



Living statues: Entertainment on the street



In fact, there are so many of them on the streets of Barcelona that the city council has decided to control the number and give out only thirty licences for fifteen locations. Local resident Joan Castells explained, 'You can't move past the crowds on the pavement, and most of them are not really entertaining people, they're just begging.' Now, each licensed artist can perform either in the morning or in the afternoon.

So why do so many people want to be living statues? Joan Castells says, 'It's an easy way of earning money. All you need is some makeup and a costume.' But according to one of the living statues in London's Covent Garden, 'Preparation takes ages – and so does getting clean at the end of the day. It's also extremely difficult to stay completely still for long periods. I can't even move my eyes or show that I'm breathing.' And although it's 'understood' that if you take a photo or a selfie, you leave some money, not everyone is so kind and generous. 'Nobody gets rich doing this,' said the living statue I spoke to in London.

Go sightseeing in many cities today and among the famous buildings, street markets and other attractions, sooner or later you'll see a special kind of display – living statues. These street performers, who are usually dressed as famous characters from history or from popular culture, have become a common sight in tourist areas of Paris, London, Barcelona and other cities. The performance involves standing completely still for long periods of time. The performers are like statues, but they are human.

Perhaps they don't get rich, but every performer has some tricks to encourage people to give them money. Every time a tourist throws them a coin, they react with a quick, small movement. Perhaps they wave, or turn their head or reach to touch the person. The statue comes to life for just a moment, entertaining the crowd and rewarding the payment. And maybe giving the tired and aching performer a chance to move into a new, more comfortable position.

This kind of performance has a long history, and it has existed in various forms since the sixteenth century. The French used the term *tableaux vivants*, which means 'living pictures'. A group of actors stood in positions to illustrate a scene, but they didn't speak or move during the display.

The subject of the displays was often religious or from mythology. In some places, they were part of royal occasions. In the Catalan region of Spain, *tableaux vivants* has been a popular tradition since the early eighteenth century. The performances are called *Els Pastorets* (shepherds). They take place at Christmas and show the nativity scene. Nowadays, Catalonia is also famous for its modern living statues.