

# Taxidermy 101

## 1. What is Taxidermy?

Taxidermy is a general term describing the methods of reproducing a life like three-dimensional representation of an animal for permanent display.

In some cases, the actual skin of the animal is preserved and mounted over an artificial mannikin. In other cases, the specimen is reproduced completely with the use of man – made materials.

The word ‘taxidermy’ is derived from two ancient Greek words; *taxis*, meaning movement; and *derma*, meaning skin. Loosely translated taxidermy means the movement of skin. This is a fairly accurate definition as many taxidermy procedures involve the removal of the skin from the animal, treating the skin and then placing the skin over an artificial replica of the animal. Thus the skin moves from the actual animal to an artificial replica of that animal.

## 2. Brief History of Taxidermy

Thousands of years ago when Man first hunted for his food, he found that the skins of his prey, when treated with certain substances could be preserved and used for clothing and shelter. The tanners became one of the most important members of the tribes.

As the demand for quality leather and skins grew, so did the methods of preserving skins become more sophisticated. By the mid 1700s tanning businesses started flourishing, and by the 1800s hunters started taking the skins they had received from the tanners to upholstery shops. The upholsterers would sew up the animal skins and stuff them with rags and bits of cotton, which they had lying around their shops. This gave rise to the term “stuffing” or “stuffed animal”

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of people such as Carl E. Akeley, William T. Hornaday, Coleman Jonas and Leon Pray, taxidermy began to evolve into it’s modern form.

Being great artists they developed anatomically accurate mannikins which incorporated every detail – right down to each muscle and tendon of the animal. They created realistic settings and poses that were more appropriate to the species and more pleasing than the “stuffed” caricatures previously presented.

## 3. Taxidermy Today

The modern practice of taxidermy incorporates many crafts such as carpentry, woodworking, tanning, molding and casting, requiring artistic talent including the art of sculpture, painting and drawing. In a modern shoulder mount the only natural parts used are the skin and horns. The eyes are made of glass and the mannikin or form is made from polyurethane foam. The face is sculpted from clay; an earliner of

fibreglass is used to keep the ear erect and putty is used around the eyes to finish off the eyes.

Some taxidermists do however still use plaster of paris to mould the face and an earliner made from lead.

**Some taxidermy mounts do not contain any part of the original animal, mainly saltwater fish, which are totally recreated from man – made materials. Green hunting, which is the stalking and darting of endangered specie such as Rhino has led to the creation of replicas of these animals. Given the measurements of the horns and a photograph, taxidermists now provide the hunter with a replica made from various materials of his Rhino**