

SUBJECT/OBJECT: NEW STUDIES IN SCULPTURE

Series Editor: Penelope Curtis  
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We have become familiar with the notion that sculpture has moved into the 'expanded field', but this field has remained remarkably faithful to defining sculpture on its own terms. Sculpture can be distinct, but it is rarely autonomous. For too long studied apart, within a monographic or survey format, sculpture demands to be reintegrated with the other histories of which it is a part. In the interests of representing recent moves in this direction, this series will provide a forum for the publication and stimulation of new research examining sculpture's relationship with the world around it, with other disciplines and other material contexts.

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# Pantheons

## Transformations of a Monumental Idea

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## Madame Tussaud's as a popular pantheon

*Uta Kornmeier*

Although the *Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette* did not usually, in the early 1830s, devote much space to 'the manifold and diverse exhibitions which from time to time visit our town', the editors made an exception in order to 'elicit the commendation of all who visit' one in particular: Madame Tussaud's exhibition.<sup>1</sup> After noting how much the spectacle 'exceeded our anticipation' the author of a long eulogy on the exhibition continued: 'We were in the midst of the living and the dead ...; here departed monarchs – there, their living successors; here, a patriot – there, a traitor; in one place, warriors and courtiers – in another, ministers and authors; interspersed with many of the most remarkable characters of past and present times.' Other newspapers agreed that the 'selection ... is both comprehensive and judicious, embracing the most illustrious individuals of modern times'.<sup>2</sup> If a pantheon, according to one definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is 'a group of particularly respected, famous or important people', the same must be said of Madame Tussaud's exhibition.

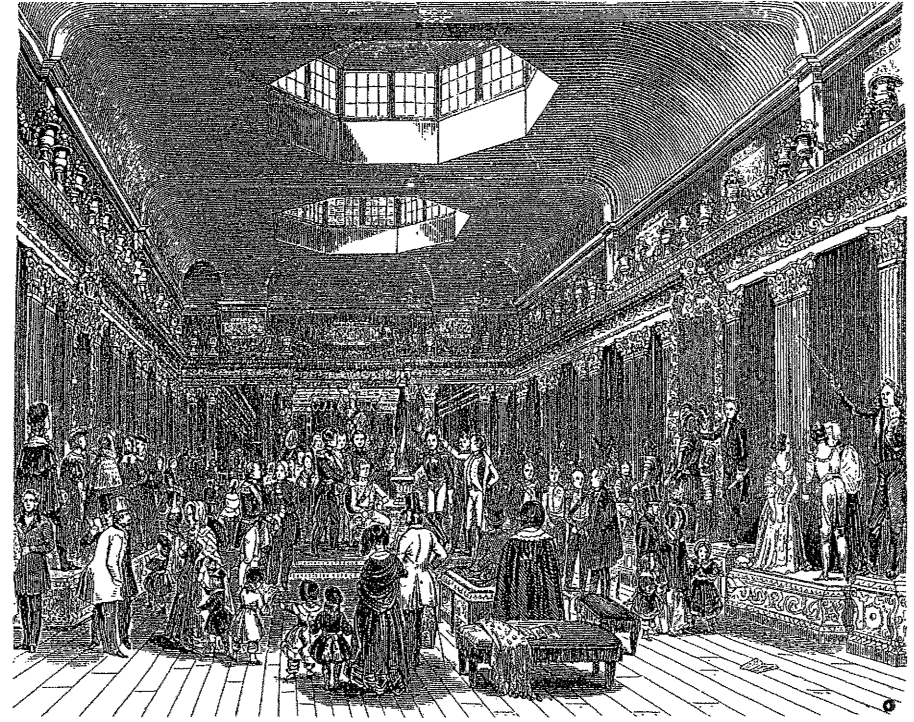
From the early 1800s onward and for more than 30 years, Marie Tussaud (1761–1850) exhibited her collection of wax figures throughout Great Britain. She had inherited the portraits from her fatherly tutor, the wax modeller Philippe Curtius, who had begun to show waxworks in Paris in the 1770s. As he and his assistant Marie up-dated the collection of figures constantly, it soon contained the main leaders of the French Revolution as well as the now defunct French Royal Family. While Madame Tussaud was on tour in Great Britain, she gradually modified and enlarged the French-dominated exhibition to suit British tastes. When the wiry little lady (fig. 7.1) finally settled down in London's Baker Street Bazaar with the help of her two sons in 1835, the exhibition had 'taken so firm a hold upon the British public, that it would be almost a work of supererogation to notice its existence' (fig. 7.2).<sup>3</sup>



7.1 Paul Fischer, *Madame Tussaud at the cash desk of her exhibition*, 1842

### 'Waxwork Walhall'

Although Madame Tussaud never used the word 'pantheon' herself but called her exhibition the 'Grand European Cabinet of Figures' or a 'Collection of Distinguished Characters', the concept of her show was 'pantheonic' in



7.2 Madame Tussaud's exhibition, *Pictorial Times*, 11 May 1844

the sense that eminent persons were represented by a sculpted likeness. This was confirmed by *The Times* when it dubbed the exhibition a 'waxwork Walhall'.<sup>4</sup> Yet compared to the Walhalla near Regensburg or the Panthéon in Paris there are two significant differences: one is that the images at Madame Tussaud's were not made from noble and lasting materials such as marble or bronze, but from the fragile and immensely illusionistic material that is wax. The most significant feature of this sculptural material is its malleability, which makes it easy to work with, so that a likeness can be produced without great force, special tools or a lengthy training in an academic institution. Madame Tussaud, being a skilful wax modeller herself, was therefore not dependent on renting a studio or commissioning the production of her models from a specialist in casting metal or hewing stone, but could work on her own from the first draft to the finished statue.<sup>5</sup>

The wax's malleability is due to its organic nature and inherent instability. Just kneading it by hand will give form to an amorphous mass and make it 'come alive'. Furthermore, the way the light is absorbed by the material

makes the contours of a wax sculpture undefined, so that seen from different angles, the form seems to shift, almost move. This slight, superficial translucence makes the wax physically resemble the human skin with its underlying flesh more than any other material. Thus, wax is predestined for lifelike portraiture. Since the socially most important incarnate body part is the head, the seat of reason and will, and more specifically the face, wax portraits can easily stand for the personality of the sitter. Combined with real clothing, glass eyes and human hair it can be deceptively similar. A well-executed wax portrait, as a frequent trope goes, is only distinguishable from a living person by the absence of breath and movement.

On the other hand, a waxen object can lose form just as easily as it has gained it. Raised temperatures soften the thinner parts of the sculpture, they begin to sag and will ultimately deform the image. At higher temperatures, easily caused by the work of the sun, a candle flame or an oven, the image will melt and disintegrate unpleasantly. Thus, the potential danger of form being reduced to an amorphous mass is ever present in wax sculpture. In literary and cinematic narratives this potential for material disintegration of extremely lifelike portraits has been used from the end of the nineteenth century onwards as an image for a slipping out of control, the disintegration of personality and the loss of mind.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, the plasticity of the material can only ever be governed partly by the artist's will – it retains an inert, uncontrollable, active energy of its own.<sup>7</sup> Wax, therefore, is a willing, but most unreliable carrier of form and a surprisingly transitory material for a memorial of important men and women.

This is exactly the second main difference between Madame Tussaud's and any 'classical' pantheon: the wax figures were not made as memorials to honour or celebrate everlasting fame or to form a canon of noteworthy individuals, but to represent contemporary opinion on the most influential characters of the moment. Topicality was a key feature of the waxworks at the cost of being only temporarily valid. Rearrangement and revision were part of the programme. The waxworks were topical but transitory, their 'cast' was as flexible as the material from which they were made. One personality's image could quickly disappear and melt into any other. Today, the removal of a figure from display is a celebrated spectacle and receives a similar amount of press coverage as the installation of a new one. For a pantheon proper, on the other hand, the withdrawal of a monument is a riotous and disastrous event<sup>8</sup> since it draws into question its authority, the capacity of representing and guiding a nation's aspirations. As a result, many pantheons established a rule banning images of persons who were still alive or who had died less than a certain number of years before, in order to avoid the influence of personal acquaintance with members of the selections committee and to exclude embarrassing misjudgements.<sup>9</sup> Nothing

could be further from Madame Tussaud's criteria for acquiring new portraits than a rule about sitters having to be deceased: personages were actually preferred to be still alive and hotly debated. When the exhibition was shown in Manchester in September 1820, for example, Madame Tussaud added a portrait figure of Bartolomeo Bergami, Queen Caroline's Italian chamberlain. His relationship with George IV's estranged wife Caroline had been discussed publicly during her trial for adultery which had opened only a month earlier. The nature of his fame was as flimsy as its duration, and after a couple of years his portrait was removed from the exhibition.<sup>10</sup> This did not undermine the exhibition's judgement, but instead confirmed its relevance. The ability to change cemented the idea that Madame Tussaud's was exciting, up-to-date and 'popular'.

#### 'To the Ladies and Gentlemen and the Public at large'

Madame Tussaud's exhibition of wax figures was popular indeed in the sense that it was perceived as being open to everyone. Aesthetic access to the portraits was generally easy, due to their naturalism. The illusionistic finish of the statues made them completely devoid of abstraction. While with marble portraits the eyes were often left blank or incised only slightly, staring into space, the wax figures featured naturalistic glass eyes, possibly arranged to an occasional direct glance at the visitors. This provided very personal images that seemed directly approachable, and visitors were reported actually having addressed a wax figure.<sup>11</sup> These images could be 'read' without prior knowledge in portrait iconography: rulers did not wear antique togas, women did not appear in the guise of goddesses or personifications, but were 'elegantly dressed in their proper costume'.<sup>12</sup> The clothes of the figures were meant to be the 'natural' dress of the persons represented, if not actually from their own property, then at least something they might have worn, or, in the case of special ceremonial dresses, copies of the originals.<sup>13</sup> To facilitate the recognition of the figures further, there was, in the early years, a person on hand to explain the exhibits, and a printed catalogue containing biographies of the persons represented was available from the start.<sup>14</sup> Thus, no special education was needed to comprehend and enjoy the exhibition.

In fact, the exhibition was meant as a tool for education itself. The foreword to the second known edition of the catalogue, explaining the purpose of the publication, can also be read as a kind of mission statement of the exhibition: 'Madame Tussaud, in offering this little Work to the Public, has endeavoured to blend utility and amusement. The following pages contain a general outline of the history of each character represented in the Exhibition, which will not only greatly increase the pleasure to be derived from a mere view of

the Figures, but will also convey to the minds of young Persons, much biographical knowledge – a branch of education universally allowed to be of the highest importance.<sup>15</sup> The ambition of Madame Tussaud, therefore, was to offer more than mere amusement. Newspaper reviews spread the educational appeal to ‘those who have young persons under their care’, arguing that promenading amongst the figures could not ‘fail to awaken in their minds a desire to make themselves acquainted with history and biography’.<sup>16</sup> The exhibition could lead them to understand ‘the absolute necessity of rendering themselves familiar with the lives of those who have enjoyed the love, or writhed beneath the execration of their fellow-men; and the necessity of choosing that path, by pursuing which, they will ensure the esteem of goodmen here, and a glorious name here-after.’<sup>17</sup> Moral education was meant to be effected by confronting adolescents with exemplary characters for them to emulate or to despise.

By adopting this truly ‘pantheonic’ idea of presenting the famous and the infamous as moral guidance for any student of human character, adults could also profit from viewing the portraits, as was pointed out in the *Birmingham Chronicle* in 1822:

There is not a science or study that has been more generally appreciated than Physiognomy. ... How pleasing then, it must be, to the lovers of the science, to know that they have ... an opportunity of gratifying their curiosity, by viewing Madame Tussaud’s collection of figures. ... There, they may, at leisure, view and study the countenances of some of the most celebrated characters of the past and present times, which have been faithfully copied ...; and, by having an opportunity of comparing various countenances collected within a small space, it affords [them] a wide field for pleasing reflections. [...Madame Tussaud...] has been enabled to render this collection highly creditable to her talents, as an artist, and particularly edifying and instructive to the learned as well as to others, by affording them the pleasure of viewing the wonderful and astonishing difference of form with which Nature has stamped the different countenances of men.<sup>18</sup>

Reading and correctly interpreting a character by facial features was also seen as important within the world of commerce, and the *Jackson’s Oxford Chronicle* observed that ‘even a man of business may devote a couple of hours, not only with pleasure but with profit’.<sup>19</sup> Thus, any child or adult, man or woman, while being entertained by the illusionistic portraits, the beautiful costumes and a military band that would play in the evenings, could gather useful information, imbibe moral guidelines and exercise their sentiments when viewing the exhibition.

This concept of merging pleasure and instruction into a ‘rational recreation’ obviously appealed to many, and in terms of visitor numbers, the exhibition was truly popular from the beginning. When exhibiting in Edinburgh in 1803, Madame Tussaud took £190 within eighteen days.<sup>20</sup> At 2s od a ticket this meant the enormous number of 1900 full-paying visitors in less than

three weeks at more than 100 visitors per day.<sup>21</sup> Visitor figures varied from town to town, but in the early 1810s, an average day’s takings ranged between £4 and £10.<sup>22</sup> At 1s 6d full price this still equates to between 50 and 130 visitors a day. Later, the price of the exhibition settled at 1s od, with an extra sixpence for the ‘Separate Room’ in which the remains of the French Revolutionaries were shown. A season ticket for the entire duration of a stay was later offered for 5s od and the catalogue sold for 1s od. Thus, the show was completely commercialized. This made the physical access to the exhibition seem democratic, because, for a set price, anybody could enter, no references or letters of invitation were necessary and proof of status was not needed.

Yet not everybody could afford the entrance fee, however moderate it may seem, so that with respect to class structure, Madame Tussaud’s was not entirely ‘popular’, it was no institution for all levels of society. Since 2s od or even 1s od represented a large amount of money for any farm hand or servant in the first half of the nineteenth century to pay for a good hour’s entertainment, the show was clearly aimed at a more bourgeois public with both leisure time and more than a servant’s weekly pocket money to spare. Furthermore, the exhibition’s advertisements on posters and handbills or in the local papers were usually addressed to the ‘Nobility, Gentry, and Public’ or the ‘Ladies and Gentlemen’ of a town – something that might have discouraged a less fashionable audience.

When Madame Tussaud lowered the admission to 1s od towards the end of her touring years, this still did not make the exhibition a cheap pleasure, but may have helped to broaden the audience when prices in general fell after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The price of 1s od was also more in keeping with the prices of other entertainments, such as panoramas or small exhibitions.<sup>23</sup> When the exhibition visited Portsmouth in 1832, there was a further concession to popular accessibility: Madame Tussaud and her sons Joseph and Francis, who worked with her, announced by handbill:

considering that a large class of persons are unavoidably excluded from viewing the Collection, in consequence of the pressure of the times, they [the proprietors] have made arrangements to admit THE WORKING CLASS During the time the Exhibition remains *For Half Price*, From a QUARTER BEFORE NINE TILL TEN in the *Evening*; by this arrangement, sufficient time will be given for both classes to view the Collection without interfering with each other.<sup>24</sup>

Madame Tussaud must have felt the concern beginning in her time to provide some kind of education and possibility for self-improvement not only for the middle, but also for the working classes. However, it seems that even she was suspicious about the popularity of her collection, and saw to it that the classes would not mingle there or confront one another. The occasional noble or royal visitors, on the other hand, would have added lustre to the audience, even if they did not make up a significant number of the patrons.

It is quite obvious, therefore, that Madame Tussaud felt most comfortable with and appealed most to the middle classes, from artisans to merchants and industrialists<sup>25</sup> whom she could dazzle with the splendour of the costumes, impress with the high standing of the characters represented, and educate to be useful members of society.

### The famous and the infamous

Yet not all portraits were of members of fashionable or respectable circles. As the physiognomist in the *Birmingham Chronicle* pointed out in 1822, there

are placed together men of various talents ..., some, ... possessed of brilliant talents and fortitude, have risen to the very pinnacle of human ambitions, by their superior knowledge of the tactics of war; others, who, by the strength of their genius, have immortalized themselves by philosophical and useful writings. ... Turning ... to the violent and sanguinary revolutionist, how different is the sensation on looking at his countenance! We fancy that in every feature we can discover the self-malignant smile at the idea of thousands of victims immolated at the bloody shrine of ambition.<sup>26</sup>

The exhibition was not meant as a celebration of royalty and nobility, but of the distinguished individual, and the range of personalities represented, therefore, stretched from high to low-life, from monarchs to revolutionaries and murderers. The inclusion of the latter can be seen as another popular element in the exhibition, as the stories of horrendous crimes and the descriptions of the life and character of the perpetrators reached a very broad public through broadsides, pamphlets and newspapers.

This interest in the individual, good as well as evil, demonstrates a fairly recent understanding of the waxwork exhibition strongly influenced by the Enlightenment. Before the end of the eighteenth century, waxworks functioned rather differently. The two best-known examples of such waxwork cabinets are the Dutch Doolhof collection and Mrs Salmon's in London. They both showed not only portraits of the rulers of their day but also groups of figures representing stories from ancient mythology, poetry and history, the Bible and local folklore. In the Doolhof Inn in Amsterdam, for example, from the 1630s onwards patrons could inspect the portrait figures of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, William II of Orange or the former Spanish stadtholder of the Netherlands, the Duke of Alba, as well as a representation of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Salome dancing before King Herod, and David slaying Goliath.<sup>27</sup> Although the portraits and the groups were not explicitly connected to one another, they were closely linked by contemporary political iconography. During the ongoing Netherlandish struggle for political independence, visitors did not need prompting in order to detect and interpret

typological references in the exhibition: the figure of King Herod, a long-established example of the fickle, selfish and tyrannical king, stood as a prototype for the hated Spanish statholder – the Duke of Alba's suggested lineage back to the Old Testament served to discredit his power for the visitor. The Prince of Orange on the other hand, or King Gustavus Adolphus, both accepted Protestant rulers, were clearly heirs to the wise King Solomon, the epitome of the good king – their power was legitimized by showing their relationship to the admired biblical king. Finally, the representation of David, the simple shepherd who won over the giant Goliath fighting for the Philistines, was a powerful symbolic image for a small community of merchants fending off a large occupying monarchy. The message of this allegorical programme was simple but effective: the exhibition aimed to express support for the House of Orange and the Protestant cause in general against Catholic Spain.

Another exhibition based on an allegorical combination of the wax figures was the predecessor of Madame Tussaud's in London, Mrs Salmon's.<sup>28</sup> Two handbills from around 1711 outline the selection of histories represented there at the beginning of the eighteenth century: there was to be seen, for example, 'Queen Thomira with the overthrow of Cyrus the great', 'Queen Voaditia [Boudicca], and the Tragical Death of her two Princely Daughters' or the 'Rites of Moloch, or the Unhumane Cruelty, with the manner of the Canaanitish Ladies, Offering up their First-born Infants'.<sup>29</sup> However bizarre the mixture of subjects may seem, the scenes are variations on one common theme: the vices and virtues of women, particularly of mothers. Queen Tomyris, for example, stood as a symbol for motherly love, avenging her son who was killed in a war initiated by Cyrus, a rejected suitor. By killing the Persian King, she expressed her motherly grief at the death of her son and, at the same time, proved to be a good 'mother' of her people when putting an end to the King's greed and saving her realm from occupation. Thus, she can also stand for the cardinal virtue of 'iustitia'. Another 'good mother' was to be seen in Queen Boudicca who led a revolt against Roman rule when her daughters were humiliated and her people plundered by the Romans invading her kingdom. Demonstrating a great sense of justice for the persons in her care and fighting bravely for their rights, she must also be read as a personification of the virtue of 'fortitudo'. Little bravery and motherly love, according to Mrs Salmon's, can have possessed the 'Canaanitish Ladies' who sadly but willingly surrendered their firstborns to the heathen god Moloch, and whose example may be read as a negative variation on female behaviour.

At the same time as Mrs Salmon was exhibiting these examples of virtuous conduct and warnings of bad behaviour, female rulers were once again involved in British politics: in 1689, Queen Mary II ascended to the throne as

an equal to her Dutch husband William III of Orange, and when William died in 1702, a female again, Queen Anne, succeeded him. As Mrs Salmon's handbills announced, the portraits of 'her most excellent Majesty Queen Anne, sitting in a Chair of State, attended by Dukes, Earls, Lords spiritual and temporal, with Court Ladies, and Maids of Honour' stood at the entrance to the exhibition.<sup>30</sup> Its contents then can easily be interpreted as references to the Queen: the groups relating moral examples for desirable female conduct could be understood as a royal lineage in celebration of or as advice to Anne. The particular emphasis on the figure of the mother might have been a simile for the Queen's own ill-fated motherhood – none of her seventeen children reached adulthood. This was not only a personal tragedy for Anne but it also robbed Britain of a Protestant heir to the throne, an issue of great concern to the British public. Thus, while the 'message' of Mrs Salmon's referred less to a specific political conflict, it nevertheless functioned as a celebration and affirmation of Anne's rule.

In general, then, early waxworks such as Mrs Salmon's and the collection in the Doolhof – juxtaposing allegories on good or bad government or behaviour with portraits of actual rulers – cannot strictly be considered 'pantheonic'. They rather represent a transposition into the public sphere of the *uomini illustri* or *femmes fortes* cycles, a form of princely representation known from the Renaissance onwards.<sup>31</sup> These pictorial programmes made up visual catalogues of moral examples manifested in characters from the Bible or ancient history, while, at the same time, displaying the ethical ideals of the person commissioning the cycle and arguing for the legitimacy of their authority on the basis of these ideals. By contrast, Madame Tussaud's exhibition two centuries later relied solely on the lifelike portrayal of the particular individual. Rather than depicting complex allegorical stories she presented individual 'great men' for their own sake.

The idea of the 'great men' had been discussed in Madame Tussaud's home country for most of the second half of the eighteenth century. The *Encyclopédistes* explicitly contrasted the 'great man' or 'grand homme' against the 'héros'.<sup>32</sup> The concept of the hero as a man admired for his determination and strength in combat appeared outdated to the men of the Enlightenment; they preferred the 'great man' who was a benefactor to the nation or mankind in general by his scientific, intellectual, artistic or political prowess. His strength was 'greatness of mind' in the sense that he acted without self-interest for the furtherment of the 'general good', and that his achievements were due to the fertility of his thoughts. Even before the nation dedicated a Panthéon Français to her 'great men', Philippe Curtius, Madame Tussaud's tutor, had taken up this idea of the brilliant individual in his own ephemeral pantheon, his 'Sallon de Cire'. Although the centrepiece of his waxwork exhibition was still a representation of the Royal Family, he devoted the

remainder of it to the 'great men' of his time, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, Benjamin Franklin, Jean-Sylvain Bailly or the Marquis de La Fayette.

When Madame Tussaud inherited this collection and transferred a great part of it to Great Britain, she seems to have felt the need to explain the characters represented. Thus, an important aspect of the display of the portraits became the opportunity to read up on their biographies in the catalogue on sale at the exhibition. In fact, most interior views feature little groups of visitors consulting one of the small pamphlets (fig. 7.2). The existence of copies bearing the owner's name on the front page indicates that they were treasured as a worthwhile publication independent of the exhibition and were used for further reference.<sup>33</sup> These catalogues did not focus on dates, but rather the individual development of the persons represented, their occupation and achievements and a general description of their character traits. The catalogue entries served as proof of their distinction, but more importantly made their personality retraceable through the stations of their life. Thus, character seemed open to rational explanation, and the emulation of a person represented in wax became a valid tool for education – at the end of which stood the possibility of becoming part of the exhibition oneself one day.

### The 'proximity of the heroic and the criminal' – the Chamber of Horrors

Introducing notorious personages to the exhibition was no moral problem then, as they could serve as samples for studying negative developments in a character; exposed to the scrutiny of the physiognomist, they made valuable exhibits. Already in pre-Revolutionary Paris, Curtius had presented his visitors with a collection of thieves and murderers executed for their deeds, called the '*caverne des grands voleurs*' ('cave of the great thieves') as an ironic reference to the '*grands hommes*' displayed elsewhere. Although the '*caverne*' does not seem to have existed for a very long time,<sup>34</sup> Curtius had realized that with the enlightened interest in the bright side of human endeavour, there rose a taste for the darker sides, too. Thus, he supplied his visitors with the pleasurable experience of being horrified about 'monstrous' crimes and looking into the perpetrators' eye, while remaining perfectly safe themselves.

Madame Tussaud kept this 'sublime' element also in her British exhibition. When she showed in Liverpool in February 1829, an important new addition was proudly advertised in the *Liverpool Mercury*:

MADAME TUSSAUD has the honour to announce that she has completed a figure of Burke, which she hopes will meet with the approbation of her friends and the public. – Although the introduction of such a character to her exhibition may be considered improper by some, yet as it is done merely in compliance with the public

curiosity, she trusts it will be received with satisfaction. It represents him as he appeared at his trial; and the greatest attention has been paid to give as good an idea as possible of his personal *appearance*.<sup>35</sup>

Of course it was not only the serious student of human nature who was drawn to see the portraits of Burke and his companion Hare, added three weeks later. Everybody had heard about the two and been curious to see the reliable, lifelike portraits of the killers who had murdered people in order to sell the bodies to the anatomy classes of a well-known professor at Edinburgh.<sup>36</sup> The trial in December 1828 was sensational for the atrocity of their crime as well as for the human interest that was excited when Hare turned King's evidence and only Burke was executed in January 1829. The case of Burke and Hare contained all the elements of a 'dark' tale about the blackest depths of the human soul and thus suited the taste of the time very well.

Due to the domestic character of the events there may have been even more interest than nearly 30 years earlier, when Madame Tussaud was so successful with her display of the 'authentic' images of the French Revolutionaries. In fact, the interest in the portraits of the Revolutionaries had been very similar. Although the lives of Robespierre, Marat, Hébert, Carrier and Fouquier-Thinville whose portraits Madame Tussaud had brought, presumably in full figure, from Paris to London were described in some detail in the first catalogue, they were soon exhibited as a ghastly sight. By October 1803 the display was announced simply as the 'heads of Robespierre, Foquier de Thianville [*sic*], Hebert [*sic*], ... and Carrier' and a 'full length Portrait of Marat in the agonies of death' (fig. 7.3).<sup>37</sup> The portraits were now shown as blood-stained, chopped-off heads (figs 7.4 and 7.5) and a bleeding and distorted body. Partly exhibited as famous political personalities, they stood mainly as examples of violence and cruelty, which was atoned for by the horrible mutilation of the portraits.

Apart from those French characters, there were no other definite 'criminals' in the early exhibition except for a portrait figure of the deranged Colonel Despard who had taken part in a failed conspiracy. It must have been the Revolutionaries' heads, then, that were the principal cause for criticism, when in 1819 a Cambridge University don complained about 'the close proximity of the heroic and the criminal'.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the next following edition of the catalogue mentions a 'Separate Room' where these 'Highly Interesting Figures [... were placed] In Consequence of the Peculiarity of their Appearance'<sup>39</sup> – Despard, by the way, remaining in the principal part of the exhibition. In 1836, finally, the 'Separate Room' developed into the true 'Chamber of Horrors', when the portrait figures of Burke and Hare were moved next to the Revolutionaries, and the political extremists were likened entirely to the famous low-minded murderers. By the 1840s, when *Punch*

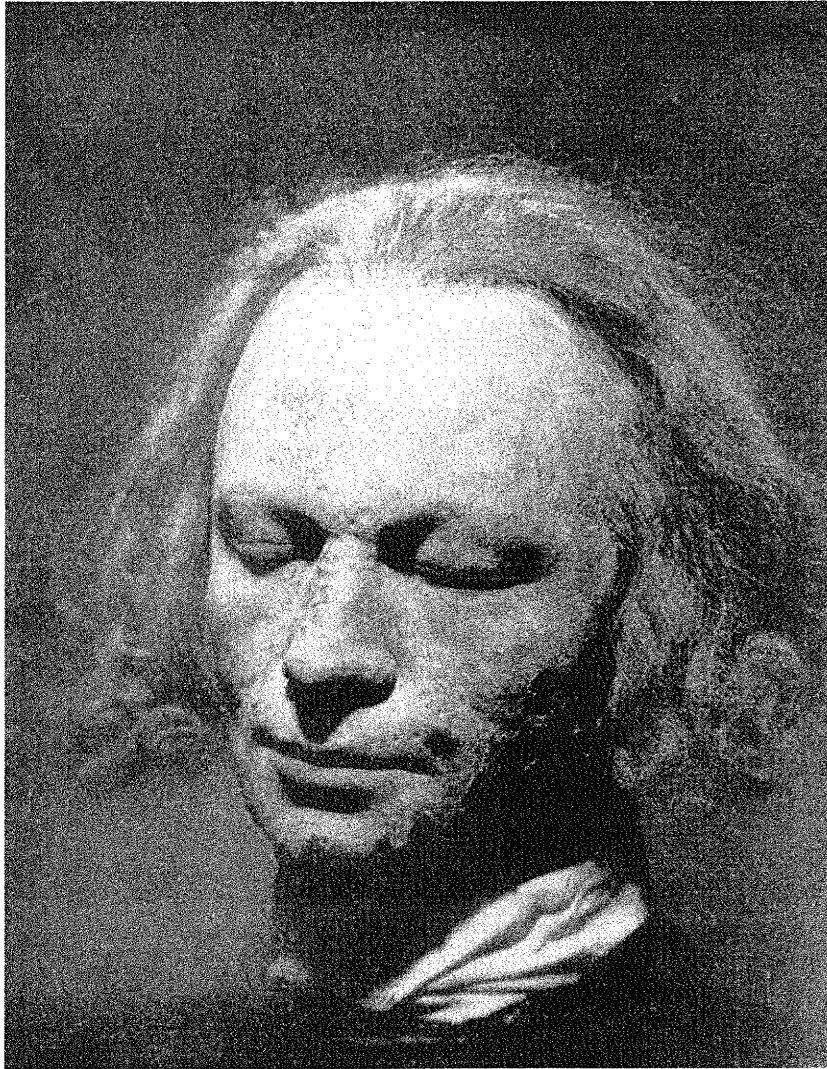


7.3 Marat in the agonies of death, in Madame Tussaud's exhibition, c. 1920

magazine began to satirize the 'Chamber of Horrors',<sup>40</sup> the portraits of the murderers had eliminated any political meaning from the representations of the Revolutionaries that might have been left, and taken over this part of the exhibition.

#### 'By the express desire of many ladies and gentlemen' – the people's pantheon

That visitors enjoyed the 'horrible' part of the exhibition in particular was not lost on Madame Tussaud. Her exhibition was, or so it seems, also a 'pantheon' that could be manipulated at the visitors' will, by the 'vote' of their feet. Today this is achieved by asking visitors to fill in questionnaires about their most and least favourite portraits and whether their expectations were met or disappointed. The same mechanism must have applied during the nineteenth century, albeit less formally through secret observation or personal interrogation. It appears, for example, that in 1820 a figure of Bergami was sorely missed by the visitors, because Madame Tussaud, announcing



7.4 Head of Robespierre in Madame Tussaud's exhibition, c. 1920

her new addition in the Manchester newspapers, declared that she 'has been induced, at the particular request of several Ladies and Gentlemen, to obtain a Likeness of the celebrated B. BERGAMI, taken from a bust executed by an eminent Italian Artist'.<sup>41</sup> The influence of visitors' wishes on the exhibition was suggested further by the fact that, when exhibiting in Norwich in 1819,



7.5 Head of Carrier in Madame Tussaud's exhibition, c. 1920

Madame Tussaud announced 'that in compliance with the particular request of several Ladies and Gentlemen, she will continue to exhibit her magnificent Collection ... a few days longer'.<sup>42</sup> Another example of her reaction to a public request for a portrait was the figure of 'the infamous, the diabolical

Hare'. In the *Liverpool Mercury*, Madame Tussaud reveals the mechanics of his addition to the exhibition:

influenced by the great satisfaction which the introduction of the figure of Burke has produced to her Friends and the Public, and in consequence of numerous inquiries for a figure of the wretch HARE, she sent her Son to Edinburgh, in order to procure a good Likeness of him, together with a description of his person.<sup>43</sup>

Other portraits were kept on display surprisingly long, such as the figure of Madame Sappé, a caricature of an old woman hung with jewellery and painted with make-up. From early on she was characterized as an 'old coquette, who teased [*sic*] her husband's life out', and the catalogue of 1819 ironically describes her as an '*elegant and beautiful woman. ... She was the wife of a rich merchant at Paris; she had a happy knack at conversation. ... But the cruel guillotine took off the head of this lovely creature.*'<sup>44</sup> Obviously, visitors took to the figure for its comic qualities despite its obscure biography.

And, although there were only a few cases in the early years, it did also occur that figures were eliminated from the show while it was still expanding. Early examples are the portraits of the actresses Madames Catlois and Lassahl, Napoleon's co-consul Le Brun, his generals Kléber and Moreau and the Prussian King Frederick the Great. The figures were all brought to Great Britain from France in 1803 but had disappeared by 1816.<sup>45</sup> These withdrawals must have been motivated by the diminishing interest of the visitors and Madame Tussaud's anxiousness to avoid boredom. Whereas the usual state-funded 'pantheon' existed independent of visitor numbers, Madame Tussaud's, as a private commercial enterprise, relied on people's interest in the exhibits. It was therefore necessary for Madame Tussaud to anticipate her visitors' fancies and observe their reactions closely. The visitors themselves, on the other hand, knew they were consumers, as they had paid their shilling as an entrance fee and were presumably open in giving their opinions of the exhibition.

Madame Tussaud's, as has now become clear, can be considered a 'popular pantheon' during the nineteenth century in several ways: due to its commercial nature and the illusionism of the exhibits, it was open, intelligible and enjoyable to a broad, if mainly middle-class public. The contemporaneity and topicality as well as the variety of the exhibits – ranging from the recently crowned king to the recently hanged criminal – appealed to a large number of visitors indeed. Furthermore, the exhibitions' maker took into consideration the wishes and expectations of her paying 'guests'. Other than with an official state pantheon, they had the chance to influence the content of the exhibition by showing support or lack of interest. That Madame Tussaud could adapt reasonably quickly to the taste of her public was because of the material she used for her representations. Flexibility in material as well as conceptual terms, therefore, were the key elements that made Madame Tussaud's exhibition into a 'popular pantheon'.

## Notes

1. *Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette*, 11 June 1832, p. 3. I am grateful to Michael Phipps for providing the Oxford newspaper cuttings. I would like to thank Stefan Trink and Dr Simon Ward for their help with this text.
2. *Manchester Courier*, n. 234, 20 June 1829, p. 2.
3. *Pictorial Times*, 3 July 1847, 10 (225), p. 6. On *Madame Tussaud's* in general see Leonard Cottrell, *Madame Tussaud*, London, 1950; Anita Leslie and Pauline Chapman, *Madame Tussaud. Waxworker Extraordinary*, London, 1978; Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London. A Panoramic History of Exhibitions 1600–1862*, Cambridge MA and London, 1978, pp. 333–8. My own PhD dissertation: "'Taken from Life'. Madame Tussaud und die Geschichte des Wachsfigurenkabinetts vom 17. bis frühen 20. Jahrhundert", Humboldt University, Berlin, 2002.
4. *The Times*, 6 March 1883, p. 10. The word 'Walhalla' rather than 'pantheon' is used in connection with Madame Tussaud's as it affords a pleasing alliteration with 'waxworks'.
5. Although the process of wax modelling – the most important stage being that of making a clay model – is quite similar to that of making a marble bust and likewise depends on technique and experience, the transfer into the final material takes less time and effort than when working in marble or bronze; see the comparison of the portrait technique of Francis Chantrey with that of Madame Tussaud in Kornmeier 'Taken from Life', 2002, pp. 49–62.
6. For examples see Michelle E. Bloom, 'Waxing eloquent: The Wax Figure in Literature and Cinema, 1840–1935', Brown University, Providence, PhD thesis 1995.
7. On the plastic properties of wax see Georges Didi-Hubermann, 'Die Ordnung des Materials. Plastizität, Unbehagen, Nachleben', in Wolfgang Kemp, Gert Mattenklott, Monika Wagner and Martin Warnke (ed.), *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus*, Berlin, 1999, vol. iii, pp. 4–29.
8. Such as the removals from the Panthéon in Paris of the monuments to Mirabeau or Marat; see *Le Panthéon. Symbole des révolutions. De l'église de la Nation au Temple des grands hommes*, Montreal, 1989, pp. 145–9.
9. A rule not to accept the portrait of any person deceased less than ten years previously (except the reigning monarch) was adopted for example by the Trustees of the London National Portrait Gallery at its foundation in 1856; see Uta Kornmeier, 'Faces and figures. Towards a comparative analysis of Madame Tussaud's and the National Portrait Gallery, London', *Georges-Bloch-Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Universität Zuerich*, 5, 1998, pp. 111–2. This rule, however, was abolished in 1969 and the National Portrait Gallery now features a very popular twentieth-century department.
10. The first mention of the portrait in *Exchange Herald* (Manchester), n. 573, 19 September 1820. It was last mentioned in the catalogue of the exhibition when it was shown in Penrith, *Biographical and Descriptive Sketches of the whole-length Composition Figures and other works of Art, forming the unrivalled Exhibition of Madame Tussaud* (Penrith, 1828), Madame Tussaud's Archive, London (MTA). This Archive holds the most comprehensive collection of catalogues; further copies are in the John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Ashbridge Collection, City of Westminster Archives Centre, London.
11. '... many [visitors] have been most completely deceived by the near resemblance between her [the artist] and her representative in the room; so much so, that they have absolutely addressed the figure instead of Madame Tussaud.' *Liverpool Mercury*, n. 521, 25 May 1821, p. 6, as one of many examples.
12. *Glasgow Herald*, 3 October 1803, p. 3.
13. In 1814, when the exhibition was shown first in Bristol, then in Bath, a notice at the bottom of the posters said, that all kinds of 'old-fashioned dresses and paste stones' were being bought, obviously to furnish the older figures with appropriate costumes and jewels (poster, Bristol 1814, MTA; poster Bath 1814/15, City of Westminster Archive Centre, London). In 1822, it was announced in the *Birmingham and Lichfield Chronicle* that 'the dresses [of the coronation group of George IV are] copied from the most authentic sources', 59 (3423), 7 November 1822, p. 1.
14. 'A Person attends to explain the Characters', *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, no. 14295, 1 August 1803. In a letter from Edinburgh to her husband in Paris (9 June 1803, MTA), Madame Tussaud mentions 'mon interprète qui explique au Sallon'. The earliest surviving catalogue of the exhibition was printed in Edinburgh in 1803, one copy in the National Art Library, London, another in the Scottish National Library, Edinburgh.

15. *Biographical and Descriptive Sketches*, Cambridge, 1819, MTA.
16. For example in *Bristol Mirror*, 49 (2538), 30 August 1823, p. 3; *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, 12 (589), 20 January 1824, p. 2; *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 (932), 13 March 1829, p. 86.
17. *Birmingham and Lichfield Chronicle*, 59 (3429), 19 December 1822, p. 2. As the newspaper reviews featured a vocabulary that was suspiciously similar to Madame Tussaud's own advertisement rhetoric, it can be assumed that the articles were puffs or paid copy, as was common in the early days of newspapers; see Allen Hutt, *The Changing Newspaper. Typographic Trends in Britain and America 1622–1972*, London, 1973, especially p. 35.
18. *Birmingham and Lichfield Chronicle*, 59 (3429), 19 December 1822, p. 2.
19. *Manchester Courier*, n. 234, 20 June 1829, p. 2; the same in *Jackson's Oxford Chronicle*, 21 April 1832, p. 3.
20. Letter from Edinburgh, 9 June 1803, MTA.
21. The figures are speculative since not every visitor may have paid the full single price. There may have been season tickets and concessionary tickets for children, as later on her tour. Also, the takings from selling the catalogue may have been included in the sum mentioned.
22. See Cash Book 1811–12, MTA.
23. For examples see Altick, *The Shows of London*, 1978.
24. Handbill, Portsmouth 1832, (Portsmouth City Library). A similar arrangement was made in 1833 when the exhibition stayed in Rochester, *Rochester Gazette*, 29 October 1833, p. 4, yet no continuation of the cheap hours is known after the 1830s. Examples of other waxworks and other exhibitions offering concessionary admission prices to 'children, servants and working people', were Bradley's waxworks, see *Nottingham Herald*, 28 September 1825; Major's waxworks, 1841, poster in Portsmouth City Library; Allsop's waxworks after 1849, handbills in MTA.
25. More about Madame Tussaud's envisaged public see Uta Kornmeier, 'Madame Tussaud's first Exhibition in London 1802–1803', *Object. Postgraduate Research and Reviews in the History of Art and Visual Culture*, 1, 1998, pp. 45–61.
26. *Birmingham and Lichfield Chronicle*, 59 (3429), 19 December 1822, p. 2.
27. A visit to the *Doolhof* is described by Zesen in 1664 (Christian Gellinek (ed.), *Europas Erster Baedeker. Filip von Zesens Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam 1664*, New York, Bern, Frankfurt a.M., Paris, 1988, pp. 367–8; Dirk Christian Meijer, 'Het Oude Doolhof te Amsterdam', *Oud-Holland*, 1, 1883, pp. 30–36; Nicolas de Roever, 'Het Nieuwe Doolhof. In de Oranje Pot' te Amsterdam', *Oud-Holland*, 6, 1888, pp. 103–112; Marianne Eisma, 'De concurrentie tussen het Oude en het Nieuwe Doolhof', *Amstelodam*, 85, 1998, pp. 229–43. The *Doolhof* existed until 1862 but had lost its splendour long before.
28. Established some time before 1693 by a Mr Salmon, by 1711 the exhibition could be found at 189 Fleet Street under the management of Mary Salmon. Mrs Salmon died in 1740 but her name remained associated with the exhibition long after her death, Edward J. Pyke, *A Biographical Dictionary of Wax Modellers*, Oxford, 1973; Altick, *The Shows of London*, 1978, especially pp. 52–3.
29. British Museum, Harley 5931, fol. opp. 36, n. 154 [c. 1711], and fol. 5, n. 29 [after 1711].
30. Mentioned in another handbill datable between 1705 and 1710, British Museum, Harley 5931, fol. 89, n. 263.
31. See Martina Hansmann, *Andrea del Castagnos Zyklus des 'uomini famosi' und 'donne famose'. Geschichtsverständnis und Tugendideal im Florentinischen Frühhumanismus*, Muenster, Hamburg, 1993, especially pp. 26–98, in general; on *femmes fortes* series see *Die Galerie der Starke Frauen. Die Heldin in der französischen und italienischen Kunst des 17. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Bettina Baumgaertel and Sylvia Neysters, Duesseldorf and Darmstadt, 1995.
32. *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, Geneva and Neufchatel, 1751–1780, reprint: Stuttgart, Bad Cannstadt: Frommann, 1966, 35 vols: 'héroïsme', 'héros', vol. viii, 1765; 'grand, grandeur', vol. vii, 1757; 'grand homme', supplement, vol. iii, 1777.
33. For example *Biographical and Descriptive Sketches*, Cambridge, 1819, MTA, and Manchester, 1822, John Johnson Collection, Oxford.
34. First mentioned in about 1782, a year later it is reported to have been forbidden and closed, François-Marie Mayeur de Saint-Paul (attr.), *Tableau du Nouveau Palais-Royal*, London (actually printed in Paris), 1783, pp. 96–102.
35. *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 (928), 13 February 1829, p. 49.
36. Pauline Chapman, *Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. Two Hundred Years of Crime*, London, 1984, pp. 41–6.
37. *Glasgow Herald*, 3 October 1803, p. 3.
38. Leslie and Chapman, *Madame Tussaud*, p. 143. However, there seems to be no proof of this complaint.
39. *Biographical and Descriptive Sketches* (Boston, 1819), Ashbridge Collection, City of Westminster Archives Centre, London. Apart from the representations of the Revolutionaries, there were also placed models of the guillotine, of the Bastille entire and in the state of destruction, as well as the figure of the 'Count de Lorge', an alleged survivor from the Bastille, a blood-stained shirt of Henry IV and an Egyptian mummy. There was an extra entry charge of 6d.
40. The name was first adopted by Madame Tussaud's in 1843 and then discovered as a catch phrase by *Punch* in the mid-1840s (Chapman, *Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors*, pp. 53–4, Kornmeier, 'Taken from Life', 2002, p. 134).
41. *The Exchange Herald. Aston's Manchester Commercial Advertiser*, no. 573, 19 September 1820.
42. *Norfolk Chronicle*, 6 March 1819, p. 2.
43. *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 (931), 6 March 1829, p. 73.
44. *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, no. 14274, 13 June 1803, p. 1; *Biographical and Descriptive Sketches* (Cambridge, 1819). Madame Sappé was still on show as late as 1928, when the exhibition reopened after a complete remaking following a disastrous fire in March 1925.
45. Last mentions were: Madame Catlois: 1803; Madame Lassahl: 1808; Le Brun: 1810; Kléber and Moreau: 1812; Frederick the Great: 1816.