The matter and meaning of museum taxidermy

Rachel Poliquin

Abstract

Focusing on taxidermy in contemporary museums and art galleries, my paper explores relationships between the materiality of taxidermy and its multiple readings or narratives. I present four such narratives – descriptive, biographical, cautionary, and experiential – and examine the ways these overlapping and competing readings manipulate and transform taxidermied mounts and, conversely, how mounted creatures always embody an excess that resists full disclosure.

Full Text:

PDF

Copyright (c) 2015 Rachel Poliquin

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
NEW YORK — Torah and taxidermy don’t usually flock together, but at New York City’s quirky — and award-winning — Torah Animal World museum, a stuffed zoo comes alive. Located in the heavily Orthodox neighborhood of Borough Park, Brooklyn, Rabbi Shaul Shimon
Deutsch’s museum blends a Noah’s Ark of taxidermy with informative tours. “Whether you’re interested in the Torah or nature, the point of what we do here is to educate and [teach] respect for animals,” says Deutsch. Get The Times of Israel's Daily Edition by email and never miss our top stories Free Sign Up. The museum’s 1,100-animal c Taxidermy displays, which gave viewers more information through their relatively realistic habitats and scientific captions, marked a key step of that democratization. These displays took visitors to worlds they could otherwise never visit. “They were the virtual reality machines of their age, the pre-television era,” says Skelly. Luce, of the Bell Museum of Natural History, points out that taxidermy dioramas are still important for getting children invested in nature—perhaps even more so today, when they tend to spend less time outside. “Heck, these kids are growing up and seeing everything on a screen,” Luce says. “Dioramas are a place where we can elicit that kind of search and observation experience.” Taxidermy is a general term showing the many methods of reproducing a life-like three dimensional representation of an animal for permanent display. The actual skin from an animal is taken and mounted over an artificial armature. In other cases, the specimen is completely done with man made materials. Taxidermy is derived from two ancient Greek words: taxis, meaning movement, and derma, meaning skin. Therefore translated, taxidermy means the movement of skin. Taxidermy can be done on all species of animals including humans. A brief history of Taxidermy, T...