

Art Box

Body Worlds: The Original & The Cycle Of Life

In most art exhibits, the works on display are created by people. In *Body Worlds*, the people are the art. Of course, that depends on your definition of art.

On display here are roughly 200 exhibits ranging from enlarged hearts to a fully-skinned and dissected giraffe. *Where's the art in that?* you might say. And all we can reply is simply: Go and see.

All of the exhibits on display here are the result of the combined efforts of Dr. Gunther von Hagens and his wife, Dr. Angelina Walley. Von Hagen's contribution to the world-wide phenomenon (and frequent controversy-bringer) known as *Body Worlds* is his invention of a process known as plastination. Through this process, human blood, bone, muscle and all the other bits we have inside us are impregnated with a polymer (like silicon) that forever preserves them. The result is that our insides retain their mind-boggling detail and color yet, thankfully, lose any odor associated with decomposition.

Walley's hand in the exhibit is where the true art comes in. And we're not just talking about the tastefully arranged and annotated plastinized organs in the glass cases (although you'll spend hours marveling at what cigarettes can do to lungs or alcohol to the liver). What is truly striking here are the complete humans—the man holding his own coat of removed skin; the skinless woman releasing two pigeons composed solely of their circulatory systems; the gymnast forever showing off his strength in a pose on the rings, with his entire set of organs hanging next to him.

According to the pair, the artistic poses of the bodies were necessary to hold the interest of the public, as static poses crept out the Japanese, where the show was first mounted years ago. As Walley puts it, "being a good educator means being a good entertainer."

And entertained you will be. In fact, in this newly-revamped exhibit (the original *Body Worlds* was shown here in 2002), great care has been taken to captivate. The exhibits tell the tale of our birth-to-life journey. Along the way, inspiring quotes from the likes of Henry Ford and Kahil Gabrand cause introspection of the most literal type while large scale information boards explain what happens to us as we age and how we can care for bodies. Although the exhibits might shock at first, that quickly gives way to a sense awe and fascination that'll have you wanting to spend hours with the bodies on display—all of which were donated by people eager to make a lasting contribution to this art-meets-science project. By the end of your time peering into the human condition, you'll feel moved, enlightened and inspired to be a better person—inside and out.—Michael Franco

Body Worlds: The Original & The Cycle Of Life is on through 6 Mar, 2010. Singapore Science Centre, 15 Science Centre Rd., 6425-2500. \$20, children \$12.

