

Arresting Nature: creation, presentation, evolution
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In her analysis of the museum's ways of seeing Svetlana Alpers argued that they turn any thing, even a giant crab, into an artefact. The act of looking is invested almost with the same aesthetic value traditionally reserved for works of art. It is the stillness of the animal's preparation that enables this type of close looking, which in turn makes it an object of visual interest.

The paper explores some of the different ways in which nature is exhibited. The notion of 'arrested looking' will be investigated in relation to the different taxonomies and concepts of nature presented in the museum. From the first cabinets of curiosities to the American Museum of Natural History's African wildlife dioramas, nature has been spectacularly represented. More recently it has also been reanimated, mostly in the jerky moves of animatronic dinosaurs. While the freely living species are arrested in habitat dioramas or individually mounted for better contemplation, extinct ones are being made to move, instilling contemporary displays with the Cartesian notion of the automaton.

These different modes of representation will be interrogated as to the ways in which they perform taxonomies of creation or make visible principles of evolution. With natural history's transition from stasis to movement the question of an arrestingly arrested nature was reframed. The paper will ask how this reframing was achieved and what role realist modes of representation played in that process.

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