

Event Critique – Museum Form

Use the following format for your museum critique; answers must be typed below the questions and all questions must appear in full on your final copy. You can use this document as your template. Pay careful attention to the required number of words for those questions that have them. Failure to follow the instructions here and on your syllabus will result in a substantially low grade. Minimal answers poorly written are a D grade or less. Elaboration of points, excellent arguments, and good writing garner higher grades.

Name: Michael Simmons

Class time period (not section number): Online

1) Which museum did you visit?

The Leonardo

2) Describe at least one of the broad collections on a theme, period, geographic region, or topic within the museum.

Besides the special exhibit The Leonardo is home to quite a space. The current exhibits include an art gallery on Human Rights and another on Nature. They also have a “Made in Utah” exhibit which features inventions and scientific progress that has its roots in Utah. Things like television, video gaming (Atari), artificial hearts, and I learned that a breakthrough in gene therapy at the University of Utah earned Mario Capecchi a Nobel Prize and that he is an immigrant to our country and a holocaust survivor. There are also several sections in the Leonardo related to technology. Interactive workstations for stop-motion animation or “Clay-Mation” and green screens are available on the second floor. While waiting to enter the exhibits I saw something about the lab at The Leonardo can help you collect your own DNA so there is also an exhibit regarding self, though we did not visit this exhibit due to time and crowding.

3) Give a brief, one paragraph description of a special exhibit:

The special exhibit and main reason for my visit to The Leonardo is titled “Mummies of the World: The Exhibition”. It contains real mummies, both human and animal as well as both natural and, for lack of a better term, intentional. The exhibit begins with a three minute video explaining the intent of the exhibit and that the individuals were once living and should be given the respect afforded to them. Each piece in this exhibit is labeled with a description and what if any information was obtained through scientific methods and which scientific methods were used and why or why not.

4) What kind of information is provided about the works? Tell me three places you might find more detailed information that doesn't only include Google searches.

In the exhibit information about where the mummy was found, what the mummy is (human male, female, or species of animal), about how old the mummy is thought to be and any known or assumed historical significance as determined by scientific findings. Additional information is available from the museum which the mummies are on loan from, as well as from the exhibit specific website from The Leonardo: mummies.theleonardo.org or from www.mummiesoftheworld.com.

5) Choose **several** works that particularly appealed to you. Explain why you were drawn to these works.

I think this question relies too heavily on the art museum concept and I am not comfortable with its application as it pertains to the mummies exhibit. I suspect that I will more than make up for this in the answers to the next two questions. If there is a problem with this I apologize. Should you require this question and if you are willing to work with me on it I will try to work through the difficulties after notification and will resubmit.

6) *How* did the artworks you looked at relate to material we have discussed in class?

The mummies exhibit relates to material that we have and likely will discuss in class in ways that I hadn't expected. First and most obviously is the Egyptian religious practice of mummification which is addressed in the exhibit but is not the focal point. The focal point of the exhibit is more the science of studying mummies and the stories and discoveries that are made possible through that study. This difference in focal point brought to my mind the relation to stereotypes; I had incorrectly stereotyped the exhibit into Hollywood mummies. More on my personal thoughts will come in the personal reaction.

We are just beginning our topic of religion. Mummification is widely associated with religion and is mentioned in the exhibit. Without singling out ancient Egypt and alluding to other cultures performing mummification the exhibit explains that many cultures mummified their loved ones or important leaders believing that the mummification process would aid them on their journey in the afterlife. Several cultures even included figurines meant to be servants in the afterlife, or scrolls containing passages from the book of the dead, or the individual's personal, prized possessions or tools of their trade. It was interesting to consider the implications and reasons for mummification from a religious perspective.

7) What was your personal reaction to this experience? Would you enjoy attending this type of event again? Why or why not?

My personal reaction to this experience is kind of like an onion, it has many layers. First, I went into this experience not really knowing what to expect and thinking I had no expectations. I quickly learned that I had subconsciously expected mummies in the

stereotypical form. You know, elaborate sarcophagi, fairly well preserved cotton bandages wrapping the whole body and nothing but human or what once was human for that matter. When we entered the exhibit I was surprised, we first encountered a human mummy of what appeared to be an infant but as we read we learned was assumed to be about three or four years of age. Immediately following the infant was a section explaining the various types of climates for natural mummification, which to this point I hadn't even considered as being part of this exhibit.

We explored the arid deserts, which seemed to me the most likely to produce a natural mummy, again probably due to Hollywood, the extreme cold which we were informed and if I had thought it through I would have known is just as likely to dehydrate and preserve a mummy as the arid desert is. One other that was surprising to me was bogs. I never would have thought that water would be an ideal method to preserve a body, it actually seems counter intuitive to me. But as it is the water in bogs is usually so alkaline that bacteria does not form or grow thus preserving the body. Stranger yet, the bones of a mummy preserved by a bog are often soft and spongy. To answer your question, yes the next portion of the exhibit was a display explaining what each of the types of preservation might feel like and providing examples to feel for your self (don't worry the samples were not of actual mummy).

We progressed through a number of animal mummies all of which were natural so far and I found myself discovering that mummification is a natural process which humans have discovered and practiced on their own, and also that it does not only happen to humans. As we continued to move through the exhibit we moved into more of the science of discovering the stories behind the mummies. I learned that through studying mummies we can learn about the cultures they belong to. Things like: Did they smoke? What did they eat? And on a more individual level what illnesses did they suffer and possibly what was the cause of death.

It was through the mention of the more scientific reasons for an interest in mummies that the exhibit became more than just a "cool", albeit nerdy, way to spend an afternoon. I began to think about the implications, of the knowledge that could be gained from mummies, of the insights that these individuals, despite having already made the ultimate sacrifice, would provide to our generation. I also found myself thinking of our own traditions of burial, embalming and preservation. An example from the exhibit (**Spoiler Alert**), there is one mummy who appeared to be holding something in each hand, and despite our technology of x-rays and CT imaging scientists were not able to determine what the objects were. Through 3D printing or rapid prototyping scientist were able to recreate the objects and determined them to be teeth.

As we were leaving the exhibit there was a wall with pictures of several of the mummies we had seen in the exhibit and above them was text saying that they each had a story to tell and through studying them we would discover who they were and parts of what life was like for them.

The whole exhibit really drove home the humanity of the human mummies and the natural process that is mummification, despite human application of the process. There is so much more that this exhibit covers from a unique cultural perspective. For example when you think of mummies, if you are like me, you instantly think Egypt, but this exhibit discusses German, Asian, and Peruvian mummies as well and showcases the different styles of mummification and even some body modifications from various cultures.

This exhibit was interesting before I even got to the museum but it became so much more interesting once we got inside. I would highly recommend making this exhibit a must see. If you haven't seen it, please go. Some advice if you do, buy tickets online in advance and pick a time earlier in the day rather than later.