



# Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums

*Stephen T. Asma*

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The natural history museum is a place where the line between "high" and "low" culture effectively vanishes--where our awe of nature, our taste for the bizarre, and our thirst for knowledge all blend happily together. But as Stephen Asma shows in *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*, there is more going on in these great institutions than just smart fun.

Asma takes us on a wide-ranging tour of natural history museums in New York and Chicago, London and Paris, interviewing curators, scientists, and exhibit designers, and providing a wealth of fascinating observations. We learn how the first museums were little more than high-toned side shows, with such garish exhibits as the pickled head of Peter the Great's lover. In contrast, today's museums are hot-beds of serious science, funding major research in such fields as anthropology and archaeology.

"Rich in detail, lucid explanation, telling anecdotes, and fascinating characters.... Asma has rendered a fascinating and credible account of how natural history museums are conceived and presented. It's the kind of book that will not only engage a wide and diverse readership, but it should, best of all, send them flocking to see how we look at nature and ourselves in those fabulous legacies of the curiosity cabinet."--*The Boston Herald*.



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