

Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić. Lost and Found: Indonesian Picture Scroll Theatre. Zagreb, Ethnographic Museum, 25th January – 2nd April 2017

Exhibition Review

The exhibition "Lost and Found: Indonesian Picture Scroll Theatre" was put up at Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb from the 25th January to 2nd April 2017. Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić, cultural anthropologists, are authors of the exhibition and texts in the accompanying catalogue. The theme of the exhibition is *wayana beber* - Indonesian "Picture Scroll Theatre". The exhibition is realized in collaboration with AngArt association, the Embassy of Indonesia in Zagreb and the Ethnographic Museum.

Wayana beber is a part of a much wider tradition of puppet theatre in which a richly painted scroll wound around a bamboo stick is used. According to the authors, this theatre format dates back to the 9th century, but the picture scroll theatre as we know it today was established in the 14th century. Plays were performed at royal palaces to mark important events, and at villages where they served as protection. Not only did the plays have an important social role, they also had a ritual function, and people still believe scrolls have magic powers. The central role was that of a narrator - *dalang*, who unrolls the scrolls, tells the story and sings. *Dalang* sits in front of the scroll he unrolls scene by scene, or behind it, from left to right. He imitates the voices of various characters from the story, and sings songs at the beginning and the end of the performance, as well as at the beginning of each new scene. Songs are accompanied by the music of *gamelan* ensemble. Unlike other forms of theatre in Java which focus on Indian epic poems Mahabharata and Ramajana, *wayana beber*, tells a story of Panji, the prince of a kingdom called Jenggala, who is looking for the runaway princess of a kingdom called Kediri. Legends of Panji are transmitted orally as well.

The authors laid out a historical overview of *wayana beber* in this exhibition, and presented the findings of their ethnographic research which they conducted in central and eastern Java from August to October 2016. Their aim was to gather information on the condition of old scrolls, traditional and contemporary styles of *wayana beber*, and to become familiar with the current state of play. They talked to artists, craftsmen, performers, the locals, and storytellers and monitored their efforts to revitalize *wayana beber*.

The exhibition is divided into three themes on the basis of photographs and video recordings taken and filmed by the authors: the role of the narrator and the *gamelan* ensemble, scroll painting techniques, the making of *daluan* paper for scrolls, and traditional and contemporary performances of *wayana beber*. Exhibits such as narrator's clothes, original scrolls, and painting tools were collected during field research.

Scrolls which could not be brought back and displayed in this exhibition are presented via photographs of the originals. For example, only two sets of scroll made in royal

palaces remain nowadays. All the royal scrolls were relocated to families in villages in the 18th century, during the Javan war, in order to preserve them. Since then they have been in the possession of several families in Pacitan and Wonosori regions. The owners allowed the authors to be present at the scrolls unravelling. Prior to scroll presentation there is a ritual and a prayer, and then photographs of scrolls can be taken.

Pacitano set consists of six scrolls and presents one of Panji legends about a forbidden love between two young people. The performance is one hour long, in the past it used to go on for up to three hours. The narrator sits behind the scroll for the entirety of the performance and the audience cannot see him. No one knows exactly when these scrolls were created, but it is assumed that they date back to the end of the 17th century. Since the original scrolls are in a poor condition, copies were made in 2010 which are now used in performances. Pacitano scrolls are packed with illustrations, while Wonosari scrolls are less detailed. Stories from three (out of eight) scrolls are unknown, one or two scrolls are supposedly not to be unrolled, but are only used for ritual purposes. The performance lasts for about two hours, the *dalang* sits in front of the scroll and uses a stick to point at individual scenes.

In addition to traditional performances the exhibition presents activities of three artist collectives from Java who promote scroll theatre and bring it closer to younger audience through contemporary topics. The performances move away from traditional forms, and puppets, masks, modern instruments, and video screenings are used in addition to scrolls. Cahyati Praba Hardini, an artist and a member of "Welingan" collective from the city of Surakarta, was a guest at the Museum throughout the duration of the exhibition. Her performance gave Zagreb audience a one of a kind opportunity to be a part of a contemporary scroll theatre performance.

In order to bring this theatrical form even closer to the audience, spectators were given an opportunity to unroll the scrolls themselves and tell their own version of the story, or to try their skills in colouring characters typical of *wayang beber* and become familiar with another kind of artistic expression. The Embassy of Indonesia in Zagreb lent four *gamelan* ensemble instruments (rebab, gong, kendang and kenong) played at traditional performances of *wayang beber* in Pacitano for the purposes of this exhibition. The instruments were displayed in a staged Javanese pavillion (*pendopo*), which is a place where people gather and where various ceremonies are held, including *wayana beber* plays.

The accompanying program included a performance by "Terbangun Matahari" - a *gamelan* ensemble from Zagreb, a dance performance by Gendis Putri Kartini and Una Matija Štalcar-Furač, a student of Contemporary Dance at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb, who performed a Javanese dance called Gembira, a workshop for children, and lectures for experts and general audience.

With this exhibition the Ethnographic Museum continues its series of exhibitions in which themes related to Indonesian culture are presented, on rare but regular occasions. Furthermore, this is the first time the Ethnographic Museum put on display a field research conducted by our native ethnologists in a land far away of which we do not

know a lot about. This exhibition gave the audience an insight into a theme of which not much has been said in Croatian and European museums so far. This exhibition might prove very useful for students of ethnology and cultural anthropology because they can learn about various processes and parts which constitute an independent ethnographic research.

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