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Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago News

THE VENTRILOQUISTS CONVENTION

November 12-14, 2015



MCA Stage presents **The Ventriloquists Convention**, a new contemporary theater work that centers on the annual convention that takes place at Kentucky's Vent Haven Museum, the world's only museum of ventriloquists' dummies. The piece imagines meetings among the convention delegates and their dummies, who each maintain distinct voices and identities. Influential European director/choreographer Gisèle Vienne makes her Chicago debut with this project. She has collaborated with American author Dennis Cooper for more than 10 years, and they are joined for this project by Puppentheater Halle, an acclaimed German puppet-theater company. *The Ventriloquists Convention* is presented as part of the MCA's Global Stage Series and takes place November 12 through 14 in the MCA's **Edlis Neeson Theater**.

Gisèle Vienne and Dennis Cooper developed their approach for this show from documentary and fictional sources, building it into a group of quirky portraits of ventriloquists celebrating their shared interests and friendship. The show explores why ventriloquists do what they do, and what lies behind the relationships that they have with their dummies. Performed by nine ventriloquists-puppeteers, the piece hinges on the use of multiple layered dialogues, including the ghostly, non-physical ventriloquists' voices. These portraits enable Gisèle Vienne to continue her ongoing research into the interplay between physical presence and dissociation that she had developed in prior projects.

Gisèle Vienne is a director, choreographer, and visual artist born in Austria and based in Paris. She was trained as a musician, earned a degree in philosophy, and went on to the foremost school for puppetry, Ecole Supérieure Nationale des Arts de la Marionnette. She works regularly with the writers Dennis Cooper and Catherine Robbe-Grillet, the musicians Peter Rehberg and Stephen O'Malley of drone metal band Sunn O))), and actor Jonathan Capdevielle. Since 2005, she has frequently exhibited her photographs and installations, including at the Whitney Biennial in NY (2012) and The Pompidou Center in Paris (2012).

Dennis Cooper is an American novelist, poet, and critic based in Paris and Los Angeles. Regarded as a master of transgressive literature, he is known for his minute observations of human relations and obsessions. He has published nine novels, most recently *The Marbled Swarm*. He is also a contributing editor of *Artforum* and the editor of the American publishing imprint *Little House on the Bowery*.

The **Puppentheater Halle** is a group of eight puppeteers based in Halle, a city in the former East Germany known for its puppet theater. Trained at the theater school Ernst Busch in Berlin, they are also directors, teachers, or puppet makers. The company was created in 1954, and in 1995 Christoph Werner brought a new dynamic by developing a new style that foregrounds a permanent relation between theater and puppet.

TICKET INFORMATION

The Ventriloquists Convention takes place November 12 through 14 at 7:30 pm. Tickets are \$30 and available at the MCA Box Office at 312.397.4010 or www.mcachicago.org.

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Image: Group picture from Vent Haven Convention, 2014. Photo: Estelle Hanania.

The Ventriloquists Convention is supported by the French-American Fund for Contemporary Theater (FACE), an initiative of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the US and the Institut Français, funded by the Florence Gould Foundation and the Catherine Popesco Foundation for the Arts. Additional generous support is provided by the Goethe-Institut and the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The museum is generously supported by its Board of Trustees; individual and corporate members; private and corporate foundations, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and government agencies, including the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. Museum capital improvements are supported by a Public Museum Capital Grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.

The MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue, one block east of Michigan Avenue. The museum and sculpture garden are open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday from 10 am to 8 pm. The museum is closed on Monday. Tuesdays are Community Free Days with free admission for Illinois residents. Suggested general admission is \$12 for adults and \$7 for students and seniors. Children 12 years of age and under, MCA members, and members of the military are admitted free. Information about MCA exhibitions, programs, and special events is available on the MCA website at mcachicago.org or by phone at 312.280.2660.