



Installation view of Shari Lewis and James Patrick Brymer's hand puppet Lamb Chop, with costumes by Pat Brymer Creations. On Wednesday, Lewis's daughter Mallory and Lamb Chop will perform "The Shari Lewis Legacy Show." Karsten Moran for The New York Times

But perhaps this festival's most novel element is its partnership with the Museum of the City of New York, which will open its 2,500-square-foot exhibition with a sold-out celebration on Thursday evening. "Puppets of New York," which runs until early April at the uptown Manhattan museum, features photographs, videos, films and sets, as well as more than 60 puppets. They range from cardboard finger models designed by Penny Jones to José A. López Alemán's 12-foot-tall Titanya, the fairy queen from "Sueño," Teatro SEA's Afro-Caribbean version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

"The main argument of the show uptown is that the history of puppetry in New York City mirrors the demographics of the city," said Monxo López, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation fellow who curated "Puppets of New York." And, he noted, "many different puppeteers that reflect that diversity have not been as visible as others. It was important to tell that story of diversity, of visibility, of inclusiveness, in a way that also showed joy and possibility."





Derek Fordjour and Nick Lehane's puppet (called a man whose name is never known) from their 2020 production "Fly Away." Karsten Moran for The New York Times

To that end, the exhibition includes not only designs by famous masters like Jim Henson and Ralph Lee, but also work by artists like the Manteo family, who brought complex metal Sicilian marionettes when they immigrated to New York a century ago, and Derek Fordjour and Nick Lehane, whose 2020 puppet production, "Fly Away," featured a nameless young Black man.

“My strategy was that each object had to tell as many stories as possible,” said López, who also collaborated with the author and curator Leslee Asch to organize “Puppets of New York: Downtown at the Clemente,” a complementary exhibition on view through Sept. 30. It joins three other art shows that will be there through August: “Teatro SEA’s International Collaborations”; “Murals of Puppetry Around the World,” featuring Alfredo Hernández’s paintings; and “Vince Anthony’s Legacy,” which celebrates the retired founder of the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, to whom the festival is dedicated.

The exhibitions reveal a synergy with the festival’s live performances, which will mostly be presented outdoors. (All in-person events require registration and face masks.) Chinese Theater Works, which will deliver puppet dragons and the Chinese judge of the dead to the Clemente’s plaza over four nights in “The Triple Zhongkui Pageant,” will be represented by shadow puppets at the Museum of the City of New York. Also at both those locations will be Lamb Chop, perhaps the most memorable — and feistiest — sock puppet of all time, who appeared on children’s television for 40 years with her ventriloquist co-star, Shari Lewis.

“She’s the Velveteen Rabbit of puppets,” said Lewis’s daughter, Mallory Lewis, referring to Margery Williams’s children’s classic about a stuffed animal that becomes real. On Wednesday evening, Mallory Lewis and Lamb Chop will perform “The Shari Lewis Legacy Show,” an interactive production featuring a new, pandemic-related ending. “It’s a tribute to the first responders,” she said in a phone interview.



The City Parks Foundation’s production of “Little Red’s Hood” will be performed in both English and Spanish. via Museum of the City of New York

Other family-friendly performances will take place all weekend. Bruce Cannon, artistic director of the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater in Central Park, contributes his talents to the City Parks Foundation’s jazzy production of “Little Red’s Hood,” to be performed in both English (Saturday) and Spanish (Sunday).

Besides this fairy tale, in which the Wolf stalks Little Red through Manhattan, Cannon will present his own “Harlem River Drive,” a one-man homage, on Sunday.

“It explores how Harlem became Harlem,” he said in a phone interview. While touching on serious topics like racism and the Depression, it also offers joyful music and multiple kinds of puppets, all operated by Cannon. They usually include a marionette inspired by Diana Ross — absent from the festival performance because it’s in “Puppets of New York” — and two of Michael Jackson. (When was the last time you saw a moonwalking marionette?)