

Guided Tour of Musée Théâtre Guignol, Brindas



Welcome in the Musée Théâtre Guignol, a very special site which is both a museum and a theatre.

This site is dedicated to Guignol, the most famous French puppet. Created in Lyon in the nineteenth century, it quickly became one of its symbols. Even if today we use the word "guignol" to talk about somebody awkward, ridiculous, unserious ... We own more than two Hundred puppets, accessories, archives ... from Jean-Guy Mourguet, the last Mourguet's descendant.

Before talking about Guignol, we might talk about his "father", Laurent Mourguet.

He was born in Lyon, in 1769 (seventeen sixty-nine), from a humble family. Thus, as He was a child (maybe 6 years old), He learned working as a silk weaver (a "canut" as we say in Lyon !) (Lyon was very famous at this time due to the silk manufacturing). He worked until the age of 20, so until the French Revolution in 1789. At this period the middle class wasn't interested anymore in buying expensive things and then, the silk industry declined and Laurent Mourguet lost his job.

As he was already married and had children (He had 10 children), he had to find a new job.

So, he became travelling salesman/ hawker (And sold thread, needles, bundles of wood, medicines ...). Later, He added another activity to his job and became "teeth puller" (=dentist). Everybody was able to become a teeth puller, you just need to have tools (a big plier) and that was enough ! That was free and occurred during markets, as a public show. This allowed him to sell his medicines.

In order to draw customers, He formed a small theatre, a castelet. A simple one with 4 poles and a curtain all around them. This is also a good manner to hide patients screams ! At first, He used Punch, Harlequin... = puppets with a sleeve, which is easier to play with.

He quickly became a professional puppeteer with his own traveling theatre and he also in small theatres in Lyon. He joined a man, called "le Père Thomas" to work with him in the markets.

The Père Thomas was entertainer and played violin. He used to chat with the puppets Laurent Mourguet was playing with, improvise songs or satirical scenes.

People loved Thomas but he had a fault: he was too fond of Beaujolais (Red wine)!! Thus, it became difficult for Laurent Mourguet to work with him (he was grumpy, fell asleep in the castelet, was often late ...). He decided to leave him.

As people always claimed for him, Laurent Mourguet had a great idea: He made a puppet in the image of the Père Thomas: Gnafron.

Later, he made another puppet which looked like him: Guignol : the same round face, round eyes, a turned-up nose and dimples.

