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CREATION OF WAX TABLEAUX

IS EXACTING, EXPENSIVE

Walter's International Wax Museum

New York World's Fair, 1964-65

Creation of tableaux for Walter's International Wax Museum is an exacting, exhausting, and costly undertaking.

Months of research generally are required before a sculptor or designer can start his work.

For an historical scene, the production staff probes deeply into the times, customs, and fashions of the period. All possible paintings are obtained as guides in constructing the set. Every reference source is thoroughly digested. Clothing is painstakingly studied for styling, material, and coloring. Ancient or Biblical fabrics now may be extinct, in which case wardrobe personnel set out on treasure hunts through the largest yardage stores, where drapery and upholstery cloth sometimes meet the specifications. As a last resort, the material is woven to order.

When furnishings from antiquity are nowhere to be found, these too must be created by the design and carpentry departments.

(more)

Creation of Tableaux - add 1

Stone tablets for the Cleopatra scene had to be cut to order from museum pieces that could not be begged, borrowed, or bought.

Although all wax heads and body parts are finished by the same kind of procedure, their beginnings may be widely divergent. Wherever possible, the subject sits for sculpture of the clay head from which a wax model will be created. Famous persons often are too distant or busy to sit, in which event the sculptor works from as many photographs as is possible to obtain.

In cases of subjects who lived before the advent of photography, paintings and sculpture are used.

When a satisfactory clay likeness is obtained, a plaster mold is applied to the sculpture in three sections, so that it may be removed from the clay and from the wax that will be poured into it. The wax mixture contains five components, mostly beeswax, which imparts the lifelike translucency to the surface.

Wax poured into the plaster mold is called a slush cast, which hardens to a thickness of about an inch before the remainder is poured out to leave a hollow head. Much of the finished work, such as installation of eyes and teeth, is done from the inside.

One of the most delicate operations is insertion of eyes, which are made of glass and imported from Europe.

(more)

Creation of Tableaux - add 3

In a setting such as the window display of "Robin and the Seven Hoods", original costumes were obtained from Warner Bros.

Before joining their bodies, heads are taken to the barbershop or attended by the hair stylist. Coiffures are held in place by hair spray.

When all figures are ready for a scene, the set designer fixes them in place, reviews the installation of backgrounds, settings, and properties, and subjects every detail to thorough scrutiny before the tableau is dismantled for shipment to its place of exhibition.

Thus it is a small wonder that many historical groupings in Walter's International Wax Museum represent an investment of more than \$50,000.

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