

The newest addition to the Pellone/Barrett Puppet Collection is this Catania-style Sicilian marionette. Dated 1921, the marionette was most likely constructed by Agrippino Manteo following his immigration to New York City where he set up an Opera dei Pupi theater in the early 1920s. The Manteos were one of the most successful puppet companies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This marionette is one of the original figures used in the theater and is identified on the Manteo's List of Characters as figure #3, a Christian captain. It has suffered significant damage over the years, so I have spent the last 3 months restoring it with the blessing of his great grandson, Michael Manteo.

When I received it, the marionette was in fair to poor condition. Fortunately the armor was in fair condition with only a few pieces missing. To begin repairs, I resoldered large cracks and loose parts in places where the residual heat wouldn't melt old joints and used a high quality steel epoxy in other areas to err on the side of caution. The cuirass (breastplate) was missing one of two fastening loops which I assume were intended to be used as the primary method of securing the armor to the body of the puppet. I made and soldered a replacement loop and added a leather strap between them to fasten the breastplate to the puppet body.



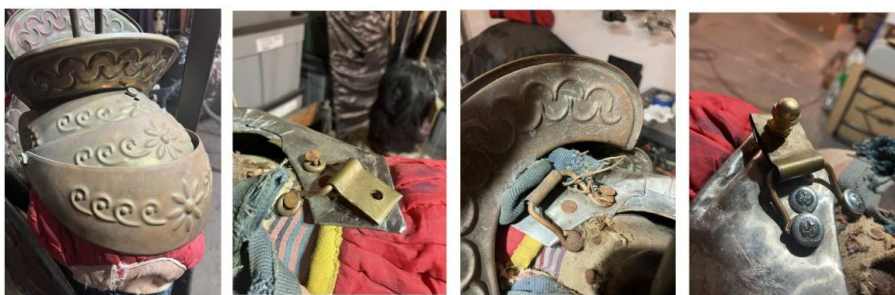
Manteo marionette



Inside breastplate, writing with date, soldered cracks, replaced loop

Leather strap to secure breastplate to the body

Both shoulder pauldrons had years of dirt and tarnish, but now cleaned and polished, they reveal the beauty of Manteo's metal artistry. The armor was held together with old corroded hardware and rusted nails held the pauldron mounting brackets to the shoulders of the puppet. I carefully removed the rusted nails and replaced them with noncorrosive zinc-coated metal screws and mounting brackets and refitted both pauldrons with appropriate brass hardware.



Original shoulder pauldrons and mounting hardware.



Polished pauldrons and noncorrosive mounting brackets, screws and hardware.



Unpolished/polished  
cuisses and greaves

The brass leg cuisses and greaves also had years of tarnish, corrosion and were attached to the legs with old rusty wire. I cleaned and polished and reattached them with noncorrosive soft brass wire. The vambraces were attached to the puppet arms with rusty nails and wires. I removed the nails, cleaned and polished and reattached with them soft brass wire. The right arm vambrace was literally cracked in half when the marionette arrived and required extensive soldering and polishing to repair it. Many imperfections remain in the armor as testament to years of battle.

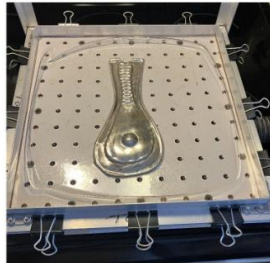
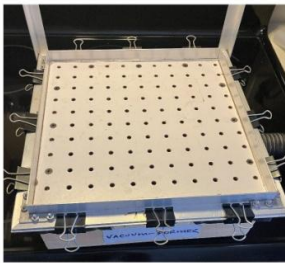


Rusted and soft brass wire



Damaged/repaired vambrace

I also had to reproduce a missing tasset and built a special vacuum form tool to mold a duplicate of one in thermoplastic. Once finished, painted and reinforced, it's difficult to tell the difference between the duplicate and an original metal one. It took many hours of hand polishing to remove 100 years of corrosion, dirt and tarnish from all of the armor. I cleaned the rust from both control rods using a wire wheel and steel wool and applied several coats of Renaissance<sup>®</sup> wax to help protect them.



Vacuum forming tool used to thermo-mold tasset replica



Armor with tassets



The 'heart' of this type of marionette is primarily the pelvis and leg joints where most of the movement occurs and principally bears the entire weight of the puppet. Standing, running, kicking, marching, stomping, etc. The arms have considerable movement, but are not weight bearing. When I disassembled the piece to evaluate it, I found the brackets and hardware that support the legs to be severely rusted. Fortunately, there was no wood damage. I removed the legs and hardware and cleaned the rusted metal parts. The metal parts that couldn't be removed or replaced were treated with a rust neutralizer and sealant. I repainted the hands and feet and sealed them with clear matte enamel.



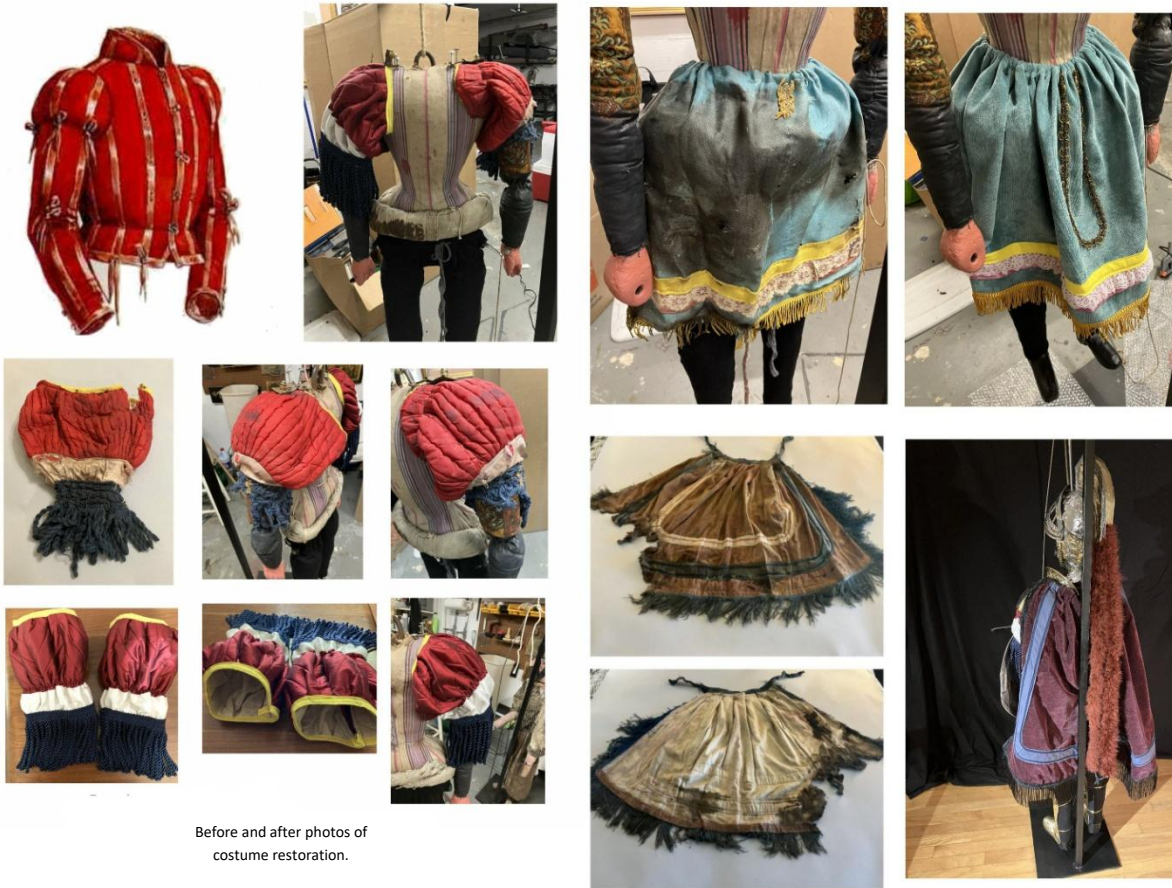
Pelvis and leg joint hardware showing rust and corrosion, removal and treatment with neutralizer/sealer.

Catania style marionettes always hold the sword and never sheath it, whereas the Palermo style puppets can withdraw the sword from a sheath and then return it to the sheath after battle. The sword made for this puppet is crafted from two pieces of chrome-plated metal and soldered together. Over the years the solder has worked loose and the parts separated, so I used a propane torch to carefully reheat the blade while pressing it together in a vise and successfully relaminating the blade. The blade was also slightly bent and carefully restraightened. A large nut threaded on the handle of the sword secured the hilt to the puppet hand and a large chrome acorn cap nut served as the pommel. I replaced the large nut with a turned wood grip and polished the chrome acorn nut. I cleaned the rusted cross-guard with a wire wheel and repainted it metallic gold. Brown paint applied sfumato gives it the appearance of old patinated brass. I cleaned the blade and gave it a final bright shine using white polishing compound on a medium-hard buffing wheel.



Before and after photos of the sword restoration.

The original costume garments of the puppet were extremely soiled and damaged beyond repair. I produced replicas based on the existing designs using similar materials. The fabric covering the puppet body and legs was in good minus condition with just a few tears/holes that were easily repaired. I didn't find any evidence of insect damage or infestation. I believe the red, white and blue puffed sleeves were meant to represent an arming doublet, unfortunately, they were also tattered with age and unrestorable. The kilt was soiled with a black, oily substance and quite threadbare with many tears and holes. The cloak was heavily soiled with black stains and had a large area missing from past burn damage. There were no patterns to work from, therefore the old pieces served as guides to help duplicate the Manteo's costuming ideas. All of the original materials/garments are maintained for historic and archival purposes. I added a dark mauve feather ornamento pennacchio (plume) to the helmet in keeping with the 'ciuffo di piume' tradition.



Finally, all of the polished armor received a finishing coat of Renaissance<sup>®</sup> micro-crystalline wax polish, formulated by the British Museum research laboratories in the early 1950s. It leaves a protective layer which is a very efficient dust and moisture barrier. The reverse side of every piece of armor was sprayed with several protective coatings of clear matte enamel to safeguard against future oxidation and tarnishing.



Fully restored Manteo marionette

The restorative work is finished and I have included **before and after** photos and the finished puppet the way it most likely looked when the family performed it 100 years ago. Fully dressed it weighs over 55 pounds/25 kilograms. I had to build a special heavy duty metal display stand for it. I predicted about 6 months of work, but finished in 3 months because my schedule permitted me to spend more time working on it than I had originally planned. With sensible safekeeping it should easily last at least another 100 years. I am very honored to have been allowed to care for a part of the Manteo family legacy.

Greg Pellone  
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