



That was then. This is now: PostNatural Nature

Thursday, February 7, 2019
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- *That was then. This is now: PostNatural Nature* is an exhibition on view at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHMLA) from February 7 to April 28, 2019.
- Presented by artist/curator Richard Pell and the Center for PostNatural History, the exhibition draws from the collections of both NHMLA and the Center for PostNatural History to explore 10,000 years of human-guided evolution.
- Richard Pell is the Curator of PostNatural Organisms at the Center for PostNatural History. He has a background in art and engineering, and founded the Center after he “began to wonder why transgenic organisms weren’t shown on the evolutionary tree” and started collecting specimens of living things that had been intentionally and heritably altered by humans.
- The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is located in Exposition Park, across the street from USC.

“When we speak of the ‘postnatural,’ we refer to anthropogenic interventions into evolution that are both intentional and heritable, regardless of their subsequent unintentional consequences. The postnatural therefore is not an epoch of earth’s geohistory, but a conceptually inclined adjective used to describe the purposeful and permanent modification of living species by humans through domestication, genetic engineering, and synthetic biology . . . The term arises in response to the conception of nature that is commonly presented by natural history museums.”—The Center for PostNatural History

WHAT IS POSTNATURAL HISTORY?

The Center for PostNatural History defines “postnatural history” as:

1. The study of the origins, habitats, and evolution of organisms that have been *intentionally* and *heritably* altered by humans.
2. The record of the influence of human culture on evolution.

SO HOW DO HUMANS ALTER ORGANISMS AND THEIR EVOLUTION?

Humans alter organisms—meaning plants as well as animals—in many ways, including selective breeding or genetic engineering. Even something as familiar as the domestication of pets is a form of human interaction with the processes of evolution.

Humans affect the evolution of other species by

- controlling their habitats (e.g., cohabitating with them or building fences to keep them out)
- controlling their reproduction (e.g., breeding plants or animals in captivity)
- genetic engineering (e.g., turning a specific gene “on” or “off”)
- releasing genetically modified organisms back into the wild

THE CENTER FOR POSTNATURAL HISTORY

The Center for PostNatural History, which opened in 2012, is a Pittsburgh museum dedicated to the advancement of knowledge relating to the complex interplay between culture, nature, and biotechnology. The Center’s mission is to acquire, interpret, and provide access to a collection of living, preserved, and documented organisms of postnatural origin. Or as *Vice* puts it, “This museum documents all the ways man has messed with nature.”

The Center also collaborates with other institutions on traveling exhibitions like *That was then. This is now*, and provides information and resources via its website and on social media, including a Specimen Vault at www.postnatural.org/Specimen-Vault.

Core participants include Richard Pell, Curator of PostNatural Organisms; Lauren Allen, Director of Science and Learning; and Mason Juday, who designs and produces mobile exhibitions.

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County started as the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art in 1913, with galleries filled by displays created by four organizations: the Historical Society of Southern California, the Cooper Ornithological Club, the Southern California Academy of Sciences, and the Fine Arts League. Over the course of the twentieth century, the art department relocated to its own museum the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and other museums were built in Exposition Park, including the California Science Center and the California African American Museum. Today, NHMLA protects over 35 million specimens dating back 4.5 billion years and is a significant resource for Southern California educators and an authority on the “big picture” of the planet, looking at both the natural and the cultural world. The original 1913 building went through a major renovation and re-opened in 2009.

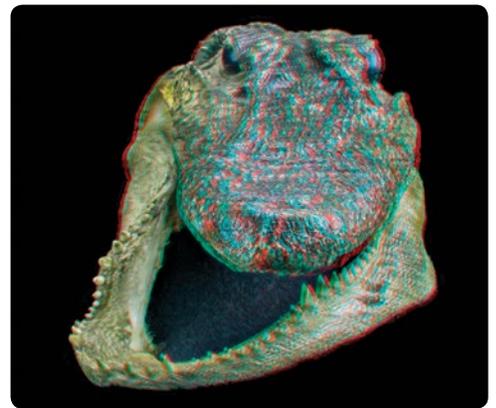
NHMLA is a public-private partnership between the non-profit Natural History Museum Foundation and the County of Los Angeles. Its family of museums also includes the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the William S. Hart Museum.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

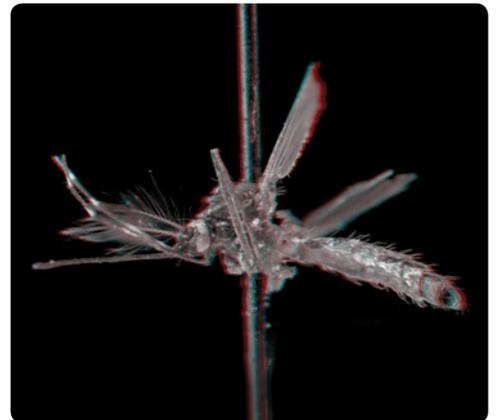
- The Center for PostNatural History maintains that postnatural organisms represent “the human desires and fears that shaped them.” Think of one postnatural organism you encountered at this event—what human desires and fears shaped it?
- Having seen this show at a natural history museum, what do you think is different about the concept of postnatural history and “the conception of nature that is commonly presented by natural history museums”? How do these different concepts interrelate at the NHMLA show?
- The Center for PostNatural History points out that “postnatural change is not unidirectional.” Humans do not only shape nature—our environment, including the ways we’ve changed it, also shapes us. What are some ways that organisms that humans have altered have in turn altered humans?
- What excites you about humans’ influence on other organisms? What concerns you about it?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

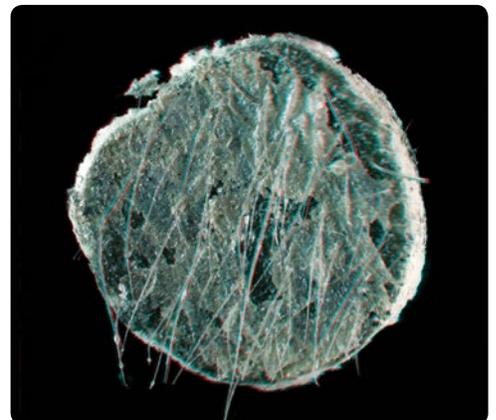
- The Center for PostNatural History
postnatural.org
- Upcoming Exhibitions at NHMLA and its neighboring museums in Exposition Park
expositionpark.ca.gov/about-us/venues/
- The Center for Land Use Interpretation
clui.org
- The Museum of Jurassic Technology
mjt.org



Deformed gator.



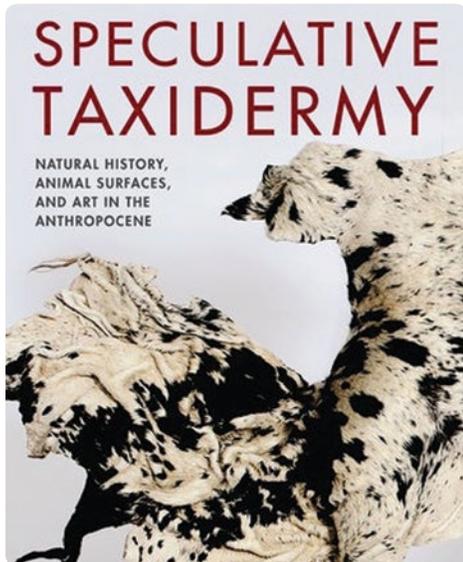
Mosquito.



Freckles sample.



Pug.



DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

BREE RUSSELL of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about the exhibition and this evening's discussion. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

BOOKS

Aloi, Giovanni. *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Architecture & Fine Arts Library: N7660 .A57 2018

Caulfield, Sean, Curtis Gillespie, and Timothy A. Caulfield. *Perceptions of Promise: Biotechnology, Society and Art* Edmonton. Alta: Department of Art & Design, University of Alberta, 2011.

Architecture & Fine Arts Library: N72.B56 P47 2011

Esbjörn-Hargens, Sean, and Michael E. Zimmerman. *Integral Ecology: Uniting Multiple Perspectives on the Natural World*, 1st ed. Boston: Integral Books, 2009.

Von KleinSmid Center Library: GF21 .E75 2009

Lemaitre, Jeroen. *Wonders Are Collectible: Taxidermy, Tranquil Beauty*. Tiel: Lannoo Publishers, 2016.

Doheny Memorial Library: QL63 .L486 2016

Thorsen, Liv Emma, Karen A. Rader, and Adam Dodd. *Animals on Display: The Creaturely in Museums, Zoos, and Natural History*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.

Doheny Memorial Library: QL71.A1 A55 2013

Weschler, Lawrence. *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*, 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1995.

Architecture & Fine Arts Library: AM101.L725 W47 1995

DATABASES

Braidotti, Rosi. "Posthuman Humanities." *European educational research journal: EERJ*. 12, no. 1 (n.d.): 1–19. Retrieved from SAGE Journals.

Gelling, Cristy. "Humans' Living Creations Put on Display: Center for PostNatural History Examines Genetic Engineering, domestication.(MUSEUM)." *Science News* 184, no. 9 (November 2, 2013): 28. Retrieved from ProQuest

JOURNALS:

Mckibben, Bill. "POSTNATURAL." *Aperture (Archive : 1952–2005)*, no. 150 (March 1, 1998): 5–21. search.proquest.com/docview/1705645636/.

Natural History (New York, N.Y.). New York, N.Y: American Museum of Natural History, 1919.

Pell, Richard, and Lauren Allen. "Bringing Postnatural History into View." *American Scientist* 103, no. 3 (May 1, 2015): 224–227. search.proquest.com/docview/1676076798/.

DVDS

Feinstein, Leonard, David Hildebrand Wilson, Ricky Jay, Barbara Stafford, John Walsh, and Lawrence Weschler. *Inhaling the Spore a Journey through the Museum of Jurassic Technology*. S.I: Leonard Feinstein, 2004.

Architecture & Fine Arts Library: CIRC-DESK AFADVD 672

