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Body Worlds Exhibit: Anatomy Up Close & Personal

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

PROVIDENCE – The recent Body Worlds Vital exhibition at the museum gallery in the Rhode Island Convention Center offered an anatomic, athletic and artistic view of the human body.

The approximately 200 specimens on display were preserved through a process Dr. Gunther von Hagens developed in Germany in 1977 at the Anatomical Institute of Heidelberg University he termed Plastination. Since that time, he has refined the process; his first whole-body plastinate was created in 1992.

The Plastination method extracts bodily fluids and fat from specimens, replaces them with acetones, which in a second step is replaced by polymers. The body is then positioned, with the entire anatomical structure properly aligned and secured with wires, needles, clamps, and foam blocks. In the final step, the specimen is hardened. Depending on the polymer used, this is done with gas, light, or heat.

The Providence exhibit included whole body figures, as well as individual organs, blood vessel configurations, and transparent longitudinal and cross-sectional body slices, allowing viewers to observe the anatomy and working of the human body, and the effects of disease on it, often by comparing healthy and diseased organs. Two in the exhibit showed black lungs illustrating the effects of smoking. Long-term outcomes of disorders, and substance abuse are illustrated in the same way, as are the mechanics of artificial hip and knee joints.

All of the specimens in Body World exhibits, which have been seen by millions around the world, are from individuals who have willed their bodies to the donation program managed by the Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, Germany.

Donors agree that their bodies will be permanently preserved and used in dis-

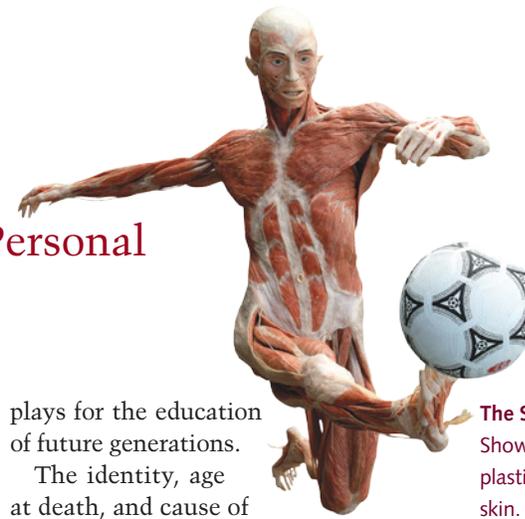
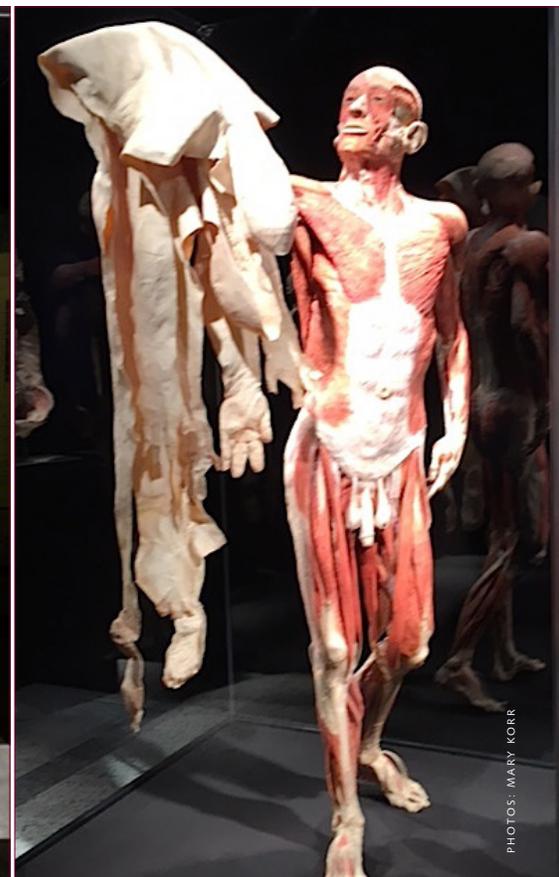
plays for the education of future generations.

The identity, age at death, and cause of death of the donors are not revealed. A few of the plastinates in the exhibitions originate in old anatomical collections, which is particularly true of the embryos shown.

The Institute for Plastination has more than 16,000 donors on its roster, and more than 1,400 of them are Americans.

Dr. von Hagens, who announced he suffers from Parkinson's disease, has signed up for his own program and will have his body plastinated so that people can learn about PD. ❖

Up-to-date information on the traveling exhibitions is available at www.bodyworlds.com.



The Soccer Player

Shown here and on the front cover, this plastinate shows all the muscles just below the skin. The skeletal muscles all overlap intricately. Photo © Gunther von Hagens' BODY WORLDS, Institute for Plastination, Heidelberg, Germany, www.bodyworlds.com. All rights reserved.

The Orthopedic Body

(Below left) This plastinate is posed as a dancer. It is fitted with artificial joints at the knee, hip, and elbow. The jawbone has also been partly replaced. Some of the instruments are surgical. Others are for orthopedics.

(Below right) Plastinate of a man holding his skin.