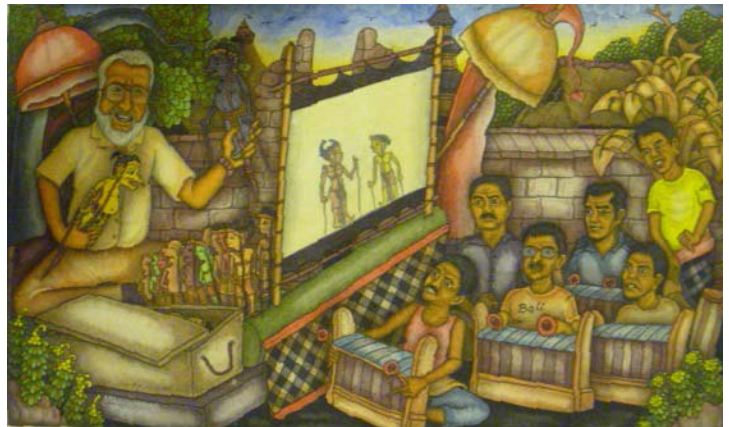


The Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets: The Structure of the Conjunction

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Between 1970 and 2010, Swiss biologist Dr. Walter Angst assembled the world's largest collection of Indonesian puppetry (*wayang*), comprising at least 15,000 puppets along with several thousand related objects ranging from wayang silverware to masks, paintings, and musical instruments. Angst took a natural history perspective on the field. He understood that wayang's diversity was shrinking due to forces of globalization, education, mass media, and Islamization, and took it upon himself to construct a study collection whereby major and minor regional styles and forms, and the experimental offshoots of these traditions,



Walter Angst in Bali painting

could be preserved for posterity. Contrasting himself with other European collectors, who tended to collect isolated examples, Angst acquired, when possible, entire sets of puppets in their original boxes as he was convinced that an individual puppet could only be properly understood in relation to a larger apparatus of performance. Angst's collection proceeded with the active assistance and collaboration with many of the best known wayang experts and puppeteers of Java, Bali, and Lombok—who served as agents and tutors in the history of the art form and its diverse local inflections. Ironically, with the rise of discourse around artistic patrimony, heritage preservation, and repatriation of cultural properties, some of these same individuals, sometimes themselves rival collectors, became Angst's most vocal critics.

This talk, richly illustrated with images from the Angst collection (known as the Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets since it was acquired by the Yale University Art Gallery in 2017), examines the structure of the conjunction between Indonesia's changing wayang scene in the four decades of 1970 to 2010 and Walter Angst as a European collector. While earlier studies have tended to demonize collectors of "ethnic" and "primitive" art for wanton destruction of indigenous cultural practices and myopic assimilation of cultural difference to Western aesthetic norms, the Angst collection reveals complex complicities with Indonesian actors and agents and an evolving hybridity in collecting as a cultural practice. The collecting not only produced a material *product*—a collection to be conserved, stored, exhibited, and transported—but served, in sometimes subtle ways, to transform the *practice* of wayang in Indonesia, with potential to transform likewise the representation and understanding of wayang internationally.

Matthew Isaac Cohen is Professor of International Theatre and Director of the Centre for Asian Theatre and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London, and a practicing puppeteer. In fall 2017, he is a Visiting Senior Fellow at the Yale University Art Gallery in order to research and curate the Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets. His most recent book is *Inventing the Performing Arts: Modernity and Tradition in Colonial Indonesia* (University of Hawaii Press, 2016).

Wednesday, November 29, 12:00 Noon
Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue