

Taxidermy and Embalming

Taxidermy is the art of preparing and preserving the skins of animals and of stuffing and mounting them in lifelike form.

The word taxidermy is derived from the Greek words "taxis" and "derma". Taxis means "to move", and "derma" means "skin" (the dermis). The word taxidermy translates to "arrangement of skin and a person who practices taxidermy is called a taxidermist.

Taxidermy takes on a number of forms and purposes including natural history museum displays, hunting trophies, study skins.

Modern taxidermy now employs an extensive array of styles depending on the type of specimen being worked on. However, at its very core, the procedure usually involves the use of borax and acetone to thoroughly clean and preserve a specimen's skin and bones.

Formaldehyde and arsenic can also be used for limbs to plump them up and to protect them from turning into ant/termite fodder.

Preparing the Animal

1. If the specimen to be worked on is small enough to fit in a freezer, then you can place it there until you are ready to do the procedure.
2. Take the proper measurements to use as basis for the form to be utilized in your taxidermy project. You may also want to use a mold or a wooden/wire frame to form the shape of your specimen.
3. Remove the skin of your specimen with a sharp knife, taking care not to puncture the organs or any body cavity as doing so can destroy the skin. Peel off the skin and making sure that any flesh or fat is scraped off for proper skin preservation.

Preserving the Skin

1. The skin may be preserved by rubbing non-iodized salt onto the flesh side and setting it under the sun for 24 hours. The salt will eventually absorb any moisture from the hide.
2. If there is still any moisture left, rub salt again and let it set for another 24 hours until it totally dries up. However, don't let it dry up to the point where the skin becomes too hard to mold.
3. After the skin becomes strong enough not to rip, rehydrate it by soaking it in a solution of cool water, disinfectant, and table salt.
4. After an overnight's worth of soaking, hang to dry and towel off excess moisture.
5. Take one more opportunity to take off any flesh that may still be sticking to the hide prior to tanning.
6. Heat up some tanning oil then rub it on the skin being treated.
7. After several hours, store the skin inside a plastic bag and put in the refrigerator until mounting start.

Creating the Mount and Management

1. If you already made a mannequin based on the measurements of the original deceased, then dressing it with the skin you preserved will be easy. However, for parts that need some adjusting, bit of newspaper or twine can help.
2. There are shops that specialize in items like glass eyes or even animal appendage casts that taxidermists can use to properly mount their specimens. These can help to make your project more lifelike in appearance.
3. When sewing the hide, stitch using a thread color that will blend well with the hide/feathers/skin. Try to make the stitching as invisible as possible.
4. In caring for your finished product, make sure that it is regularly dusted off and kept away from direct sunlight. Place it in an area of the room that is free from any moisture that could destroy the hide.

Embalming is the art and science of preserving an animal/human remains by treating them with chemicals) to prevent decomposition. Embalming is distinct from taxidermy by preserves the human body intact, whereas taxidermy is the recreation of an animal's form often using only the creature's skin mounted on an anatomical form.

Embalming chemicals are a variety of preservatives, sanitising and disinfectant agents, and additives used in modern embalming to temporarily prevent decomposition and restore a natural appearance for viewing a body after death. A mixture of these chemicals is known as embalming fluid and is used to preserve bodies of deceased persons.

Typically, embalming fluid contains a mixture of formaldehyde, glutaraldehyde, methanol, and other solvents. The formaldehyde content generally ranges from 5 to 37 percent and the methanol content may range from 9 to 56 percent.

Taxidermy vs. Embalming

One may be confused as to how similar or different taxidermy is from embalming. While both have body preservation as the result, embalming process is trying to keep a dead body intact for a longer time.

Much of an embalming specimen's skin, muscle, and bone remain throughout the process which requires the injection of embalming fluid into the deceased body's arterial system. By the time the embalming fluid is injected, the body has previously been drained of its own body fluids.

Meanwhile, with taxidermy, all that is left of a specimen's original body is its skin. After preservation, the skin is mounted on a cast or model that would mimic the specimen's original anatomical structure, then the minute features of the specimen are left to the artistic hands of a taxidermist.