Facing skeletons

Reflections on three Stone Age portraits

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Abstract: *The discussions in this article relate to the already existing literature about bodies in museum exhibitions and the tension between humanization and dehumanization, individualization and objectification. It approaches the archaeological exhibition practice called “forensic art”. Forensic art means giving a face and identity to human skeletons through specific methods. The point of departure is three different reconstructions based on the remains of two Stone Age women presented at two different museums, one in Norway and one in Sweden, from the beginning of the 1990s until 2006. These reconstructions are highlighted here as entangled and related objects. The article explores the tensions that arise between bodies as scientific objects and as individualized subjects and the tensions that occur between bodies as facts and as fiction. In addition, it examines the work of faces in museum exhibitions and discusses how race seems to be an issue, albeit not communicated nor discussed with the audience. At the same time, race is narrated into the reconstructed faces and becomes a bodily fact the audience meets physically.*

Keywords: Reconstructions, faces, forensic art, knowledge production, human remains, museum facts.

What does it mean to have a face or being faceless? Put it in another way: What is the function, the work of faces? To have a face is often understood in terms of being an individual, to be unique and distinct from others. To have a face might be understood as the very core of our understanding of “identity”, “personhood”, of “personality” and then: our “humanity”. On the other side, to be robbed of our faces is like being robbed of our identity marker, it would be like lacking a personality and being anonymous (Sanders 2009:197). Having or not having a face is as

such considered a main concept of what a human being is (Sanders 2009).¹

Within museums the question of having a face or not becomes significant because it opens up a core discussion about humanization and dehumanization, about individualisation and objectification. Such discussions are to be found in the growing corpus of literature on the presence and effect of bodies in museums. To a large extent this research unfolds the relations between bodily representations and museological knowledge regimes.² This research has also produced interesting discussions on

humans and animals in light of dichotomies such as scientific object versus subject and specimen versus individual. In addition, issues such as time, aesthetics, vividness, racial doctrine, ethnocentrism, originality versus authenticity have been problematized and explored (Hurst 2001, Åhrén 2002, Sandberg 2003, Fabian 2010, Varutti 2011, Alberti & Hallam 2013, Opdahl Mathisen 2014, Svanberg 2015, Redman 2016). The existing literature about bodies in museums is the point of departure for this article which attempts to focus on the increasing use of reconstructed faces made by using the method called “forensic art” in archaeological museums over the past two or three decades and which also can be seen in Scandinavian museums that house archaeological artefacts (Nordström 2007:18). Forensic art actually means to give face and identity to skeletons through specific methods. The tangible result of this process is a human head made to identify or represent a singular person – a process that initially was employed to identify a criminal or a victim – but when used in archaeological exhibitions it enables the museum visitor to meet the people of the past literally face-to-face.

However, the practice of making three-dimensional faces based on human remains does not seem to have been explored much in terms of these already mentioned museological perspectives and discussions, even though these reconstructions transform museum objects into individuals and enact both gender and race as well as individuality and history, to paraphrase anthropologist of science, Amade M'charek (2013).³

Explored through three different reconstructions based on remains from the Stone Age found in Scandinavian museums, I will focus on the significant tensions that occur between bodies as scientific objects and as

individualized subjects, the tensions that occur between bodies as facts and as fiction. These reconstructions are often put on display together with the skeletal remains. In other words, museums often enact these skeletons as multiple bodies. The question is thus how this is done: What kind of status are the different versions given and how are they related? In addition, I am also intrigued by the question of who has the right to make a tangible and concrete materialization of the past.

I am inspired by Science and Technology Studies (STS) in this exploration. A direction within STS allows for approaching entities and objects in terms of fluidity, mutability and multiplicity (Laet & Mol 2000, Mol 2002, Law 2004). The Dutch philosopher Annemarie Mol's concept of the “the body multiple” where she sees the body as “more than one, but less than many” (Mol 2002:55), offers a way to approach this multiplicity. Mol talks about bodies in different versions without one version being more genuine or authentic than another. Employing both *critical museology* (McDonald 2011:8, Brenna 2014:6) and materiality studies inspired by actor–network theory (Asdal, Brenna & Moser 2001, Damsholt, Mordhorst & Simonsen 2009, Hauan & Maurstad 2012), I wish to study the practice of how these bodies are enacted.⁴ The concept of enactment as developed by Mol is connected to performance theory and emphasizes both the social and material aspects of a performance (Mol 2002:5). As such, it allows us to see these reconstruction practices as material and social.

By studying three different reconstructions made in the period from the beginning of the 1990s until 2006, I will highlight both the network and the actors that make the different versions stable. As such, I let myself be inspired by *material semiotics*, the term used to describe actor–network theory (Haraway

1997, Law 1999, Brenna 2002:47). Material semiotics “takes the semiotic insight, that of the relationality of entities, the notion that they are produced in relation, and applies this ruthlessly to all materials – and not simply to those that are linguistic”, the British sociologist John Law explains (Law 1999:4).

On the following pages, I will examine and discuss the three reconstructions, their materiality, how they are staged and the status they are given in the museums’ exhibitions. As such, I hope to contribute to the debate on the effects of the physical presence of bodies in museum exhibitions and of how humanity is enacted. In addition, this examination also contributes with empirical knowledge of what happens to human remains when they become part of archaeological reconstruction practices and offer a basis for reflection for museums.

ENACTING BODIES AS SCIENCE AND AS HUMANITIES

During the last few years, there have been ethical discussions on how human remains should be displayed and whether they should be displayed at all (Curtis 2003, Alberti *et al.* 2009, Giesen 2013, Svanberg 2014). “A primary reason for displaying human remains is to educate and inform, either about past cultures or the human species,” British science historian Samuel Alberti and his co-authors claim in the article “Should we display the dead?” (2009:143). They underline the inherent tension in human remains; they are both people and things (Geary 1986:169, Alberti *et al.* 2009:143). In the same way as philosophers and theorists have emphasized how the body is both subject and object, culture and biology (Merleau-Ponty 1994, Engelstad 2006), so has Alberti *et al.* Therefore, when we look at a human body on display, it is the enactment

of the remains that determines whether they appear as objects, as individuals or both.

By the eighteenth century, museums had come to display the dead by accentuating anatomical peculiarities. These objects were viewed primarily as a testimony to the rich diversity of the chain of universal being. At the end of the nineteenth century, human remains were typically displayed as parts of an evolutionary series (Bennett 1995:79). Human remains were therefore exhibited within a zoological context together with animals and presented as objects and as species (Alberti *et al.* 2009:142). This was a period in time when archaeology had a strong link to the natural sciences (geology and zoology especially). In the middle of the 1980s a turn towards the humanities, towards cultural history, contextual archaeology and post-processual archaeology took place (Kristiansen 1996, Olsen 1997). A critical attitude towards archaeology’s use of the past in the present was furthermore reintroduced (Kristiansen 1996:109, Olsen *et al.* 2012). This shift could be seen in archaeological museums in the way they focused on individuals and according to the Swedish archaeologist Nina Nordström there has been a clear transition from a predominantly scientific attitude towards human remains in exhibitions to a heightened sensitivity towards the display of such remains (Nordström 2007:18). As such, the story of how bodies have been displayed in museums is also a story of how ancient bodies have been produced in museums, either as object or subject, as species or as individuals that we should care for and get to know.

As mentioned above, the natural sciences have been an important contributor to the formation of archaeology as a scientific discipline, and the contribution from natural science have grown both in scale and number of subjects

since the nineteenth century (Kristiansen 1996: 107). Archaeology today would be unthinkable without the assistance of natural sciences such as zoology, environmental studies, technology, physics, medicine and age determination technology (Kristiansen 1996:107). DNA-analyses should also be added to this cluster of science affiliations. In addition, new digital technology has made it possible to reconstruct and communicate archaeological material, human remains included, in new ways. According to Danish archaeologist Kristian Kristiansen, archaeology today does not use one shared nor one mainstream theoretical framework but has dissolved into a multitude of methodological and theoretical approaches (Kristiansen 2014:15). Archaeology therefore finds itself in a position between the natural sciences on the one hand and the humanities on the other. The implementation of forensic art practices in archaeological museums could be seen as part of this tension.

Forensic art, the practice in focus in this article, is claimed to be a blend of art and science because it presents scientific information in a visual form rather than a verbal one (Taylor 2010:6). Therefore, within forensic art there is an inherent tension between science and interpretation. This was a topic for debate already in the beginning of the twentieth century when it appeared in its simplest form (Vanezis *et al.* 1989, Wilkinson 2010) and is still being discussed among practitioners as well in museums using the method (Wilkinson 2010).⁵ Today, this practice is claimed to be based both on a profound anatomical knowledge and on some artistic interpretation (Wilkinson 2010). The question is thus how any artistic freedom is expressed and intertwined in the final object. While the scientific ideal within contemporary forensic reconstruction is accuracy, the British forensic anthropologist Caroline Wilkinson

claims that more artistic licence is appropriate in archaeological reconstructions because she believes that “recognition of the face is rarely the primary objective and producing the most likely depiction may be more important than individual identity” (Wilkinson 2010:247). As such, it seems to be more important to make a general characterization and humanize the old skeletons, turning them into representations that we can identify with rather than to give them accurate identities. In other words, the face itself is an “unreliable document”, both malleable and changeable, according to Danish professor of Scandinavian literature Karin Sanders (Sanders 2009:198).

Another question that arises is who is in the position to or has the right to create faces based on old bones and to give ancient people a voice and a story, as Sanders claims face-making is about (Sanders 2009:198). The practice of forensic art gives museums a transformative power that makes a discussion on museums as laboratories highly relevant. STS-scholars have taught us that laboratories, by changing the relationship between things and changing the relationship between things and humans, have the capacity to produce reality and therefore change society. This is the political impact of the laboratory (Latour & Woolgar 1979) and several museologists (Bennett 2005, Grahn 2006) have discussed in what sense the museum as a knowledge-producing institution has that same capacity. In the article “Civic laboratories” (2005), Tony Bennett claims that museums tend to work as laboratories in the way that they bring objects into new configurations and new relations. Museums do not relate to the object “as it is”, he says. However, Bennett is reluctant to draw this parallel to the laboratory too far primarily because the object in the laboratory is a complex and unfinished structure which

seems to be in a continuing process of being materially defined. He asks if museums actually have the same ability as laboratories to produce “such raw and unfinished objects” that maintains such as complex and dynamic relation to the people involved in the objects (Bennett 2005:530f). He claims that museums seem to stabilize their objects and establish them as facts and black boxes. In line with this understanding, Wera Grahn uses the concept of museum facts to study how objects obtain their identity and how they may be staged as material facts through a series of museological practices (Grahn 2006:42). This also corresponds with the American historian Steven Conn’s thinking about the museum as places of ideas: “...places where knowledge is given shape through the use of objects and exhibitions” (Conn 2009:7). The question here is therefore how museums present bodies, how they present remains as well as reconstructions in an exhibition context: Are they presented as bodily facts or are they presented as fiction?

EXAMPLE NO.1: THE LIFE-SIZE WOMAN IN THE DIORAMA

The Swedish History Museum (Historiska Museet) in Stockholm holds a nine thousand year old skeleton found by a farmer in Skåne in 1939. During the excavation the archaeologists noticed its special position – the skeleton was placed seated in the grave with its legs drawn up to its chest. Since then, an interesting scientific biography attached to the remains has developed as described by Nina Nordström (2007), Eva Insulander (2010) and Björn Wallebom (2015). The remains have been exhibited several times; as a skeleton, as a pictorial display and as a reconstruction. The remains has as such really been enacted as a

multiple body in accordance with Mol’s theory (2002).

In 1943, four years after it was first discovered, the skeleton was put on display for the first time in a new permanent exhibition, *Tiotusen år i Sverige (Ten Thousand Years in Sweden)*. The remains were here presented to the audience in the context of the grave (Nerman 1943). The skeleton was sitting in the same body position as the archaeologists believed it had been buried in, with the knees drawn up towards the chest. The skeleton was mounted by the well-known zoologist and osteologist Elias Dahr and surrounded by objects such as tools and was displayed in a glass case. The remains were presented as a purely factual object, set apart from any interpretation and from any of the other objects on display. It was of great importance to the museum to present these remains as authentic and as accurate as possible – with the correct and still quite vivid body position. (Fig. 1–2.)

For a long time, the remains were presented to the public in the context of that separate glass case – which came to be both its dwelling and grave. Occasionally, the remains were taken out to be studied and consequently new findings were done. In the 1970s the osteologist Nils-Gustaf Gejvall claimed that the remains had to belong to a woman and not a man as originally stated and that she had given birth to several children (Gejvall 1970, Nordström 2007:104).

At the beginning of the 1970s, changes of this exhibition’s Antiquity part, *Fortiden*, were planned (Hejll 2007:11) and museum carpenter and doll-maker Jan Kloboucek saw the female skeleton for the first time. In a short retrospective article, Kloboucek describes this first meeting and how he later came to make a reconstruction based on these remains (Kloboucek 2000). He claims that the

Fig. 1. From the exhibition *Tiotusen år i Sverige* (Ten Thousand Years in Sweden) in 1943, where the remains were presented to audience in context of the grave and further, as a purely factual object. Photo: Christer Åhlin, Riksantikvarieämbetet.

idea was born in the 1980s when the Swedish public service television company, SVT, first had a reconstruction of her face drawn on the historical program *Sagan om Sverige* (*The Tale of Sweden*). He also says that the decision to make a three-dimensional reconstruction of the Stone Age woman was made by the museum's exhibition department. In other words, it was a purely *didactic* idea, initiated by Kloboucek and the curator in charge of the exhibition department, the docent Hans Åke Nordström (Kloboucek 2000:85).

Kloboucek did the reconstruction himself,

using methods developed and used by Scotland Yard and the Russian palaeontologist and pioneer in this field, Mikhail Gerasimov (1907–1970), who developed his own reconstruction techniques in the early 1920s. Today, Gerasimov's technique is termed the "Russian method" where the development of the skull and neck musculature is regarded of fundamental importance. In the article, Kloboucek carefully describes how he worked, reconstructing a life size woman who was given a naturalistic head with hair, and hands, feet, clothes, jewellery, shoes and weapons. The

material description shows how Kloboucek adopted two different practices when constructing his representation of the Stone Age woman. The reconstructed face was made using forensic art practices. The construction of the rest of the body, which was claimed to be of the same size as the skeleton, seemed thus to follow ethnographic museums' traditional practice of making bodies by adding padding to a core consisting of a round piece of wood and then attaching mimetic casts of real people's limbs (Sandberg 2003, Hjemdahl 2013).

My main point here is to show how this reconstruction became a *collage* of different scientific and didactic practices. The Russian method of forensic art, which emphasizes the musculature on the skull and neck in the construction process, was used to reconstruct this three-dimensional mimetic face. The reconstruction also came about as a result of

ethnographic exhibition practices and was directly linked to contemporary women's bodies through the use of casts of limbs of living women. This Stone Age female representation was first and foremost a hand crafted reconstruction. Also, by making this reconstruction, the narrative aspects of this particular female individual was emphasized. The ending sentence of Kloboucek's article reads: "This is how a middle-aged woman of hunters from ancient times was reborn in the summer of 1991" (Kloboucek 2000:85f.), which tells us how he in retrospect saw himself and his hand crafted work as a way of giving life to a woman that lived nine thousand years ago. By giving her a face, skin and a body, she became something more than a universal skull and a skeleton. She became an individual with a voice and a story as seen through Kloboucek's eyes and born through the work of his hands.

In her famous essay "Modest witness. Feminist diffractions in science studies", feminist theorist Donna Haraway emphasizes how the process of making knowledge produces both objects and subjects and that this process also generates a set of cultural values and characteristics. Hence, gender, race and class are being co-produced in the process of making knowledge (Haraway 1996). Viewed as a representation, both gender and race was co-produced when this Stone Age woman was reconstructed. She was clearly gendered in accordance with its time; she was for instance given medium length blond hair. In addition, she was given a European appearance with a narrow face, white skin and blue eyes. In other words, the Swedish public met a face they could recognize. Sanders claims that face-to-face encounters are a variant of the "face recognition practice" in the same way Italian semiotician Patrizia Magli describes it. The face, she writes, "has a fluctuating and unstructured

Fig. 2. Photo: Christer Åhlin, Riksantikvarieämbetet.

logic but also a sort of perceptual perseverance that allows us to recognize each other” (Magli 1989, in Sanders 2009:199). The reconstruction of the Stone Age woman and especially of her face became someone the mainstream Swedish public could recognize and identify with as a Swedish woman belonging to the Swedish tribe, so to speak: she became a pretty and “neutral” white woman dressed in leather clothes. The Stone Age woman thus became a figure linking Sweden’s historical past with its presence and future. Knowing that her remains actually belong to the Swedish History Museum it almost seems like a necessity that she was enacted as a Swede. Subsequently, we see the significance of her social body and person connected to both museum ownership and power relations. This also highlights how the body becomes a prime site of construction, of contestation and negotiation of individual and collective identities, as museologist Marzia Varutti emphasizes in her article “Materializing the past. Mannequins, history and memory in museums”, in this issue (Varutti 2017). (Fig. 3.)

In the exhibition, the reconstructed female was located in a big glass case together with her remains. She was displayed as a life size woman in a diorama with a weapon or a tool in her hand and situated in an environment that looked like a forest. As the American film- and media historian Mark Sandberg have emphasized in his study about how peasants were exhibited in Scandinavian museums at the time around 1900, the constructed figure can simulate more easily both agency and consciousness when given props and context (Sandberg 2003:198). In addition, the head of the Stone Age woman was placed so that visitors met her face in such a way that she seemed both to be aware of and also could meet the public’s gaze. The glass case she was presented in was lifted slightly up from the floor.

Fig. 3. The reconstructed life-size woman in the diorama made in 1991. Photo: Christer Åhlin, Historiska Museet (The Swedish History Museum).

In other words, this Stone Age woman was presented as a diorama enacting the past in the present in two versions: as a mimetic three-dimensional “live” individual from the Stone Age and as a skeleton, sitting in her grave. The skeleton was located in the corner of that same showcase, facing away from the reconstructed figure. Subsequently, these two versions of the woman was staged as separate representations, yet connected through the display case. In terms of an archaeological perspective, this diorama could be seen as a staging of two different archaeological approaches to the same woman: First, the archaeological discovery and source,

that is the skeleton sitting in her grave in the same way the archaeologists found her in 1939. Second, the archaeological interpretation of the individual, the living hunter woman with her weapons as archaeologists believed her to look like when she was alive nine thousand years ago. Nevertheless, there were no differences in how these representations were enacted according to the factual aspects of the two representations; they were both displayed as separate museums and bodily facts.

EXAMPLE NO. 2: THE ABSTRACT SCULPTURAL WOMAN FROM SØGNE

In 1994, cottage owner Helge Bentsen was dredging a piece of the seabed close to the shore in Søgne in the south of Norway. Suddenly human remains appeared. The authorities were contacted and it was soon determined that the findings were of great archaeological interest. The findings included an almost complete skull but without the lower jaw, a large fragment of the frontal bone from another skull, a nearly intact left femur and a broken left leg bone. It was unclear how many people these bones represented but they came from at least two different persons, both female it was assumed, one of them 35–40 years old at the time of death. The C14-analysis of the remains showed them to be around 8 600 years old. It was also established that this was the oldest discovery of human remains in Norway up till then. In addition, C-13-analysis of the bones revealed that 86 per cent of their diet was protein based seafood.⁶ The researchers involved, archaeologist Birgitte Skar and physical anthropologist Berit Sellevold, assumed that the remains belonged to a grave which back then was land based, but was swallowed by the sea due to raising shore levels (Sellevold & Skar 1996b).

It was especially the well-preserved skull

that received archaeological attention. Even if it was robust, investigations determined it to be a woman. It was claimed that “at the time women had heavy and robust skulls similar to younger bygone period male skulls” (Sellevold & Skar 1996a: 24–25).

Soon after the find, the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo (Kulturhistorisk Museum)⁷ decided to put together an exhibition about this presumed woman and the archaeological findings. Archaeologist Kathy Elliot curated the exhibition together with the culture historian Bjørn Vidar Johansen. According to Elliot, it was her own idea to make a reconstruction of the skull for the exhibition which they intended to work as an “attention grabber” in the exhibition.⁸

However, it proved difficult to find an expert the museum could bring in to do the reconstruction work. The reconstruction process became instead part of a wider international network of scientists, institutions and curators. The museum started by contacting Past Forward in York, UK, which passed them on to Robin Hennessey at University College Hospital in London. It became clear that the lab at University College Hospital could make a reconstruction for the exhibition if provided with the right sort of data. Hennessey says that they needed to digitize the skull.

This can be done via a laser surface scanner (which would need to be done in the UK) or via CT scanning (which you could probably arrange to have done in an Oslo hospital). You can have the skull CT scanned while it sits in its box – you simply put the box on the patient couch. If you do this, we need to discuss which scanner is being used so that we can make sure we can read the data, and how many slices will be acquired.⁹

The most important issue now was the quality

of the data and also establishing what type of data that could be used for communicating with University College Hospital's computer system. To do this, the museum contacted a Dutch expert, Dr. Arthur Voorpool, who was working at the Toshiba Medical System Headquarters in the Netherlands. He was able to design a program for the scanning of the remains. Berit Sellevold from the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) was responsible for the scanning of the skull in Norway.¹⁰ Then Dr. Lars Garberg at Sentrum Røntgeninstitut A/S in Oslo did the actual scanning of the skull and made a series of sectional images of it with a special X-ray apparatus while Dr. Arthur Voorpool was responsible for the transferring of data into the right digital format. These data constituted the basis for the three-dimensional reconstruction and were then sent to the laboratory staff at University College London who in collaboration with Sellevold made the reconstructed face. The process did not, however, run quite as smoothly as expected. A set of data for the top of the skull went missing somewhere in the transferring process but it was restored and transferred so that the reconstruction process could proceed in London.

Nevertheless, the scanned data alone was not enough to make a reconstruction of the face. Additional information about gender, race and age was sent by fax to professor Dominic Tweddle at University College London. Sellevold writes:

The skull is 8600 years old, and even though the sex of the skull is female, it is very heavily built compared to more recent crania. In particular, the glabellar and temporal regions are markedly developed, having an appearance we associate with modern male skulls. The age of death is estimated to

be ab. 35–40 years, but the teeth are heavily worn, compared to more recent finds... As for racial origin, we do not know, but the skull looks mostly European or Caucasoid (Fax to Dominic Tweddle from Berit Sellevold 3 February 1997).

This information was also included and highlighted in the form sent over that contained drawings of the skull. (Fig. 4.)

Another aspect of this process was that the curators at the museum did not exactly know how the reconstruction was to be made, of which material or form it would take.¹¹ Nevertheless, at the end of July it became clear that the reconstruction would appear as a three-dimensional physical reconstruction (e-mail 29 July 1997). The sources do not say anything about the material used for the reconstruction but when it was completed and curator Bjørn Vidar Olsen could bring her home from London to Oslo in his luggage, he carried a head made of foam and no effort had yet been made to construct a naturalistic face.¹²

My objective of recounting how the Søgne woman's reconstructed face came into being in the summer and autumn of 1997, is simply to emphasize that the reconstruction is an *entangled object*. The reconstructed face was intertwined in an international network of things (computers, X-ray machines, boxes and airplanes), inscriptions (digitized data files, pictures and descriptions), institutions (Sentrum Røntgen, Toshiba Medical Service, Museum of Cultural History, University College London) and people (researchers, engineers, medical experts and curators). The museum was even dependent on an expert who could transform data from Norwegian computers to English ones. It also meant that they had to establish a network for just this purpose. In addition, I want to underline how the different types of information was

FACIAL IMAGING - SKULL RECORD SHEET

Sex of skull	Female	Age at death	35-40 yrs	Date of skull	8600 BP
Height and build of person when alive (if known): Heavily built					
Racial origin of skull: European (?)					
Any other details: Please see attached fax

Fig. 4. Scan made of fax to Dominice Tweedle from Berit Sellevold 3 February 1997. Kulturhistorisk Museums arkiv: Fruen fra havet (Museum of Cultural History, Archive: The Lady from the Sea).

Black indicates "bone present"

PLEASE INDICATE ON THE ABOVE DIAGRAMS ANY DAMAGE OR MISSING AREAS OF BONE

communicated and made relevant within this network. Whereas the measureable X-ray data was communicated through digital means, any information that helps to identify a person such as gender, race and age and that inscribes a person into the culture was communicated verbally, or through text and pictures.

Let us follow the reconstruction further into the exhibition: On 9 October 1997 the Museum of Cultural History could present their first exhibition about the discovery of the oldest human remains in Norway.¹³ The temporal exhibition presenting the astonishing archaeological discovery was named *Fruen fra havet* (*The Lady from the Sea*). Based on presenting archaeological science as well as this sensational new discovery, the exhibition was scientific in its basic attitude and divided into two sections: the discovery and the woman herself. The first section told the visitors about the circumstances related to the object, the discovery and the research process, while the second section approached the woman herself and presented knowledge, narratives and sceneries about her and her life: how she lived, what she ate, and who she was. Furthermore, the preserved skull was made the focal point in the exhibition together with the abstract reconstruction of the face. Both skull and reconstructed head were exhibited together, placed on a shelf and displayed in a glass-case as an installation in the middle of the room.

Skeletons might be viewed as trophies, as “scalps” in a sense but they might also be viewed as “an uncritical, unvarnished truth of what lies beneath all of the things that seem so important in life: skin colour, fat, scars, beauty, ugliness, difference. The skeleton represents human life at its most universal, stripped of the apparent differences that can divide the living”, say Alberti *et al.* (2009:135). Opposite the skull, which could be seen as both a “trophy”

Fig. 5. Text: The display of the female Stone Age skull together with the sculptural foam-made facial reconstruction, in the exhibit *Fruen fra havet* (*The Lady from the Sea*). Photo: Åse Kari Hammer, Kulturhistorisk Museum (Museum of Cultural History).

and as universally representing all humans, the reconstructed face was placed. The face was made of white foam and was subtle in the way that it only gave the viewer an impression of facial features.

In fact, the face was almost presented as an individual piece of art – as a white marble sculpture – belonging to the Western cultural canon. The ideal when making this face was that of a likely depiction and not an accurate naturalistic face (see Wilkinson 2010). As such, the sculptural impression of the woman became significant. Simultaneously, the whiteness and the physical features of the face made her into a European woman the audience could both recognize and identify with, and thus easily include into the “Norwegian tribe” – even if she was made a bit abstract.

The museum presented the white reconstructed head in front of the original skull. (Fig. 5.) The Søgne woman was displayed as a multiple woman where the skull and

the reconstruction, i.e. the object and the individualized presentation of an ancient woman were presented as two versions of the same person. Exhibited in the same showcase, they also seemed to be given the same status and presented as archaeological facts.

However, textual information given in the exhibition seemed to tell another version. One part of the exhibition told the story about the reconstruction process albeit a more straight and linear process than the story I have told here. The curators also chose to highlight the fictional part of the reconstruction by emphasizing the uncertainties surrounding the facial appearance: "Even if the model is based on measurements which are accurate, we must always use our judgment when facial features are to be recreated. We will never know for certain if this woman really looked like this", the museum told the audience in the exhibition text¹⁴ As such, the face was communicated through text to the visitors as both facts and fiction, as accurate digitized measurement data, as science and as an archaeological interpretation. Taking the text into account, the reconstruction was not communicated as an indisputable fact but more as a fact in motion. However, information such as racial origin which was stated to be European with a question mark and which was significant for the modelling process was not communicated to the audience. In other words, difficult issues such as the racial origin of the ancient people that once inhabited Norwegian land were not presented to the public. Instead race became a factual part of the body. My point here is to emphasize that even if the museum tries to display the rawness and uncertainties about what the skull actually can tell us about this particular individual, the bodily representation itself appeared factual to the visitor – although not as factual as the skull itself.

In my third example following below, I go back to the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm and to the Stone Age skeleton that was found in Skåne in 1939.

EXAMPLE NO. 3: THE NATURALISTIC WOMAN WITHIN A STONE AGE HOME

The Swedish History Museum presented another exhibition on prehistory in 2005. A new reconstruction of the remains found in Skåne was done using the same method: forensic art. This time, the Swedish artist and archaeologist Oscar Nilsson was now the sculptor and model maker. This was Nilsson's profession and he had already supplied museums in Sweden with several reconstructions: "The Vasa Museum and The Swedish History Museum contacted me simultaneously, around 2004–2005. They wanted to highlight their findings, get closer to the individuals and use osteological knowledge about their lives and fates to get visitors more engaged and eager to learn more", Nilsson explains in an e-mail correspondence.¹⁵

According to head curator Lena Hejll, the Swedish History Museum wanted to focus on human beings' existential situation in Antiquity in this exhibition; "This gives us a perspective on the human situation then and now", Hejll claims. The museum wanted to focus on the real life people lived back then and not the artefacts (Hejll 2007:11). Focusing on the diversity of the past, the exhibition was titled *Forntider (Prehistories)*.

It was within this context that the new reconstruction was done. A number of new scientific findings had been made examining the Skåne remains in 1996 (see Steen 1990:76). The museum was therefore eager to present these findings and do so in a more individualized and expressive form (also making the 1991 reconstruction obsolete).

However it was only the female skeleton from Skåne and the Bronze age remains named “the Man from Granhammar” that was given three-dimensional faces, even though the exhibition presented several skeletons. The exhibition entrance displays a film where eight different life stories are told. Then – as the visitors enter the exhibition itself – the Stone Age woman is the first person they meet when they step into the exhibition room which is designed as a house placed in a forest.

Centrally located in the Stone Age house is an open hearth while the house is surrounded by glass cases displaying different tools. Both in the entrance to as well as in the background of the house, the audience can see an image of a forest and a full size female figure – the same figure they encountered in the film at the beginning of the exhibition (Insulander 2010:81). When the visitors are standing in the middle of the house, they encounter the reconstruction of the Skåne woman as a bust with white skin, a mane of brown grey long hair and grey-blue eyes. Her face is finely modelled with visible wrinkles and veins. She is enacted as a head with a hyper-naturalistic appearance presented in a separate glass case on the wall. She is placed at the height of an adult visitor who will meet her gaze when looking at her face. Next to the reconstructed head is her skeleton displayed as it was presented in the first exhibition described in example one: seated in her grave with only a few minor changes in posture and within a somewhat less naturalistic grave (fig. 6).

The museum presents the Skåne woman as a multiple body in three different physical versions: as a skeleton, as a hyper-realistic head and as pictures. In addition, the curators have set up a monitor where the model maker Nilsson himself explains the reconstruction process and the methods in use. This acts

as an intermediary between the finished reconstructed face and the skeleton, between what seems to be the subject and the object.

This documentary film tells us about how the natural sciences and its accurate digital methods makes it possible to actually reconstruct people and then about the technical procedure for the modelling of the face. It also emphasizes the interpretation process and the uncertainties about the appearance of the reconstruction such as the design of the mouth, the ears and teeth, the skin and eye colour. The film subsequently highlights the role of the interpreter (both Nilsson and the museum) and also the enacting of the past done by the museum. The colour of the skin and the eye colour are difficult to know, Nilsson admits. They have therefore given the Stone Age woman a Nordic complexion and blue eyes “to make her come across as neutrally as possible”, he says. Towards the end of the video, Nilsson evaluates the results and concludes by saying that “the woman would not recognize herself if she could see the reconstruction but she would understand that someone had tried to portray her”.

As such, Nilsson becomes significant as an interpreter and as an artist in collaboration with the museum. Through the use of the video, he sets the female skeleton in motion for the visitor. Simultaneously, the museum creates a dialogue between the two body versions, between the skeleton and the reconstructed face by explaining how this skeleton became the physical woman the audience meet in the exhibition.

At the same time, there are factual aspects regarding the reconstruction that are neither discussed nor questioned in front of the audience. Questions of racial belonging and discussions around the reconstruction's facial expressions are omitted from the exhibition. In the same way as with the reconstructions

Fig. 6. The way the Stone Age woman from Skåne was staged at the Swedish History Museum for the new exhibit Forntider (Prehistories) in 2006: as a hyper realistic facial reconstruction, as remains and as a picture of the life-size woman. Photo: Anne-Sofie Hjemdahl.

I have analysed above, this reconstruction is enacted as woman of today's European origin with "neutral colours" as Nilsson puts it. In an e-mail correspondence, Nilsson expands on this by saying that it is hard to know the remains' racial origin and that race is a difficult issue. In relation to the Stone Age woman, he claims that the museum staff decided that it felt less controversial to adopt a common European origin while this decision at the same time opens up for a pretty interesting discussion because there is no such thing as a right result or a fact – but many.¹⁶ Also, we

see here the importance of creating a figure the audience can relate to and meet as a part of the "Swedish tribe".

Another important aspect of facial reconstruction is that it is hard to make a human face without also giving that face a particular expression when attempting to make it appear vivid and life-like. Nilsson describes how he tries to convey *neutral* in the construction process while he also has to make the face come *alive*. He does this by using as few resources as possible and explains how he achieves this by concentrating his work on the

expression around the eyes which gives both life and expression to the entire reconstruction: "I try to obtain an ambiguous expression as possible; the optimal thing would be if different visitors see different types of expressions."¹⁷ The process is, in other words, about creating faces that connect with the visitors, creates an interest and gives visitors an opportunity to make their own impression of the people that inhabited Swedish land in Antiquity.

The process of making museum facts is explained to the visitors while they at the same time are invited into the reconstruction process. In other words, there seems to be an opening process and not a black box process going on here. This means that no attempts are made to turn the reconstruction into hard facts by separating the facts or knowledge from the actual process of creating them – as Latour has pointed out is a characteristic of the production of *hard facts* (Latour 1987). Instead the opposite seems to happen. The laboratory is taken into the museum exhibition with its stories about science and artistic skills and becomes a part of the bodies on display. The parallel to this can be seen in the concept of public archaeology where the discipline of archaeology becomes part of a wider public culture and where contestation and dissonance are inevitable. Public archaeology seems to attempt to open up a space where both products and the process by which meaning is created from archaeological material in the public realm, is discussed (Merriman 2004:5).

FACING SCIENTIFIC AND DIDACTIC BODIES: CONCLUDING REMARKS

By transforming human remains into reconstructed faces, museums change the epistemological status of the remains. They become humanized individuals with a story

and a voice and appear as pictures of the past. The question is thus: What kind of individuality and what kind of faces do we meet? The examples given in this article show us that the process of giving faces to these old skeletons are complex and have been done through different procedures within Scandinavian museums through the 1990s and 2000s.

The reconstructed life-size woman made at the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm in 1991 appeared as a collage of forensic and ethnographic practices, which also included casts of contemporary women's bodies. No specialist was invited into the process in 1991 and the construction of the entire body was located at the museum. The result of the mimetic reconstruction presented within the ethnographic tradition of dioramas, seemed to be an authoritative body-representation where the audience was kept outside the reconstruction process.

In the second example from Oslo in 1997, a scientific network was established to reconstruct the face of the Søgne woman that appeared as an abstract almost sculptural and art-like reconstruction. The laboratories in Oslo and London were also present even in the communication with the visitors; the scientific narrative of the reconstruction was told through words in the exhibition.

In the third example, from 2006, we once again find ourselves at the Swedish History Museum where the reconstructed face of the Stone Age woman was made with the help of a professional and local model maker. Here, we meet a hyper-realistic version of the Stone Age woman. In addition, the laboratory is brought into the exhibition space where the whole face making procedure is presented and where the model maker and artist himself is present as an interpreter and as a subject in the exhibition. In contrast to the other examples, he is here

himself responsible for communicating the reconstruction process to the audience. The archaeology enacted invites the public into the process.

These three chronologically presented examples might be seen as parts of a history of knowledge, of how the practice of forensic art have developed as a profession and has been implemented in archaeological museum exhibitions over the last two decades. Having both educational and research opportunities, forensic art has become a profession which has manifested itself in archaeological exhibitions.

Even more interesting is the relationship between the remains, the reconstructions and the work that these are intended to do in the museum exhibitions. The relation between the remains and the reconstructions seem to be enacted both as symmetry and hierarchy. In the first reconstruction of the Skåne woman described in example one above, both the remains and the reconstruction seemed to be enacted as symmetric; both were presented as undisputable museum facts. In the second and third example the relation seemed to be enacted as a hierarchy where the skeleton was enacted as an indisputable original object and the factual basis for the reconstruction, while the reconstructions themselves told narratives about science, knowledge production and interpretation.

How were these reconstructions inscribed with stated and non-stated facts about the individuals? My aim has been to highlight the co-production of scientific narratives and explore the position the reconstructions are afforded in the museums' communication. The women were humanized and individualized in diverse ways – as ethnographic bodies, as sculptures and as hyper-realistic faces. What they had in common was that they all were physically enacted as women belonging to the

European race – even though the museums did not know the racial origin of these women. I have also highlighted how the issue of racial origin was discussed and emphasized in the reconstruction process by drawings and texts as “uncertain facts”, while the “facts” on race was simultaneously physically narrated into the women faces. In other words, questions of racial affiliation were not incorporated into the verbal discussions with the audience. Instead, the museums enacted the reconstructed faces as museum facts which further means that the political aspect of the bodies was not made relevant or discussed. Information about racial origin is a type of information that could challenge the grand narratives about the nation and its inhabitants. Knowing that Stone Age often is interpreted as a pre-; i.e. before the real history of civilized human beings begins, a period seemed to start with the discovery of literal sources around 4 000 B.C. (Smail 2008), it seems to be of great importance to translate these remains into faces which looked like contemporary Scandinavians to link them to the Swedish and Norwegian past. In addition, questions about race could also open up a debate about the concept of race and whether it belongs to biology or constructivism (M'charek 2013), which is highly complicated.

By not inviting the audience into discussions about the skeletons' race and racial origin, the museums did not challenge the grand narratives of the nations in question. Instead the museums and the model-makers enacted the skeletons by giving them similar facial appearance as themselves, which made these faces uncontroversial, apolitical while they simultaneously seems to confirm already established relations of power.

As such, issues about racial origin seemed to be a fact the public should encounter physically and engage with. As mentioned,

Sanders sees face-to-face encounters as a variant of the “face recognition practice” which allows us to recognize each other. In addition, she claims that “when we have the opportunity to observe faces from a distant, even ancient past, we seem to instinctually place ourselves in relation to these strangers, as if to make ourselves contemporaries with them” (Sanders 2009:199). Facing these women, the Swedish and Norwegian audiences were supposed to meet and recognize faces that appeared similar to themselves: white and European. As such, the museum facilitated a meeting between the audiences and their European ancestors, a meeting where the visitors would relate to these individuals from a distant past and see them as forbearers. We see here the real work of the faces and notice that encountering the past face-to-face, is not after all just an innocent meeting.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank the reviewers and editors of the journal for the good comments and input on this article, as well as Mette Irene Dahl for great help with the language.
2. Be it taxidermy practices and the presentation of animals in natural history museums and research (see Wonders 1993, Poliquin 2014, Thorsen 2014) or representation practices connected to ethnic, social and historical groups of people in ethnographic and historical museums (see Sandberg 2003, Varutti 2011, Opdahl Mathisen 2014). It might also be scientific collections of medicine and reproductions and collections of human remains (see Hurst 2001, Åhrén 2002, Fabian 2010, Alberti & Hallam 2013, Svanberg 2015, Redman 2016), that have discussed issues such as racial doctrine and problematized how people are made into scientific objects (Svanberg 2015).
3. Except for professor in Scandinavian literature

Karin Sanders (2009) and science anthropologist Amade Mcharek (2013) who have done interesting studies about how museums have engaged with human remains and reconstructions.

4. In addition, actor–network theory has taught us that only practice or “science in the making” gives an opportunity to grasp how scientific knowledge is enacted and made into scientific facts (Latour & Woolgar 1979).
5. The practice of forensic art can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century in its simplest form. At this time it focused on presenting the appearance of Neanderthals, people from the Stone Age as well as Egyptian Pharaohs (Prag & Neave 1997:16, Wilkinson 2010).
6. Museum of Cultural History Archive: Berit Sellevold, Lecture to Reidar Nydal-symposiet på NTH, 2–3 November 1995.
7. At this time the museum was called Department of the University Museum of National Antiquities.
8. It was the researcher Birgitte Skar from NIKU who came up with the idea for the exhibition. Conversation with Elliot 16 November 2016.
9. Museum of Cultural History Archive, The Lady from the Sea, letter to Robin Hennesey from Idunn Kvalø, 16 April 1997.
10. Conversation with Elliot 16 November 2016.
11. Museum Archive: e-mail, 4 and 7 July 1997.
12. Conversation with Elliot 16 November 2016.
13. This exhibition was open until April 1998.
14. Museum of Cultural History Archive, The Lady from the Sea, text for the exhibition.
15. Oscar Nilsson, e-mail 18 November 2016.
16. Oscar Nilsson, e-mail 18 November 2016.
17. Oscar Nilsson, e-mail 18 November 2016.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES AND PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Kulturhistorisk Museums arkiv: *Fruen fra havet*, utstilling (Museum of Cultural History Archive: *The Lady from the Sea*, exhibition).

Lena Heijll, e-mail 18 and 26 October 2016.

Kathy Elliot, conversation 16 November 2016.

Oscar Nilsson, e-mail 18 November 2016.

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