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Portfolio Essay 1: Madame Tussauds

Random people push through the crowd to try and grab their time to get their picture taken with Johnny Depp. The loud party music crashing through the room. Flashbulbs briefly sparking the room with intense light. One by one each person is victorious. The person smiles and drapes her arm around Johnny as if they were best friends. The picture is snapped, Johnny's lifeless smile looks back at the camera as the flash goes off. A new person pushes through the crowd. A flash goes off. Another picture is taken, Johnny's lifeless face and pose completely unchanged. Over and over again the ritual occurs.

This is my first time in London and I have stopped at Madame Tussauds, a world famous wax museum. This is my first visit ever to a wax museum. The first room of the museum is a "party" room where Johnny Depp, along with a multitude of other celebrities, including Sean Connery, Morgan Freeman and Jim Carrey, are posed in their best party poses. Some stars of the Bollywood screen, Indian movie stars with names that are unfamiliar to me, are off to the side forgotten by the masses staring in at the stars of Hollywood. Lifeless, the Bollywood stars show no distress that there are throngs of people putting their arms around the Hollywood stars and having their pictures taken with them whereas the stars of Bollywood are largely ignored by the masses of people. Shuttling from one star to the next. Pushing their way forward to have their picture taken with each star.

Madame Tussauds is an odd looking building with a large solid white facade bearing Marie Tussaud's picture on the side with the dates 1761 to 1850, with a large green dome next to it with a dark red ring around it with Madame Tussauds printed in gold script written multiple times around it with an odd large blue cylinder standing behind the dome. The wax museum has seen around fifty million people pass through its doors in the over 200 hundred years that it has been open.

Madame Tussauds was started by Marie Tussaud, whose first wax sculptures were of Voltaire and Benjamin Franklin. Further wax work, including the death masks of nobles and the monarchy killed during the French Revolution, made Marie Tussaud famous.

I can't help but imagine a young seventeen-year-old Marie Gresholtz, as she was known prior to her marriage to Francois Tussaud in 1795, who had been born in Strasberg, France in the year 1770. Her mother was a housekeeper for Dr. Philippe

Curtius, a physician and wax modeler, and she and Marie lived in Philippe's house. Philippe Curtius had originally learned the craft of wax modeling for making anatomical models. Five years prior Philippe Curtius had moved to Paris to start making wax models for art instead of medical reason. Curtius had taken a liking to Marie Gresholtz and started teaching her the art of wax modeling. Prior to his death in 1794, Philippe had opened two wax museums in France that he left to the twenty-four-year-old Marie. Marie turned the museums into a traveling show that went around France displaying her and Philippe's wax figures.

As I move out of the Hollywood party room and past a concession stand selling fake Oscars and popcorn I run into a throng of people. Unable to see ahead I wait among the masses to see the exhibit that is drawing so many people. As I get to the front I see the members of One Direction, a young pop band that came into existence in 2010, sitting on benches with people from the crowd going up and sitting on the benches with them while members of the Madame Tussauds staff snapped their pictures.

In 1802, Marie Tussaud took the show to Great Britain as a traveling exhibition show. The traveling exhibition show featured wax figures of statesmen and a section called The Chamber of Horrors, which featured wax figures of villains. The traveling exhibition show also provided patrons with news and information about global events and became a place where people could get world information as well as view the wax figures. The traveling exhibition show finally found a permanent home on Baker Street in London, home of legendary detective Sherlock Holmes, in 1835.

Next up is the Hollywood section, where the stars that were apparently not invited to the big wax shindig at the entrance are located. Robert Downey, Jr., portraying Sherlock Holmes located a mere two blocks away from where he might feel at home, Bruce Willis, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, in his most robotic form as the Terminator, are all in attendance here. I notice that the figures are easier to look at as the crowds of people seem to have died down.

Continuing on to the stars of yesterday, John Wayne, Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock all stare out at the mostly empty room not looking at all envious that One Direction is hogging all the attendees of the wax museum.

Her life came to an end in 1850, shortly after she made a self wax model. After her death her grandsons moved Madame Tussauds a block over to Marylebone Road in London in 1884, which is its current location. The Tussaud family lost control of the Tussaud Group, the operators of Madame Tussauds in 1889, due to financial problems and family fighting

and since then no member of the Tussaud family as had any control in the business. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the need for news from Madame Tussauds diminished. Newspapers were common place and people had no need to get their news from Madame Tussauds anymore. The focus became on celebrities. Tussaud Group added a cinema and restaurant to Madame Tussauds in 1928 and added a planetarium in 1958.

The large green dome seen from the outside of the building is where the planetarium was located, which was known as The London Planetarium. In 2006 the planetarium was shut down to make it a more celebrity based attraction. Schools in the London area had used the Planetarium to teach students about the solar system around them as well as providing shows to the public.

Reportedly the London Planetarium website had the following message after it's closure, "In 2006 the Planetarium was rebranded and renamed the Star Dome. The Star Dome is part of the Madame Tussauds attraction and is included in the ticket price. Please note that we no longer show astronomy-based shows."

Madame Tussauds stated that only a small percentage of customers were bothering to view the planetarium anymore, which is what prompted them to change it. At the current time it houses the Marvel Superheros 4D Movie experience.

A line is formed filling the room for the Marvel Superheros 4D Movie Experience. People are mulling around, within their designated line spot, unwilling to give it up or have to wait again for the next showing a scant five minutes later. The big doors to the theater open, an employee with a headset announces that people should enter the theater. Move into each isle all the way so no seats are wasted, said the amplified voice of the employee. The patrons who were patiently waiting in line are escorted into the theater to don their 3D glasses and watch an animated movie about superheros who ultimately end up having to save Madame Tussauds from Doctor Doom. Outside, a family with two children have paused, before the entry to the queue to look at a wax figure of Captain America on the side of the room. Hurry, or you will miss the show, barked the employee, her amplified voice echoing inside the theater and out for all to hear, to these stalled patrons. The employee shepherds the family into the theater and away from the wax work. The lights dim and the presentation starts.

Upon leaving the Marvel Superheros 4D Movie experience, one does not get a chance to re-enter the wax museum.

Looming before you is the brightly lit gift shop with the familiar rings of cash registers completing a sale. Children crying for some trinket that they must have to forever remember Madame Tussauds, which will ultimately become broken, lost or

eaten by the dog within the first two months of returning home. And the sounds of vehicles from the street, where the gift shop pours the finished masses into, readying itself for the next group of patrons who will be ushered into the gift shop in under five minutes. The patrons, ushered past the wax works, unable to return to gaze upon what they have missed.

As I exit the museum, I can't help to wonder, would Marie Tussaud be happy with how her museum is today? Would the throngs of people, pushing to have their photos taken with lifelike reproductions of their favorite stars make her smile with a content feeling? Or would the new attractions now contained within the building offer her pause?

The Madame Tussauds started by Marie Tussaud was very different than the one visitors flock to today, sometimes spending up to three hours in queue just to get in. In the days of Marie Tussaud, the wax figures and news and global events were the appeal that brought people in. Now, Madame Tussauds offers a collection of entertainment possibilities within its walls for its millions of visitors.

The animated Marvel Superheros 4D Movie experience, which opened in 2010, is a far cry from the wax works that Marie Tussaud became famous for. Marie Tussaud, who started out as the daughter of a housekeeper, who managed to survive the guillotine during the French Revolution, and created the world's most famous wax museum. Did she go through all this so that the wax figures now seen in her museum come second place to an animated 3D movie? Would she be happy touring the Madame Tussauds of today seeing what has become of it?

Madame Tussauds has been struck by tragedy numerous times since the Tussaud family lost control. In 1925 the building was massively damaged by a fire. An earthquake struck the building in 1931. And in 1940 the building was bombed by World War II bombers damaging or destroying most of the figures within the building. Oddly, the wax figure of Adolf Hitler survived the bombing with no damage at all.

The biggest changes to the establishment started occurring in 1993, when the five minute Spirit of London ride was added to Madame Tussauds. You are ushered into a black London taxi cab which is pulled via conveyer belt. The ride brings you through a quick history of London up to the present day. The Spirit of London incorporates moving wax figures and very elaborate sets which keeps the idea of a waxwork museum with modern innovations to make the displays become more alive. The Spirit of London ride is more of an attraction that I can see Marie Tussaud approving of.

Marie Tussaud herself dabbled with moving wax figures during her life. The first one she created in 1776 called Sleeping Beauty, which featured Madame Du Barry, Louis XV's mistress, which mechanically breathed. Not at all the spectacle that is seen within The Spirit of London but since Tussaud dabbled with moving wax figures, it is not a far cry to see her creating a ride with moving wax figures had the technology existed for it back in her time.

Prior to getting to The Chamber of Horrors, a display of real life villains and atrocities which happened within the past that dates back to Marie Tussaud's traveling show, you get to the Scream! attraction, a five minute haunted house walk with live actors that jump out at patrons. Combined with the live actors are what appear to be stationary wax figures throughout the walk. The lack of lighting within the attraction makes it impossible to tell if the stationary figures are wax work or if they are composed of some other substance, and there is no way to enjoy the figures at all since visitors are constantly pushing by to get away from something that scared them.

In 2007, Tussauds Group merged with Merlin Entertainment, owners of The London Dungeon and The London Eye. The Scream! attraction seems more appropriate for The London Dungeon, a gruesome walk through of London's dark history with live actors, than it does at Madame Tussauds. Under the control of Merlin Entertainment, it now takes a team of twenty sculptors a total of four months to create one new wax model, at a cost of £150,000 per model.

The local and global news is gone from Madame Tussauds. The waxworks are not gone, but they seem underplayed heavily when stacked up against some of the other entertainment now available at Marie Tussauds. The more stoic figures – legendary celebrities, world leaders and great people within culture – seem largely ignored for the passing celebrity fancy of the day. A complete turn around from the museum that Marie Tussaud had on Baker Street.

I was convinced during my experience that Marie Tussaud would not have been happy with what happened with Madame Tussauds. I was sure that she would have been upset with the heavier promoting of the additional attractions that were added to the wax museum that have less and less connection with wax works to the point where the waxwork angle is almost a side thought. However I am no longer convinced of this.

The fact remains that Madame Tussauds runs keeps people flowing through the doors every day, sometimes waiting up to huge amounts of time to enter. Even if some of these people have been drawn in due to the additional attractions within the building, they are still coming to visit her waxworks. If Scream, the Marvel Superheros 4D Movie Experience, The Spirit

of London, or the wax figures are the reason for them coming into Madame Tussauds is irrelevant. If some people rush through the wax works to get to the other programmes, ultimately that is their choice. However people are still, in 2014, coming in to Madame Tussauds and seeing the waxworks.

Madame Tussaud realized that there was a market to view famous people, according to an employee of Madam Tussauds. Even with all the changes that have occurred within the establishment over all of the years, there is still a market for viewing famous people.

Madame Tussaud originally wanted a place to display her craft for people to see it . That concept is still fully embraced with the current establishment under the control of Merlin Entertainment. The original desire behind the establishment is still going, in 2014.

In a corner of the cultures section, sharing an area with luminaries such as William Shakespeare, Pablo Picasso, Albert Einstein, and Charles Dickens to name a few sits a rather non-descript woman working at a table with clay. With a white bonnet wrapped around her head with her long brown hair sticking out. Dressed in a white skirt with a brown and white tied up top, looking very much of the peasant class of a long begone time. A wooden bookcase inset into the wall on her right is holding heads and bottles. Madame Tussaud, frozen in time at the craft that made her famous, at work forever within her waxworks. A family rushes by with young ones screaming to see Britney Spears as they head into the loud music of Whitney Houston drifting over the speakers in the music section.

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Portfolio Essay 2: Cambridge Scene

Set in amongst the grandeur and luxurious buildings in Cambridge is the Cambridge Market. Birds flock by the hundreds atop Great St. Mary's occasionally flying in circles over the striped tops of the market tents before perching back upon Great St. Mary's. The market looks out of place in Cambridge. Striped tent roofs, with white, green and red colors are set haphazardly it seems with anything imaginable for sale. Bicycles, German sausage, cell phone cases, souvenirs of all sorts, fruits, vegetables, cheese and flowers are among the wares for sale within the crowded tents of the market.

Dressed in a white fleece with his dark hair in a pony tail held up by a pink hair tie, Dominico Caputo sits on a purple and white cushion resting upon an ornate black and white blanket. Dominico is off to the side of the markets in front of the Guildhall. A cold breeze runs through and the air is cold as the sunlight is blocked by the Guildhall. Dominico plays his santur, a lute with angry strings, as he describes it.

A black case with red velvet lining lies propped open next to him. CDs of his music line one side of it and silver coins and an occasional piece of paper money are inside.

Dominico sits playing his music as people mull by, some going into the market, others just passing by. Occasionally one of the passersby tosses some silver into the case. Dominico comes to Cambridge when the weather is good. He has two daughters and no job to support them. So he plays in Cambridge for money. Dominico trained at the University of Venice for seven years to learn his craft and plays a mix of Indian, classical, flamenco and jazz on the santur.

Every two hours Dominico cleans up his set up and has to move to a new location, as the laws in Cambridge state. When he sets back up he must be 100 yards from any other person playing. Rules that Dominico says some street musicians respect and others do not.

The Cambridge Market, seemingly out of place in this prestigious town, where the colleges look elaborate and only the admitted can do more than look at the buildings. The make-shift canopies and tent poles with an eclectic collection of wares are just down the street from where Charles Darwin and Stephen Hawking still have listed university offices. Yet for the vendors within this bustling market filled with price haggling, this is a means of survival. Forever in the shadow of one of the most prestigious universities in the world, just trying to put food on the table and create a better life for their families.

An hour later, Dominico is not to be seen. He has moved from the markets to another location at Cambridge. No one has filled his spot yet. The people continue to mull on by.