

## Tavia La Follette on her work in puppetry and performance art

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“AS AN ARTIST, I believe it is my job to interpret and analyze cultural behavior. I do this through crossing borders, physical, psychological, and emotional. My work in puppetry and performance art has taught me the power of symbols. Symbols help me to say what I cannot say with words, they tap into our emotions. Emotions, like religion, help us recognize our values. Values, like cultures, contradict. This contradiction, this paradox, is what interests me about the human condition. This is why I spend my time crossing disciplinary borders: to build connections, to send shoots in search of new perspectives towards new epistemologies. Being an interdisciplinary artist, professor, and philosopher allows me to be a connector, a current that travels through and with ideas, times, and cultures.

Aesthetics, like emotions are not turned on by thought. It is something we let happen to us as opposed to thinking it through. Puppets are symbols of humanity who can tell us a great deal about our human nature. How much love we can put into an inanimate object, whether it's a car, a stuffed animal or a cell phone, or even a song or a memory fascinates me. We get emotionally attached to something that doesn't give us back any love, so we have this amazing ability to project emotions onto inanimate things. When you see something that transforms from a stick into a face, it's a magical moment. We realize that it's not really a face... but we emotionally want to believe in it so much that we do. In other words, when we see a puppet, something psychological happens and we are there, in that child-like state where we once believed more than we doubted.

How valuable the art of creative vision, then, that we can create an object that has the power to transform our minds and change the way we think of ourselves and the world around us, if only for a brief moment. And how delightfully ironic it is that we don't even have to think about it, instead we feel it. These un-thoughts through aesthetic insights are what help us to be together in one place, and have the power to create a common catharsis.

I chose to use puppets so that I can say... what I cannot say.”



“FAUST: A Masked Telling,” written, designed, and directed by Tavia La Follette, performed first at Colby College, The University of Pittsburgh and The Three Rivers Arts Festival. Puppets have been recycled for many street theatre actions.

Photo credit: Tavia La Follette