Android Clarinetist

Android Clarinetist, a life-size robot standing over six feet tall, was created by Cornelis Jacobus van Oeckelen in 1838. A costume would have concealed the intricate inner workings that allowed him to play four pieces of classical music on a 32-note clarinet.

Large-scale automatons, conceived as mechanical wonders and designed to enact allegorical performances, heightened the fascination of Renaissance and Mannerist gardens and reached the peak of their popularity in the eighteenth century. Van Oeckelen’s android toured the major cities of the Netherlands as well as Boston and New York, and became a public sensation.

Android Clarinetist
1838
Cornelis Jacobus van Oeckelen
Dutch, 1798–1865
Mixed media
74 ½ x 26 ½ x 30 in.
Lent by the John Gaughan Collection,
Los Angeles