

Yale Institute of Sacred Music

presents:

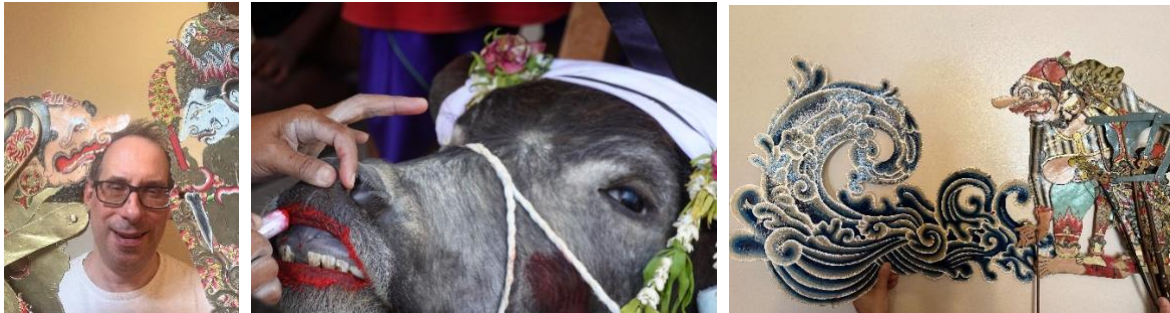
“Sea Offerings”

Cosponsored by The Religion, Ecology, and Expressive Culture Initiative and Southeast Asia Studies at Yale

Offering important resources to academic audiences and the broader public through events and symposia, and supporting individual and team projects

Sea Offerings

A performance-lecture by Matthew Isaac Cohen, with video by Ben Hagari



About *Sea Offerings*

With the end of the pandemic and a mounting crisis in social isolation and alienation, there is an urgent need for reviving old forms of social interaction and creating new ones. This lecture-performance revisits an ancient rite called *nadran* and the associated puppet play *Budug Basu* sponsored annually by fishing communities on the north coast of Java, Indonesia. Performer-lecturer Matthew Cohen studied and enacted this ritual drama about the misbegotten romance of a rice goddess and the diseased Budug Basu early in his puppetry training, while living in this part of Indonesia in the 1990s. In the summer of 2024, he returned with video artist Ben Hagari to document and participate in contemporary enactments of ritual drama.

The proposal in *Sea Offerings* is to activate and interrogate idioms of myth and ritual that have served generations of seafarers to maintain relations to spirits of the sea and communal solidarity so as to provoke awareness of relations between the sacred, ecology, and artistic

performance. The lecture-performance asks what is contingent in the realization of ritual drama and what might transcend gaps in time and space. The work combines mythic storytelling, dialogue with and about puppets, autobiographical musing, ecological reflections, and documentary footage of ships of different sizes, a severed male buffalo head made up as a woman, and the seascape. Attention is given to epistemological gaps and intercultural misunderstandings, dilemmas in cultural translation, and shared concerns about ecology, art, and spiritual values in the current moment of climate change, modernization, and globalization.

Credits

Performer/director: Matthew Isaac Cohen

Videographer: Ben Hagari

Technician: Beau Brazfield

Music: *Banyu Urip* (Living Water) by Embie C. Noer; *Bayeman*, *Lagu Gede*, and *Pacul Gowang* as performed by Gamelan Sinar Surya under the direction of Richard North; *Lagu Nadran Bungko* sung by Iin Novita.

Puppets: *Kayon* and wave figures by Rommy Hendrawan after original designs by Ki Enthus Susmono; all other figures are traditional Cirebonese puppets carved by Ki Ato Suatno and colored by Ki Purjadi.

Artist biographies

Matthew Isaac Cohen is a leading scholar-practitioner of Indonesian performing arts, with more than thirty-five years of experience in the academic study, performance, and curation of Indonesian puppet traditions (*wayang*). He is currently a professor at the University of Connecticut, where he teaches puppet arts and theatre studies, and is at work on two books about wayang, based on the research he has been conducting over the last seven years into the Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angest Collection of Indonesian Puppets at Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG), the largest collection of wayang puppets in the world. He holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from Yale (1997), has twice held fellowships from YUAG's Department of Indo-Pacific Art, and was a fellow of the Yale Institute of Sacred Music fellow in 2017-2018.

Ben Hagari works in film, video, and animation to create tragic comedies that unfold in absurdist environments. His work often employs optical illusions and "persistence of vision"

(visuality after the image ceases) to understand the origins of moving images and technologies' effects on perception. Extending from the screen-based to installation format, his projects are the result of wide-ranging research in the fields of literature, theater, art history, and scientific curiosities. His works have been shown in biennials, museums, galleries, film festivals, and other venues in the United States, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, including at The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, MA, Sculpture Center, The High Line and The Boiler in New York, Whitechapel Gallery in London, Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, KIT in Düsseldorf, Flora Ars+Natura in Bogotá, Fundación CALOSA in Guanajuato, Mexico, Total Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, The Tel Aviv Museum of Art and The Israel Museum, among others. Hagari is the recipient of the 2024 Guggenheim Foundation award and is a lecturer at Yale School of Art.

Special thanks to: Ki Purjadi, Mang Jaja, Daniel Haryono, Matt Sorensen, Yale Institute of Sacred Music, Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, UConn Office of Global Affairs

Content warning: this show includes scenes of animal sacrifice, which may be upsetting to some.