

Exhibitions of Automata in Ireland in the Age of Enlightenment

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In March 1768, an advertisement in Dublin's *Freeman's Journal* highlighted an exhibition in the city that promised to "fill all the Faculties of the Mind" and charm "every Spectator".¹ The sole exhibit, a ten-foot-tall automaton theatre called the *Microcosm*, was promoted by the proprietor Edward Davies in language contrived to evoke wonder and curiosity for commercial gain. Automata were mechanical devices that mimicked living beings: elaborate clockwork objects, which could take the form of animals, figures, or moving tableaux.² In an explanatory pamphlet, sold to accompany his Dublin exhibition, Davies claimed that a visit to view the *Microcosm* offered paying visitors an experience "calculated to delight the eye, please the ear and improve the mind".³

In a period when the commercialisation of leisure created opportunities for entrepreneurs like Davies, the illusory capacity of automata, and the sensory stimulus of viewing them, was vaunted in their advertising. The unsettling concept that art was challenging nature, or that machines were confronting man, recurred in ephemeral print, used by canny exhibitors, alert to the synergy between curiosity and commerce. While certain aspects of Dublin's cultural life have received sustained attention – theatre and sport in particular – the wide range of shows that animated the capital during this period, from

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- 1 *Freeman's Journal*, 1 March 1768. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Toby Barnard, Dorit Kluge, John Loughman, Marian Lyons, Gaëtane Maës and Isabelle Pichet in preparing this chapter.
 - 2 Alfred Chapuis and Edmond Droz, *Automata: a historical and technological study*, London, 1958; Minsoo Kang, *Sublime dreams of living machines: the automaton in the European imagination*, Cambridge, MA; London, 2011; Antonia Harrison et al, *The marvellous mechanical museum*, Warwickshire: Compton Verney, 2018; Adelheid Voskuhl, *Androids in the Enlightenment: mechanics, artisans, and cultures of the self*, Chicago; London, 2013.
 - 3 Groups of 'Four or more' could view the exhibition at 'any Time from Ten till Three, and from Five till Seven'. Edward Davis, *A succinct description of that elaborate and matchless pile of art, called, the microcosm. With a short account of the solar system, interspersed with poetical sentiments, on the planets. Extracted from the most approved authors on that subject*. 8th ed., Printed by S. Powell, for the proprietor, Mr. Edward Davis, Dublin, [1767?]. The proprietor's surname is spelt Edward Davies in London imprints, but Davis in the Dublin edition of the catalogue.

automata to waxworks, warrants further investigation.⁴ They represent a dimension of urban life not easily overlooked by those navigating the city, whether as residents or visitors, for work or for leisure. Davies, the showman who brought the *Microcosm* to Dublin, was not responsible for creating the “ten-foot-tall wooden cabinet, in the form of a four-tiered ‘Roman Temple’, bedecked with trumpeting angels, the figures of classical gods, and a guard of sphinxes,” along with changing landscapes and “astronomical indications like solar time and the lunar faces”.⁵ Neither was the exhibit that presented the “cosmos in a cabinet” new to Dublin audiences.⁶ It jostled with disparate types of shows that catered variously, and often simultaneously, to the public’s desire to be “amused or instructed”, to “the indulgence of curiosity”, to the “sheer sense of wonder”, as well as to an aesthetic sensibility.⁷ Touring to London, Dublin, Scotland, Paris, the American colonies, and Jamaica, the *Microcosm* connected the curious across continents.⁸ Yet, while the confluence of art and science may have been part of a collective experience offered, there were regional variations. What passed for spectacle in the more populous and metropolitan city of London was not always replicated for Dublin’s smaller stage.⁹

A direct appeal to the senses was common in the advertising associated with commercial shows during the period covered by this collection of texts.¹⁰ It was addressed in notices announcing the arrival, location, and price of certain exhibitions, in puff pieces generated by, or on behalf of, their proprietors, and in the catalogues or pamphlets that accompanied some of them.¹¹ In the case of automata exhibited in Dublin during the

4 See for example, John C. Greene, *Theatre in Dublin, 1745–1820: A History* (2 vols., Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 2011; John C. Greene, *Theatre in Dublin 1745–1820: A Calendar of Performances*, 6 vols., Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 2011, James Kelly, *Sport in Ireland, 1600–1840*, Dublin, 2014.

5 Paul E. Sampson, “The Cosmos in a Cabinet: Performance, Politics, and Mechanical Philosophy in Henry Bridges’ ‘Microcosm’”, *Endeavour* 43 (1–2), 2018, pp. 25–31, here p. 25. *Making marvels: science and splendor at the courts of New York*, Wolfram Koeppel (ed.), exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2019, p. 203. On the *Microcosm*, see also Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, Cambridge MA.; London, 1978, pp. 60–62.

6 As will be shown, it was exhibited in Dublin during the 1740s. The term ‘cosmos in a cabinet’ is used by Sampson, 2018 (note 5).

7 Altick, 1978 (note 5), p. 1.

8 Sampson, 2018 (note 5), p. 25.

9 For an exploration of local and regional manifestations of public science, see for example, Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, Christine Blondel (eds.), *Science and spectacle in the European Enlightenment*, Abingdon and New York, 2016. The broader spectrum of commercial exhibitions in Ireland during this period merits fuller analysis, beyond the scope of this chapter.

10 See for example, Paul Keen, *Literature, commerce, and the spectacle of modernity, 1750–1800*, Cambridge, 2012. On the relationship between science and spectacle in eighteenth-century Britain, see Al Coppola, *The Theater of Experiment: Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford, 2016.

11 Pamphlets, of the kind used by Edward Davis/Davies in connection with the *Microcosm*, doubled as an additional source of revenue and a marketing tool. On the emergence of printed ephemera and its relationship with forms of sociability see Gillian Russell, *The Ephemeral Eighteenth Century: Print, Sociability, and the Cultures of Collecting*, Cambridge, 2020.

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a combination of sophisticated mechanisms, coupled with the clever sequencing of artefacts, was clearly intended to evoke aural and visual surprise. The responses of spectators are inevitably difficult to recover. A surviving broadside for Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg's celebrated sound-and-light show, the *Eidophusikon*, includes the annotation "very well worth seeing indeed", a ghostly trace of an anonymous spectator, in Cork, Ireland's 'second city'.¹²

The making and exhibiting of automata reached a high point in the eighteenth century, by which time they were firmly part of the cultural landscape of European cities.¹³ As complex objects with sophisticated mechanisms, they were simultaneously enthralling and unsettling.¹⁴ In his intellectual history of the automaton as an idea in the European imagination, Minsoo Kang cites a letter from the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, written after a gathering where Rousseau and Jacques de Vaucanson, the celebrated maker of automata, were both in attendance.¹⁵ Rousseau claimed not to be impressed by Vaucanson's man-made wonders, exhibitions of which had been captivating European audiences. Alluding to the complex meanings that came to be associated with the term automata in the eighteenth century, Rousseau wrote that he came from a land, already "filled with quite well-made machines", who, in "going through the motions of their programmed activities", knew how to play cards, to "swear, drink champagne, and spend the day reciting lies to other, quite wonderful machines, that pay them back in kind".¹⁶ His comments reflect a trope in visual and textual satire of the period, where automated humans were pilloried for mimetic behaviour and poor judgement.¹⁷

In a recent analysis of science and splendour in the courts of Europe, Wolfram Koeppe has written that, "from their very beginnings, automata elicited from onlookers a profound curiosity and wonderment, as well as strong – indeed, at times visceral – emotions that speak to these early machines' evocation of a vital, lifelike essence".¹⁸ Some of these objects were so compelling that they caused viewers to question the existence of a life-force within them; they appealed at once to the senses and to the emotions. Three of the most celebrated automata, made in the second half of the eighteenth century by the Swiss watchmaker Pierre

12 National Library of Ireland, EPH E289. On de Louthembourg, see Ann Bermingham, "Technologies of Illusion: De Louthembourg's *Eidophusikon* in Eighteenth-Century London", *Art History* 39, 2016, pp. 379–399; Olivier Lefevre, *Philippe-Jacques de Louthembourg (1740-1812)*, Paris, 2012.

13 See, in particular, Chapuis and Droz, 1958 (note 2).

14 Franziska Kohlt, "In the (automated) eye of the beholder: Automata in human culture and the enduring myth of the modern Prometheus", in Antonia Harrison et al., 2018 (note 2), p. 19.

15 Kang, 2011 (note 2), pp. 146–147. See also Jacques de Vaucanson, *Le mécanisme du fluteur automate, présenté a Messieurs de l'académie royale des sciences*, Paris, 1738.

16 Kang, 2011 (note 2) pp. 146–147.

17 For early nineteenth-century examples of satirical prints referencing automata, see: Anon, *Nicolas dansant l'Anglaise!*, hand-coloured etching, 1815, British Museum no. 1868,0808.8238; Robert Seymour, *The March of Intellect*, hand-coloured etching, c. 1828, British Museum no. 2003,0531.29.

18 Koeppe (ed.) 2019, (note 5), p. 201.

Jacquet-Droz, his son Henri-Louis, and Jean Frédéric Leschot, could between them play harpsichord, draw and write.¹⁹ An automaton artist shown in Dublin in the early nineteenth century, and later discussed, created drawings and poems, the latter in English and French.

Automata exhibited in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Ireland ranged from tiny gold and enamelled caterpillars and mice to figures that could convey the illusion of human breathing, musical performance, and draughtsmanship. When the *Microcosm* was shown in Dublin during the 1760s, it was advertised in a way that directly addressed the sensory dimension in the experience of viewing it. As previously indicated, this was not its first outing in Ireland. Made by the Essex clockmaker Henry Bridges, completed in 1733, it was created for the Duke of Chandos, but when the duke failed to buy it, Bridges, and later Davies, toured it as an exhibit.²⁰ It was shown in Dublin in 1743, where potential visitors were invited to ascend a flight of stairs to see “The World in Miniature”.²¹ At the apex of the mechanism were three alternating scenes, the first representing the Muses on Mount Parnassus playing a variety of instruments, the second representing Orpheus and the wild beasts, and the third, “a beautiful grove [...] adapted with great propriety to entertain both the eye and the ear, and to produce pleasing ideas in the imagination”.²² A poem published in *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal*, written from the perspective of the mythological god Jove, and likely placed by, or on behalf of, the proprietor, declares the deity, “greiv’d that my world, hath with amazement seen, itself outrival’d in a small machine”.²³

During the late 1760s, when the *Microcosm* was re-exhibited in Dublin at Geminiani’s exhibition room on Dame Street, it was possible to buy a perpetual ticket for five shillings, a single admission for half a crown, to attend a lecture on its different facets, or indeed to buy the explanatory souvenir pamphlet for six pence.²⁴ There were multiple daily exhibitions of its paintings, music and mechanisms that were presented as, “a graceful Composition of Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music, and Astronomy”.²⁵ A visit to the exhibition promised to delight the imagination and nourish the soul – the advertising framed in rhetoric responding to the impetus towards rational entertainment and the popular science associated with the period.²⁶

19 Along with a fourth automaton, “an assemblage of parterres, rocks, architecture and cottages”, these automated figures were exhibited in London, Paris and Lyon in the second half of the eighteenth century. The automated figures are part of the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

20 Sampson, 2018 (note 5), p. 25. This represented a change from intended private use to public use.

21 The venue in this case was an upstairs room at *The Raven* in College Green. *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal*, 20 March 1743. Private viewings could be accommodated at prices from 2 shillings, 6 pence for 2–3 people, 1 shilling for groups of 10 or more, and a general public viewing each evening at a cost of 1 shilling.

22 Edward Davis, 1767 (Note 3), pp. 5–6.

23 *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal*, 29 April 1746, cited in Sampson, 2018 (note 5), p. 29, which describes it as the earliest audience response to the *Microcosm*.

24 An advertisement of the *Microcosm* in the *Freeman’s Journal*, 4 March 1769, included the addendum “NB Coaches can drive down Shaw’s-court and turn”.

25 *Saunders’s News-Letter*, 16–18 November 1767.

26 *Ibid.*



1 Silver Swan Automaton from the Museum of James Cox, 1773, Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham

Just as Henry Bridges, the original creator of the *Microcosm*, had exhibited his automaton theatre when it failed to find a home, the jeweller James Cox showed versatility on a more ambitious scale when the market for his elaborate musical clocks, automata, and jewelled items declined in the late eighteenth century.²⁷ Repurposing some of his finest automata for display in London (fig. 1) with a scaled-down Dublin version, his intention was to sell the exhibits by lottery.²⁸ This represents a particularly striking instance of the sort of adaptability showmen (and women) were required to

27 Clare Le Corbeiller, “James Cox: A Biographical Review”, *The Burlington Magazine*, 112, June 1970, pp. 350–358; Alison FitzGerald, “Astonishing automata: staging spectacle in eighteenth-century Dublin”, in *Irish Architectural & Decorative Studies: The Journal of the Irish Georgian Society* 10, 2007, pp. 18–34; Catherine Pagani, “The Clocks of James Cox: Chinoiserie and the Clock Trade with China”, *Apollo*, 141, January 1995, pp. 15–22; Marcia Pointon, “Dealer in Magic: James Cox’s Jewellery Museum and the Economics of Luxurious Spectacle in Late-Eighteenth-Century England”, in Neil De Marchi and Craufurd D. W. Goodwin, (eds.), *Economic Engagements with Art*, Durham and London 1999, pp. 423–51; Roger Smith, “James Cox (c.1723–1800): A Revised Biography”, *The Burlington Magazine* 142, June 2000, pp. 353–361.

28 James Cox, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Several Splendid Pieces of Mechanism and Jewellery, in Mr Cox’s Museum, Now Exhibiting at the Great Room, in William Street, Dublin*, Dublin, S. Powell, 1774.



2 Exhibition Room of the Society of Artists, South William Street, Dublin

demonstrate in an environment where commercial exhibitions vied with one another, as well as with other forms of urban entertainment.²⁹

Newspaper advertisements suggest that Cox's Dublin exhibition was held in the Society of Artists Exhibition Room on South William Street (fig. 2), the first purpose-built exhibition venue in Ireland. There were distinctive aspects to the Dublin version of his show, including the fact that he altered the catalogue to assure Dublin jewellers that he did not intend to injure their trade by taking commissions while he was in the city.³⁰ This was during a period of significant competition from British imports of jewellers' work.

29 For example, women exhibited waxworks, paper models and needlework in Dublin towards the end of the long eighteenth century.

30 James Cox, 1774 (note 28), pp. 3-4.

It underscores the value of considering regional variations to popular exhibits and the relationship of centre (in this case London) to periphery (Dublin, Britain's 'second city').³¹

The capacity for key exhibits to captivate visitors – by mimicking the appearance of life and actions – is illustrated by a description of one of the pair of clockwork peacocks that were listed in the Dublin catalogue:

Even the smallest feathers are set surprisingly into motion, and rise with the greatest regularity; the wings at the same time have their proper animation; the head and neck also move in different directions, and the bill opens and shuts, so nearly to resemble nature, as cannot fail of exciting general admiration.³²

The wonder of automata that represented human figures – rather than birds, animals, or even insects – was heightened by their illusory ability to 'breathe'. The capacity to mimic this fundamental function of life via clockwork was highlighted in the trade ephemera associated with contemporary automata in Paris, London and Dublin, where the rational line between sensory bodies and lifeless but lifelike machines was key to the spectacle. "Piece the Seventh" in Cox's Dublin show was a man and a women dressed in "Turkish fashion", who greeted visitors to the exhibition and were described in the catalogue thus:

These figures, which are the first of the kind ever brought to such perfection, play various tunes, both duets and solos with the strictest musical truth, upon two ivory German Flutes; the wind actually proceeding from their mouths and their fingers performing the various graces of every note, with the most pleasing exactness.³³

While the museum was presented primarily as entertainment, Cox also claimed that "the use made of natural and mechanic powers in several of these pieces, offer surely ideas useful and philosophical enough to defend them from the reproach of being only glittering gew-gaws".³⁴ This was in a context where luxury, materialism, and automatism all had vocal critics.

The idea that machines could equal or surpass nature was also highlighted by the Irish organ-builder Marsden Haddock in the exhibition pamphlet for his exhibition of *Androides* that toured Ireland, Britain and North America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³⁵ Haddock's show is noteworthy for a number of reasons,

31 FitzGerald, 2007, (note 27), pp. 27–28; Alison FitzGerald, *Silver in Georgian Dublin*, London, 2016, p. 136.

32 Cox, 1774 (note 28), p. 19.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

35 Altick, 1978 (note 5), pp. 66–67, 79, 86, 362; *The Ricky Jay Collection*, Sotheby's New York, 27 October 2021, lots 287–290.

not least because it was not imported but rather originated in Ireland and then travelled widely beyond Ireland, but also for Haddock's entrepreneurial *élan* and consistent use of the term “androides” to advertise the exhibits, a word first used in the eighteenth century to describe automatons resembling human beings.³⁶

A poem that appeared in the *Bath Herald* in 1797 and was reproduced in at least one Irish imprint of his exhibition pamphlet, addressed “the ingenious Inventor of these almost human figures”, describing an encounter between Nature and Art, in which Art invites Nature to take a seat at Haddock's exhibition.³⁷ After being initially delighted and amused by the exhibits, it dawns on Nature that she is being usurped. In one sentence her mood shifts from “rapture” to “envy”, echoing the premise of the poem published in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* in response to the exhibition of the *Microcosm* in the city five decades earlier.

Haddock's Dublin exhibition in 1795 was held in the Lyceum Gallery on College Green.³⁸ In an advertisement printed in the *Freeman's Journal*, he made the bold claim that “the Androides, not only imitate human Actions, but appear to possess rational Powers”.³⁹ This idea that an exhibition-goer could be fooled into thinking that the artefacts were not just lifelike but possessed a life force recalls the writings of Pliny the Elder on artistic verisimilitude in the ancient world, specifically the competition between two painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, both said to be the best painters of the fourth century BCE.⁴⁰ Pliny relates the myth that Zeuxis painted grapes so realistically that birds tried to eat them. He went to view his competitor's painting and asked Parrhasius to lift the curtain in front of it, only to be astonished that the curtain was actually painted, and his eyes, even with the critical capacity of an artist, had been deceived.

Naturalia and *artificialia* co-existed in early collectors' cabinets, distinct offerings from nature or God and from man, and objects which stimulated the senses were prized. An engraving of one of the most famous early-modern collector's cabinets, formed by the Danish physician Ole Worm and dating to 1655, shows an automaton figure beside various natural specimens.⁴¹ But the idea that *artificialia*, in the form of mechanised figures, were threatening to displace nature, God's creations, was a disconcerting one. The alchemical power of the Greek god Prometheus, who, according to classical mythology, managed to bring clay figures to life, was cited in the newspaper advertisements for the Swiss craftsman-turned-showman Henri Maillardet, who took his exhibition of automata to Ireland

36 Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopædia; or, an universal dictionary of arts and sciences*, 1st edition, London, 1728 (2 vols.), vol. 1 p. 87 provides a definition of an androide, describing it as ‘an Automaton in figure of a Man’ that was capable of human actions.

37 See, for example, Marsden Haddock, *A description of Mr Haddock's exhibition of androides, or animated mechanism; also of telegraph worked by an automaton, with telegraphic dictionary*, & c, Cork, [1800?].

38 *Freeman's Journal*, 17 March 1795.

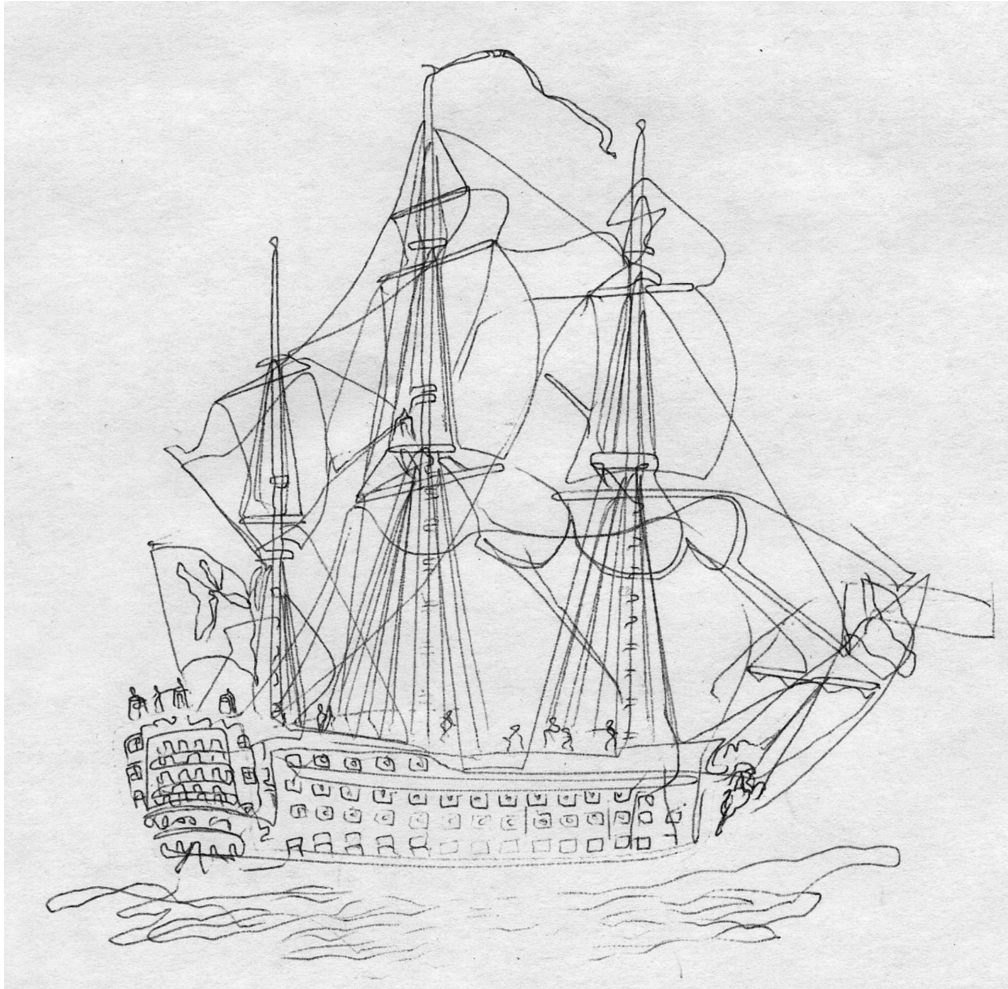
39 *Ibid.*

40 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History, Volume IX: Books 33-35*, Translated by W.H.S. Jones. Loeb Classical Library 394, Cambridge, MA, 1952, pp. 308–311.

41 Frontispiece to Ole Worm's *Museum Wormianum*, Leiden, 1655.

in the early nineteenth century.⁴² Maillardet presented Irish audiences with sophisticated continental craftsmanship, contributing to the noteworthy community of peripatetic artisans and artists drawn to Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Maillardet is associated with a remarkable automaton advertised as the *Juvenile Artist* that was capable of producing a series of drawings and poems, the latter in French and English (figs. 3a & b).⁴³ He organised exhibitions of this *Juvenile Artist* with other automata



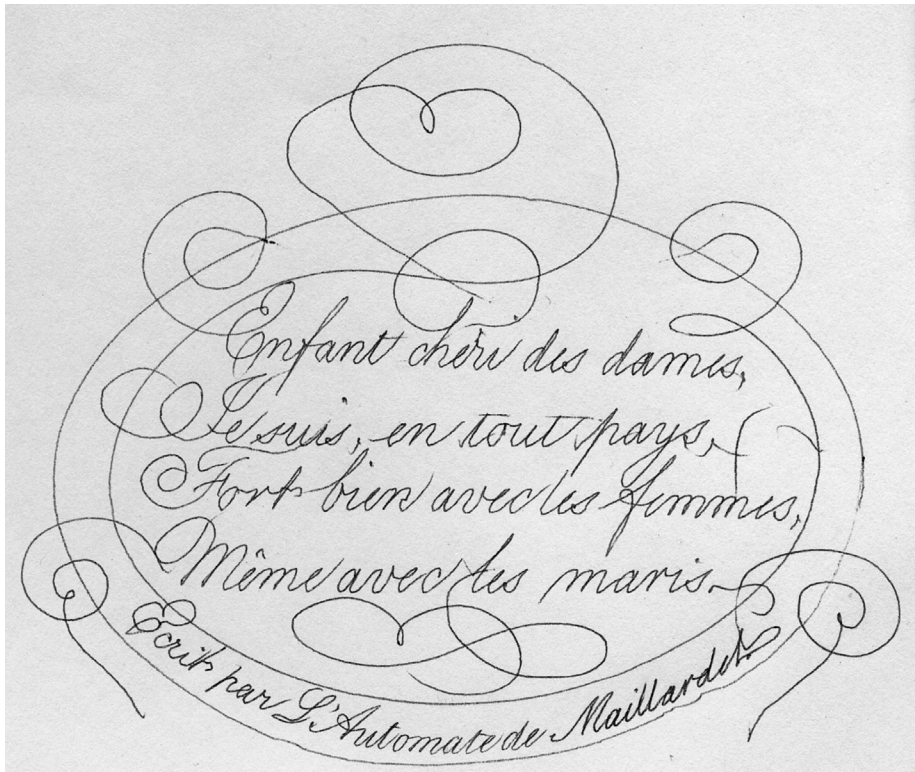
3 a Drawing produced by Henri Maillardet's automaton, *Juvenile Artist/Draughtsman Writer*

42 On automata and the tale of Prometheus, see Kohlt, 2018 (note 2), pp. 20–21. Maillardet's time in Ireland merits further analysis, which will be developed elsewhere.

43 See Chapuis and Droz, 1958 (note 2), pp. 302–308; Koeppel (ed.) 2019 (note 5), pp. 260–261.

in Ireland in the early nineteenth century before advertising it for sale by auction when retiring to his native Switzerland. The way that this object was described highlights a recurring theme in the way that exhibitions of automata were advertised in this period: the idea that man-made wonders could be mistaken for living beings, that nature could be surpassed by technology, and that, in sensory terms, the eye could be fooled.

One of the main attractions in his exhibition, an automaton figure also known as *La Belle Roxalana*, was described in contemporary newspapers as “a wonderful piece of mechanism”, which had the capacity to astonish exhibition-goers due to its lifelike “respiration”.⁴⁴ As previously noted, Cox had claimed this quality of verisimilitude for his mechanical flautists. Unsurprisingly, automaton figures that could speak, play music, draw and even produce poetry were singled out in advertisements, highlighted for their complexity and their illusory capacity to astonish the eyes.⁴⁵ A contemporary newspaper account remarked of Maillardet’s *Juvenile Artist*, that:



3 b Text produced by Henri Maillardet’s automaton, *Juvenile Artist/Draughtsman Writer*

⁴⁴ *Freeman’s Journal*, 21 November 1821.

⁴⁵ More sophisticated examples drew “connections between the divinity of the cosmos and the humanist desire to harness or control its power”, Koeppel (ed.), 2019 (note 5), p. 200.

If this Figure were destitute of motion it would be picturesque, but when, with the ease and elegance of a well-educated youth, it unites the power of producing such perfect imitation of Nature, as almost to sanction the Greek Mythology, when speaking figures formed out of solid clays, which touched by Prometheus, started into life.⁴⁶

Maillardet's exhibition, initially at least, was comparatively expensive to attend, which is perhaps not surprising given the precious nature of his exhibits, but like many in his position his prices dropped in response to the market once the exhibition was nearing the end of its run.⁴⁷ Where a panoply of popular attractions, from automata to waxworks, charged a standard admission price of a shilling, entrance to Maillardet's Belfast show was priced at 2 shillings, 6 pence in 1804.⁴⁸ Earlier the same year, he had shown his automata at the Exhibition Room on William Street in Dublin, where Cox's spectacular peacocks, a "miracle of art", had performed three decades earlier.⁴⁹ In January 1804, attendees of a ball at the Dublin venue enjoyed a private viewing of his automata at the late hour of 10 pm, followed by "an excellent dancing band". Gentlemen paid 7 shillings, 7 pence, for the pleasure of experiencing this spectacle while ladies were admitted for 5 shillings, 5 pence.⁵⁰ The commercial exhibitions and shows of Dublin, in all their variety, sought to pique the widest possible range of curiosity. Nevertheless, there was a delicate balance to be struck between the commercial impetus to fill exhibition spaces, whether established galleries or makeshift rented rooms, and satisfy all sensibilities. Inevitably, some exhibitors were more alert to local audiences than others, and also more skilled at self-presentation.

In 1824 Maillardet advertised that he was retiring to Switzerland and planned to exhibit his museum one last time for a month, this time in the Royal Arcade, Dublin.⁵¹ He arranged to sell his exhibits and claimed to be accepting offers greatly below their market value. The *Juvenile Artist*, for example, was valued at 4,000 pounds.⁵² Framing his show as a confluence of science and spectacle, he described it as the "daily resort of

46 This broadside is associated with a showing of the exhibition at York. *Unparalleled automatical museum. Which has been several times honoured by the presence of their Majesties, and patronized by many of the nobility and gentry, &c ...* [s.l.] : [s.n.], [1801?], British Library, General Reference Collection 85/1882.c.2.(58).

47 One of his exhibits was the *Siberian mouse*, described as a "specimen of art, composed of materials of the richest kind", which 'moves-stops-gazes, and turns away, with as much apparent sagacity as if it dreaded, like a natural one, to be made a captive of', *Freeman's Journal*, 16 March 1822. Sotheby's, *Treasures*, London, 8 July 2015, included as lot 47 an automaton mouse, attributed to Maillardet, cataloguing it as a "white mouse with enamelled fur set with irregularly-shaped baroque pearls, chased gold ears and paws, round ruby cabochon eyes".

48 *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 June 1804.

49 This is how Cox described one of the peacocks in the exhibition catalogue. Cox, 1774 (note 28), p. 20.

50 *Saunders's News-Letter* 19 January 1804.

51 *Freeman's Journal*, 14 January 1824.

52 *Ibid.*

scientific and fashionable families”, an exhibition that blended “instruction with entertainment”, and which promised to be suitably beneficial for “the youthful mind”.⁵³

Children were singled out in advertisements for various Dublin shows during this period, not just exhibitions of automata. However, the extent to which Maillardet’s exhibits were really instructive and beneficial for the youthful mind is debatable. Certainly, his exhibition promised creatures unfamiliar, even exotic, like the “Ethiopian caterpillar” and the “Siberian mouse”, though for those interested in learning more about far-off lands, menageries and dedicated natural history exhibits offered more in this regard.⁵⁴

The commercial exhibitions of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Dublin connected Irish audiences to a wider world, whether that was through the cosmopolitan communities of people who organised them, or the materials, objects and ideas that they introduced to local audiences. In Maillardet’s case, his *Juvenile Artist* was brought to America by another entrepreneur and ended up in Philadelphia, where it is now one of the key exhibits at the Franklin Institute.⁵⁵ So, at a time when there was a public appetite for popular science, when exhibition-goers were confronted with the spectacle of clock-work figures that actually appeared to breathe, and when the mechanical knowledge creating the illusion was a potentially profitable commodity, exhibitions of automata found a ready market with urban audiences in Ireland. Though it was an overstatement to claim, as he did, that Maillardet’s *Juvenile Artist* produced drawings that were “superior to the best specimens of the first Masters”,⁵⁶ it was still a spectacle to see such an extraordinary machine conjure up drawings for Dubliners to gaze at.

⁵³ *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 February 1824, *Freeman’s Journal*, 2 February 1824.

⁵⁴ During the 1770s *Saunders’s News-Letter* advertised an eclectic range of exhibits at the Hibernian Museum of Natural History, where children were admitted free of charge. See for example, *Saunders’s News-Letter* 17 and 24 April 1776, 3 May 1776. I am grateful to Toby Barnard for these references, and for reading an earlier version of this text. See also, Hibernian Museum of Natural Curiosities. *A catalogue of the animals, birds, coins &c. in the Hibernian Museum of natural curiosities, at the exhibition room, in William-street*. Printed by M. Mills No. 139, Capel-Street, n.d.

⁵⁵ The automaton is known as *The Draughtsman Writer*.

⁵⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 June 1804.

