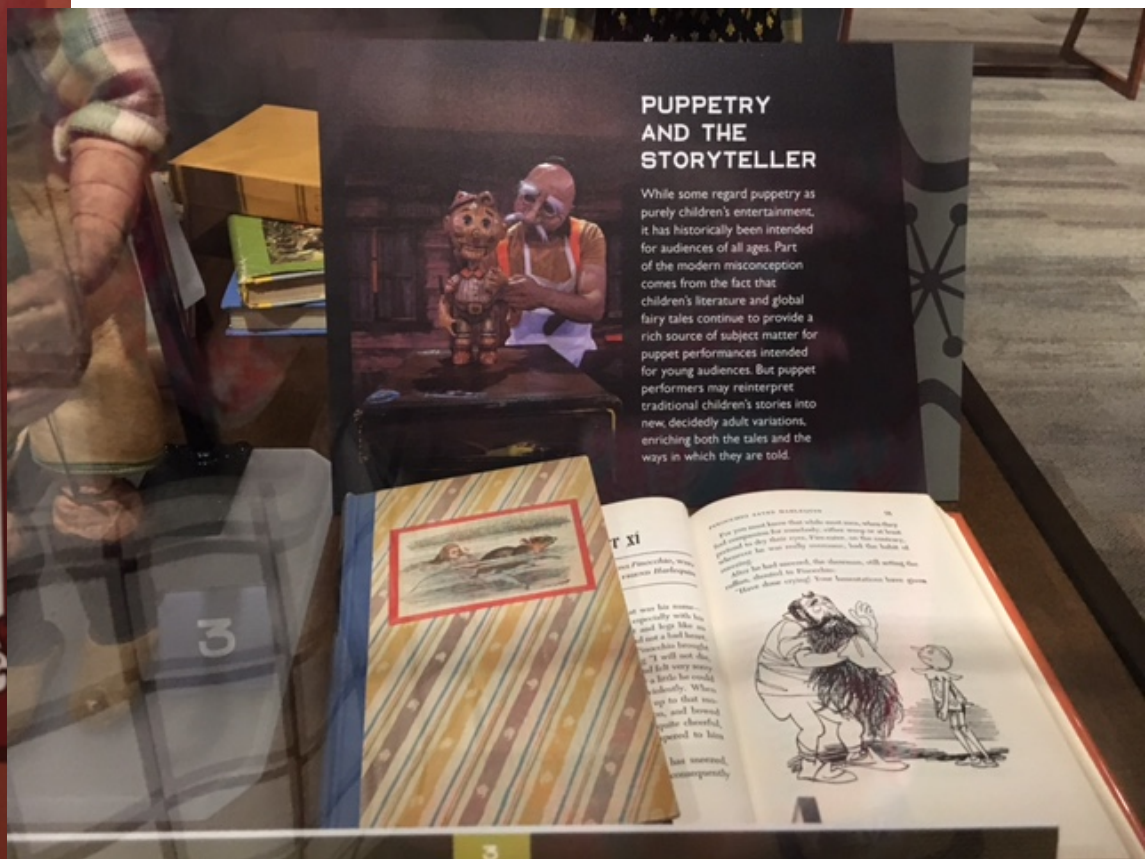
Curator: Bradford Clark

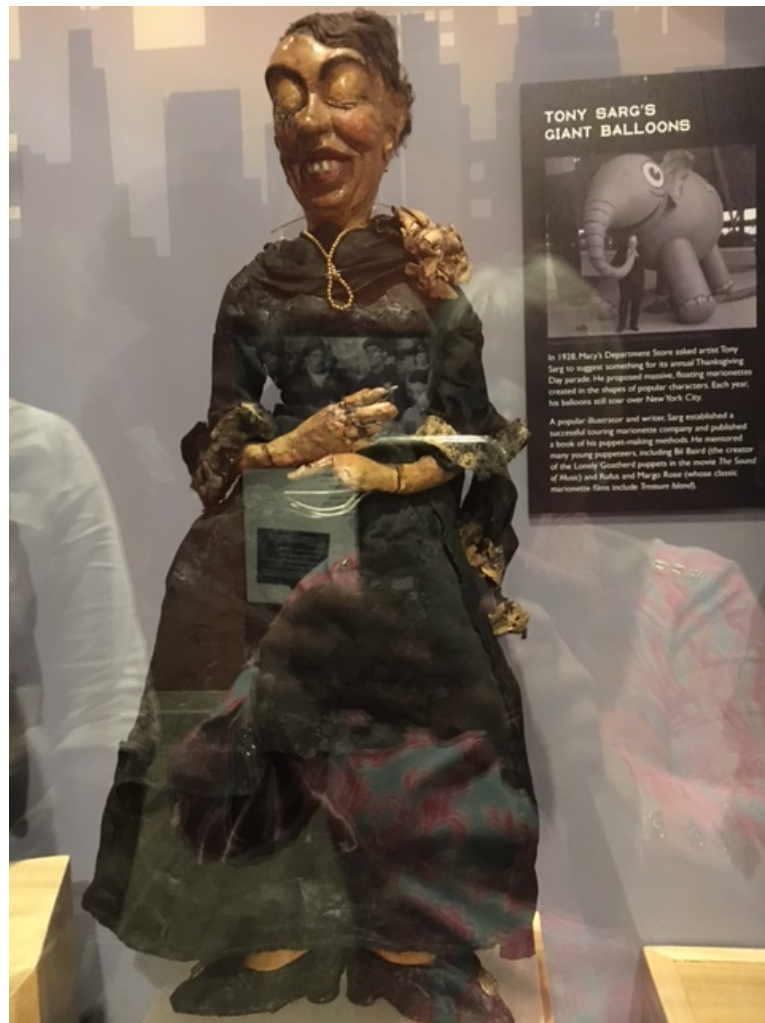
Exhibitions Director: Kelsey Fritz

Designed by: Thinkwell Group

Museum Consultant: Carolynne Harris

Center for Puppetry Arts Staff: Aretta Baumgartner, Bill Jones, David Vito Leanza, Liz Lee, Megan Montague, Athena Smith, Russ Vick





TONY SARG'S GIANT BALLOONS



In 1928, Macy's Department Store asked artist Tony Sarg to suggest something for its annual Thanksgiving Day parade. He proposed massive, floating marionettes created in the shape of popular characters. Each year, his balloons still soar over New York City.

A popular illustrator and writer, Sarg established a successful touring marionette company and published a book of his puppet-making methods. He mentored many young puppeteers, including Bill Baird (the creator of the Lemony Snicket puppets in the movie *The Sound of Music*) and Rufus and Marge Rose (whose classic marionette films include *Tremors Island*).

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Creator TONY SARG

1934 | United States

TYPE *String*

MATERIALS *Synthetic hair, paint, nylon, papier-mâché, textile*

Gift of the Sarasota Opera Association, Inc, from the Marian McKennon Collection

Looking forward to 2021

- **Tony Sarg's** legacy as a designer and illustrator offers manifold examples for study.
- He was the key figure in the revival of American puppetry. It was theatre with a sophisticated audience in mind.
- His sense of humor and play are personal characteristics that continue to appeal.