

pulled away the blade is released back into position. The actor with the knife squeezes a air pump in the handle and a rubber eyeball on the end of the knife inflates. The eye appears to be impaled on the tip of the knife. Many magic shops sell an inflatable ball and pump mechanism that could work as a base for this prop.

Cutting off a man's hand is easier than it sounds. Stiffen a glove with glue water so it holds it's shape and paint it like a real hand. The actor wearing the glove should still be able to move his fingers a bit. When the hand is chopped off the "chopper" removes the glove and the "chopee" moves his hand up into his cuff which is reinforced with a cardboard tube and fitted with a blood pack. The stiffened glove should hold it's shape perfectly as the unwilling amputee writhes in pain.

Many plays outside of the repertoire of the Grand Guignol call for realistic scenes of murder and mutilation. Look at Shakespeare, for instance. The secrets of the Grand Guignol coupled with a prop master's own skill and ingenuity can provide an arsenal of horrific tricks and turns. The effects can be so startling that it can surpass what we see in movies. After all, our audience witnesses the crime.

Excerpt from www.GrandGuignol.com -- From *CALLBOARD* magazine - April, 1996 by Russell Blackwood

The Gore and Glory of the Grand Guignol

A Chinese torture master rips a strip of flesh from his victims naked back. A lunatic gouges out a young woman's eye with a knitting needle. A French soldier's hands are chopped off by the enemy. What's more, all these atrocities and more have been witnessed by thousands of onlookers during a 60 year rein of terror that shocked and stunned Paris. Thankfully, no one got hurt. This murder, mayhem, and mutilation was staged for the enjoyment of ticket buyers at Theatre du Grand Guignol. Indeed, the victims and villains in these gruesome crimes are actors, playwrights, and prop masters who created plays so horrific that a doctor was stationed in the lobby to revive fainting spectators.

Established in 1897, the Grand Guignol quickly gained a reputation for staging one-acts. By far the most notorious was their repertoire of horror plays. The theatre's fame was so great that for many years Parisian guidebooks hailed it among the city's most popular attractions rivaled only by Maxim's, the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, and legalized brothels. History has remembered this fact and the phrase "Grand Guignol" has become synonymous with over the top bloodletting and gore.

Mel Gordon, currently a theatre Professor at U.C. Berkeley, is one of America's foremost authorities on the Grand Guignol. His book *The Grand Guignol -- Theatre of Fear and Terror* (Da Capo Press, 1997), chronicles the history, repertoire, and special effects of this unique theatre. Mel has let me in on some of the secrets that artists employed to induce sheer terror in an audience.

The stage trickery of the Grand Guignol was a closely guarded secret. Some of the effects were even patented. Mel says "The secrecy probably had more to do with concealing their simplicity of design than a desire to prevent other theatres from using them." Old publicity photos picture oddly proportioned daggers and wounds that are no more than a streak of blood across an actress' neck. Hardly the kind of effects that could frighten an audience. He reminds me that "the audience wanted to believe in what they were seeing, the acting was intense, and there was 20 to 40 minutes of suspense and dread leading up to the bloodletting."

The theatre itself is eerie and foreboding. Built as a convent in 1786, the interior is decorated with grinning cherubs carved into the beams of the vaulted ceiling. The front doors are solid oak and cut with a pseudo-gothic pattern. The building served as a blacksmith's shop, a fanatical preacher's pulpit, and an artist's studio before being converted to a 285 seat theatre complete with a balcony. The twenty-by-twenty foot stage was so close to the audience that one critic joked that you could shake hands with an actor during the show without leaving your front row pew. There's even a confessional booth from which some say you could hear the prayers of nuns as grizzly events were enacted on stage. Sets were often dimly lit with faint hints of red and green light around the proscenium. An orchestration of live sound effects, painstakingly rehearsed for each play, added to the gloom and impending horror.

Blood flowed like water at the Grand Guignol. A heated mixture, half carmine and half glycerin, is the base of the blood recipe. It drips and splatters like fresh blood, but will coagulate after just a few minutes to form scabs. Mel says that in later years, as money got tight at the theatre "Large body wounds were limited to women (smaller costumes to clean) and head wounds for men (less hair to clean)." On the subject of weapons he says "Daggers with retractable blades spurted blood when the blood-filled handles were squeezed." A turkey baster, rubber ball, or an eye dropper could provide a good base for building a blood squirting knife. A knife can also penetrate an arm or leg. Not unlike the old arrow through the head gag, a prop knife can be separated from its handle by a curved metal clasp that can then be fitted around an actors limb.

Mel has several suggestions on how to gouge out an eye. A female victim can be fitted with a plaster or latex quarter-mask (holding a sheep iris, lactose powder, and blood capsule) which is partly concealed by her hair hanging over that side of her face. The sheep's eye can be popped out of the mask with a knitting needle or even a bare hand. He grins and says "If it's a Veronica Lake hair style and the sheep iris matches her real eye it's a beautiful effect."

Another eye-popping effect is to scoop it out with a spoon. A sheep's eye can be hidden in the hollowed out handle or in a tight fitting sleeve on the handle of the spoon. The actor doing the scooping conceals it in his grasping fist and squeezes the eyeball out of the handle and into the bowl of the spoon. Mel says "Using an animal eye works best because it bounces a bit if it hits the floor." One method even produces an eyeball skewered on the end of a jack-knife. The retractable blade of the knife moves into the handle which squirts blood when pressed against the victim's face. Affixed to the end of the handle is a piece of adhesive "skin" (latex or lamb skin) with a slit to allow the blade to move through it. As the handle is pressed against the victims eye the sticky "skin" is pressed to the eyelid leaving a gory empty eye socket. When the knife handle is