Trapezist Antonio Diavolo

This automaton (anything that can move or act by itself) is named Antonio Diavolo after a renowned Italian acrobat. The magic of the automaton’s success emanated from his lifelike demeanor, which his creator, Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin, highlighted during performances. During his routine, Robert-Houdin instructed Antonio, asked questions to which Antonio responded by shaking his head, and encouraged him to attempt ever more daring trapeze acts, some of which are recorded in the video.

Trapezist Antonio Diavolo
1848
Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin
French, 1805–1871
Mixed media
29 x 9 x 5 in.
Lent by the John Gaughan Collection, Los Angeles