

LAURENT MOURGUET'S GUIGNOL



GUIGNOL IN LYON ROOM



NAME, FIRST NAME

Guignol

Guignol, did you say Guignol?

The origin of the name is uncertain. Jean-Baptiste Onofrio, a Lyon magistrate and fan of Guignol, who wrote 2 volumes on the *Théâtre Lyonnais de Guignol* (1865-1870), came up with several suggestions:

- It could come from the local expression, “*c’est guignolant !*”, meaning “it’s funny!” for some and “it’s boring!” for others.
- It could be of Italian origin. A man from the town of Chignolo, in Lombardy who settled in Lyon, would have been noticed. To Gnafron, a companion of Guignol, wasn’t he known as “*Chignol*”?
- Pierre Rousset, author of Guignol plays in the late 19th c., confirmed that a certain Jean Guignol did exist and could have been used as a model by the puppeteer.

Regardless of its origin, the name Guignol soon made its mark and was adopted in everyday language: “*Ne fais pas le guignol !*”, which translates in English as “Stop clowning around!”

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH, NATIONALITY

1808(?) in Lyon - French

Birth of a hero

There is no official birth certificate for Guignol. 1808 was arbitrarily selected to celebrate his centenary. Nevertheless, Guignol is certainly a creation of the early 19th century. What’s more: He was definitely born in Lyon!

HEIGHT

58,50 cm

This is the oldest known Guignol puppet. It actually belonged to Laurent Mourguet, just like its two associates, **Gnafron** and **Madelon**. Handed down from one generation to the next, repaired and regularly renovated, they were given to the museum in 1949 by Pierre Neichthausser, a descendant by marriage of Mourguet and manager of the **Théâtre de Guignol du quai Saint-Antoine** (quai Saint-Antoine Puppet Theatre).

TYPE OF PUPPETS

hand puppet

The Lyon hand puppet

The garments on the Lyon hand puppet conceal leather cones for the arms and head, into which the puppeteer insert his fingers: The thumb for the left arm, the index finger for the head, and the second, third and fourth fingers for the right arm (see **puppets to be operated in the trunk**). This technique soon gained in popularity throughout 19th c. France and the term *guignol* became synonymous with hand puppet.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

young man, small nose, almond-shaped eyes, braided hair

How is he dressed?

Brown frock coat and waistcoat, gilt buttons decorated with a ship’s anchor... Guignol’s costume dates from the 18th c. and is reminiscent of that of **père Coquard**¹, a famous puppet in the Lyon crèches.

His leather bonnet is rather strange: Some say it looks like a cocked hat with flat edges, whilst it reminds others of the head gear worn by boat haulers on the Rhône – a wide leather band used to protect the forehead from girths.

Last but not least, Guignol would not be Guignol without his “*braids*”: hair tied in ribbons.

Le père Coquard (Father Coquard), rod and string puppet of the Théâtre Joly, Lyon, late 19th c., Inv. 48.1



1: Père coquard (Father Coquard), Lyon, 19th c., Inv. 48.1 see in the *Traditional French Puppets* room

SPECIAL FEATURES

developing a smile with age



Guignol's smile by Ernest Neichthäuser, hand puppet, Lyon, early 20th c., Inv. N 3914

His round face, almost invisible nose, and large, almond-shaped eyes have scarcely changed down the centuries, but the same cannot be said for the smile. Whereas Laurent Mourguet's puppet hardly ever smiled, if indeed at all, the 20th c. heralded the arrival of a smiling Guignol, which was more suitable for an audience of children (see Frédéric Josserand's Guignol, Inv. D ATP.56.1.2).

PROFESSION

silk worker, good for nothing, valet... emblem of the town of Lyon

Guignol is said to be a silk worker or weaver. Throughout the repertoire, he is rarely a weaver and more often a servant. His profession changes with the plot.

"Who is Guignol? A good man of Lyon..."

"... represented by a mythical, slightly exaggerated character, it's true, but one which sums him up perfectly."

This is what Morel de Voleine, a journalist with the *Gazette de Lyon*, wrote in 1847. Guignol soon became the local hero and a representative of "lyonnaiseté" to coin a phrase inspired by the vocabulary of weavers.

The emblem of the town of Lyon, he was praised to the skies by both the radical deputy, Justin Godart, and the royalist, Tancrède de Visan. Although Guignol is losing his vigour and tends to be nothing more than a character in a puppet show for children, the official homage continues, culminating in celebrations to mark the centenary of his birth in 1908 and the erection of a monument in Vieux Lyon (the old district of Lyon). In the 20th c., his portrait decorated numerous tourist keepsakes.

FATHER'S NAME

Laurent Mourguet

Born and christened in the Saint-Nizier Church on 3 March 1769, the son of a weaver.

Married Jeanne Esterle.

Fathered 10 children.

Laurent Mourguet had many different professions, including tooth puller. This was how he came into contact with the puppet world. He used Pulcinella to attract clients. No doubt having a bigger audience than patient portfolio, he opted for a career



Grégoire Lambert Ladré, known as Père Thomas (Father Thomas), lithography by Claude Jacquand, Lyon, 19th c., Inv. 1325.7

as a professional puppeteer, joining forces with Grégoire Lambert Ladré, known as *le père Thomas* (Father Thomas), a public comedian and violin player.

Following a quarrel, Laurent Mourguet separated from Father Thomas and created his first puppet – in the guise of his former accomplice: Gnafron. Then he created Guignol – a veritable self-portrait. In 1820, he formed his first company with his son, Étienne, daughter,

Rose Pierrette, and then his son-in-law, Claude Louis François Josserand. Success guaranteed. At the age of 71, Laurent Mourguet together with his wife and one of his grandsons left Lyon for Vienne, where they ran a theatre in rue des Clercs and then in rue Peaux Belles. He died on 30 December 1844.

FAMILY

friend of Gnafron, bachelor, sometimes married to Madelon

The inseparable threesome

Guignol is not on his own. Gnafron, a shoe repairer (*gnafre* in the Lyon dialect), often accompanies him. Most of the time they are friends, even cousins. As for Madelon, the only recurring female character, she is either Gnafron's daughter or Guignol's wife. With a strong, sometimes cantankerous character, she mellowed in the late 19th c.

CRIMINAL RECORD

laziness, debts, violence, bad encounters and stealing jam

Watch out for the cudgel!

Guignol's accessory is the *tavelle*, a long stick used as a weapon against all types of intruder: crook, landlord or policeman. Split lengthwise, it makes a loud noise when struck against the curtains/panels. As with all accessories used in hand puppet theatre, the dimensions are deliberately exaggerated to make them more visible and, above all, easier to operate!

FOREIGN VISAS

