

Bodies Exhibit

A long line, with long black straps to harness bodies, waiting for an exhibit about the undersides of our skin sacks. *The Bodies Exhibit*. Even the name has no artsy words, no sugar-coated skin.

A girl whose hair falls so long it covers the Camp _____ on her t-shirt tries to hang on the canvas straps stretched horizontally but they droop and one clangs to the ground. Straps to tame the bodies from becoming anything other than a linear waiting line, obedient and leaning. There is a whisper between each set of bodies, families, couples, punctuated by huffs and sighs, since the tickets promised no waiting. "This is not what we paid for," one of them whispers. And another child whimpers. The body of the girl is in constant flurry, audible breaths and grunts, legs moving in every possible direction. Picking up the aluminum divider stand brings her joy and a look of surprise that she did it by herself.

The Bodies Exhibit, where sinew shines, and fascia upon skeletal mazes comes to life and the skeletons stare back at you in your clothing, as if to say, "What are you doing here, so masked, so covered, so afraid of what is raw in you?" Just as you got up the nerve to ask your new girlfriend, and swallowed hard when the price of the tickets came up on the screen, and you both tried to shrug it off, because you were still trying to impress each other that you lived OTHER than close to the bone, pun intended, you realized that it was like going to a nude show, as you looked at the preview photos.

But you were following the rave reviews and your niece's artistic shout-out ("This should be in an ART museum instead of a SCIENCE museum – it is like a human taxidermy studio, and captures the magic of our bodyself! They are preserved with plastination, which is something I studied in grad school Art Mediums class. Very new process.") and the promo material that said this was possibly the last time at this museum, or in your city at all, and the future of the exhibit was uncertain.

Over 200 bodies were donated to the artistic and scientific cause. Nine rooms of different body systems. All I wanted was to impress my date, find out which muscle in my mid-back I kept whacking out, and see how close to animals we really were under our skin. I heard there were arguments over whether to show breasts and genitals. And a larger argument over where the bodies came from. I didn't mind. They were dead. Whether from prisons, or hospitals, or graveyards, their fleshy selves were dead, and their souls had moved on, so why lose so much time delaying the exhibit in some cities because this question was not precisely answered?

Hand-in-hand we sauntered, 4th date, first very public one, and heteronormal families stared at our affection, then back at the sinewy displays. The decision to keep the breasts on some of them was apparent. My date was reading the exhibit guide and whispering facts to me about the time-consuming process of preserving the bodies, and slicing them into bread-like slivers so we could see into our insides more than even a surgery viewing booth. One minute I was nauseous, watching the intestines drop slightly out of a pregnant woman's slit open belly, and the next I was aroused, and my muscles jumped seeing so many exposed muscles in one place.

My mouth was acutely aware of being an appendage of my whole alimentary canal, instead of just something to put occasional lipstick on and make sure I didn't burn on my macchiato. I touched the top of my femur, fascinated with how the nearby trochanter fit so perfectly into the pelvis, like a puzzle piece, while staring at the cadaver's leg bones. I willed my girlfriend to touch her own, and it worked. We both then touched each other's, and moved away quickly, because: a) Museum guards. 2) Nuclear families. 3) 4th date. She went back to her nose in the program. I stood uncomfortably close to the people with audio sets, describing the bodies, so that I could listen in on them, which wasn't too hard, since they had earmuff style headphones. The two of us snaked through like this, touching shoulders, staring at pieces of bodies, her brushing up my mid back to show me where the rhomboids inserted, while I asked her to do it several times so I could "remember." Ahhh. So delicate but firm was that touch.

I do remember where my rhomboids are today.
I don't remember what her program said.
I do remember us finding each other's bodies.
I don't remember the names of all the pelvic bones.
I do remember holding each of her pelvic bones for hours.

The museum chosen was losing money until this exhibit came to town. 6 months and it was flush, new memberships from the Mercedes crowd, and demands for other exhibits like it.

And the Seattle City Council voted never to have it come to town again, since there was no clear paper trail from a deceased donor to a finished plastinate. I care more about blazing trails into bodies than chasing them down to death.