Marionette (Polichinelle)

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**Polichinelle by Émile Labelle**

**Passport No.**

Inv. (9)50.136

**Guignol in Paris Room**

**Name, First Name**

Polichinelle

**From Pulcinella to Polichinelle.**

_Pulcinella_, “chick” in Italian, supposedly alludes to the physique: A head that resembles a chicken emerging from an egg with its crooked nose!

During the 16th c., the character arrived in France and took on the name of Polichinelle. This character became popular mainly during the Parisian fairs in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Date and Place of Birth, Nationality**

Late 19th c., early 20th c.
Paris - European?

This puppet was created by Émile Labelle for the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. It was subsequently presented at the Théâtre des Buttes-Chaumont (castle set).

**Made in Italy**

However, the character, Polichinelle¹, appeared during the Renaissance in Italy, in the _commedia dell’arte_, in which each character possessed features specific to a different Italian town. Pulcinella, [see Inv. (9)50.143, by Paul Jeanne] is the _zanni_, valet, the most well known after Harlequin². He was undoubtely born in Naples since he speaks the dialect and wears the national dress of this region. He was extremely popular with some people who considered him to be a resurgence of the characters of yesteryear such as _Maccus_, the puppet of Roman farces or even the Persian hero, _Penj_.

**Physical Appearance**

_two humps, a crooked nose and a prominent chin_

Polichinelle traditionally has two humps – one on the back and the other in the stomach. He wears a striped costume and cavalier hat.

_The metamorphoses of Polichinelle_

The Italian Pulcinella and the French Polichinelle have little in common. With a slightly hunched back, Pulcinella wears a black half-mask, a white costume with wide trousers and a pointed skullcap or bonnet in the form of a mitre.

The Polichinelle that appeared in the actor’s theatre in 18th c. France maintained this appearance. The costume, initially red with green stripes, varied, eventually becoming multi-coloured. The two humps appeared towards the end of the 17th c. in the fair theatres. The hump in the stomach is reminiscent of the rounded breastplate worn by soldiers. He does not wear a mask, but has a crooked nose and a protruding chin. He is said to be a caricature of Henry IV and his hat is modelled on that of Henry IV’s cavaliers. It is also said to resemble the Spanish _capitan_ or _matamore_. Finally, a blend of Italian, French and Spanish elements, Polichinelle has become an essentially French puppet.

**Special Features**

_a very resonant character!_

_A shrill voice and famous flatulence_

The nasal tones of Polichinelle are produced using the _reed pipe_ or _whistle_, a small piece of metal or bone that vibrates under the puppeteer’s tongue, making him virtually incomprehensible. This technique is partly due to the privilege of speech reserved only for actors in the Comédie Française during the 17th c., who made puppeteers alter their voices.

“Well, don’t you know that farting is to Polichinelle what hitting with a stick is to Harlequin? Harlequin hits and Polichinelle farts, that’s what defines them”³

**Height**

71cm tall, 29cm wide

**Type of Puppets**

_hand puppet with legs_

**Varied techniques**

Two distinctly different techniques are mostly used, depending on the type of repertoire: The hand puppet allows the grotesque side to develop and is extremely dynamic whereas the string puppet plays a prestige game with a very emotional expression.

1: _See Commedia dell’arte room sheet in Traditional Italian Puppets room_
2: _Harlequin, Venice, 18th c., Inv. D ATP 56.7.762 to be seen in the Traditional Italian Puppets room_
4: _In L’Ombre du Cocher Poète, Review of the National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions, 2001, p.66._
5: _Opéra baroque et marionnette by Jean-Luc Impe, International Puppet Institute, 1994, C 56 M, p. 111._

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**PROFESSION**
valet, clown, presenter

Polichinelle is the valet-clown par excellence.

**A burlesque puppet**
The repertoire of the French Polichinelle was a far cry from the *commedia dell’arte* at the turn of the 17th c. In the early 18th c., authors were writing plays exclusively for him: He became an undisputed character, especially in fairs.

Following the French Revolution, his success diminished, despite his hours of glory.

During the second Empire, Polichinelle presented puppet shows, especially in the castle sets housed in Parisian gardens as well as in Amiens, where he introduced the adventures of Lafleur⁵. He often opened the show with a boisterous dance routine and commented on the plot. Polichinelle has become a children’s entertainer par excellence. Duranty, Director of the théâtre des Tuileries, created plays especially for Polichinelle, revealing a certain wisdom of the character through flights into absurdity.

Some traditional Parisian puppeteers of the early 20th c., including Emile Labelle, kept Polichinelle as the main character for a long time.

**FATHER’S NAME**
Emile Labelle

Emile Labelle, initially a magician and later a puppeteer, purchased the Théâtre Anatole des Champs-Elysées in 1900. At the same time he was granted the concession of Buttes-Chaumont (see zoom in on Castelet des Buttes-Chaumont sheet). He managed all five castle sets.

**Polichinelle’s mother**
Polichinelle is said to be the son of Mother Gigogne⁶, a so-called transformation puppet, which appeared from the 15th c. onwards. She created the element of surprise by revealing a swarm of children underneath her skirt! She is mainly used to switch between two scenes. Polichinelle is a bachelor but Mother Gigogne appears as his wife when the plot so dictates.

**FAMILY**
large!

Polichinelle, his descendants and cousins

Several puppet characters directly descend from Polichinelle, and were inspired by his physique and aversion for authority:

- Punch⁷, appeared in England in 1675 (Inv. D ATP 56.1.927)
- Petrouchka⁷, created in Russia during the 17th c., (Inv. D ATP 56.1.936 room 223)
- Don Cristobal Pulchinla, a character created in Spain

Others could be his cousins:
- Kasperek⁷, created in Prague (Inv. D ATP 56.1.1036)
- Hans Pickelhering, in The Netherlands
- Kasperl⁷, of Austrian origin, who usurped Hans Wurst in Germany.

**CRIMINAL RECORD**
complicity in crimes against the state, blows and injuries, outrage, sexual harassment

Polichinelle enjoys life and enjoys drinking. He does not mince his words and sometimes appears very cruel. He is not afraid of anyone and beats his wife, his neighbour, his cat, his dog, the chief of police and even the devil!

**A bad boy and a rebel**
Polichinelle is a subversive character.

During the 17th c. at the time of la Fronde, a popular and aristocratic revolt against cardinal-minister Mazarin, he represented the people of Paris, who were dealt a heavy blow by tax laws.

It is also said that, in his puppet guise, he would have been beheaded during the Revolution!

In the 19th c., Goethe emphasised the fact that the Polichinelle shows had a very bad reputation, and never portrayed high society or women.

**FOREIGN VISAS**

5: Lafleur, Julien barber, Amiens, early 20th c., Inv. D ATP 56.1.770, to be seen in Traditional French Puppets room
6: Mother Gigogne and her children Inv. (9)50.132.1 to be seen in the Fairground theatres and television room
7: To be seen in the Traditional European Puppets room