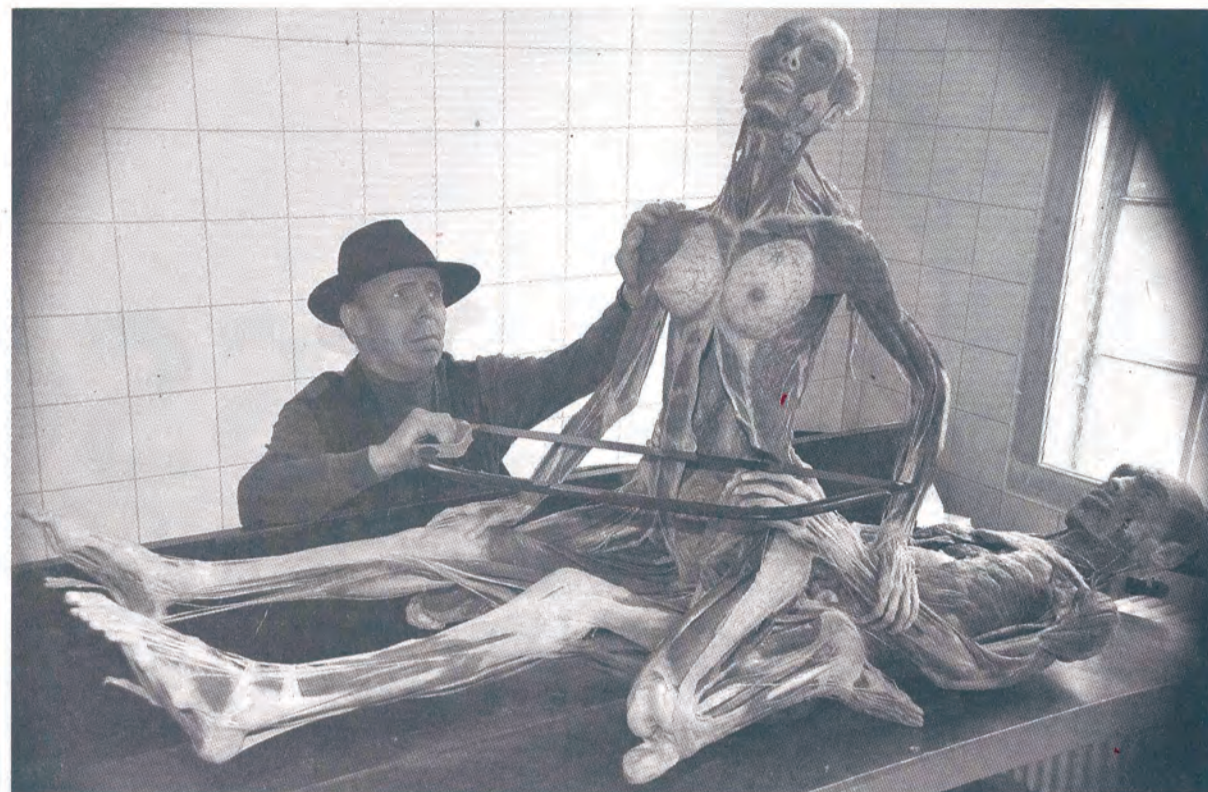


The wonders beneath the skin



The 64-year-old Plastination pioneer Dr. Gunther Von Hagens cutting up his "corpses couple".

Kathy Petite

CONTRIBUTOR/ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND

Has it ever crossed your mind how many nerves it takes just to smile? Or how impressively your bones and joints collaborate so you can lift a glass of water or close a door?

The answers are presented in such a staggering, sensational way in the world's most talked-about exhibition, "Körperwelten" or "Body Worlds". After captivating the Swiss audience for the first time in Basel in 1998, the immensely successful traveling exhibition will stop in Zürich from Sept. 11, 2009, to Feb. 28 this year, titled "Körperwelten & Der Zyklus des Lebens".

Hosted in the huge, chilly, low-lit hall of Puls-5 in Giessereihalle, this controversial, first-of-its-kind exhibition has caused a stir with its brutally honest and (literally) eye-opening exploration of the inner workings of the human body, how it reacts, ages and decays. Displayed mostly in glass cages, hundreds of dead bodies sit, ride, jump, dance, play chess, rugby or the saxophone, and are frozen in other activities.

Now don't flinch. It may sound weird, but this hair-raising revelation of real human bodies is a remarkably educational, vivid way of teaching us about our own complex-

ity, resilience and vulnerability. Of course the realness makes it slightly unnerving, strange, yet incomparably astonishing — which of course leads to the big question: How?

Save your applause for the German maverick scientist-physician Gunther von Hagens, for inventing Plastination in 1977, a groundbreaking method to preserve organic specimens for educational and instructional purpose. Revolutionary yet simple, it's a unique process of

donor roster of more than 10,000 willing individuals.

An optional audio guide gives visitors a further explanation of almost each display as they take this journey of self-discovery. Inevitably you get goose bumps as you stare at these sanitized, partially skinless, odorless (if not in glass cages) new necro-bodies, with a part of you still refusing to believe they are genuine(?) corpses.

Right. It's too much reality socking you in the face. The first shivers strike the visitors in their first few minutes of walking in, as they encounter glass boxes in which authentic embryos or fetuses float in solution. It's somewhat freakish, yet astounding.

But it doesn't take long until shock and disgust are replaced by fascination and greater curiosity. Admired, widened eyes lock onto those exquisitely designed bundles of nerves, sinews and muscles that look like an orchestra of incredibly countless and complex fine strings spreading from head to toe.

Indeed. Not every day is one privileged to peep into the extraordinary workings of the human body in such a bold, striking way.

Being an anatomical study of the body in diseased, distressed and healthy conditions, visitors are also shown organs that go bad due to lifestyle choices or the long-term impact of illness. What actually happens to osteoporosis-hit bones? Or what does a blood clot-attacked brain look like? Or a swollen liver caused by hard drinking? They're lying there to be viewed and learned from. One exhibit is the disturbing contrast of a healthy lung next to an

infected, black-spotted lung from a long-time smoker.

Then comes the bang at the last (non-PG13) section of the exhibition. Captivated faces gaze at copulating corpses adopting a standing and "reverse cowgirl" position. Nearby are a couple sitting in their most intimate union with black lingerie, funky hat and high boots. What more can you ask for?

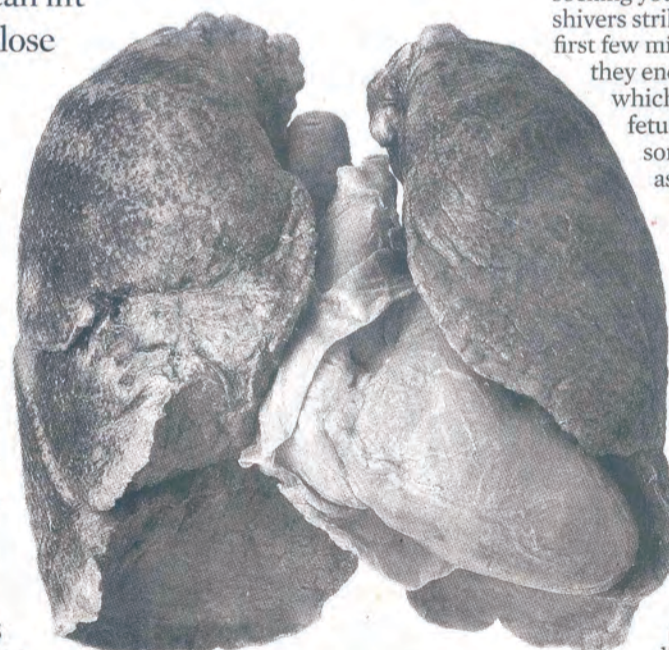
Ever since its 1995 premiere in Tokyo, "Body Worlds" has blown the minds of more than 27 million people in more than 50 cities across Asia, Europe and North America. Alfred Widmer is one of them. As this 32-year-old management consultant from Zürich tells *The Jakarta Post*, "This is actually my second after the one in Basel, and I'm still fascinated. Very interesting, as you get such a deep insight into the human body and how complex it is. I find the nerve system the most impressive. It's beautiful and incredible."

Olga, another visitor from the city, finds "Body Worlds" very good as she learns about her own body and how it works. "Especially the brain section. It's just incredible how it actually operates inside us."

Let's admit it. We are preoccupied with our bodies, but do we really fathom how every last bit of it plays a role in sustaining us? Gunther von Hagens' "Body Worlds" rewards us with a life-pondering experience to enlighten us on what makes us think, feel, move or have emotions. After such a powerful reminder, it's hard to take our bodies for granted.

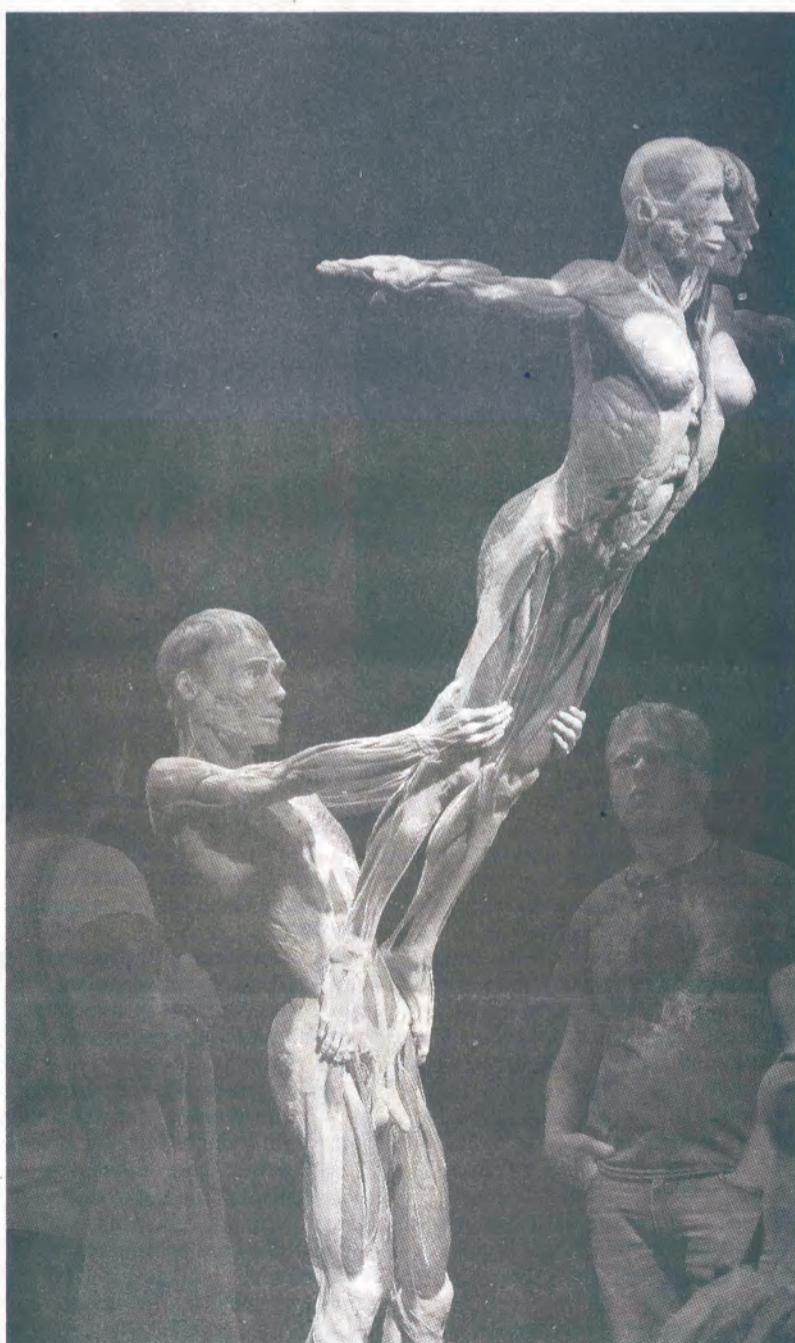
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Dr. Gunther von Hagens' "Body Worlds" is currently exhibiting in Philadelphia, Toronto, Cologne, Zürich and Singapore. To learn more, go to www.bodyworlds.com.



People can see what tobacco does to your lungs from this real damaged organ.

replacing bodily fluids and soluble fat in these specimens with fluid plastics that harden after vacuum-forced impregnation. With the bodies fixed in lifelike poses, they are then hardened with gas, heat or light. These Plastinates show how the human body responds internally to everyday movements, as well as during athletic activities. Currently, the Institute of Plastination has a



One of the poses of whole body Plastinations featured in Body Worlds, the worldwide traveling exhibition of real human bodies.