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METHOD OF AND APPARATUS FOR PRODUCING THEATRICAL ILLUSIONS

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3 Sheets—Sheet 2.

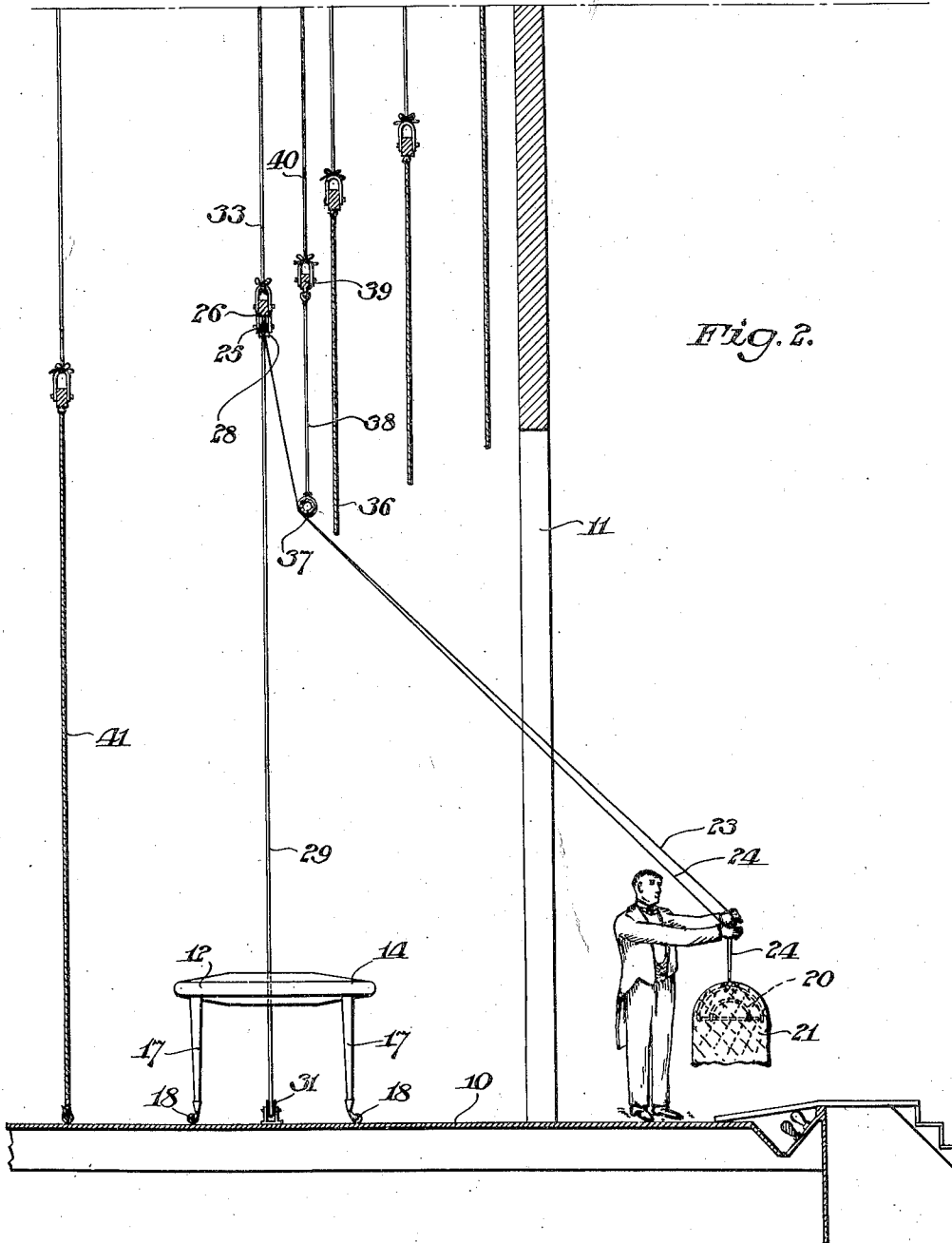


Fig. 2.

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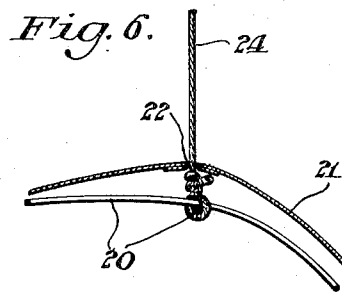
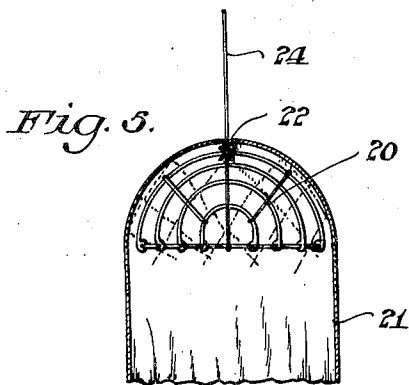
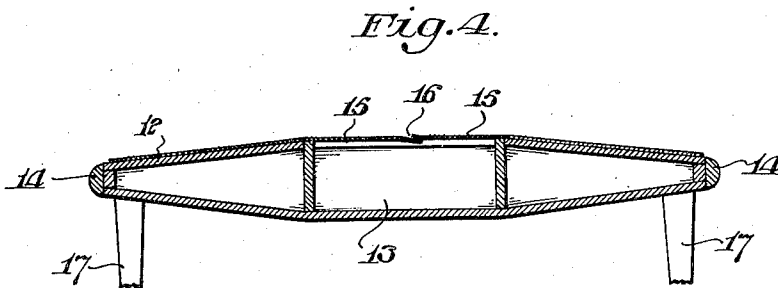
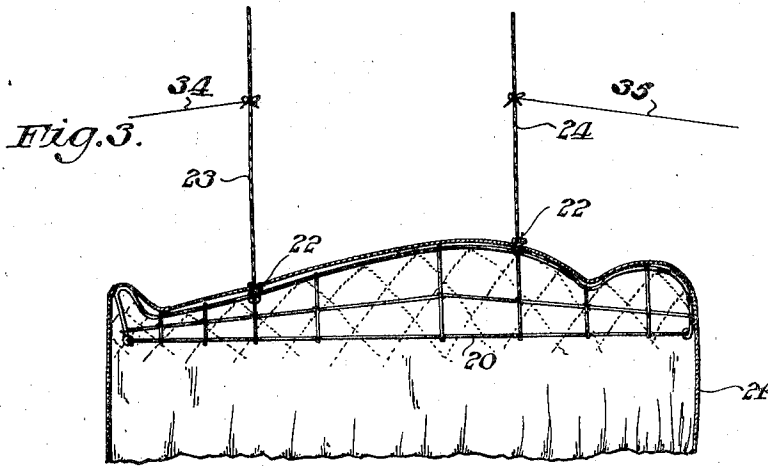
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UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

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METHOD OF AND APPARATUS FOR PRODUCING THEATRICAL ILLUSIONS.

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Our invention relates to a method of and apparatus for producing theatrical illusions, and more specifically considered, it relates to such method and apparatus as are adapted to produce the illusion to the spectators of a person floating about in mid-air without visible support, apparently under the hypnotic or other mystic influence of a "magician", hereinafter referred to as the performer. Our invention further contemplates, as a final effect in connection with the above illusion, the sudden and mysterious vanish of the floating body.

The principal object of our invention is to provide an improved method of and apparatus for producing the illusion hereinabove mentioned, the arrangement being such that the body may be caused apparently to float in mid-air about the stage, at times remote from the performer and at other times in proximity to the performer, but at all times without perceptible means of support and physical control. A further object of our invention is to provide in such method and apparatus improved means whereby the body may be finally caused to vanish suddenly and mysteriously.

The nature and characteristic features of our invention will be more readily understood from the following description, taken in connection with the accompanying drawings forming part hereof, in which:

Figure 1 is a rear elevation, partly in section and to a certain extent diagrammatic, illustrating the preferred form or arrangement for carrying out the method and showing apparatus embodying the main features of our present invention;

Fig. 2 is a similar view in transverse section, the performer being shown on the forward part or "apron" of the stage, and the supposed body being suspended beneath his hands by means invisible to the spectators;

Fig. 3 is a longitudinal sectional view of a wire form and covering sheet used for creating the illusion of the floating body;

Fig. 4 is a transverse section of the top portion of a table used for the exchange of the actual person for the wire form, and for the surreptitious removal of the person from the view of the spectators;

Fig. 5 is a transverse section of the wire form and covering sheet; and

Fig. 6 is a detail thereof enlarged, illus-

trating the manner of attachment of the supporting threads to the wire form.

Referring to the drawings, in the particular exemplification of our invention therein shown, 10 is the stage and 11 is the proscenium opening. 12 is an exchanging table having a central secret compartment 13 in which the actual person, whose body is to be apparently floated about the stage and auditorium, is adapted to be concealed.

The table 12 is provided with a relatively narrow edge portion 14, the top and bottom surfaces being inclined from the narrow edge portion 14 to the central compartment. The top and bottom surfaces of the table are covered with black material, and the whole arrangement is such as to create the illusion of a table having an exceedingly thin top, of the apparent thickness of the bead 14 at the edge thereof.

The top of the secret compartment 13 is closed by means of elastic webbing 15, the portions at the central part of the compartment overlapping as at 16, thereby providing means of ingress and egress for the person whose body is to be exchanged for a wire form, in the manner and for the purposes which will be hereinafter more fully set forth. The legs 17 of the table 12 are preferably provided with casters 18, whereby the table may be removed from the stage with little effort, notwithstanding the weight of the concealed person in the secret compartment thereof.

There is provided a wire form 20, suitably shaped so that when the same is covered with a sheet 21 it will create the illusion of the body of a person concealed beneath the sheet. The wire form 20 is made of fine, but relatively stiff wire, preferably black in color. It has been found in practice that such flexibility as the wire form may possess will only serve to enhance the illusion that a living person is concealed beneath the sheet, when the sheet is draped over the wire form. The sheet 21 is provided with apertures 22, preferably two in number, for the passage of suspending threads 23 and 24.

The suspending threads 23 and 24 are preferably made of fine black silk which for the proper operation of the illusion, must be of sufficient strength to support the draped wire form during the ordinary manipulation of the same, and yet of sufficient fragility to enable the same to be broken at the proper

time in the manner and for the purpose hereinafter set forth. It will also be understood that the design and color of the back drop curtain 41 and the lighting effects will be such that the suspending threads 23 and 24 will at all times be invisible to the spectators. The suspending threads 23 and 24 are tied to the wire form at separated points, and the same extend upward from the wire form and pass through eyelets 25 secured to the under side of a batten 26. The batten 26 is suspended in the usual manner of suspension of scenery battens, by suitable cables 33 from the grid or other superstructure of the theatre stage.

The batten 26 also serves to support two pulleys 27 and 28, over which pass endless ropes 29 and 30, which are also guided in pulleys 31 and 32 secured to the floor of the stage. The end of the supporting thread 23 is secured at a suitable point to the endless rope 29, while the end of the supporting thread 24 is likewise secured at a suitable point to the endless rope 30. The endless ropes 29 and 30 are arranged in proximity to each other, whereby the same may be operated by a single operator, who is thus able to control the up and down movement of the wire form, and the sheet covering the same, in a realistic manner, while at the same time permitting relative vertical movement of the suspending threads 23 and 24 should the same be required. It will be noted that the suspending threads 23 and 24 extend upward from the wire form to the guiding eyelets 25 in the batten 26, in substantial parallelism, whereby the horizontal position of the wire form will be more or less automatically maintained notwithstanding the manipulation of the same about the stage, and, if desired, into the auditorium.

Attached to the suspending thread 23 is an auxiliary controlling thread 34, which extends in a general horizontal direction and is adapted to be controlled by an operator concealed in the wings. Likewise, the suspending thread 24 has secured thereto a similar thread 35, which also extends to another concealed operator in the wings, on the other side of the stage.

In order to prevent the suspending threads 23 and 24 from bearing against the top border scene 36, and thereby pulling the same outward when the form is being manipulated in the extreme front part of the stage, or in the auditorium, there is provided a guide bar 37, preferably made of a suitable length of iron pipe of sufficient weight to maintain its position, this bar 37 extending across the back of the border scene 36 near the lower edge thereof. The bar 37 may be suspended by suitable cables from a batten 39, which in turn may be supported in the usual manner by suitable cables 40 from the grid or other superstructure of the stage.

In presenting the illusion, the wire form 20 is preferably arranged at the back of the top of the table 12, with the sheet 21 lying upon the top surface of the table in front of the form, thereby serving preliminarily to conceal the same, it being understood that the threads 23 and 24 are initially secured to the form and extend through the openings 22 in the sheet 21. The table 12 is placed in the center of the stage, in a position directly beneath the batten 26, with the form and sheet arranged thereon as above described.

The performer and the person (preferably a woman), whose body is to be apparently floated, appearing upon the stage, the performer makes a few pseudo-hypnotic passes, whereby the person is brought to a state of apparent hypnotic trance, whereupon the person is lifted upon the top of the table by the performer's assistants, and the sheet is then raised for the purpose of draping the same over the person, sufficient slack at this time being provided in the threads 23 and 24 to enable the sheet to be freely and properly manipulated. This sheet is momentarily held in a vertical position, and while the person is thus concealed behind the sheet, she passes into the secret compartment 13 of the table, and the wire form is brought forward and substituted upon the top of the table for the body of the actual person. The slack of the suspending threads 23 and 24 will now be taken up by the proper manipulation of the endless ropes 29 and 30.

The performer may now call for the body to rise, whereupon, by the synchronous operation of the endless ropes 29 and 30, the wire form 20, with the sheet 21 draped over the same, will be lifted above the table top until the depending skirt portion of the sheet 20 will be clear of the table. The assistants now preferably push the table off into the wings, seemingly for the mere purpose of clearing the stage, whereupon the person concealed in the secret compartment may be permitted to emerge from the table, out of the view, of course, of the spectators.

The form may now be caused to float in mid-air, to one side or the other of the stage, ad libitum, by the manipulation of the threads 34 and 35 which extend to the operators concealed in the wings, and likewise the body may be caused to rise and fall by suitable manipulation of the endless ropes 29 and 30. In the foregoing manner, there will be created the weird and startling, yet realistic effect of a body of a living person moving about in space, without apparent support, at the will of the performer.

However, for the purpose of further enhancing the illusion, the performer may, when the body is in a suitable location on the stage, in the course of various mystic

passes or movements, work himself to a position back of the form and engage the suspending threads 23 and 24 between the fingers of his respective hands, with the body suspended an appreciable distance below, and may, by advancing forward, impel the body to the front of the stage, the suspending threads 23 and 24 being slacked off at the same time to the proper amount, and, if desired, the performer may continue out over the rundown usually provided in connection with entertainments of this character, whereby the body may seemingly be caused to float, under the influence of the performer, into the auditorium, over the heads of the spectators. In this manner, a most astounding effect is produced, as it is not conceivable to the spectators how a body of the weight of a human being can be so manipulated.

As hereinbefore pointed out, when the performer moves forward with the form before him, the suspending threads 23 and 24 would be likely to pull the top border scene forward, whereby the spectators might have a clue to the modus operandi of the illusion. To prevent this, the relatively heavy pipe 37 is suspended immediately in back of the top border scene 36, this pipe being of sufficient weight to provide a guide bar against which the threads 23 and 24 may bear, and thus prevent distortion of the top border scenery.

After the performance has been carried out to a sufficient extent as hereinabove outlined, the performer may then recede to and upon the stage, permitting the draped form to assume a position directly under the batten 26, from which the suspending threads 23 and 24 extend downward, whereupon, by the further manipulation of the endless ropes 29 and 30, the draped form may be raised a sufficient distance to enable the performer to grasp the lower edge of the front depending skirt of the sheet 21. The operator who is manipulating the endless ropes 29 and 30 now steadies the same, whereupon the performer, with a quick pull, causes the threads 23 and 24 to be broken, at the same time causing the wire form 20 to be cast downward to the back, and more darkened portion of the stage. In this manner, the illusion is created of finally causing the complete disappearance of the body in mid-air.

It has been found that the illusion presented as hereinabove set forth is startling and mystifying to the highest degree, and the same may be readily set up and arranged for presentation in any ordinary theatre. We are aware that a draped form for the purpose of creating the illusion merely of a suspended body has been heretofore used, but the novel arrangement and manner of manipulation whereby the most startling ef-

fects herein described are procured have not been known or used before our invention of the same.

It will, of course, be understood that various changes may be made in the presentation of the illusion without departing from the spirit of our invention. For example, in lieu of the exchanging table hereinbefore described for the purpose of substituting the wire form for the actual body of the person, other apparatus known to "magicians" for effecting such an exchange may be employed, and likewise the particular routine of the presentation may be varied according to the individual requirements and desires of the performer.

Having thus described the nature and characteristic features of our invention, what we claim as new and desire to secure by Letters Patent, is:

1. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a draped form shaped in the resemblance thereof, suspending said draped form by threads invisible to the spectators, raising and lowering said form by the concealed manipulation of said suspending threads, and moving said form sidewise by the concealed manipulation of invisible threads extending in sidewise directions.

2. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a draped form shaped in the resemblance thereof, suspending said draped form by threads invisible to the spectators, raising and lowering said form by the concealed manipulation of said suspending threads, and moving said form to the front by a visible performer manually engaging the suspending threads without the knowledge of the spectators and then advancing.

3. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a draped form shaped in the resemblance thereof, suspending said draped form by threads invisible to the spectators, raising and lowering said form by the concealed manipulation of said suspending threads, and moving said form to the front by a visible performer manually engaging the suspending threads without the knowledge of the spectators and then advancing, the suspending threads being simultaneously slacked off as the performer advances to maintain said form at the desired position below and apparently unconnected with the hands of the performer.

4. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a draped form shaped in the resemblance thereof, suspending said draped form by threads invisible to the spectators, raising and lowering said form by the concealed manipulation of said suspend-

ing threads, moving said form sidewise by the concealed manipulation of invisible threads extending in sidewise directions, and moving said form to the front by a visible performer manually engaging the suspending threads without the knowledge of the spectators and then advancing.

5. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a draped form shaped in the resemblance thereof, suspending said draped form by threads invisible to the spectators, raising and lowering said form by the concealed manipulation of said suspending threads, moving said form sidewise by the concealed manipulation of invisible threads extending in sidewise directions, and moving said form to the front by a visible performer manually engaging the suspending threads without the knowledge of the spectators and then advancing, the suspending threads being simultaneously slacked off as the performer advances to maintain said form at the desired position below and apparently unconnected with the hands of the performer.

6. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a form shaped in the resemblance thereof, said form being normally invisible to the spectators, covering said form with a sheet, suspending said form when covered by said sheet by threads invisible to the spectators, said threads being of sufficient strength to support said form and sheet during the ordinary manipulation of the same but of sufficient fragility to enable the same to be arbitrarily broken, and finally causing the apparent vanishing of the body by violently manipulating the sheet to cause the threads to break and to cast the form free of the sheet.

7. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a form shaped in the resemblance thereof, said form being normally invisible to the spectators, covering said form with a sheet, suspending said form when covered by said sheet by threads invisible to the spectators, said threads being connected to the form and extending through apertures in the sheet, said threads being of sufficient strength to support said form and sheet during the ordinary manipulation of the same but of sufficient fragility to enable the same to be arbitrarily broken, and finally causing the apparent vanishing of the body by raising said form to an elevated position and then violently manipulating the sheet to cause the threads to break and to cast the form free of the sheet.

8. The method of producing an illusion which consists in surreptitiously exchanging for a living body a form shaped in the resemblance thereof, said form being normally

invisible to the spectators, covering said form with a sheet, suspending said form when covered by said sheet by threads invisible to the spectators, said threads being connected to the form and extending through apertures in the sheet, manipulating said form by concealed means while suspended by said threads in view of the spectators, said threads being of sufficient strength to support said form and sheet during the ordinary manipulation of the same but of sufficient fragility to enable the same to be arbitrarily broken, and finally causing the apparent vanishing of the body by raising said form to an elevated position and then violently manipulating the sheet to cause the threads to break and to cast the form free of the sheet.

9. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form, means for manually controlling said suspending threads, and side control threads extending to the sides for manual control.

10. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form, means for manually controlling said suspending threads, and side control threads secured to the suspending threads, said side control threads respectively extending to the sides for manual control.

11. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form and extending through apertures in said sheet, and means for manually controlling said suspending threads.

12. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form and extending through apertures in said sheet, means for manually controlling said suspending threads, said threads being of sufficient strength to support the form and sheet in the ordinary manipulations of the same but of sufficient fragility to permit the same to be arbitrarily broken when desired.

13. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form and extending through apertures in said sheet, means for manually controlling said suspending threads, and side control threads secured to the suspending threads.

14. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form and extending through apertures in said sheet, means for manually controlling said suspending threads, and side control threads secured to the suspending threads, said side control threads respectively extending to the sides for manual control.

15. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form, and endless controlling cables arranged in proximity to each other whereby the same may be simultaneously actuated by a single operator, said suspending threads extending individually upward to a superstructure and thence to said controlling cables.

16. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form, endless controlling cables arranged in proximity to each other whereby the same may be simultaneously actuated by a single operator, said suspending threads extending individually upward to a superstructure and thence to said controlling cables, and side control threads secured to the suspending threads, said side control threads respectively extending to the sides for manual control.

17. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form and extending through apertures in said sheet, and endless controlling cables arranged in proximity to each other whereby the same may be simultaneously actuated by a single operator, said suspending threads extending individually upward to a superstructure and thence to said controlling cables.

18. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped

in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form and extending through apertures in said sheet, endless controlling cables arranged in proximity to each other whereby the same may be simultaneously actuated by a single operator, said suspending threads extending individually upward to a superstructure and thence to said controlling cables, and side control threads secured to the suspending threads.

19. In apparatus of the character described, a form made of fine wire and shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form and extending through apertures in said sheet, endless controlling cables arranged in proximity to each other whereby the same may be simultaneously actuated by a single operator, said suspending threads extending individually upward to a superstructure and thence to said controlling cables, and side control threads secured to the suspending threads, said side control threads respectively extending to the sides for manual control.

20. In apparatus of the character described, a form shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form, means for manually controlling said suspending threads, and a bar arranged in front of said suspending threads adapted to prevent the same from distorting the top scenery.

21. In apparatus of the character described, a form shaped in the resemblance of a living body, a sheet adapted to be draped over said form, suspending threads secured to said form, means for manually controlling said suspending threads, and a relatively heavy bar depending in front of said suspending threads adapted to prevent the same from distorting the top scenery.

In testimony whereof, we have hereunto signed our names.

HOWARD THURSTON.
HARRY JANSEN.