

Figure 1. UNIMA official logo. Courtesy of UNIMA.

The UNIMA Research Commission

UNIMA (the Union Internationale de la Marionnette) is the international association for puppeteers, puppetry teachers and trainers, scholars, museum curators, festival directors, and other people inspired by and interested in the art form of puppet theatre and related arts. It is the oldest theatre organisation in the world; it was founded in 1929 in Prague, in what was then Czechoslovakia, and is a non-governmental association affiliated to UNESCO. Its seat is in Charleville-Mézières, France, and currently it has centres in more than 90 countries around the world. The work of UNIMA is organised through commissions: these commissions set up projects and promote puppetry through a range of activities, including festivals, symposia, emergency aid projects and exhibitions, for example. The current commissions include the Research Commission, the Commission for Cooperation, the Professional Training Commission, the Heritage Commission, the Youth Commission, the Publications Commission and the Commission for Education, Development and Therapy, along with several geographical commissions. The Research Commission's Broken Puppet project, which led to three symposia and, ultimately, to the current publication, was the first project of the current mandate of the Research Commission that was elected in 2016.

The Research Commission is made up of a working group and an advisory group. Members are typically scholars of puppetry drawn from diverse geographical locations, to ensure global representation within the research. The current commission's mandate was due to run from 2016 until 2020 but has been extended for one year due to the Covid-19 global crisis, which led to the UNIMA Congress due to take place in 2020 being postponed for one year.

The aims of the Research Commission are to:

- promote, encourage, develop and support research into puppetry, material, visual and object performance and fields related to these;
- support and encourage publication of research into the above areas through collaborations with publishers and other research institutions;
- work closely with Universities and other academic institutions to support and disseminate information about theses and research projects in the field of puppetry and related fields;

- assist in the promotion, visibility and accessibility of historical and theoretical puppetry research through partnerships with other bodies, making visible bibliographical material and research resources and through the formulation of puppetry research fields;
- explore ways to support practice-based and practice-led research;
- increase the participation of puppetry researchers in international conferences and symposia and support the visibility of puppetry research within these conferences (where they are not specifically puppetry (and related forms) – focused);
- work towards increased dissemination of puppetry (and related forms) research through international networks;
- work closely with other UNIMA Commissions to explore joint initiatives;
- encourage new puppetry (and related forms) research and the participation of young and new researchers in projects of the Research Commission.

Over the last four years, the Research Commission has worked on four projects: firstly, the promotion and development of scholarship into applied puppetry: puppetry in social contexts, including contexts of health, wellbeing and disability. The current publication is a direct result of this project, which led to the Broken Puppet symposia over three years, initiated by Dr Emma Fisher of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (Cork 2017; Bath 2018; Birmingham 2019).

The second project of the Commission was an exploration of puppetry and multi-media, headed by Professor Ida Hledikova from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. This led to a symposium in October 2017 and a forthcoming publication as part of a Research Commission publication series: *International Puppetry Research*.

Thirdly, the Commission, led by the commission president, Cariad Astles, worked closely with the Commission for Heritage and the Asia-Pacific Commission to collaborate on a series of symposia in China, focusing on the relationship between tradition and contemporary approaches to creating puppetry. Symposia took place in Nanchong (2017), Langzhong (2018) and Quanzhou (2019).

The latest project of the Research Commission has been the setting up a series of practice-as-research residencies for puppetry projects. Currently, there are five practice-as-research residencies around the world, in the UK, Slovakia, Canada, Brazil and Taiwan, which are promoted and organised by the Research Commission in collaboration with the different centres in the countries where the residencies are held.

The Research Commission is planning a future practice to carry out research into puppetry, text and writing, which will take place over the course of the next two years.

The Commission welcomes proposals for collaborations from Universities, research centres, museums, individuals, UNIMA centres, publishers and other entities interested in developing and promoting the highest possible research into puppetry and related forms.

For more information or to propose a project, please contact:

research@unima.org

<https://www.unima.org/en/commission/research/>

Contributor details

Cariad Astles is Course Leader for the BA Puppetry at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and is also Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter, UK. She is President of the Research Commission for the international puppetry association, the *Union Internationale de la Marionnette*. Cariad specialises in training, researching, performing and directing for puppet theatre; in objects and puppets within healthcare and applied settings and in the puppet as marker of political and cultural identity. She frequently runs training workshops in the UK and overseas, most recently in China, Chile, Australia, Germany, France and Spain.

Contact: Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Eton Avenue, London NW3 3HY, UK.

Email: c.astles@cssd.ac.uk; c.astles@exeter.ac.uk

Orcid: 0000-0001-6327-8980