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?
TONY SARG
HIMSELF
Father of the Modern Puppets
Creator of the Tony Sarg Marionettes
Originator & Creator of the
Halloween Street Parade
Illustrator
Artist

AN EVENING WITH
TONY SARG

Tony Sarg brings to a unique effect the lifelong
love of toys, affection for children and
care for the human heart in a
unique entertainment.
In a series of Lions and Lambs, Trollops
and Tramps, a charade of Punch and Judy,
and a pantomime of a circus, he will
show the continuance of the progress of
the human race from dawn to night.

In this unique entertainment, Sarg
will exhibit his skill and humor in
creating puppets and marionettes that
are a delight to children and adults.

The show combines music, magic,
and a touch of unusual humor that
will entertain the audience.

A one-of-a-kind experience that
should not be missed.
Tony Sarg (1880–1942) was a prominent puppeteer, designer, and illustrator. Born in Germany, he immigrated and married American Beatrice Eleanor McComas. Together they created elaborate puppets and stage designs for Broadway shows and revues.
NHA Sea Serpent video
Nantucket

Images of America

James Everett Grieder and Georgen Charnes
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
Map of Nantucket
Linen Towel
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

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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

Tony Sarg's Balloons

Courtesy Nantucket Historical Association
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)
Shadowgraph, Variations on Ancient Chinese Art Form
Victor Herbert, Willow Plate Suite
In music and video, Victor Herbert, (1924) *The Willow Plate*, marionette play by Tony Sarg (1924)

Review of Rip Van Winkle
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)
Frank Portillo
"The Childlike Clown"
Punch and Judy & Marionette

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

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

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
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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
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](https://www.luhringaugustine.com) 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.
Cardiff and Miller
Parades and the Circus

Mother Goose float from Circus World Museum
Origins of Parade sponsored by Macy’s
Jacket Illustration by Tony Sarg
To [illegible] from [illegible].
PUPPETRY AND THE STORYTELLER

While some regard puppetry as purely children’s entertainment, it has historically been intended for audiences of all ages. Part of the modern misconception comes from the fact that children’s literature and global fairy tales continue to provide a rich source of subject matter for puppet performances intended for young audiences. But puppet performers may reinterpret traditional children’s stories into new, decidedly adult variations, enlivening both the tales and the ways in which they are told.
In 1935, Macy's Department Store placed a huge Tony gay icy sugar-covered turkey (in actuality, a dirigible) in its Thanksgivings parade to impress crowds. The dirigible, which had a propeller and a chimney, was a hit. Each year, its size increased until it became the star of the show.

The giant balloons became a tradition, and Macy's created a parade route that allowed spectators to watch the parade from the comfort of their homes. The first parade was a huge success, and it has continued every year since.

The parade has featured many other creative floats and balloons, including a giant elephant, a giant frog, and even a giant rubber ducky. The parade has become a beloved holiday tradition, attracting millions of people to the streets of New York City.

The parade has also been a platform for social and political messages, with floats and balloons that have highlighted issues such as environmental protection and human rights. The parade has become a symbol of the spirit of the holidays, offering a moment of joy and wonder for people of all ages.

The parade has also been a source of inspiration for artists and designers, who have created stunning floats and balloons that have captured the imagination of viewers. The parade has become a showcase of creativity and imagination, with floats and balloons that have pushed the boundaries of what is possible in this medium.

The parade has also been a source of economic benefit for the city, attracting millions of visitors each year and providing a boost to the local economy. The parade has become a beloved holiday tradition, attracting millions of people to the streets of New York City.

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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.