

Pulling Strings

Art That Moves—the World of Flexitoon

BY ALICE LONGWORTH

TAKE YOUR IMAGINATION OUT TO PLAY with award-winning puppeteers Olga Felgemacher and Craig Marin, when “Pulling Strings: Art That Moves—the World of Flexitoon” comes to The Bendheim Gallery. “Our goal is to entertain and enlighten visitors and catapult puppets as an art form into the twenty-first century,” Craig promises.

The show, underwritten primarily by Fidelity Investments, will run from November 29, 2007, through January 5, 2008, with an exhibition completely occupying the gallery, and live performances on a full puppet stage in GAC’s adjoining meeting room.

Puppets and props from most of the television series for which Flexitoon creators Craig and Olga are so well known—series like *Pinwheel* (Nickelodeon), *Shining Time Station* (PBS), *KIDS-TV* (Showtime), *D.J. Kat* (Fox), and *Goin’ Up* (Thirteen/WNET)—will be on view, while video loops stream excerpts from the original broadcasts.

In the live stage production of *Hamlin*, you’ll meet Mayor Greedy Grab, who likes to play hide and seek with his money, and his Wifey-Wife, who exhausts herself “acquiring” (shopping). Audience members of all ages will enjoy this new adaptation of *The Pied Piper*, a classic “honesty is the best politics” tale. It stars an “all-singing, all-dancing Shakira-in-

training” cockroach who can transform into a cat to charm those rats as quickly as you can say cha-cha-cha.

Live performances of *Hamlin*, which was chosen to open the Global Festival of Puppet Arts in Taiwan earlier this year, are scheduled for December 1, December 9, and December 15. Additional shows will be staged between Christmas and New Year’s Day, dates to be announced. Private showings of *Hamlin*, for small school and corporate groups or special personal occasions, may be booked during the run of the exhibition. For more information or to make arrangements, call GAC at 203.622.3998.

FRAGMENTS, A COMPLETELY NEW piece (being created as we go to press), is designed specifically to engage and entertain audience members with Alzheimer’s disease and their families. In this twenty-minute, live show the performers, as well as the puppets, will be up-close and visible. A variety of objects—for example, a picture frame and a wig, or a glove and a pen—will be presented to evoke memories. Groups from community centers will be invited to participate.

Greenwich Adult Day Center and the Commission on Aging have joined the Arts Council in sponsoring this production.



PHOTO COURTESY THE WORLD OF FLEXITOOON

Puppets, Mayor Greedy Grab and his Wifey-Wife, will star in three live stage productions of *Hamelin*, a new adaptation of *The Pied Piper*, at Greenwich Arts Council in December.

Flexitoon co-founder Craig Marin, a native of New York City, grew up enamored of the puppets he saw on television. He apprenticed with Chuck McCann on WPIX and after high school formed the Marko Puppet Theatre, which toured colleges throughout the United States. Their psychedelic puppet show, inspired by ZAP comic books, garnered such an underground reputation that Marko was asked to perform at a Grateful Dead birthday party for Jerry Garcia.

Olga Felgemacher, meanwhile, had graduated with a degree in speech from Northwestern University and headed to New York City to seek employment with her childhood idol, the legendary Bil Baird. Bil signed her to a contract as his lead puppeteer. It was there that she and Craig met.

After falling in love (“I saw her and it was cosmic,” Craig recalls.) and deciding to team up professionally, they founded Flexitoon in 1979. At first they called the company “Craig and Olga, the Puppeteerz,” but as they grew, they

didn’t want to sound so much like “mom and pop.” Craig, who might have been a cartoonist if he hadn’t become a puppeteer, likens puppetry to cartooning in three dimensions in real time—flexible cartoons—hence Flexitoon!

Flexitoon’s accolades include receiving the first grant given by the National Endowment for Children’s Educational Television and the 1996 Henson Foundation/UNIMA Award for Outstanding Broadcast Puppetry. Their *Shining Time Station* puppets were on display throughout 2002 at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, Georgia, as part of the exhibit Winner’s Circle: Ten Years of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry. ■

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