

Comical Types in Puppet Theatre (100 Years of Hurvínek)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE



**18-19
June
2026**

**Figurentheater Osnabrück,
Germany**

Supported by the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation



WELCOMING WORDS

It is an honour for us to have been chosen as the venue for this conference. The City of Peace, Osnabrück, is a perfect fit for working alongside so many international centres of UNIMA, the oldest international theatre organisation. The exploration of the comic figure is also closely linked to Osnabrück. In 1761, Osnabrück-born Justus Möser wrote his polemic: "Harlequin: Or, a Defence of Grotesque Comic Performances" as a response to the German dramatists of the Enlightenment, who increasingly found the comic figure in theatre repugnant. For Möser, however, it is a character who fights the scholars and their quills with a "wooden sabre". He speaks out what others dare not or are not allowed to say. And that is precisely why a Kasperkopf, the logo of the Figurentheater Osnabrück, has shaped the image of our old town for decades.

We are delighted that this conference brings so many things together here.



**Florian Rzepkowski
Rona Ludin**

Artistic directors of Figurentheater
Osnabrück



Katerina Dolenska

President of UNIMA Czech Republic

In my opinion, this international conference on comic characters in puppet theatre is extraordinary for several reasons. First and foremost, it represents a synergistic international collaboration that arose spontaneously and blossomed into two distinct yet interconnected gatherings – one in the Czech city of Plzeň and the other in Osnabrück, Germany. It all began with our friendly meeting with Daria, a tireless promoter of Ukrainian puppetry, and a conversation about our research plans for the coming year. And what a surprise it was when we discovered that we were planning to focus on almost the exact same topic at nearly the same time! We met several more times to refine our ideas, jointly issued an open call, selected speakers together, and fine-tuned the program and concept of both conferences under a single umbrella. While the Pilsen conference is primarily set to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Hurvínek puppet, the Osnabrück conference will focus more broadly on comic characters and, above all, their relevance to today's audience.

It is a tremendous honour for me to participate in this cross-border gathering, and I look forward to meeting puppetry experts and practitioners from several continents. In today's fractured world, marked by growing aggression, this event will serve as a symbolic cultural bridge, a sharing of experiences, and a celebration of our shared love for puppets. And I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in the event, whether through financial support, patronage, or by contributing their expertise.



WELCOMING WORDS

Dear colleagues and friends, dear puppeteers! I am delighted to welcome you to the wonderful city of Osnabrück, which has become my second home since 2022. And what sort of puppeteer's home would it be without puppets? Thank you to each and every one of you for coming here with your puppets, presentations, experiences, and ideas about our ancient and wonderful art. The topic we will be discussing over the next two days as part of the conference (and I sincerely hope for much longer afterward) resonates deeply with me as a researcher and lecturer. Our folk puppet heroes (and in Ukrainian theatre studies we do indeed call them "heroes") are what unite our theatres, making them so similar in their nature, history and spirit. At the same time, we recognise and respect the uniqueness of every hero and theatre in a particular country and region. And in this diversity and respect for it lies the beauty of puppetry as well!

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who helped organise this event. Especially Rona Ludin and Florian Rzepkowski, who have welcomed us so warmly here at the Figurentheater Osnabrück. Mareike Gaubitz who introduced us to each other back then. And also to Katerina Dolenska for suggesting, in September 2025 during our marathon between performances and events at the festival in Charleville, that our UNIMA national centres (Czech Republic and Ukraine) organise this wonderful joint conference.

So, let's talk, chat, share our thoughts, discuss, and let's enjoy puppetry — especially in such wonderful company with our folk puppet heroes!



Daria Ivanova

President of NGO "UNIMA-UKRAINE"



June 18 • Thursday

CONFERENCE
PROGRAMME

11:00–11:15

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

Welcoming word from the organisers: Rona Ludin, Florian Rzepkowski, Katerina Dolenska, Daria Ivanova

11:15–12:00

KEYNOTE SPEECHES

Mareike Gaubitz (Germany)

The Many-Faced Character – an exploration of the commonalities and shared characteristics of the intangible cultural heritage of the comic glove puppet in Europe

Dr. Nazlı M. Ümit (Turkey)

Karagöz: From the Puppet Stage to Living Heritage and Cross-Cultural Meanings

12:00–12:20

Coffee break

12:20–13:40

SESSION 1: COMICAL TYPES IN PUPPET THEATRE: HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Dr. Antonia Napp (Germany)

With a Razor's Edge of Wit and Wisdom – Kasper is Figaro.

Dr. Prof. Marzenna Wisniewska (Poland)

Polish Faust, Matołek the Billy-Goat, and Kazio Sponge: Traditional and Contemporary Comic Characters of Polish Puppet Theater

Dr. Daria Ivanova (Ukraine)

We be of one blood, you and I: Cossack and others

Cariad Astles (Great Britain-Sweden)

Agency and autonomy in female comic characters in traditional puppetry

13:40–14:00

DISCUSSION



June 18 • Thursday

CONFERENCE
PROGRAMME

14:00–15:00

Lunch break

15:00–16:00

**SESSION 2: COMICAL TYPES IN PUPPET
THEATRE: THE SEARCH FOR NEW MODELS**

Dr. Katerina Dolenska (Czech Republic)

Spejbl and Hurvínek: Between Tradition and Modernity

Padmini Rangarajan (India)

Comical Types in Puppet Theatre: Hurvínek and Indian
Parallels

Dr. Anne Helgesen (Norway)

The television puppet that entitled himself as a national
Norwegian scapegoat

16:00–16:20

Coffee break

16:20–17:00

Dr. Roman Lavrentii (Ukraine)

Ukrainian puppet theatre in the context of the urban culture
in Lviv in the 1920s and 1930s: the creation of a modern folk
hero

Kateryna Lavrynets (Ukraine)

The Archetype of the vertep character Cossack in the image
of Lunio as a cultural and historical heritage of the Volyn
Academical Regional Puppet theatre

17:00–17:30

DISCUSSION

19:00

**SHOW "DOM ROBERTO" BY
RUI SOUSA (PORTUGAL)**



June 19 • Friday

CONFERENCE
PROGRAMME

10:00–11:00

**SESSION 3: COMICAL TYPES IN PUPPET
THEATRE: POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

Dr. Oriane Maubert (France)

Neville Tranter, the puppet and the actor: caricature of the power

Lars Rebehn (Germany)

Kasper and the Nazis

Fedelis Kyalo (Kenya)

Humorous Resistance in Kenyan Puppet Theatre: The Ruto Puppet.

11:00–11:20

DISCUSSION

11:20–11:40

Coffee break

11:40–12:00

FINAL CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

12:00–13:00

**PANEL DISCUSSION
"3P: PUPPETS–POWER–POLITICS"**

Moderator Cariad Astles. Participants: Rui Sousa, Katerina Dolenska, Fedelis Kyalo



June 19 • Friday

**CONFERENCE
PROGRAMME**

13:00–14:00

Lunch break

14:00–15:00

**PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK "FOLK
HEROES OF EUROPEAN PUPPET THEATRE.
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PORTRAITS"**

Moderator Sofiia Rosa-Lavrentiy, author Daria Ivanova,
artist Rui Sousa

16:00–17:00

**SHOW "VOLYN VERTEP" BY VOLYN ACADEMIC
REGIONAL PUPPET THEATRE (UKRAINE)**

19:00–22:00

NETWORKING PICNIC



ABOUT PERFORMANCES

Two Stories of Dom Roberto

18 June 19:00

Cachaçaria Planeta Sol (Bergstraße 8, Osnabrück-Westerberg)



Technic: Teatro Dom Roberto – national heritage of Portugal since 2021
Performed and adapted by Rui Sousa (premiere in 2010).

This performance is part of the traditional Portuguese puppet theatre known as Teatro Dom Roberto, a lively and humorous popular art form rooted in street performance and oral heritage.

The show brings together two short stories:

- **The Haunted Castle** is a playful adventure with romantic elements. Princess Rosa is imprisoned in a tower, surrounded by ghosts and strange beasts. The bold and mischievous Dom Roberto sets out to rescue her, leading to a sequence of comic encounters, scares, and heroic moments. The story blends romance and humour, turning danger into entertainment through fast-paced action and witty improvisation.
- **The Bullfight** offers a satirical twist on the traditional spectacle. Instead of glorifying the matador, the story humorously inverts expectations—the bull becomes the true hero. Through exaggeration and slapstick comedy, the piece gently mocks the conventions of bullfighting while celebrating cleverness and resilience.

Performed by a single puppeteer using hand puppets, the show preserves the energetic rhythm, sharp humour, and audience interaction that define Dom Roberto theatre. Rui Sousa's adaptation stays faithful to popular tradition while making it accessible to contemporary audiences.



ABOUT PERFORMANCES

Volyn Vertep

19 June 16:00

Meeting point: Figurentheater Osnabrück (Kleine Gildewart 9)



"Volyn Vertep" is a solo performance by the People's Artist of Ukraine Petro Savosh in collaboration with the folk ensemble "Rodyna" (translated as "Family"), created in 1990 on the basis of the classical Ukrainian Christmas vertep tradition (nativity scenes). It is a Christmas story about the birth of Jesus Christ, combining biblical motifs, folk culture, authentic humour, and the spiritual values of the people of Volyn. Through the characters of the traditional vertep, the performance tells a story of the struggle between good and evil, victory of faith, hope, and the light of Christmas.

Directed by Volodymyr Bohdanets and Iryna Khmilevska.

Scenography by Mykola Kumanovskyi.

In December 2005, "Volyn Vertep" was successfully presented at the European Parliament and the headquarters of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France.



Cariad Astles (Great Britain–Sweden)

Puppetry trainer, teacher, director and researcher. Puppetry tutor at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London as well as at the University of Exeter in the UK. She is a co-President of the UNIMA Training and Research Commission and sits on UNIMA's Executive Committee. She was a keynote speaker for the IDEA conference in Beijing in both 2024 and 2025. In her research, she specialises in applied puppetry, directing for puppet theatre, and puppetry during war and under dictatorship. She is currently leading a puppetry project on FGM and writing a book on puppetry and migration.

Dr. Katerina Dolenska (Czech Republic)

Graduate of Theatre Studies (Charles University Prague) and doctoral program at the Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre (Theatre Faculty, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague). Since 2006, she has been working in the editorial office of the professional magazine *Loutkář*; since 2015, she has been the editor-in-chief. She is an Associate Professor at DAMU, where she leads courses dedicated to the theory and history of puppet theatre. She cooperates with the Institute for Research and Study of Alternative Theatre, Puppet, and Theatre Creation in Specific Disorders of DAMU as a leading researcher in puppetry. Since 2024, she has been the President of UNIMA Czech Republic.



Mareike Gaubitz (Germany)

Head of the Documentation and Research Center at Fidena, the German Forum for Puppetry Arts in Bochum. She teaches an academic focus on puppetry at Ruhr University Bochum. As a freelance moderator, she contributes to conferences and research formats. Her research focuses on performance analysis, comic figures in European puppetry, virtual reality in museums, and international networks. Since 2025, she has been a Co-President of the Futures Commission of UNIMA International



Dr. Anne Helgesen (Norway)

Puppetry artist, playwright, author and researcher in theatre science. She received her doctorate in 2003 with a thesis on the history of Norwegian puppetry. She has been a university teacher in theatre studies at the University of Oslo, Oslo Metropolitan University and University College of Østfold. She is the artistic director of both Kattas Figurteater (The Cat's Puppet Theatre) and the puppetry festival, Figurfestspillene in Toensberg. Received the award of UNIMA Norway (Tyrihansprisen) in 2005, the cultural award of Toensberg city in 2010 and the Literature Award of Vestfold County in 2024. She was appointed a state scholarship holder in 2015.

Dr. Daria Ivanova (Ukraine)

Theatre scholar, puppet theatre director, and cultural manager. Lecturer at the Department of Puppet Theatre Art at the Kyiv National I.K. Karpenko-Karyi University of Theatre, Cinema and Television. Since 2023 president of the NGO "UNIMA-UKRAINE". Researcher at the Department of Art History at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (Germany). Scholarship holder of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Gerda Henkel Foundation, and the Philipp Schwarz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Author of the book "Folk Heroes of European Puppet Theatre: Historical and Cultural Portraits" (Lviv 2026).



Fedelis Kyalo (Kenya)

Artist who specializes in puppetry and storytelling. He is a puppeteer, playwright, and assistant director. He co-founded the Krystal Puppet Theatre Company and wrote the well-known production "Tears by the River". He has also created several short puppet shows that use humor and social messages. Currently, he is the Head Puppeteer for Buni Media's "XYZ Show". President of the UNIMA Africa Commission, and Co-Director of Puppets254. Fedelis is dedicated to developing new talent and promoting puppetry across Africa. His goal is to inspire audiences and build meaningful connections through his art.





Dr. Roman Lavrentiy (Ukraine)

Theatre scholar, PhD in Art Studies, Associate Professor at the Theatre Studies and Acting Department of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine), editor-in-chief of the academic theatre journal Proscenium, and a member of expert council of the National Ukrainian Theatre Festival and Award "Great Real Art" 2021–2026, member of the NGO "UNIMA-UKRAINE", and a co-founder of the Maïia Harbuziuk Art-Foundation.

Kateryna Lavrynets (Ukraine)

Puppet theatre director and lecturer. In 2023, she graduated from the I. K. Karpenko-Karyi Kyiv National University of Theatre, Cinema and Television with a master degree in puppet theatre directing. The same year, she moved to Lutsk and began working at the Volyn Academic Regional Puppet Theatre. She has created seven productions for children and adults. She also teaches at Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University.



Dr. Oriane Maubert (France)

Lecturer in the University of Strasbourg, researcher for the laboratory ACCRA, in Puppetry arts, Dance and Drama studies. She wrote her doctoral thesis *La Marionnette danse. Ré-activer le geste sur la scène contemporaine* (2021), and several articles in *Puppetry and Multimedia* (2020); *Puppet during the 21st century* (2019); *Voix plurielles* (2018); and *Agôn* (2019), among others. Her research explores concepts and practices in the question of dance in puppetry arts, multimedia, raw material and corporéités on stage.



Dr. Antonia Napp (Germany)

Executive Director at KOLK 17 Puppet Theatre & Museum. She has been the director of KOLK 17 Puppet Theatre & Museum since 2021. The programme here focuses on combining modern puppetry with scholarly collection work in exhibitions and performances. She is actively involved in networking within the puppet theatre community in Germany and internationally. In addition to regularly publishing on the subject of puppetry, Antonia Napp is a member of the editorial team of "DaT – Das andere Theater" and of the UNIMA Heritage Commission.

Padmini Rangarajan (India)

Puppetry artist, educator, and researcher. She directs Sphoorthi Theatre-STEPARC and served as General Secretary of UNIMA Puppeteers Trust (2023-2026). Recipient of Senior fellowships from Ministry of Culture and UNESCO recognition, she integrates puppetry into education, therapy, and social contexts, with a special focus on Montessori classrooms.



Lars Rebehn (Germany)

Studied ethnology and social and economic history at the University of Hamburg. Since 1984, has been conducting archival research on the history of puppet theater and public entertainment. Completed his studies with a thesis on Hamburg marionette performers in the 19th century. Joined the Puppet Theater Collection of the Dresden State Art Collections in 1997, has served as Chief Curator of the collection since 2022.





Dr. Sofiia Rosa-Lavrentiy (Ukraine)

Theatre scholar, philologist, PhD in Art History, Associate Professor at the Theatre Studies and Acting Department of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv and the Cultural Studies Department of the Ukrainian Catholic University. Since 2023, she has been co-editing the academic theatre journal Proscenium. She is a member of the Shevchenko Scientific Society (theatre studies section), the Union of Theatre Workers of Ukraine, and NGO "UNIMA-UKRAINE" and heads its Scientific and Publishing Commission and is a member of Maïia Harbuziuk Foundation.

Dr. Nazlı M. Ümit (Türkiye)

An independent researcher, Karagöz puppeteer, and theatre practitioner. Her recent research focuses on Turkish puppetry in the contexts of historiography, iconography, and under-researched repertoires. She is the founder of Sirkeci Theatre, which aims to reconstruct and stage lost or scarcely known texts through research and performance-based approaches. She studied under Alpay Ekler, a Karagöz master designated as a Living Human Treasure (UNESCO), and she is officially acknowledged by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Türkiye as a Karagöz practitioner within the scope of Intangible Cultural Heritage. She currently serves as the chair of the UNIMA International Heritage Commission.





Dr. Prof. Marzenna Wiśniewska (Poland)

Professor at the Institute of Culture Studies of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Member of the Research Commission of the Union International de la Marionnette (UNIMA), POLUNIMA and the Polish Association for Theatre Research. Her academic interests focus on the history and theory of world puppet theatre, media in theatre, theatre for children and youth, theatre pedagogy, and culture animation. Author of the monograph: *The Archipelago of Individualities. Solo Theatres of Performers Interacting with Matter* (Toruń 2022).

Rui Sousa (Portugal)

Professional puppeteer, visual artist, and teacher of artistic disciplines. As a puppeteer, he restores the traditional arts of puppetry of threads and Teatro Dom Roberto, elevating them to living heritage. Participant of the festivals in Spain, Belgium, Brazil, Tunisia and Macau. Winner of the award for Best street show (2007) and Public award for best show in the city of Ovar (FIMO, 2017). In October 2021, he received the National Arts Award for best script. His collection includes more than 30 independent productions, from which he built and presented solo and participated in more than 20 co-Productions.





**Figurentheater
Osnabrück**



**ROK
LOUTKOVÉHO
DIVADLA
2026**



**MUZEUM
LOUTEK
V PLZNI**



Logo concept – Vladyslav Lianh (Ukraine)
Poster and booklet designer – Mariia Karetyk (Ukraine)