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Human bodies and reliquaries on display: The tension between education and spectacle in museum and religious spaces

Brittany Rose Cassandra

James Madison University

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Human Bodies and Reliquaries on Display:
The Tension between Education and Spectacle in Museums and Religious Spaces

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by Brittany Rose Cassandra

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FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Project Advisor: Sarah Brooks, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Art History

Reader: David Ehrenpreis, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Art History

Reader: Kate Stevens, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Art History

HONORS PROGRAM APPROVAL:

Barry Falk, Ph.D., Director, Honors Program
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Introduction

Throughout history, mummified remains and reliquaries from ancient Egypt, the Middle Ages and contemporary times have fascinated and intrigued people. The display of human remains and reliquaries has interested audiences as well. There is a line, however, that a museum or church has to beware of when creating an exhibit or chapel for deceased remains. While putting human remains or relics out on display, it is necessary to keep the history of the object or person in mind and be respectful towards the culture it came from. The purpose of exhibits in museums or in churches is to educate and entertain any visitor that walks through the doors. If the display is tastefully done, a visitor will get the experience that is warranted by the institution.

When the traveling exhibit of the treasures from King Tutankhamun’s tomb was put on display in the 1970s, it was an instant blockbuster exhibit drawing crowds from all over. However, the museum was not respectful of what ancient Egyptians believed or if displaying the dead was acceptable in their culture either. In contrast the mummy of Ti Ameny Net at Richmond University was recently displayed with her past and the education of the public in mind. The two exhibits show that there are different ways to display remains of mummified remains, but in order to be successful, the visitor’s education and respect for the dead must be kept in mind by the curator.

Relics and reliquaries from the medieval period provide further examples of how an institution should respectfully display religious objects and remains of saints. Religiosity and the sanctity of objects such as the Fieschi Morgan reliquary, the relics of Saint Mark and the relics of Saint Catherine have to be respected because they are in places of tourist attraction making them a spectacle in the first place. The curators of the church or museum have to display the relics and
reliquaries in a manner that decreases the spectacle surrounding the history of the object and focuses on educating the visitors while also allowing the faithful to venerate these remains as well.

Contemporary exhibitions of modern mummies, such as *Bodies: The Exhibition* in New York, New York and *Body Worlds* created by Gunther von Hagens were created to educate the public. The difference between education and spectacle is seen in these exhibits. New techniques of mummifying remains as well as the history behind the deceased people in these exhibits are extremely controversial and sensitive since they are recent creations. It is necessary for plasticized body exhibits to approach all individual remains in a respectful manner and keep the visitors in mind constantly. People attend the exhibits to learn about the human body’s inner-workings, but also to gawk at these human bodies in various positions.

This paper was created to show different ways remains and reliquaries can be exhibited. There is a wide variety of information that people can learn from human remains, but the way that they are exhibited can detract from the viewers experience. Ultimately it is the curator’s decisions that can create an educational exhibit with respect of the human remains or cause a spectacle and draw unwanted attention. The exhibition of mummified remains and reliquaries is fascinating to visitors while also necessary for education and veneration, but if treated incorrectly an exhibit can easily become a spectacle and detract from the educational experience a visitor can have, as well as disrespect the deceased and their culture.
Chapter 1

Mummies in Museums: the Ethical Exhibition of Ancient Bodies

Most major museums own ancient Egyptian corpses, more commonly known as mummies. This reflects the European and American participation in what historians have called “Egyptomania” or the very popular public interest in the history of Egypt after Napoleon’s visit at the start of the 19th century. Many modern visitors still share this interest but others want to learn more about the human body and the Egyptian culture, and today’s museums must consider both. A mummy is the body of an ancient Egyptian that has been preserved by dehydration through the use of natron in a complex and culturally significant process. Since a mummy was once a person who was mummified for religious and spiritual reasons, museums need to find ways of appropriate displays that balance the educational purposes while still observing the religious and spiritual attributes given to deceased humans. Exhibits such as the traveling Treasures of King Tutankhamun and the permanent installation of the mummy of Ti Ameny Net at the University of Richmond are two examples of how museums have handled this issue. King Tutankhamun’s exhibit in 1976 defined the “blockbuster” museum exhibit possessing such entertainment aspects that it drew record-breaking crowds while the current exhibit of Ti Ameny Net’s is strictly educational in nature. Contrasting these two exhibits will demonstrate two extremes methods American museum have used to display human remains to the public.

Museums are educational institutions and great consideration is given to how to get visitors through the door as well as how best to convey cultural information through exhibitions. When cadavers are the focus of such exhibitions, there is a thin line between attracting public interest and respect for the dead and his or her cultural traditions. There are many successful exhibits that display mummies in an educational manner but others that do not seem to extend beyond the provocative aspect of displaying dead bodies.
All cultures approach death and corpses differently. For example, dying and death are terrifying to many Americans, who will frequently avoid the subject as much as possible. Andrea Fontana, a sociology professor at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, said referring to death, that as Americans, “[…] we think about it, we talk about it, we watch films, tell stories, and read books about it, but ultimately, as individuals and as a society, we still deny it and would prefer to avoid it.”\(^1\) Therefore, when confronted with death in a museum setting, a visitor most probably will be uneasy. Curators must carefully consider how best to arrange an exhibit so that visitors will experience educational aspects that surround the creation of a mummy and its cultural context.

Death, since it is so closely linked to religious and spiritual ideas of an afterlife, is a different event for most Americans than what it was for the ancient Egyptians. While both cultures traditionally embalm their dead, many Americans believe that the deceased ceases to be an active part of the family. American funerals mark a time when ties between the living and dead are severed and a new phase of life begins for the survivors with the deceased passing to some unknowable realm. Ancient Egyptian funerals, by contrast, mark only a different stage in a person’s life; they were always expected to remain an active part of the family. As a result their funerals culminate in a feast in which the deceased participates. This interaction was expected to continue indefinitely as tombs in ancient Egypt were created so that the living could constant make offerings to the deceased and ask for favors or advice. Judging from the elaborate rituals surround these interactions, the ancient Egyptians viewed and treated their dead very differently from modern Americans.

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\(^1\) Andrea Fontana and Jennifer Reid Keene, *Death and Dying in America* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 3.
To understand just a part of the complexity of Egyptian funerary ritual that exhibits could convey, one should examine the process behind mummification. In ancient Egyptian culture, people believed that there were eight parts of the body that were important and needed to be preserved. These were the heart, the physical body (khat), the shadow (khai’bit), the intellect or will (akhu), the true name (ren), the manifested spirit (ba), the spirit (ka), and the life force (sekhem). Ancient Egyptians in the prehistoric period were mummified naturally when buried in sand. This contact with the desert sand naturally desiccated the remains, preserving the body with little human interference. However, by the age of the pharaohs, kings and upperclassmen were given elaborate tombs that removed their direct contact with the sand. Priests and embalmers began to mummify them so that the body could be preserved.

The process began by cleaning the corpse was cleaned and removing the internal organs, placing both in natron, a naturally occurring mixture of baking soda and salt, to dry. The major organs were later stored in four canopic jars. Each canopic jar depicted a different god, the four sons of the solar god Horus, which held and protected different organs. The human-headed god, Imsety, protected the liver; the baboon-headed god, Hapy protected the lungs; the jackal-headed god, Duamutef, protected the stomach; and the falcon-headed god, Qebehsenuef, protected the intestines.2 The heart was the one organ not taken out of the body. The ancient Egyptians believed the heart spoke for life and actions, and it was weighed against the feather of Ma’at, the goddess of right being, in the afterlife. After the organs were preserved, and the body was dried, the deceased was filled with sawdust and wrapped in linen along with amulets for protection. The amulets included were an ankh, djed, belt of Isis, and a scarab. Linen wrappings were then covered with a thin layer of plaster and paint and decorated.

In addition to the preparation of the mummy, the tombs of the pharaohs are decorated so the deceased can have everything imaginable in the afterlife. Images of hunting or fishing scenes appear on walls so the deceased can perform leisurely activities in the afterlife. Images of the farming and harvesting are also portrayed as part of the afterlife included serving the gods by providing food for them. Because most ancient Egyptians preferred leisure to labor intensive work, they developed shabtis. A shabti, or answerer, is a mini version of the deceased that come alive and take the place of the deceased when he or she was called upon to work. Ancient Egyptians also left food and other items such as jewelry, pendants, pottery, and chests in the tomb to provide the deceased with everything needed for the afterlife.

In 1976 Egyptomania swept through the United States when the exhibition *Treasures of Tutankhamun* was organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and traveled throughout the country. Fifty-five objects from the tomb of King Tutankhamun were exhibited to honor the fifty-fifth year anniversary of its discovery by Howard Carter. Years of discussions between the Egyptian Organization of Antiquities and American museums preceded the creation of the exhibit. Only after President Richard Nixon visited Egypt and was approached by Egyptian President Mohamed Anwar el-Sadat about displaying the treasures of King Tutankhamun’s tomb was there any progress. The Secretary of State Henry Kissinger signed an accord that allowed American museums to create an exhibit with the objects, including King Tutankhamun’s funerary mask (Fig.1). After the exhibit’s tour throughout the U.S. an estimated

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8.8 million people had seen it, and the exhibit brought tourism and profit to local businesses in cities on the tour. Over three million people went to see the exhibit in Chicago over a four-month period. Even in places like Toronto, Canada, Treasures of Tutankhamun drew 780,000 people, with 100,000 that were from out of town. These tourists needed 40,000 hotel rooms and spent $26 million in the city.

These numbers demonstrate how successful the exhibition was regarding attracting visitors to the museum. But since bringing people to the museum is only part of the success of any exhibit, it is necessary to look at how the curators portrayed King Tutankhamun and how information was received by viewers. In the 1976 catalog to the exhibit the author states the objects used “were chosen […] not only for their variety of subject matter, material, and sheer aesthetic beauty, but to give an accurate image of the contents of the four rooms of the tomb […].” There was no focus on the life and beliefs of King Tutankhamun, instead the exhibit showed only the rich goods that were intended to supply his afterlife. If education had been considered, perhaps other objects might have been selected that evidenced the life of a young man who ruled the two lands of Egypt between 1334 and 1325 BCE. Instead Tutankhamen’s tomb objects, and the body adornments themselves, were used to demonstrate the sheer wealth of the ancient Egyptians, creating a dazzlingly spectacle of gold and precious stones that stunned visitors. While this generated a profit for both the museums and for their gift stores, the curators

7 Edwards, 4.
did not do their best to educate and to communicate a respect for the ancient Egyptian dead. Instead of giving visitors an insight into the history of human life and death, they promoted the idea of Egyptomania.

By contrast, the University of Richmond’s Classical Studies department is the home to Ti Ameny Net (Fig 2). She is a 3,000-year-old mummy who lived during the 25th Dynasty of ancient Egypt between 750 and 656 BCE. The woman herself held a high position in society, as seen by the elaborate nature of her coffin, but she suffered from scoliosis and died around age 30. The University of Richmond has had the mummified body of Ti Ameny Net since 1876 CE when Professor Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry donated it, but it was not until 2009 when a student, Caroline Cobert, began a project that would increase the knowledge of Ti Ameny Net’s life twofold. Her work led to the current exhibit of the life of Ti Ameny Net and several scientific breakthroughs.

After her death, Ti Ameny Net was buried near Thebes. Her body and sarcophagus was exhumed in 1869 CE for the entertainment of Edward VII, Prince of Whales, who had visited the area. The Prince gave the body and sarcophagus to his American translator who sold it to Professor Jabez in 1875 CE. After Ti Ameny Net was donated to the University of Richmond, she was unveiled to an excited and enthused Richmond audience. Because of the lack of an exhibition venue, Ti Ameny Net’s body and sarcophagus resided in many different places, including Philadelphia’s Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, several basements, and a library. Eventually her body came to its final resting place in the Ancient World Gallery at the University of Richmond.

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of Richmond and was to be used for educational purposes. Though the history and travels of Ti Ameny Net is important, the exhibit of her remains today shows how a museum staff and curator have tastefully and meaningfully displayed mummified remains. At the presentation given by student curator Caroline Cobert about Ti Ameny Net’s exhibit, she stated “In the past mummies have been more curiosities and haunted house attractions. […] We wanted to design a display that would showcase her in a dignified, respectful way.” In order to do so the exhibit is designed so CT scans, artifacts, the sarcophagus and a timeline of Ti Ameny Net’s life is shown to the visitor before the actual mummified body is seen. By allowing the viewer to see information about Ti Ameny Net’s life and times before seeing the body makes her into a real woman, not just a spectacle or novelty item to pass by.

What makes a successful exhibit? While the King Tut exhibit drew in the crowds and profits, it was a blockbuster show in which the curators treated the person of Tutankhamun as a curiosity. Alternatively, the Ti Ameny Net exhibit is successful for its educational value and ability to treat the mummy as a deceased human rather than as an object. To create an exhibit that showcases the person and history behind the mummy, the curator needs to display objects in an order that allows the viewer to create a relationship with the person behind the mummy before seeing the actual mummified remains. King Tutankhamun’s exhibit was based upon creating a spectacle that would bring in record crowds. As such it focused on the materialistic goods the boy king received in the afterlife. Though he is one of the most recognized names in ancient Egyptian history, the exhibit commoditized his identity, ignoring his continuing rights and

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dignity as a person. In comparison, the exhibit of Ti Ameny Net showed how a museum can successfully impart the educational value of a deceased ancient Egyptian while maintaining his or her life and history.
Chapter 2

Relics and Reliquaries: The Display of Religious Objects in a Public/Religious Setting

Along with ancient Egyptian mummies, relics are mummified remains only displayed in a different setting. Their presence in churches creates an overwhelming feeling of religiosity when walking through a city like modern-day Florence, where almost every city block contains a church. The faithful worship using both images and relics that had been displayed to be venerated and to consecrate the church. Relics are the mortal remains of holy people or objects that were sanctified by contact with Christ or another holy person or place.\(^{11}\) The most important relics are pieces from the True Cross, or the monumental wooden cross Jesus was crucified on in 33 CE in Jerusalem. The Legend of the Cross, to be discussed later, describes how it was found and subsequently divided between the Byzantine emperor, his churches in Constantinople, and the shrine of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Over time, many more pieces of the True Cross were scattered to other important sites in the Christian world\(^ {12}\) creating the need for reliquaries, such as the Fieschi Morgan reliquary (discussed in Section 1), to hold fragments.

Relics after the True Cross included bodily remains of martyrs, apostles of Christ, and objects used during the Crucifixion. Such objects included nails that went through Christ’s hands and feet. In order to be classified as a relic, the bodily remains or objects had to be in contact with a sacred place or holy person during his or her lifetime. Contact normally occurred when a miracle was witnessed. Relics are still visited and venerated today by worshippers, but originally when churches first received the remains of a saint, they were to bring great power and prestige


to the church as well. The more recognized the saint was, the more power the church or city held. San Marco in Venice is a prime example of this phenomenon. The basilica of Saint Mark was created specifically to hold the relics of the saint and bring power to the city of Venice.

In a number of cases, saints’ bodies have remained in an excellent state of preservation over the centuries. In the Christian tradition it is believed that Christian saints experience the passing of the physical body as distinct from human remains. The general population undergoes the physical death of the body, including decomposition, a process in which the stench is associated with Hell.13 It is important to note that from a scientific perspective, the human body experiences death in four stages and go through processes that saints’ bodies do not. The four stages include fresh (freshly dead), bloating, decay, and drying which change depending on various factors. The rate of decomposition for the natural body changes based on a number of factors, including environment, temperature, weather conditions, how and where the body is buried, what type of surface the body rests upon, and whether the body has been embalmed.14

Since the bodies of saints do no go through these changes after death, they are considered incorruptible. In the writings of Saint John of Damascus (b. 645, d.749), he states that the bodies of Christian saints do not experience decomposition. Instead their bodies skip that phase because they never actually die. Saint John of Damascus was a fourth-century Christian theologian who wrote that saints are the means by which the faithful can reach heaven, and through which miracles are performed. Saints are never truly dead for the deaths of saints’ bodies transcend the physical world. Like Ancient Egyptians, in which the mummified corpse was necessary for the person’s afterlife, bodies for saints needed to remain intact for their afterlife and miracles to be

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performed. Thiofrid of Echternach believed saint’s bodies became incorrupt because Jesus Christ made the saints part of his own incorruptible body. After death, however, all saint’s bodies are submitted to decay, yet their merits and divine mercy give them heavenly power and prevent decay. The doctrines of John of Damascus are questioned, as well as the thoughts of Thiofrid of Echternach, but they are ways to justify the condition of saints’ bodies after exposure to the elements over hundreds of years.

Every relic and reliquary is special and sacred, but some of these religious objects are becoming spectacles or neglected in their repositories. Churches and museums have a responsibility to create a display for these religious objects in which the faithful can venerate and visitors can learn from. Yet, the repositories need to display them respectfully and not draw a crowd, such as the *Treasures of Tutankhamun* exhibit. People have a fascination with the dead and preserved remains, as seen in the discussion about ancient Egyptian remains, but to preserve the sanctity of the person behind the mummified remains is a task the museum must handle. Churches are the resting place of these relics and it is their duty to display the remains and reliquaries so visitors can gain the most education from them and venerate them, yet allow the objects retain their spiritual and sanctified qualities.

**Section I: Fieschi Morgan Reliquary**

A reliquary is any box, shrine, or container that is meant to hold a relic. An example is the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary (Fig. 3-8), which measures 2.7x10.3x7.1 cm and held relics of the True Cross. The reliquary is one of the most well-known to date, and the interesting part about it

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16 Bagnoli, 22.

is its travels. Today the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York houses the reliquary, but the exact location of its origin is unknown. The problem with housing relics or reliquaries in museums is that they are taken out of their original context and therefore stripped of meaning. It is the job of the curators to bring that piece back to its original meaning. Curators must be able to educate the public with the object at hand, but show how much meaning it had when first created.

The Fieschi Morgan reliquary was made around the second quarter of the 9th century CE in Byzantium. The reliquary was made of niello, cloisonné enamel and gilt silver and was specifically designed to hold several wooden remains of the True Cross from Jerusalem. The interior of the box is sectioned off in the form of a cross (Fig 5) displaying its function. There are busts of twenty-seven different saints that have their names in Greek rendered in niello. Healing saints, apostles, evangelists, soldier saints and a deacon saint are present on the lid and the four sides of the reliquary. John, Saint Demetrios, Saint Eustathios, Saint Lawrence, Luke, Mark, Thomas, James, Saint Damianos, Saint Kosmos, Saint Gregory the Miracle-Worker, Bartholomew, Matthew, Jude and Simon are all located on the lid starting from the upper left corner moving clockwise. On the side of the reliquary starting at the top left moving clockwise is Saint Anastasios, Saint Nicholas, Saint Platon, Saint Theodore, Saint Prokopios, Saint George, Saint Merkourios, Saint Eustrastios, Saint Panteleimon, Saint Andrew, Saint John, Saint Paul, and Saint Peter. The lid also features a colorful depiction of the Crucifixion in cloisonné enamel. On the reverse of the box’s lid are four scenes from the life of Christ (Fig 6). The Annunciation, the Nativity, Crucifixion and Anastasis, or Christ’s descent into Hell, are depicted in a sketchy manner lacking the same detail put into the saints surrounding the box. These four

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scenes present the most important and recognizable aspects of each narrative and therefore viewers can immediately known what the scenes represent. Each saint and scene on the reliquary is significant to its meaning and function. Without the depictions of the saints or scenes on the reliquary, viewers would be clueless to the use of it.

In addition to depictions on the Fieschi Morgan reliquary, it is important to note the travels it has taken. The first known owner of the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary was Pope Innocent IV, Sinibaldo de’ Fieschi (r. 1243-54 CE), who acquired it from a Byzantine source. Though Fieschi is the first known owner of the reliquary its journey began long before the mid-1200s. When Emperor Constantine’s mother Helena decided to search for the pieces of the True Cross, the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary was used to house pieces of the relic and it is one of the only reliquaries that have survived. The legends behind the True Cross create a sense of mystery and wonderment about the objects that housed them. One legend told about how Helena found the True Cross is that Helena incessantly asked the Jews of Jerusalem where the True Cross was. Eventually a single witness, the son of the prophet Judas, told her its location. Previous to her discovery, the True Cross had stayed hidden for over two hundred years after Christ was crucified.

The definite translation of the reliquary from Constantinople to the hands of Pope Innocent IV is unknown today. One possibility, however, is during the Crusades in 1204 CE.

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19 Bagnoli, 82.
21 Bagnoli, 82.
Constantine’s possessions were ransacked and the Romans brought back the reliquary. Another possibility is one in which Pope Innocent IV brought back the reliquary himself when he participated in the Crusades. A third possibility is the reliquary was a gift from a monk of San Sabas, which occurred prior to the coronation of an Emperor. After the reliquary left the hands of Pope Innocent IV, its translation was meticulously documented. The pope’s descendents gained control of the reliquary after his death in 1254, and maintained possession until the piece was sold in 1887.

From 1887 until 1904, the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary was under the care of Baron Albert Oppenheim of Cologne, France. Oppenheim bought the reliquary and ivory box that held it at an auction by Countess Thellug of Genoa, the last descendant of Innocent IV to possess the reliquary. Before the sale occurred, the relics of the True Cross were taken out of the reliquary at an unknown date. The relics were supposedly removed from the reliquary in 1595 when construction began on the present day relic. Additionally, Pope Innocent the IV was known for wearing the relics of the True Cross in a crystal shaped as a cross around his neck. Today, the relic and crystal reliquary are housed in San Salvatore Nuovo, a basilica in San-Salvatore-di-Lavagna, Genoa, Italy. The basilica was built for a collegiate foundation created by Innocent IV.

J. Pierpont Morgan was the next owner of the reliquary sold from Oppenheim’s collection by the French art dealer Jacques Seligmann. The reliquary remained overseas

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23 Wilensky, 45.

24 Ibid, 46. Wilensky quotes Margaret E. Frazer discussing the Age of Spirituality exhibit, saying Pope Innocent IV could have brought back the reliquary himself.

25 Williamson, 296.

26 Wilensky, 48-52.

27 Williamson, 301.

28 Williamson, 296.
Morgan’s European collection until 1910 when a twenty percent tax on imported works of art over 100 years old was lifted. Morgan’s collection was brought to the United States after the lift.\textsuperscript{29} In addition to collection artwork, Morgan served on the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee, and the Finance Committee for the Board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York. He also served as Vice President and President for the museum.\textsuperscript{30} Thus it was fitting that after his death in 1913 Morgan’s son donated his collection to the Metropolitan, which included the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary.

Annabel Wharton, a medieval scholar, stated, “[…] in modernity, the box [Fieschi Morgan Reliquary] acts not as a reliquary, but like an artwork.”\textsuperscript{31} Though the Fieschi Morgan reliquary has a long history with the church, it is no longer regarded as a religious object because of its inhabitance at the Metropolitan Museum for a prolonged period. The reliquary became a commodity when it was sold at the auction in 1887. At that point in time the box was not a religious object anymore. The reliquary was an accessioned work identified by its collection number in the Metropolitan Museum and placed in a case with other objects, which detracted from its sacred meaning and function. Translation of the object from its original context to a new one changed the meaning as well, but the museum has to handle the consequences of the move. The original function of the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary will never be restored unless the relics of the True Cross need a reliquary, but the curators of the Metropolitan have to make sure to portray the original meaning of the box to visitors. Education is one of the main goals of exhibiting

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\textsuperscript{31} Wharton, 37.
\end{flushright}
ancient objects in museums. To get the educational value of the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary across without taking away the religious meaning, curators have to display the object in a respectful manner. The move of the reliquary from the Pope’s hand to those of a secular man and then to a museum affected the significance of this reliquary, made it into a source of amusement, wonder, and profit, but it is the duty of the curators to display the reliquary in a manner that visitors can get the most out of coming in contact with the piece.

Even though the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary is not a relic or remains in a museum, it is a religious object displayed in a secular space. The spirituality of the object is decreased significantly especially since the relics were removed, but it is an important object in Medieval history. The crowded, loud and bright atmosphere of a museum changes the whole dynamic of the object, but it is a curator’s job to allow visitors to have an interaction with the reliquary while preserving its religious value.

In the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo in Florence, Italy both artwork and artifacts that were once part of the Duomo, known for Brunelleschi’s Dome, are housed. Not only were sculptures present in the museum, but there were also relics of Florentine artists and teachers in reliquaries. The display of the relics was not special. Each relic was housed in its own reliquary, but there were three to a case and bright lights that made the object hard to appreciate (Fig 9). Setting up the reliquaries in this manner was the decision of the curator. Instead of treating each object as special and having a visitor learn the most from each reliquary, the display is distracting and overcrowded. The display does not give the reliquaries and relics the proper attention they deserve and visitors do not take away much from seeing the objects.
Though the reliquaries in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo have relics inside, the educational and religious value is lost. The display is key when it comes to showing the significance of an object and the curators of the Metropolitan do that with the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary. Even if the Fieschi Morgan reliquary has lost its original meaning due to its removal from the original context, when the reliquary is properly displayed visitors can take away a lot from their interaction with the object.

Section II: Saint Mark and His Relics

Saint Mark’s Basilica (Fig.10) is the principal church and tourist attraction in Venice. The church was first erected in 829 CE with five domes basilica and a crypt. In 976 CE, a fire broke out during a popular revolt against Doge Pietro Candiano IV (r. 959-76), burning down the church and losing the relics of Saint Mark. Construction for the new basilica began in 1063 CE on the foundation of the old one (current plan, Fig. 13). The new basilica was created in the plan of a Greek cross with the nave slightly longer than the transept. The five domes were constructed over the arms of the cross and at the intersection of the nave and transept. Underneath the presbytery, or area for the clergy, and side chapels is the crypt holding Saint Mark’s remains. The crypt has three naves, an apse and a small chapel where the relics are displayed. According to church records, after the new basilica was complete the people of Venice prayed for the return of the lost relics. At that moment the church began to shake and crumble, causing the masonry of

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a column to fall. The concealed coffin of Saint Mark’s relics was revealed for the first time since
the fire in 976.  

Another legend that surrounds the relics of Saint Mark is the story of how the relics were
stolen in 828 CE. While in the Muslim territories of Alexandria, Egypt, Venetian merchants stole
Saint Mark’s body. The legend shows the significance relics of patron saints had in individual
churches throughout Christendom. If the patron saint was popular, the city had more power.
Prior to Saint Mark’s relics in Venice, the Doge, or ruler of Venice, had the relics of Saint
Theodore the city’s original patron saint. Saint Theodore did not have the same prestige or
spiritual stature that Saint Mark did. Known in his lifetime as Theodore of Amasea (b. Unknown,
d. 306), he joined the Roman army in Amasea (current day Turkey). Theodore denied the
existence of multiple pagan gods when an edict against Christians was issued and had to report to
Roman emperors. He was told to sacrifice to the Roman gods but instead Theodore proclaimed
his devotion to Jesus Christ and died a martyr when the emperors took his life.  

The relics of Saint Theodore did not have the prestige the Doge wanted. So when the
opportunity to obtain Saint Mark’s relics arose, the Venetians took it. Saint Mark, the Evangelist,
is a well-known saint in Christianity. He was an Apostle of Jesus Christ, founded the Church of
Alexandria, and interpreted the sermons and teachings of Peter, known as the Gospels of Saint
Mark. Saint Mark is associated with a lion in art and scripture. The facts of Saint Mark’s
martyrdom are uncertain, but it is widely accepted that he was dragged through the streets of
Alexandria and his body was put to rest in a Christian Alexandrian church.

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33 Rainer Hagen and Rose-Marie Hagen. What Great Paintings Say, Volume 1. (Cologne,
Germany: Taschen, 2003), 166.
Venice has been known for international commerce because of its location on the Adriatic Sea. Venetian merchants traded frequently with cities such as Alexandria, where Saint Mark was martyred and his remains laid. The Venetians had wanted the remains of Saint Mark and in 828 CE their chance arose. During that year, the Abbasid Muslim caliph in Alexandria decided to build a palace for his own pleasure. To make his vision come true, he wanted to use the marble columns from Christian churches in the area, which included the church Saint Mark’s relics rested in.\(^{35}\)

The theft of the relics was also impacted by the looming threat of the Frankish-Carolingian kingdom to the north, which continuously attempted to gain military and political power over Venice. Failing at gaining military and political power of Venice, the Carolingians decided to try gaining ecclesiastical power and in 827 CE at the Synod in Mantua they attempted to do so. The purpose of the synod was to end the age-old dispute of Episcopal dominance between Aquileia and Grado, another northern Italian city. Grado believed it had primacy when the patriarch of Aquileia fled to Grado bringing the relics of the church with him. By doing so, the patriarch established a permanent jurisdiction in Grado. The people Aquileia did not believe they had lost primacy but brought falsified documents to prove their side. The vote was to determine who had primacy and since Aquileia was in Carolingian territory as was Mantua, Aquileia was favored. The Carolingian kingdom received power over the Greek churches of the Adriatic region.\(^{36}\)

Venice was overseen by Aquileia but wanted to gain independence. If the Venetians had not tried to do so after the synod, the Carolingians would have gained control. In order to obtain

\(^{35}\) Hagen and Hagen, 166.

independence, Venice needed to increase their spiritual capital and the only way to accomplish that goal was to steal Saint Mark’s relics. At this point in time, Saint Mark was considered the founder of the Church of Aquileia. By having Saint Mark’s relics, the Venetians would have power instead of the Carolingians. The relics of an Apostle, especially of an Italian evangelical saint, wielded Venice political power distinct from the Carolingians.37

Angelo Particiaco (d. 828 CE) was the Doge of Venice when Saint Mark’s relics were stolen from Alexandria. Two Venetian merchants, Bonus and Rusticus, were in the port city of Alexandria when they heard about the construction of the caliph’s palace. They realized the threat construction posed to the church where Saint Mark’s body laid and how it upset the caretakers of the church. Bonus and Rusticus claimed they were the sons of Mark and received the gospel from Mark himself to make a deal with the caretakers. A deal was made in which the caretakers allowed the two Venetian men to take the body but they would have to take the Alexandrian priest and monk back to Venice as well. The idea sounded outrageous to the men of the church, but one member of the church got whipped for hiding marble from the ruler so realizing the tyranny the deal was accepted.38 Other less prominent sources report the men of the Alexandrian church did not budge when the Venetians offered to house Saint Mark’s relics in a safe place. 39

Additionally it is said the Venetians replaced Mark’s body with that of Saint Claudia, so pilgrims who visited the relics were not suspicious. After replacing Saint Mark’s body, the Venetians still had to get the relics through the Muslim port, customs, and safely to Venice without being caught. The merchants put the remains of Saint Mark at the bottom of a basket

37 Geary, 89-91.
38 Geary, 92-93.
39 Hagen and Hagen, 164.
with a blanket on top and filled the rest of the basket with dried pork. The Muslims of Alexandria found the pork highly disgusting and repulsive, so the basket passed through customs without hesitation or a second look. Once back in Venice, the merchants had Saint Mark’s body placed directly in the hands of the Doge.

On the west façade of Saint Mark’s Basilica above the door leading to the Cappella Zen is a Baroque-era mosaic representing the well-known account of how the Venetians smuggled Saint Mark’s body across customs in a basket (Fig. 12). The gold and glass composition was created in the seventeenth century and shows the reaction of the Arabs at customs in Alexandria when the pork in the basket was revealed. One can tell that they are disgusted and want nothing to do with goods in the basket, which concealed the body of Saint Mark. In the intrados of the arch to the left and right of the main scene, the artist depicted the Venetians placing the body in the basket in Alexandria and depositing Saint Mark’s body on the altar in Venice (Fig 12).

In Christian theology, the saints serve as mediums between Earth and Heaven, as Saint John of Damascus stated. Relics were put on display for the benefit of the pilgrims who venerate and worship the saint’s remains. When miracles occurred, the efficiency and sanctity of the saint was solidified. Saint Mark’s remains were intentionally displayed not to be immediately visible to the public. Not every single visitor can see the remains of Saint Mark in the crypt and pilgrims cannot approach the remains very closely. Saint Mark’s relics are under the ground in an ancient chapel behind the altar. Relics are so precious and important to the faithful therefore it is necessary for the church to properly display them in a respectful manner.

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41 Ibid, 13.
The relics of Saint Mark are a good example of exhibition by the church since visitors can learn about him, yet only worshipers get to see him. There is an air of mystery that surrounds Saint Mark’s relics because of their long history, but in order not to make a spectacle of the remains and stay respectful of them, the relics are underground.

The question that churches have to deal with when displaying relics is how is it possible to maintain the religious and spiritual aspect of the object without it becoming a spectacle? Saint Mark’s Basilica houses the relics in a crypt, but when Virgin Mary’s belt was put on public display in Moscow, Russia in 2011 at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, it was made a spectacle of. The line was miles long, with at least 25,000 people queued up at any given time and the wait reached 24 hours at some points. When the faithful heard about the Virgin’s belt coming on display, they braved the cold to kiss the glass case that held the reliquary the belt rested in. Many of the pilgrims were women who believe that the Virgin’s belt assists with fertility and childbirth. The relic caused such a spectacle, however, because it normally rests in an Orthodox monastery on Mount Athos in Greece where women cannot visit it. The belt’s tour through Russia allowed female pilgrims to stand in front of it and revere it, but in a situation such as this, it is hard for the curator to prevent a spectacle from occurring.

Each relic is important to those who worship it. Relics were put on public display for the benefit of the faithful, but it is up to the church to maintain the spiritual and sanctified quality of the objects. How relics are displayed, whether it be in a crypt or in a case, should allow visitors to take away the most they can from the object without demeaning the worth of the relics. Saint Mark’s remains will always draw a crowd. He is one of the most well known apostles in

Christianity and his remains are in the primary church in Venice. Even though Saint Mark’s Basilica sees thousands of tourists in a day making is a spectacle of its own, the relics of Saint Mark retain the spiritual, religious, and sanctified quality because of how the relics are displayed.

Section III: The Relics of Saint Catherine of Siena

The church of San Domenico in Siena, Italy, preserves treasured memorials of the life and miracles of Saint Catherine of Siena. A chapel in Saint Catherine’s name is decorated with scenes of her mystical experiences. 44 On a tour through San Domenico today, a guide will report that thousands of Christians make the pilgrimage to view the relics of Saint Catherine every year. Saint Catherine was born in Siena in 1347, and died in 1380 while in Rome. Though Catherine lived a short life, she was extremely influential. She was illiterate throughout life, yet left over three hundred and seventy dictated letters and a book to disciples after death. Catherine dedicated her time to helping the sick and brought peace to the church when there was division among the papacy.

Saint Catherine’s relics displayed in the Sienese church include her skull and thumb, which are neatly displayed behind grating and a glass case (Fig. 14-16). Behind the grating, the gothic style elaborate reliquary is seen, which does not match the style of the simpler Dominican church built in 1226. San Domenico has a plain brick exterior with the plan set up to have a long and wide nave and transept at the east end of the church (Fig 18). The church’s interior is also particularly simple and unadorned, as seen in Figure 19, but it has a feeling of a wide-open space with tall windows allowing in light. When a visitor enters the church, there is a fenced off alcove with the skull of Saint Catherine placed behind glass. A bench to kneel on is placed in front of

the alcove allowing visitors to pray to her, and no photographs can be taken displaying the
sanctity of the church and Saint Catherine. Compared to San Domenico, Saint Catherine’s
reliquary is much more highly decorative with crenellations, a pointed roof and niches, which
house small gilt statues.

Inside of the reliquary is Saint Catherine’s sacred head presented to the viewer through a
portal and demanding the viewer’s attention. The reliquary gives Saint Catherine an important
feel, and when seen through the grating (Fig. 15) her significance is reiterated since her face is
framed by the opening. The visitor is forced to look directly at her head while standing in the
chapel (Fig. 20). Catherine’s head has a wax covering to give the illusion of life, but the eye
sockets are hollowed and empty. Her nose is not completely preserved, her face is discolored,
and her mouth is slightly open. Despite her importance, Saint Catherine’s sacred head is
frightening, ghoulish and petite. From where the visitor views the relics on public display, it
appears as if the saint’s skin still clings to her skull. The rest of Saint Catherine’s body lies in a
sarcophagus at the Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome where it has been since 1380
CE (Fig. 17).

Saint Catherine lived a pious life focused on mysticism. Before the age of seven, her
renowned visions of Christ began and she dedicated herself as a virgin to the Church. At sixteen,
she joined the Dominican Third Order, one of the leading Renaissance monastic orders. As part
of the Order she lived a solitary life confined to her room. Catherine did not venture out until she
received a calling from God that her family and outsiders needed her. In 1366, the mystical
marriage between Catherine and Jesus was performed, meaning that Catherine had a vision of
Christ saying she would be His bride.\textsuperscript{45} On April 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1375, Catherine received the visible Stigmata (depicted by an artist in Figure 22), or the markings of the Passion of the Christ while in Pisa. She, however, asked to have the marks remain invisible until after her death.

In addition to her relationship with Jesus Christ, Saint Catherine was known for her care of the sick, her mediation work with Pope Gregory XI (r. 1370-78) and the fighting factions of Florence and Rome, her dedication to the conversion of sinners and service to the poor. In 1379, Catherine arrived in Rome to support Pope Urban VI (r. 1378-89) and unite the church. Urban VI needed the Catherine’s support because people did not respect him. The pope was not well-liked because he did not live up the expectations of followers after he was elected.\textsuperscript{46} Catherine became weaker and weaker during this period of turmoil until she had a heart attack in January of 1380. She recovered but in April of that same year her body collapsed from exhaustion.\textsuperscript{47} Catherine died at the age of thirty-three in 1380 CE from that exhaustion because she accomplished so much in her short life.\textsuperscript{48}

The basilica church of San Domenico, founded in 1226, is the resting place for Saint Catherine’s sacred head. The plan (Fig. 18) of the church shows it was designed with a T-shape in mind, like many other Italian Romanesque churches of the time. The church’s nave has two transepts branching off from where the altar is located. Additionally, off of the right nave is the chapel dedicated to Saint Catherine. Her sacred head is located at the front of the chapel, furthest from the viewer, while her thumb lies to the right on a wall closer to the viewer.

\textsuperscript{47} Giuliana Cavallini. \textit{Catherine of Siena}. (London: Continuum, 2005), xxviii.
\textsuperscript{48} Gardner, "St. Catherine of Siena."
Catherine’s head is placed in the back of the chapel behind glass and grating (Fig. 15), so visitors cannot touch it. Only three people have the key to unlock the grating because people, including citizens of Siena, have tried to steal Saint Catherine’s head before. The sacred head and thumb are under such high security because they were stolen by the Sienese from her Roman resting place. The Sienese believed Saint Catherine should be buried in the town she was born and lived in for most of her life as well as where her most important miracles were performed.

The theft of Saint Catherine’s head and thumb was similar to that of Saint Mark’s body, in that both had religious and political motivations. In 1383, three years after her death, Catherine’s spiritual advisor the Blessed Raymond of Capua, decided to steal her relics while in Rome. Catherine’s body originally was in a tomb in the common cemetery of the Friars, but the body obtained damage. The tomb was not tightly sealed and Catherine’s body was exposed to the elements. On the night of October 13th, 1383, the Blessed Raymond wanted to move Catherine’s body from her tomb to the Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. In the process, he removed Catherine’s head and right thumb from her body to send back to Siena undetected by the Romans. Her head was easy to remove because the tendons and nerves had softened and some vertebrae were missing. The removal of Catherine’s head was not considered a “real” decapitation because it was not done in a harmful manner. Legend says that as Catherine’s head passed through the Roman authorities, it turned into a rose.

Over time, the reliquary for the sacred head has changed because it was nearly destroyed in a fire and almost stolen by locals during a public procession, but was dropped on the ground. The first reliquary was a copper urn, followed by a silver urn and after that a lamp-shaped,

49 "Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico Siena." Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico Siena.
50 Freeman, 141.
51 "Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico Siena," Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico Siena.
bronze urn adorned with crystals. The latter was created by the Italian sculptor Giovanni Piamontini (b. unknown, d. 18thc.). Today, Saint Catherine’s head rests in a reliquary resembling a gothic style church (Fig. 14) created in 1947.

Saint Catherine is one of two patron saints of Italy alongside Saint Francis of Assisi canonized by Pope Pius II (r. 1458-64 CE) in 1461. Every year thousands of people visit her relics to venerate them. As previously stated, relics were put on display for the benefit of the pilgrims because they believe relics will affect miracles. Saint Catherine’s relics in Siena are even more divine because of her close connection to Heaven. She died at thirty-three years of age, which is the same age when Christ was crucified and the same number of years Mary Magdalene fasted before dying in the desert.

Similar to the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary Saint Catherine’s head has become somewhat of a spectacle. Tourists walk into San Domenico every day, yet not everyone knows the story of Saint Catherine or why her head and right thumb are on display. Therefore it is the church’s job to display Saint Catherine’s relics in a way that educates visitors about her importance in Siena, but maintain the respect that she has earned. Paintings of Catherine’s life, such as the Sienese painter Andrea Vanni’s (b. 1332, d. 1414) (Fig. 21) illustrate her piety and dedication to the sick. The painting, Saint Catherine of Siena, was created circa 1400 and is placed in the back of the...

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52 Ibid.
53 Gardner, “Saint Catherine of Siena”.
55 Munk, 83.
56 Freeman, 14.
57 Ibid, 141.
church near the entrance. The location of the painting was a conscious choice because some of her miracles were performed in that spot.\textsuperscript{58}

Though Saint Catherine’s mummified head is on display like so many other objects in museums, the church shows her importance from the increased security to the adornment of the reliquary. Her head is behind a grating and glass that visitors can get no closer than five feet from. In Europe there is an overwhelming sense of faith and religiosity with churches on every street. To maintain that feeling, churches must treat the relics they have with respect and display it so the visitor gets the most benefit. Whether a tourist with no religious background arrives at the church or a pilgrim who has come only to see Saint Catherine walks in, the curator of the church has to take everyone into account. People have a fascination and curiosity with death and mummified remains, and in a spiritual setting the fascination increases along with veneration. It is up to the church to reduce the spectacle aspect of having a stolen relic of a patron saint and display the relic in a way to educate visitors and respect the relic as well.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Since the Middle Ages, relics have been an important part of religious culture, and in places such as Italy, a person cannot help but be surrounded by the remains of saints in churches and museums. Just as the Fieschi Morgan Reliquary has become more of an art object to display and visit instead of a treasured box intended to hold the relics of the True Cross, San Marco and San Domenico have become major attractions for tourists and the faithful. Every year, people who venerate the saints visit their respective resting places, but the general population visits these sites as well. Churches therefore have become tourist stomping grounds because they are

\textsuperscript{58} Sienese Tour Guide.
known symbols around the world. In light of their popularity, it is necessary for churches to have the relics displayed in a respectful manner and not create a display that causes a spectacle. The relics should be educational yet respected because they are important to so many worshippers.

Though the Fieschi Morgan reliquary is not in a church anymore or holding the relics of the True Cross it is still important in medieval history. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art people will stop and look at the reliquary, but its small stature could cause people to gaze right over it. The reliquary can easily get lost compared to the Greek and Roman statues, but it is up to the curators to prevent that.

The relics of Saint Mark and Saint Catherine along with the Fieschi Morgan reliquary provide examples of how to display religious objects. Though the Fieschi Morgan reliquary is in a museum, it now provides education to the public about the Medieval period, the history of the True Cross and the translation of the box itself. The remains of Saint Mark are in a crypt that not everyone goes into and is therefore more respected and not completely a tourist attraction or spectacle. Saint Catherine’s remains displayed in an elaborate reliquary in her own chapel show her importance in San Domenico as well as the respect the church has for her. If relics and reliquaries are successfully and respectfully displayed, it allows the visitors and worshippers to gain the most from their interaction with the objects.
Chapter 3

Contemporary Exhibitions of Human Remains

Museums do not only exhibit remains of ancient humans. Recent exhibitions such as Bodies: The Exhibit have drawn record crowds into museums. There is a fine line between education and spectacle when it comes to the display of human remains and these contemporary exhibitions have an additional factor that increases the potential for both, plastination. This process dramatically retards the decay of human tissues, leaving them supple and life-like, allowing the body to be exhibited in a variety of ways. Additionally these bodies were recently alive and shared a culture and world with the museum viewer. Because of this, museum curators need to carefully consider how to exhibit these bodies to maximize the educational potential while minimizing the potential for a visitor’s disrespectful behavior.

Plastination is a process that was created in 1977 by Dr. Gunther von Hagens, a German anatomist. In exhibits such as Body Worlds and Bodies: The Exhibit (Fig. 23), plastinated bodies are used to educate the public about how the anatomy of the body works. The process begins with embalming the body with formaldehyde to prevent further decomposition. Next the body is put into an acetone bath, which draws the water out of cells and replaces it. In the third part of the plastination process, the body is put into a liquid polymer bath consisting of silicone rubber, epoxy resin, or polyester, which creates a vacuum. The acetone boils and the polymers replace the acetone that has vaporized out of the cells leaving liquid plastic that is cured with gas, ultraviolet light or heat to harden.

Originally plastination was used for teaching purposes at medical and anatomy schools, but von Hagens began to creatively display human remains with his first exhibit of *Body Worlds* in Japan in 1995. Since then hundreds of exhibits all over the world have featured plasticized human remains and have attracted millions of people. John Lantos stated, “Anatomic museums have always flirted with and skirted the lines between education, entertainment, and prurience. They are one of the few places where it is permissible to gaze at naked bodies.” Many visitors admit that their reason behind their visit was more about curiosity than education, creating some controversy about these exhibitions. Museums should always be sensitive to the ethical obtainment of bodies, how they are display, and how their exhibition interacts with cultural mores concerning death.

Exhibits like *Bodies* and *Body Worlds* are extremely educational and teach visitors a great deal about the human body, but when remains of humans are purposefully displayed in a controversial manner the museum can become a modern version of a carnie freak show. Museum curators have to carefully balance the museum’s educational mission while allowing for artistic creativity within the exhibit, but without encouraging spectacle. Failure to consider this has created public controversy, such as in 2009 when a French judge ruled that an exhibit of human remains was not respectful towards the dead. A similar issue occurred in Berlin in the 2009 *Body Worlds* exhibition when von Hagens created and displayed cadavers as if they were

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61 Ibid, 4.

62 Ibid, 12.

engaging in sexual intercourse. Though the intent was the educational value of understanding
the physical aspect of sex, the casual approach to the two culturally sensitive topics of sex and
death in this display made most viewers uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, this is but one example of how Body Worlds negatively affected museum
visitors. The exhibit also included the body of a plasticized pregnant woman in an odalisque
position (Fig. 24). Typically seen in museums in traditional academic paintings, an odalisque is
defined as “a female slave or a concubine in a harem.” Artists such as the French neoclassical
painter Jean-August-Dominique Ingres traditionally featured them, as in his famous La Grande
Odalisque (Fig. 25). In this work a nude woman reclines in a seductive pose. The viewer can
only see her naked backside, but her head is turned towards the audience in a sexually inviting
manner. By placing the body of a pregnant woman in this pose the curator obscured the
educational potential of understanding how a fetus grows within the body by instead sexualizing
the corpse. Art enthusiasts and scholars might understand the intended comment on the
objectification of women, with a deceased woman made into a too real sexual art object to be
shown to the viewing public, but not the average visitor. However, visitors have found the
reclining woman disturbing, with one blogger stating, “[…] the pregnant cadaver in the
odalisque pose gets the award for ‘most likely to appear in my nightmares tonight.’ That's
disturbing on a heretofore-unseen level.” According to author Gwen Sharp, another reason the
woman stands out is because she is only one of a few women actually displayed in the exhibit.

64 Jason Rhodes. Reuters, "Body Worlds plans cadaver show dedicated to sex." Last modified
finearts-bodyworlds-idUSTRE58A4Z220090911.
webster.com/dictionary/odalisque
66 Jeffrey Sconce. "I See Dead People...." Ludic Despair(blog), September , 2009.
21, 2012).
Feminist reviewers have suggested that this exhibit also expresses chauvinistic views as the only woman is passively pregnant while the rest of the male bodies are placed in active poses.\(^\text{67}\)

By contrast, *Bodies: The Exhibit* successfully uses plasticized cadavers. While this exhibit is shown in different cities across the United States, the New York City *Bodies Exhibit* premiering in 2005 was particularly well planned. It opened with a plasticized corpse in a dramatic action pose that glorified the human body. Passing into the rooms behind, some bodies were cut open to display the different muscles used during daily activities while others displayed both healthy and diseased organs. While the exhibit focused on healthy young bodies, there were some that were dissected to show the effects of obesity. The exhibit is extremely educational but artistically presented to show the viewer how beautiful and complex is the human body. When sensitive subject matter is address, such as the inclusion of fetuses in one room, its contents were clearly labeled. The sign simply informed and allowed visitors to choose to enter or not. Every person had the choice of whether or not to enter the room.

It is important for museums to carefully consider how they exhibit human remains. Being human, people are interested in the body and its ultimate mortality while at the same time uneasy about. Well-designed exhibits, such as *Bodies: The Exhibit*, allow visitors to learn about themselves and to confront death through the comforting remove of display. Poorly designed exhibits not only reduce the museum to the level of carnie freak shows, but they demonstrate disrespect for human life leaving the viewer emotionally and educationally poorer for the visit. It is difficult to create an exhibit that reduces the amount of controversy in an already controversial

subject. If correctly created, without bodies in compromising positions, the exhibits will be successful and increase the education of the public.
**Conclusion**

Throughout the course of history, people have been fascinated with human remains and reliquaries. When these objects are put on display, it is necessary for it to be respectful and educational. From ancient mummies to relics of saints and plasticized bodies of recently deceased humans, each person and object has a story and a past. Therefore whenever remains are displayed they have to be respected and in order to do that a curator must create an environment that promotes education and respect for the viewer to understand the importance of the objects. There are many different ways to create a successful exhibit and many curators that have accomplished that feat.

King Tutankhamun’s exhibit was a grandiose display of personal belongings and remains but it seemed to lack of respect for the culture of ancient Egyptians. The curators of the exhibit honed in on the fact that people were extremely intrigued with Egypt and “Egyptomania” was fervent amongst the public. The *Treasures of King Tutankhamun* drew in crowds and tried to educate people, but it became more about the objects and riches King Tutankhamun had rather than the person himself. In contrast, the exhibition of Ti Ameny Net at the University of Richmond shows how a curator can correctly display remains by keeping the history of the deceased in mind. It was respectful and educational, and allowed the viewer to have a great educational experience while still being entertained.

With the display of relics and reliquaries it is essential for the curators at the object’s repository to maintain the spiritual and sacred meaning of the object while allowing visitors and worshippers to learn from and venerate it. The Fieschi Morgan reliquary has been taken out of its original location and does not have the same purpose anymore. By having the reliquary out for the public to see, the curators of the Metropolitan Museum have created a way that lets visitors
learn from it, despite its close proximity to other objects. The curators in the Basilica of Saint Mark, have placed his relics in a crypt to maintain their spiritual meaning, but venerators are still allowed to see his remains. Visitors from around the world are drawn to the location because of the long history of the relics and the basilica, so maintaining the privacy of the relics shows the importance of Saint Mark and visitors can still learn so much without seeing his remains. Saint Catherine’s remains are displayed in their own chapel in a decorated reliquary, behind a grating and glass case, which shows her importance to the Sienese community. The exhibition of her remains still allows all visitors to learn about Saint Catherine and her life while worshippers can venerate her as well.

The bodies in contemporary museums are extremely controversial and cause a spectacle in the exhibits, but if displayed correctly visitors can learn from the bodies, such as the exhibit in New York, New York, and appreciate them more. A poor execution of an exhibit or display of a body can lead to disgust and debate amongst visitors. It is necessary for curators to keep the past of these bodies in mind and display them without demeaning their memory. If done correctly a visitor to *Bodies: The Exhibit* or *Body Worlds* can walk away with knowledge they never had before and look upon those bodies with appropriate memories.

There are many different reasons for human remains and relics to be displayed and an abundance of information that the public can learn from them. Whether it is the mummified remains of ancient Egyptians, those of saints from the medieval period or of people that have recently passed, there is so much for a visitor to learn from. If the remains of humans or the reliquaries that held them are displayed correctly, the viewer can be informed on the object and appreciate the value of it as well. The curators have to make conscious decisions in order to uphold the history and sanctity of an object while still allowing visitors to gain education from
them. The examples discussed in this thesis show well executed exhibits in addition to more weakly executed ones, but each exhibit was successful in its own way. Every object has a story to tell and the curators have to bring that to life. Human remains and reliquaries are necessary in museums and religious spaces to educate the public and so much can be discovered if the display is meaningfully created.
1. Funerary Mask of Tutankhamun, c. 1327 BCE  
Source: MDID

2. Ti Ameny Net, Unknown Creator, 25th Dynasty, painted wood, 175.3x54x29.2cm  
http://chalk.richmond.edu/education/projects/webunits/egypt/mummy.jpg


9. Relics of Florentine Artists and Masters, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo. Photograph of author


17. *Sarcophagus of Saint Catherine of Siena*. Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome, Italy, wikipedia.org


20. Chapel of Saint Catherine of Siena. San Domenico, Siena, Italy, Wikipedia.org


25. La Grande Odalisque, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1814 CE, Oil on canvas
Musee du Louvre, Paris, France
Source: MDID
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