

## **Puppeteer holds shadow puppets between flame and screen as another man watches**

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A puppet master holds two shadow puppets between a lantern flame and a screen as another man, possibly his assistant, watches from behind the screen. Traditionally, Indonesian audiences sit in front of the screen and only see the dark shadows of the colorfully painted puppets, but viewers also are allowed to watch from the side of the puppeteer.

Shadow puppet dramas, known as wayang kulit in Indonesian, are very popular in many areas of Java and Bali. The dramas, performed by a single puppeteer handling a set of up to 200 carved leather puppets, often enact segments of longer epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata from India. The audiences all know the main story lines so they can pay attention to the details added for each new performance. The puppeteer knows the "voices" for all the characters, most of whom speak in ancient languages such as Old Javanese, Old Balinese, or Sanskrit. Meeting, travel, and battle scenes are interspersed with comical clown scenes that are spoken in local languages that the audience can fully understand.

Puppet masters are highly respected figures, whose skills are passed from father to son. Their performances, which traditionally last all night, are considered as a kind of blessing to commemorate important social events such as weddings. Shorter performances also now are created for tourists.



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