

Interpreting Nature: Transformation of Natural History Exhibitions

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Abstract

Natural history museums inspire visitors' curiosity and passion about nature through exhibitions. In recent hundreds of years, the impact of human's activities has led to some environmental issues, such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity, which could threaten human's life. As natural history museums collect and preserve evidences of natural history, their role has become more and more important today.

This paper firstly addresses the evolution of natural history exhibitions, and then illustrates the trend how nature is constructed and interpreted through museum exhibition in recent years. By developing various exhibit techniques, museums intend to use research and collections wisely in exhibitions and to engage visitors with new technologies. Taking environmental issue as their social responsibility, museums' exhibitions show a growing concern with environmental issues, request for more cross-discipline perspectives, and work as platforms that open to experts, communities, and the public. Exhibitions also develop a trend to recall specimen-based exhibitions that combine with spatial aesthetics design.

Through the history, natural history museums have accumulated precious exhibit research and concepts, specimens, dioramas, models, illustrations and etc., which hold the important meanings in science, history, museology, art and culture. They have become unique collection of natural history museums. This paper also suggests museums re-interpret these collections in their future exhibitions.

Keywords: Natural History, Museum, Exhibition, Cabinet of Curiosity, Diorama, Environmental Issue, Exhibit Aesthetics