

Original source taken from  
<http://sgtheatrearchive-live.centre42.sg/archive/reviews/1623/the-collectors-2016-review/>

# The Collectors (2016), Review

Updated on 25 May 2021 · 2 minutes read

## SHARE ON

### PRODUCTION

[The Collectors \(2016\)](#)

### BY

[The Finger Players](#)

### PERFORMANCE DATE & TIME

9 April 2016, 12:00pm

### FIRST PUBLISHED IN

[Centre 42](#)

## REVIEWER

[Kei Franklin](#)

## REVIEW

### The Collectors

*The Collectors* begins with Tan Beng Tian on the back of a Lorry asking us a simple question: ‘how many of you would devote all your attention to specializing in just one thing?’

I ponder the question for mere seconds, before becoming enthralled by tales of Tan’s grandparents – first generation immigrants to Singapore – who fled China in secrecy and never knew when they were born.

The Finger Players take us on a journey of memory – a guided tour through histories and experiences. Each stop is a tableau, a story, a thought, a sharing. The performers slide seamlessly between informal audience engagement and choreographed movements and words – and I am on the edge of my stool wondering what is ‘performed’ and what is ‘real,’ whether there is ever any difference and whether it matters.

A delightful mixture of string puppets, hand puppets, shadow art, film, audio recordings, and speaking and moving bodies – *The Collectors* problematises the divide between subject and object, animate and inanimate, puppet and puppeteer.

A string puppet version of the Moon Goddess (Chang’e) picks up a brush and writes four Chinese characters with all the grace of a real divine hand.

Tan’s Grandmother (in puppet form) laments the experience of feeling displaced from her home country and the loss of her mother tongue.

A quaint baby doll asks us, candidly, to consider the difference between a ‘traditional puppet’ and simply an ‘old doll.’

Chinese string puppeteer, Zhuang Lie manipulates a puppet with 36 strings with unbelievable fluidity. Just next door, sound artist/poet Bani Hakyal speaks of 'the archives of our lives' and information as a precious natural resource. The unlikely relationship between lived memory, personal experience, and big data becomes ever clearer.

As *The Collectors* comes to a close, and the 'old doll' bids us farewell, I am grateful to have been there. With thoughts of lost art forms, oral histories, and the modern age of information overload spinning in my mind, I am struck by the humility of puppet masters who are willing to try their hand at dancing, or who spend months designing creative ways to make their craft more accessible to today's children.

In a world of non-stop stimuli, it's good to be reminded of the art of choosing one thing, and staying with it.