

MASKS

OF NINIAN KINNIER-WILSON

The masks of Ninian Kinnier-Wilson represent a singular level of skill and artistry in Britain with links to much older issues and concerns. In a recent interview he described the mask as a magical and spiritual tool that is specific to the job that it does (every bit as much as a spade, a gun, or a violin). "It takes us to a place other than reality, drawing upon the right side of the brain."

Over a fifteen year period Ninian has developed a personal philosophy of the mask which underpins the craftwork. He explains that masks are powerful things, and that it is necessary to be conscious of your motives in making them work. There is also a further parallel with magic, in that just as magic is neither good nor evil, so masks don't exist on their own but work within their own traditions. And because masks show lies and untruths very clearly it is impossible to hide behind them. For this reason you must be true to yourself before you start the making process.

"Primarily I'm interested in Western traditions because I'm inside this tradition. Consequently, theatre or carnival is the Western tradition that I started from. In this regard, I began with Commedia dell'Arte and after working on the leather process with Carlo Boso and Stefano Perroco, I began to seek out the archetypes of myth. Through this search I came to see that Commedia is an old tradition (1500-1750) based on an even older tradition. And in between commedia and the archetypes of myth was the making of the full-face neutral mask. The making of the male and female neutral masks taught me precision, and each wooden mould took three months to carve."

"Earning a living as a mask-maker in contemporary Britain is a labour intensive and arduous business. You don't do it for the money. Of course, you can do something else and make masks as a hobby. After all anyone can make a mask, and kids play with them all the time. But making the right mask is difficult. I suppose I do it because it's what I'm best at. I'm still waiting for the mask teachers to catch up with me. I'd like to make more spiritual masks, and the character half-masks still need to catch on within mainstream actor-training. However, because I make them, I can't teach them. You need the mask-maker and the mask-user. For my part, I like to give them to someone else to use them."



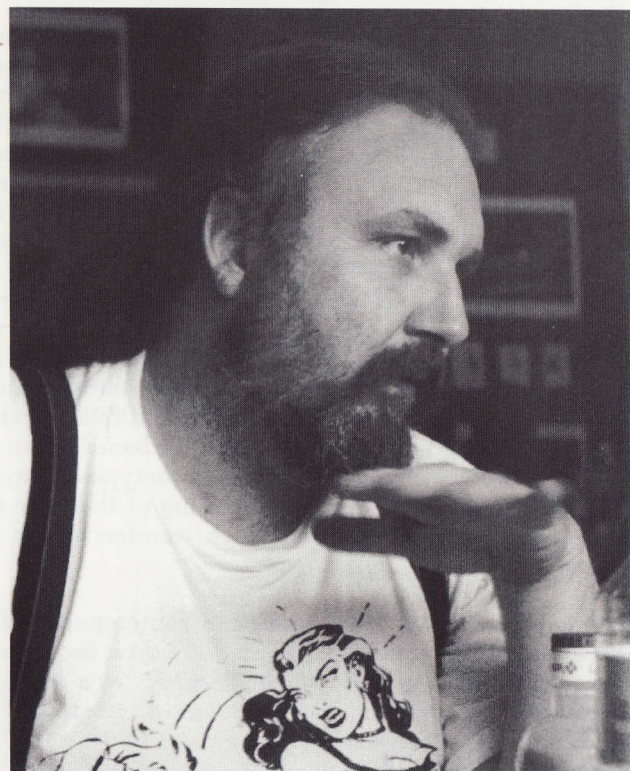
Photograph by David Corio



This exhibition consists of eighty-three masks categorised across the following areas; carnival, character half-masks, leather half-masks, commedia dell'arte, archetypes of myth, and miscellaneous fantasy creations. The masks are made from leather, celastic, and papier-mâché and have been created over a fifteen year period.

MALCOLM YATES KNIGHT

Honorary Secretary, Scottish Mask & Puppet Centre
President, International Federation of Centres for Puppetry Arts



Ninian Kinnier-Wilson



CARNIVAL MASKS

The Bauta mask from the Venice Carnival is not merely decorative, but was worn by secret informers who monitored the activities of the people against the City State. Similarly, the nose of the Plague Doctor was designed to carry medicines and herbs as a protection against the plague.

1. Bauta - Antique (CA.2)
2. The Plague Doctor (CA.9)
3. Bauta - Black (CA.1)
4. Bauta - Gold (CA.4)



CHARACTER HALF-MASKS

The Character Half-Mask series is deliberately unidentified to encourage the wearer to find the character through movement and voice. This kind of mask was first used by Michel Saint-Denis for actor training purposes at the London Theatre School in 1936, and later at the Juillard Schools in New York and Strasbourg. George Devine and Keith Johnstone also used character masks at the Royal Court in the 1960's, and this work has since been continued by Edward Argent at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

1. (C.13)
2. (C.17)
3. (C.20)
4. (C.10)
5. (C.11)



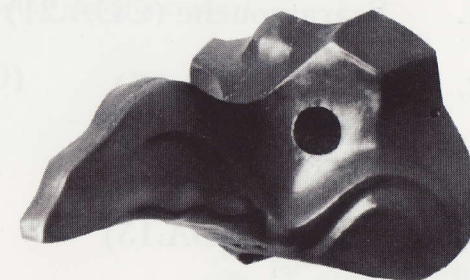
6. (C.1)
7. (C.6)
8. (C.9)
9. (C.14)
10. (C.18)
11. (C.21)
12. (C.4)
13. (C.3)
14. (C.16)
15. (C.22)
16. (C.2)
17. (C.15)
18. (C.25)
19. (C.23)
20. (C.19)
21. (C.2)
22. (C.26)
23. (C.7)
24. (C.12)
25. (C.5)
26. (C.8)



LEATHER HALF-MASKS

The traditional leather half-mask from Commedia dell'Arte disappeared in 1750 with the mask guilds that created it. The technique of working in leather was rediscovered by Amleto Sartori, a professor of sculpture at Padua University in 1948; and popularised by his son Donato who founded the Centre for Masks and Structural Gesture. One of his students, Stefano Perroco, a Venetian mask-maker, introduced Ninian to these techniques. The leather mask is the most comfortable and durable of all the masks; literally a skin that fits over the skin. This is a highly skilled and volatile process which requires appropriate materials and conditions, and enormous knowledge of leather-working, dyeing, and finishing.

1. Brighella (L.27)
2. Pimpinella (L.25)
3. Pulcinella (L.29)
4. Pantalone (L.11)
5. Capitano (L.32)
6. Trovatella (L.26)
7. Petrovitch (L.2)
8. Capitano (L.6)
9. Arlechino (L.22)
10. Il Dottore (L.8)
11. Zanni (L.33)
12. Mr. Punch (L.23)



13. Colin (L.3)
14. Capitano Catso (L.31)
15. Tartaglia (L.4)
16. Giangurgolo (L.28)
17. Zanni (L.30)
18. Pantalone Magnifico (L.10)

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

This series of commedia masks is made in celastic, and extends across a wide range of types. Celastic is a cloth soaked in acetone which is torn into strips and shaped either into or around a mould. The process demands good ventilation and protective mask and gloves. The result is a sturdy and light-weight mask which can be worked to quite a high finish.

1. Scaramouche (CDA.21)
2. Strega (CDA.23)
3. Harlequin (CDA.17)
4. Doctor (CDA.13)
5. Zanni (CDA.22)
6. Pulcinella (Neapolitan) (CDA.9)
7. Pedrolino (CDA.11)
8. Harlequin (CDA.7)
9. Mezzetino (CDA.29)



10. Casandro (CDA.10)
11. Pantalone (CDA.25)
12. Pulcinella (Venetian) (CDA.5)
13. Giangurgolo (Zanni/Old Man/Captain) (CDA.14)
14. Brighella (CDA.28)

THE ARCHETYPES OF MYTH

After the successful creation of the full-face Universal or Neutral Mask in leather (which needed to be sufficiently distinct from the Sartori originals made for the Jacques Lecoq School in Paris), Ninian became fascinated with the archetypes of myth. These emerged from a commission request by John Wright of Trestle Theatre in 1988. It was a labour-intensive and difficult project since the archetypes had not been mapped out or visually codified before. Once again, these masks are eminently suited to silent pantomime improvisations in an actor-training context.

1. The Huntress (A.10)
2. The King (A.6)
3. The Crone (A.11)
4. The Stepmother (A.5)
5. The Trickster (A.12)
6. The Mother (A.16)
7. The Devil (A.4)
8. The Hero (A.7)



9. The Ogre (A.14)
10. The Child (A.15)
11. The Victim (A.13)
12. The Virgin (A.1)
13. The Blind Man (A.3)
14. The Father (A.2)
15. The Spirit (A.9)
16. The Fool (A.8)

MISCELLANEOUS CREATIONS

During the past three years Ninian has moved away from the mask aimed at actor-training to include the creation of large-scale wall coverings and carnival sculptures. This exploration of popular Medieval imagery reveals a strong craft base and the masks are growing larger now that they are not confined to being worn on the face.

1. Satyr (MSC.2)
2. Jester (MSC.7)
3. Lunar Monk (MSC.6)
4. Vampire (MSC.4)
5. The Sun (MSC.5)



A Brief Biography

Ninian Kinnier-Wilson graduated from Liverpool School of Art with a BA Hons in Fine Art. He has studied Commedia dell'Arte with Carlo Boso and mask-making with Stefano Perroco in Paris, London, Cardiff and Avignon.

Performance:

- 1981 Co-founded UNFORTUNATI Commedia company.
- 1981-86 Performed with and made masks for UNFORTUNATI on tours of Britain and Europe.

Commissions:

- 1981 Arts Educational School
- 1981 John Wright, Middlesex Polytechnic (6 leather archetypes)
- 1982 Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama
- 1983 Trestle Theatre Company
- 1983 I Gelati Theatre Company
- 1984 The Gobbi Players Theatre Company
- 1985 Scaramouche Theatre Company
- 1987 Call of the Wild Theatre Company
- 1988 Fortunati Theatre Company
- 1988 John Wright, Mask Tutor (set of 13 archetypes of myth)
- 1988 Revels of Sienna, Royal Festival Hall (commedia masks)
- 1990 Festival of the Image, St.Etienne, France (6 masks of Gaston Le Gaffe)
- 1990 Tottering Bipeds Theatre Company
- 1991 Festival of the Image, St.Etienne, France (2 portrait masks)
- 1992 Original Mixture Theatre Company at the ICA London
- 1992 Royal Holloway and Bedford New College
- 1993 Theatre Clwyd
- 1993 Motley Books
- 1993 John Wright, Mask Tutor (4 new archetypes)
- 1993 Roehampton Institute
- 1993 Mime Touch Theatre Company, Hong Kong
- 1993 Central TV
- 1993 York Museum
- 1994 Central TV
- 1994 Mime Touch Theatre Company, Hong Kong
- 1994 Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford
- 1994 Central TV
- 1994 Out of Joint Theatre Company
- 1994 Cambridge Greek Play, Faculty of Classics

Residencies:

- 1987-91 Harlequin Art - International theatre project at Bayreuth, Germany and Metz, France. Made masks for five international theatre companies at each annual workshop.

1987

The inauguration of Sam Wannamaker Globe Theatre

Exhibitions:

One Man Shows:

- 1983 Nottingham Arts Centre
- 1986 Battersea Arts Centre
- 1987 Islington Libraries
- 1987 Battersea Arts Centre
- 1988 Old Bull Arts Centre, Barnet
- 1988 Islington Libraries
- 1989 Bibliotech, Metz, France
- 1991 Maison Rabelais, Metz, France.

Mixed Shows:

- 1990 Salisbury Arts Centre
- 1990 Touring Exhibition "The Other Face"
- 1991 Nottingham Museum
- 1992 Luton Central Library
- 1993 Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama

Teaching:

Mask-Making:

- 1983 Old Bull Arts Centre, Barnet
- 1986 Scottish Mask & Puppet Centre, Glasgow
- 1988 Scottish Mask & Puppet Centre, Glasgow
- 1988 London International Workshop Festival (Master class)
- 1989 Haymarket Theatre, Leicester
- 1990 Scottish Mask & Puppet Centre, Glasgow
- 1991 Haymarket Theatre, Leicester
- 1993 Palace Theatre, Watford
- 1994 The Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal
- 1994 Trestle Theatre Company



Commedia:

1984	Middlesex Polytechnic
1985	Battersea Arts Centre
1986	Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal
1989	Haymarket Theatre, Leicester
1990	Liverpool Festival of Comedy
1990-91	Haymarket Youth Theatre, Leicester (directed two commedia shows)
1991	T.I.E. Company, Liverpool
1991	Haymarket Theatre, Leicester
1992	Melton Mowbray College, Leicester
1994	Broadgreen School, Liverpool

Acknowledgements

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