

# Vaishali Prazmari ALADDIN Toy Theatre Specific Press Kit A4

## OVERVIEW

ALADDIN paper toy theatre 1st edition black and white published by Pollocks released in Spring 2024

Vaishali Prazmari is making a toy theatre for the 1001 Nights with Pollock's. She focuses in particular on Pollocks' amazing historic collections of toy theatres and archives. Various known as model theatres, miniature theatres or paper theatres, toy theatres hold a special place in her heart as paper and stories come to life. She is using her miniature manuscript painting training in combination with Pollock's toy theatre expertise to make a theatre for the 1001 Nights that will contain the potential for all 1001 stories. Although popular stories associated with the Nights such as Aladdin and Ali Baba were firmly placed in the toy theatre tradition, attempting to encompass all 1001 tales is to our knowledge something that has not been done before. Vaishali believes that Indo-Persian miniatures inspired many of the golden age illustrators of the Arabian Nights and she marries the knowledge of this unique painting tradition with the toy theatre tradition to create her own hybrid, updated form.

She is very excited to be combining several of her interests in these pieces starting with her ALADDIN toy theatre which will culminate in making her unique wooden toy theatre and designing smaller published paper versions for you to make at home in both black and white and full colour, in the old style of 'a penny plain and tuppence coloured'.

## BACKGROUND

Vaishali used to make toy theatres as a little girl and is fascinated by the feelings of wonder and power children have in small world play. A small child at heart herself, she also loves toys in general and what Virginia Woolf described as the 'cathedral of childhood'.

More info: <https://www.vaishaliprazmari.com/toytheatres>

Vaishali has loved toy theatres since she was a little girl and often made her own. She started making them out of old shoeboxes.

A Danish theatre in the Pollocks' collection says El Blot Til Lyst - which means 'not just for pleasure' - she believes that all theatre has a didactic function. Aladdin is set in China so she gave everything a Chinese flavour - Indo-Persian painting is also influenced by Chinese painting. She grew up in Hong Kong and wanted to share an introduction to Chinese culture with her ALADDIN theatre.

Vaishali saw the opportunity to combine 2 worlds: the small world of the toy theatre with miniature manuscript painting.

Vaishali says: "I immensely enjoyed designing the characters, combining the idea of the 'stock figure' of miniature painting, where the characters are designed to be a sort of Everyman or Everywoman and the viewer can see themselves in all of the characters. I loved combining these with the 'dastardly' poses of the character in English toy theatres, who always look as if they are pausing before some dramatic flourish or reveal something outrageous. I enjoyed the exaggeration and dynamism of the toy theatre poses which you don't see in miniature painting, so I wanted to combine the 2 traditions to make something new.

I'm looking at how the illustrators of the Arabian Nights were originally inspired by Persian miniature painting, also seen in books, and how there is a trajectory you can trace through the Golden Age illustrators via Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes to the big stage and then to our small stages. I'm looking specifically at the Orientalist plays such as Aladdin and Ali Baba.

"I want people to feel like a kid when making and performing my toy theatre. You can be an artist, architect, theatre director, costume and set designer, stage manager, FX supervisor and actor all in one. And you can even film and record your plays!

I hope that it also gets people to think about the mechanics of setting up and putting on a play and that it introduces Chinese culture including some less well-known specifics (such as those architectural brackets!), gets people to think about Orientalism and the story of Aladdin as well as being just a really fun and creative project you can do over a holiday or a couple of weekends."

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

In the popularly received 'definitive' Aladdin, Aladdin is set in China, yet Aladdin's false uncle is Mustafa the magician from the Maghreb, there are references to Middle Eastern architecture, the illustrations often combine the two cultures which is also a product of superficial Orientalist thinking. But it runs deeper than that: there is a continuity of painted line, she believes, that starts with Chinese painting and carries on through Indo-Persian manuscript paintings. Different materials, different climates, different subjects but so much crossover; this is something Vaishali teaches as well. They borrowed the bits they liked and made it their own. The Chinese and Persians had huge respect for each other's cultures and civilisations, they just thought of each other as barbarians due to different religious beliefs. And then Emperor Akbar's Mughal court in India tried to be an example of syncretising multiple different faiths including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism... and an example of religious (and therefore artistic) tolerance. It reminds her of the religion of Manichaeism, whose founder was killed because he tried to do the same thing including raising the status of women and the world wasn't ready for it in the 3rd century. And later of course you have the 19th-20th century Golden Age illustrators.

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Vaishali has been thinking about Orientalism with some academic friends as well. It's interesting that art and literature is fairly aware of it yet in the world of the big stage, namely opera and ballet, they freely give into Orientalism seemingly without acknowledging it. This could be because opera and ballet are seen as more elitist... we don't know. She also loves opera and ballet. Yet she is aware that when watching Turandot, for example, that it comes from an ancient Persian tale of an evil Chinese princess who relents in the end and falls in love and is part of the 7 stories of the Haft Paykar... Puccini's version is the more well-known one but she wonders how many people know about the origins of Turan-dokht? This is one of the aims of Vaishali's theatres and the research that goes with them - aiming to give the fuller picture while still allowing for imaginative creativity. We just have to be aware of what we borrow and do it with respect. Raising cultural awareness is also an aim.

## **INSTAGRAM POST TEXT for ALADDIN TOY THEATRE**

ALADDIN: a Paper Toy Theatre by Vaishali Prazmari

ALADDIN needs no introduction. It's the original rags-to-riches tale of a boy ragamuffin who is both lucky and smart and ends up marrying the Princess of his dreams. A story conjured in collaboration between Frenchman Antoine Galland and Syrian Maronite Hanna Diyab ensconced in a Chinese fairytale with all of imperial China as a backdrop...Everyone has their own relationship with ALADDIN. It's a story. It's countless picture books. It's Christmas pantomimes and plays. It's a Disney film. It was always, always, a toy theatre. And now I present it

here again, repackaged with the depth and culture of imperial China and flavoured with my own memories of a childhood in Hong Kong, marinated in its own Arabian Nights juices. Highly researched and intricate, scenic and character details are given their fullest expression with the trained hand of a miniature painter versed in European art and the toy theatre tradition as well as the specialised techniques of Indo-Persian and Mughal manuscript painting. Both are blended to scintillating effect in this toy theatre printed on limited edition, specially commissioned hand-tested paper – ideal for miniature painting on – to create a truly unique and delicious ALADDIN.

ALADDIN itself is not strictly part of the 1001 Nights, though it falls under its spell. It is purportedly a tale told by Diyab to Galland recounting his lived experiences and journey to France, respun by Galland's fertile imagination, interspersed with lively anecdotes of the Near East, inflected with the grandeur of Versailles and then transposed to China. It has always been popularly told around Christmas. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to you all! May we finally fill the lull between Christmas and New Year with the toy theatre and stories. And this is one of the most famous stories of all: the tale of a boy and a lamp. There is no other - it has to be ALADDIN.

Limited Edition of 101.

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