

## FOCUS MODULE DESCRIPTION

# Materiality & Movement in Puppetry (special focus: Rod Puppets)

ECTS / Duration	One semester weekly teaching inputs and one week exchange workshop (focus) with students from Budapest joining, as well as students from other study programs from the university of Vienna, 7 ECTS.
Faculty	Education in the Arts
Study Programmes	Fine Arts, Scenography, Education in the Arts, Architecture, Critical Studies, PhD in Practice
Teaching Method	Workshop with guests and regular weekly teaching
Language	German and English
Puppet Technology	Rod puppets, but as per request by participants the scope was widened and included body and multiple actor puppets/objects as well as string puppets
Target Audience	Open. In retrospective some of the puppets were later used to teach on secondary level and to participate in sculptural/installative art works and exhibition settings.

## Content & Description

The module focused on animation and figural performance, exploring the intersection of materiality and movement. We explored the freedom of expression a puppet or an object can give and how to handle the given freedom, so as to be as precise as possible. A central theme was the 'dialogue with the material', investigating how the physical properties of an object dictate its performance.

In order to make the audience understand our intention, without a single spoken word, we worked with principles such as breath, focus, and center of gravity. Key questions included: „How does an object gain agency?“ and „What defines the boundary between the performer and the animated thing?“.

## Pedagogical Rationale

What makes puppets special is that they can reinterpret the ordinary and completely transform it into something meaningful. This module contributed to contemporary art education by bridging the gap between fine arts, scenography, and performance. Even the simplest movements, such as drinking from a glass or rising from a chair, can look incredibly dramatic when performed by a puppet. Why? Because it is precisely these simple actions that can cause a puppet to fail. If, as an audience, we can take pleasure in the puppet's success through simple everyday tasks/actions, then it is exactly that, what lends the puppet dignity and the audience develops empathy for what was originally a lifeless object. For students, this process fosters a heightened sensitivity to timing, spatial presence, and non-verbal communication, which is essential in interdisciplinary artistic practices.



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## | Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Understand and apply appropriate puppet technologies and forms of expression
- Create and animate objects/subjects within a narrative framework
- Critically discuss and contextualize the art form of puppetry
- Experiment with different materials
- Explore the interface between the puppet and the puppeteer

## | Tasks — Teaching Staff

- Define the core idea and subject of the semester
- Develop a concept according to the subject and offered text material
- Design and discuss aesthetic, linguistic, poetic and content markers/signifiers
- Define appropriate puppet technology and materials
- Create a narrative / storyline with students
- Project realisation and presentation
- 80% active participation in class required
- Procure Materials to let the students experiment with

## | Assessment & Project Presentation (if applicable)

The final assessment was conducted through a dual presentation format:

**Live Performance:** Students presented short, non-verbal performance sketches. The focus was on the practical application of animation principles (breath, focus, and weight) and the students' ability to breathe life into a self-constructed object.

**Exhibition:** Parallel to the performances, the students built puppets were showcased in an exhibition. This allowed for a closer inspection of the craftsmanship, material choices, and the aesthetic development of the figures.

**Assessment Criteria:** The evaluation was based on the students' creative translation of the module's technical principles into physical form, their narrative clarity during the performance, and their ability to reflect on the puppet as both a 'performing subject' and a 'sculptural object'.

## | Additional information

Two videos available on youtube portrait students who participated in the module:

Fabienne Angelique Pipan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8BgytnwUf4&t=37s>

Sonia Schorling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-K6UKTRdDg&t=57s>



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## Implementing Institution

Institution	Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
Faculty / Dept.	Education in the Arts
Contact Person	Christoph Urwalek
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Semester / Year	Summer Semester 2025

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