

# People As Attractions at the Fair

## “Curiosity Show” and Panopticon

**No fair was complete without the extraordinary and the curious. Especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries, people with special abilities or unusual looks were the focus of attention. They presented themselves at funfairs, travelled the country with the circus or appeared at world fairs and amusement parks.**

In addition to artistic performances such as acrobatics, knife throwing or magic shows, so-called “curiosity shows” were particularly popular. People whose appearance was unusual were gawked at and degraded and marketed as “dwarfs”, “giants”, “lion people”, “Siamese twins” or “trunk people”.

Besides living people, panopticons and cabinets of curiosities at fairs attracted visitors with lurid and sensational promises. Plaster or wax figures of famous people or entire torture chambers were exhibited here. Natural anatomical preparations preserved in alcohol as well as wax models of anatomical collections with a pseudo-scientific facade were also popular exhibits.

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Whole prepared bodies were also shown in the panopticons: a famous example is the body of the “bearded lady” Julia Pastrana, who suffered from hypertrichosis. She died in 1860 during the birth of her child, who also had the disease. Her preserved body together with her child was exhibited all over Europe until 1970. It was not until 2013 that they were buried in Julia Pastrana's homeland in Mexico.