



**The Old Trout Puppet Workshop** was founded on a ranch in southern Alberta back in the strange winter of 1999. We were a small gang of old buddies, with a fondness for beards and wood and wool and other old-fashioned and pleasant things; the world was uneasy with the threat of Y2K, and we felt an urge to huddle together for mutual protection, and to dedicate ourselves to something fragile, ridiculous, and gentle, out on the edge of the world. So we learned to carve puppets, and paid our rent through wholesome labour; we collected eggs, fed the pigs, cooked big stews, and premiered our first show to a bunkhouse full of cowboys and Hutterites.



For the record, the Hutterites were more impressed than the cowboys. We took that show into Calgary to the High Performance Rodeo, and people clapped; in that moment, an insatiable craving for applause was born in us, and the warm contentment of our ranch camaraderie turned into mean and craven Ambition.

We've been labouring under the lash of that evil spirit for over ten years, during which time a great deal has changed. We moved to the city, for instance, and now operate out of a workshop next to the train tracks in industrial Calgary. It's a thriving operation that has grown much larger than the original hairy few. All kinds of things are being made: puppet shows for both children and adults, sculptures, films, music, books, paintings, ideas, and still the occasional big pot of stew. Dozens of people are employed at various points in the year for various projects. We've got a nascent apprenticeship program, technical and administrative wings, and three shows on the road this season.

We've toured our productions across Canada and into the United States and Europe. We've mounted seven mainstage shows, most of which are lurking in crates at the workshop, ready to deploy: *The Unlikely Birth of Istvan*, *The Tooth Fairy*, *Beowulf*, *The Last Supper of Antonin Carême*, *Pinochio*, *Famous Puppet Death Scenes*, and most recently *The Erotic Anguish of Don Juan*. And now we're hard at work on our next show, a puppet documentary about cavemen, called *Ignorance*. The taloned grip of Ambition has been fierce upon us.

Where are we going? Will we ever understand what hollow ghosts we've become? Can we ever retrieve our innocence, now that it is lost?

Here's our plan: we're going to build our own workshop, on our own land, in the forest somewhere. And we're going to fill it with good young people who want to make puppet shows, and teach them what we know. They'll take over from us when we are too old and grizzled to hoist a block of wood over our heads.

The workshop of our descendants will be a-bustle with artists, working on all kinds of wondrous projects. Apprentices will be slumbering in hammocks in the rafters, cooks will be chopping beautiful things for the stew, people will be drawing and carving and counting and pondering. The walls will be festooned with old and mouldering puppets, and amongst them will hang the shriveled remains of the founders, watching over the hub-bub and brou-ha-ha. And in seven hundred years, the accumulated efforts of all the blooming generations will result in a puppet show so beautiful that even we, the desiccated and undeserving ancients, will be saved. That's the plan, anyway.



**The Old Trout Puppet Workshop** is more than a theatre company. It's a multi-disciplinary creative ensemble, churning out ideas in a variety of media: films, books, sculpture, music, paintings and pedagogy. For example:



**The HONEY, HONEY MUSIC VIDEO for FEIST:**  
We won a Juno Award for Best Video of 2008 for this one. It's a wistful little sea-tale, about an ambitious fisherman and his determined wife. Directed by Anthony Seck.

**THE MISERABLE END OF DON ALONSO:**  
A short film we made about the tragic consequences of mixing art with love. Directed by Dev Singh.

**THE DEATH OF MARGOT RUMEBE:**  
A film we made with Michael Green of One Yellow Rabbit, directed by Simon Dekker. It has played numerous film festivals and won the Alberta Motion Picture Industry Association (AMPIA) award for Best Experimental Short.

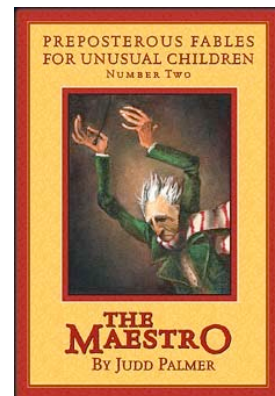


**COMMEDIA MODERNA:**  
Our first short film, directed by Dev Singh, with puppets and stop-motion.



**THE ROCK, CLOCK AND WHISTLE:**  
A sculpture commissioned by Big Rock Brewery for their facility in Calgary. It's forty-five feet tall, made out of old farm machinery, and tells time according to wind speed.

**PREPOSTEROUS FABLES FOR UNUSUAL CHILDREN:**  
A series of books written and illustrated by Old Trout Judd Palmer; two of them have been short-listed for the Governor-General's Award for Children's Literature.



**THE AGNOSTIC MOUNTAIN GOSPEL CHOIR:**  
The workshop band-in-residence. They tour across Canada and the UK playing "a ferocious combination of bluegrass and delta blues."

**WORKSHOPS:**  
Old Trout Pete Balkwill teaches a variety of workshops all over the country, but most especially the annual multi-week Banff Centre Puppetry Intensive.

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