Troublesome Trophies and Fragile Feathered Friends: Introduction to the Care of Historic Taxidermy

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Who has Taxidermy?

- Natural Science collections
- Science & Nature Centers
- Zoos
- Children’s Museums
Who has Taxidermy?

- Historic Houses
- Art Museums
What is Taxidermy?

**Taxidermy specimens:** mounted (stuffed) animals

**Study skins:** skins of animals, not mounted
Dioramas & Groupings

- Three-dimensional model or scene
Mounts as composite objects

- Skin
- Feather
- Hair
- Bone/Tooth
- Metal
- Wood
- Paper
- Foam (polyurethane, polystyrene)
- Plaster
- Fiberglass
- Glass/ceramic
- Resin/adhesive
- Paint
Preparation Techniques
Wrapped forms
Sculpted Form/Akeley Method
Plaster and burlap

Wood

Paper coated in shellac

Fiberglass
All three are from the same time period, varying in quality

Cheap  mid  high end

Older eyes

Crude but an attempt at detail

Mold made, view from reverse

Back

Set mark on the back side

Higher end eyes with whites
These modern eyes are made to represent a specific animal

Modern eye profile – corneal bulge

Is this modern or old?
Ears

Quality lead liner at left, lower end liner at right
Inherent Vice

Plaster and burlap mannequin

Caribou head mount
10 AGENTS OF DETERIORATION

1. Disassociation/Custodial Neglect
2. Physical Forces
3. Incorrect Temperature
4. Incorrect Relative Humidity
5. Pollutants
6. Light
7. Pests
8. Fire
9. Water
10. Security
Custodial Neglect/Disassociation
Custodial Neglect/Disassociation
Physical Forces
Physical Forces

Penguin with detached head

The head is often the first to go!
Handling

For smaller lightweight mounts lift from base

Large head mounts should be lifted from stable base of antlers

Avoid handling feathers and fur
Health & Safety
Materials for Safe Storage

www.STASHc.com
Incorrect Temperature & RH
Incorrect Temp and RH: Ear Damage, skin cracks
Pollutants

Could use another couple of good images.
Light
Pests
Fire
Water
Proper Emergency Planning
Security
Treatment
Treatment: Cleaning

- Brushes
- Groom/stik
- Erasers
- Cotton swabs
- Webril wipes
- Soot sponges
- Micro vacuum tools
- HEPA vacuum
- Screens
Treatment – Basic Cleaning
Treatment: Stabilization
Treatment - Preening
Treatment – Pest Control
Treatment – Skin Repair
Treatment - Fills

Before Treatment

During Treatment

After treatment
Prior Restoration
Treatment
Treatment - Recoloring

Pronghorn - before recoloring

after
Treatment - Recoloring
American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) &
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IMLS-funded project
Re-Coloring Faded Taxidermy:
Research into the Properties and Applicability of Dye Materials
for Conservation Treatment

If you are interested in possible future workshops on the care of historic taxidermy, please contact Fran Ritchie, Project Conservator at the AMNH fritchie@amnh.org

If you have experience in preserving or treating historic taxidermy and would be able to participate in a working group forming best practices, please contact Fran Ritchie, Project Conservator at the AMNH fritchie@amnh.org
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- Carolina Conservation