Introduction Bodyworks

Four of the contributions in this issue of the *Journal of Nordic Museology* are grouped together in a theme section called *Bodyworks*. This reflects a shared curiosity about, and interest in, exhibited bodies and what they do, their agency, in exhibitions. Museums and their exhibitions are normally seen as object-focused, where the objects on display – and the stories they tell – are the most important part of the exhibition. The four authors in this issue approach exhibition analysis from a different angle and focus on how museum bodies – whether human or animal – are present in exhibitions.

The classical art museums and galleries are full of bodies, depicted on canvases or in sculptural form, showing bodies processed into works of art. The essays in this special issue probe the fate of bodies on other arenas where natural and cultural histories are exhibited. Here bodies serve other functions, as signs, as evidence or as illustrations, to name but the most obvious. The bodies examined in *Bodyworks* can be real, living human bodies, as is the case in Anne Folke Henningsen's article about a group of Namibians performing in the experimental archaeological park Lejre in Denmark in 2010, or they can be mannequins or hyper-real reproductions of human bodies, as in Marzia Varutti's contribution about the role such bodies play in some museums in Eastern Asia. Mannequins of human bodies can also appear beside taxidermied animals, as in Silje Opdahl Mathisen's text about Sámi exhibitions. Yet another version of exhibited bodies is the painstakingly scientific reconstruction based on ancient human remains, as Anne-Sofie Hjemdahl writes about

in the article "Facing skeletons. Reflections on three Stone Age portraits".

Bodyworks is an exploration of how bodies are used in exhibitions and the work these bodies are set to do. The authors ask why and how bodies have played a prominent role in exhibition-making in museums of natural and cultural history. The different case studies range from live exhibitions to ethnic groups, to forensic recreations, taxidermied animals and mannequins representing a social class or ethnicity. The motives and strategies for displaying bodies are varied. This again feeds into important questions about communication and the role of the museum in contemporary society. The questions concerning the exhibited bodies are ethical, political, economic and practical.

A core issue in the different articles is the question of authenticity and the real. Exhibition techniques in the second half of the nineteenth century were preoccupied with showing "the real". Photography, wax dolls, etc. all made claims to realistic representations. These concerns were shared by exhibition organizers and museum people who believed in an object-based epistemology where knowledge would be garnered by seeing and handling the real object. The real object could be people who were presented as "themselves". It could be mannequins that were realistically made, representing individuals. Or it could be animals crafted into taxidermic specimens that were arranged to make a perfect illusion of reality. Exhibitions with mannequins and live persons are historically connected to the folk museums, a Scandinavian invention from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Into the twentieth century, these forms of representation came under attack – the real, when it came to animals, were to be found in their cells, not in their skin, and laboratory biology

changed the status of the taxidermic animals into illusionistic representations, not reality itself. In cultural history museums, the life-like mannequins were replaced with more abstract embodiments. And exhibits with living people were increasingly seen as low-culture shows, not realistic representations. Today's museums of cultural and natural history use a multitude of elements to create realistic effects. Most notably living pictures and photography play an important role in claiming representations to be real. In many museums, the exhibited bodies are removed because they are deemed old-fashioned or simply inappropriate according to changing political standards. In other museums such bodies linger and continue, and in some museums new exhibitions are made with new bodies on display. These "new" bodies in exhibitions can be made with technologies similar to older exhibition practices, or they can be made based on technologies from natural sciences and forensic art. As such, we notice that the question about bodies and authenticity takes new shapes.

The exhibited body has fascinated audiences for more than 150 years. Part of this fascination is morbid, as the example from the travelling exhibition *Body World*¹ shows us in the extreme. There is a more subtle morbidity in that the exhibited bodies in the form of mannequins and stuffed animals are simultaneously lifeless and lifelike. There is also an element of recognition in seeing something that is almost like us, but not quite. Why are we still fascinated by the exhibited body? In what way has the nature of this fascination changed during the time such bodies have been on display?

What is the status of a mannequin representing a human or animal body? Should it be seen as an object or a subject, or both? It is difficult and problematic to compare live people on display with mannequins, but this

can tell us something about the agency of the living compared to the agency of the body form. Putting live bodies on display or exhibiting mannequins has traditionally been seen as an objectifying operation, as an action that turns subjects into objects. We seek to challenge and discuss the commonsensical divide between the agency of objects (no agency) and people (have agency). We seek to add nuances to this divide: there are differences other than the commonsensical distinction between having or not having agency. Bodies, and especially human bodies, in exhibitions are something more than an object. They occupy a space in between the categories objects and subjects, and appear as a form of subject-objects. This hybrid status is part of what makes the exhibited bodies both fascinating and hard to grasp analytically.

Bodies on display send a powerful invitation to the museum visitor. Our bodies are central to how we see ourselves both individually and collectively. We seek ourselves in others. The body is a site of communality and conflict, of belonging and of difference. The exhibited bodies speak both to our intellect and to our feelings. This ambiguity has intrigued us to investigate the work these bodies actually do in different settings in museum exhibitions. How bodies are used in exhibitions is a topic that deserves greater interest.

Anne-Sofie Hjemdahl & Silje Opdahl Mathisen

1. Body Worlds is a travelling exhibition originally created by Gunther von Hagens. The exhibition shows skinned human bodies and body parts, preserved by a technique called plastination, which was invented by von Hagens. Body Worlds has, in various forms, toured since 1995, and can be seen in Trondheim, Norway, in 2017.