

## Marie Grosholtz: Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum

Madame Tussauds Wax Museums can be found throughout the world. The history of Marie Grosholtz, better known by her married name, Madame Tussaud, is quite interesting. (Note: The apostrophe in **Tussaud's** is no longer used.)

Wax figures of effigies were not new, especially during the French revolution in the later 1700s. Marie Grosholtz was born in 1761. She was born in eastern France, Strasbourg. Marie's father was a German soldier

Marie's father suffered a facial disfigurement in the wars he fought during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). He was killed two months before Marie was born. The Seven Year's War was a global conflict. It especially involved Britain and France. The war destroyed France's supremacy in Europe, which eventually led to revolt and the overthrow of the monarchy. The French Revolution began in 1789. <historytoday.com>

Marie's mother, Anne Marie, moved and brought her up in Berne, Switzerland. Her mother was a housekeeper for Philippe Curtius. He was a doctor who also modeled wax heads and busts and ran a museum in Berne. Curtius with Marie and her mother moved to Paris. Curtius' wax art became quite popular with the aristocrats. Marie learned the craft from Philippe and later became his assistant. She also served as an art tutor at Versailles to the sister of Louis XVI. <britannica.com> <historytoday.com>

Upon the death of Phillippe Curtius in 1794, Marie inherited two of his museums. At that point in history, modeling death masks was common. Marie's first wax figure was that of Voltaire. Benjamin Franklin, Horatio Nelson and Sir Walter Scott were also among Madame Tussaud's effigies.

In 1795, Marie married Francois Tussaud. Described as a "lazy, spendthrift," she left him in 1802 with her two sons and her wax collection. Marie partnered with Paul Phillipstal, a Curtius colleague. Even though she did not speak English, Marie moved extensively throughout the British Isles with her traveling show, and in 1835, she established a permanent home in Baker Street, London. In 1844 as Madam Tussaud, she moved her collection to Marylebone Road, London. She died on April 16, 1850 at the age of 88. Her death certificate read "old age certified, under cause of death."

<thelancet.com> <atlasobscura.com> <smithsonian.com>

*"Nonetheless, a careful re-analysis of the correspondence of her youngest son Francis (1802–73) tells a more complex story. A letter dated March 14, 1848, to his father François (1767–1848) in Paris shows that Marie "is growing very feeble and at times she is very ill, and she suffers from asthma which allows her no rest at night... Her legs are bad like yours, and she has bunions that hurt her when she walks". This account contrasts with an 1842 description by her great-grandson John Theodore in which she appeared as short and slim but still vivacious in conversation, with excellent memory and a fresh complexion."* <thelancet.com>

*"Her final illness lasted 5 days, which is suggestive of an infection, potentially pneumonia—a common eventuality in patients with COPD to this day."* <thelancet.com>

Unlike other wax modelers, Marie Tussaud claim authenticity in that her casts were from the real individuals. This meant that Marie was at the executions or time of death of people she portrayed. Her "Chamber of Horrors" was very popular. Two of her famous French Revolution wax casts were that of Marie Antoinette and Maximilien de Robespierre. <britannica.com> <atlasobscura.com>

*"Marie Tussaud was a hustler, and did her part, as her contemporary P.T. Barnum did in the U.S., to create what we recognize as the modern concept of celebrity—renown not being something you achieve after death with a sober legacy, but something you cultivate in life by slaking the public thirst. She died in 1850 with credit for England's most popular tourist attraction, and even the usually grumpy satirical magazine Punch had to admit: "In these days no one can be considered properly popular unless he is admitted into the company of Madame Tussaud's celebrities in Baker Street. The only way in which a powerful and lasting impression can be made on the public mind is through the medium of wax."* <atlasobscura.com>



Since Madame Tussaud's death, the ownership has gone through many iterations. From family and family squabbles to business people. Since Madame Tussauds Wax Museum is a major tourist attraction, it has seen many owners, mergers, international oversees branches, but following the same pattern of having famous people as wax figures.

The following is a list of museum locations: Asia: Beijing, China; Chongqing, China; Shanghai, China; Wuhan, China; Hong Kong; New Delhi, India; Tokyo, Japan; Singapore, Bangkok, Thailand. Europe: Amsterdam, Netherlands; Berlin, Germany; Blackpool, United Kingdom; Istanbul, Turkey; London, England; Prague, Czech Republic; Vienna, Austria. North America: Hollywood, United States; Las Vegas, United States; Nashville, United States; New York City, United States; Orlando, United States; San Francisco, United States; Washington, D.C., United States. Oceania: Sydney, Australia.

This writer has been to two Madame Tussauds Wax Museums. This photo program is in Orlando, Florida.











Sources: <https://www.madametussauds.com/>, <https://www.biography.com/people/marie-tussaud-9512435>, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/months-past/death-madame-tussaud>, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology-and-history/magazine/2018/09-10/madame-tussaud-wax-figures-history/>, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marie-Tussaud>, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/tussauds>, [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanres/PIIS2213-2600\(16\)30385-X.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanres/PIIS2213-2600(16)30385-X.pdf), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/04/madame-tussaud-edward-carey-little>, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-marie-tussaud-created-wax-empire-180967356/> and <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/european-art-1600-present-biographies/marie-tussaud>.

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