

Maximum exposure

Bodies offers peeks beneath the flesh

BY KELLE SCHILLACI

Local newscasts were all over the story weeks before the “controversial” art show *Bodies ... The Exhibition* was slated to open at the Tropicana. In a city where art openings, if not coupled without at least some degree

anatomy of event-filled and free-wine hoopla, hardly make the radar of most locals, *Bodies* raised its fair share of eyebrows — on account of what it exposed. How ironic that, in a city so overtly ruled by the flesh, we should blush before the very idea of an exhibit offering a rare glimpse of the biological functions buried deeper beneath it.

The exhibit, which features the actual body parts — scientifically dissected and pumped with silicone polymer — of some 21 corpses, opened this past weekend, directly across from the Titanic exhibit (both of which offer an educational and air-conditioned respite from the sweltering summer temps). Sometimes the 260-plus displayed organs are featured on their own, offered as complicated sculptures submerged in liquid-filled glass casing, illuminated with liquid dye to further illustrate the complex webbing of tendons, ligaments, ventricles and so forth.

Full body models, mostly male specimens donated from China, are posed in everyday actions, such as eyeing a dart shot to illustrate peripheral nerves and carpal tunnel syndrome, hunched over a starting line, or kicking a soccer ball, allowing viewers to explore the vast interconnectedness of our internal biology.

The organizers categorize the show as educational and science-based, foremost. “If someone happens to find it beautiful, that’s okay, too,” says Dr. Roy Glover, chief medical director for *Bodies*.

This merging of art and science, with a focus on human biology in particular, is age-old. Renaissance masters such as Leonardo Da Vinci found as much inspiration in the darkened halls of the local morgue as he did fretting away in his studio — and his studies of realistic human form translated into timeless masterpieces. Here, the representative “middle man” is replaced by the thing itself: the human body. And for some reason, that makes folks uneasy.

“Gory and gruesome,” Dr. Glover

says, describing the misconceptions people often have before seeing the show. “People are preconditioned to think of the body that way.”

But the biomechanics of the human

form provide the utmost artistic beauty — the way our inner struts, spokes, spines and organs work together in a kind of organic symphony. The exhibit currently runs in New York, Tampa, Atlanta, London and a related show in Mexico, but Vegas remains an intriguing locale choice.

One of the exhibit’s premier teaching displays features a chunk of tar-blackened lung suspended beneath sheer glass casing and set beside a far smaller, squeaky clean non-smoking lung. Of course, visitors must pass through clouds of secondhand casino smoke in order to even make it to the exhibit. Should the diseased lung’s less-than-subtle warning inspire you to make a lifestyle change, the curators have set up a convenient display box designed for folks to toss that last, lingering pack of cigs and finally kick the habit.

Other health-focused lessons concern themselves with enlarged spleens, cancers, and the adverse biological effects of poor eating habits and resulting obesity.

“We have no political agenda,” says Dr. Glover. “We want people to come see it and decide for themselves. There is no more practical exhibition than this one. We want people to be stronger advocates for their own bodies and their own healthcare.”

There is, however, a “Fetal” room with posted warnings, due to the sensitive nature of what’s inside the dimly lit space. This room features a series of fluid-filled display cases containing fetuses at various levels of very early development. The room also features a pair of conjoined twins, as well as a handful of birth defects. Organizers are adamant in describing the respect with which each specimen is treated and displayed.

The exhibit’s appeal is far-reaching. Med students will enjoy seeing their studies manifest in three dimensions, Aunt Dottie might enjoy getting a first-hand glimpse at what her doctor meant by “tennis elbow” and a whole new generation of students might actually get interested in science.

“It’s a field trip like no other,” says Cheryl Muré, the exhibit’s director of education. “It’s really a textbook come to life.” **CL**

Bodies ... The Exhibition

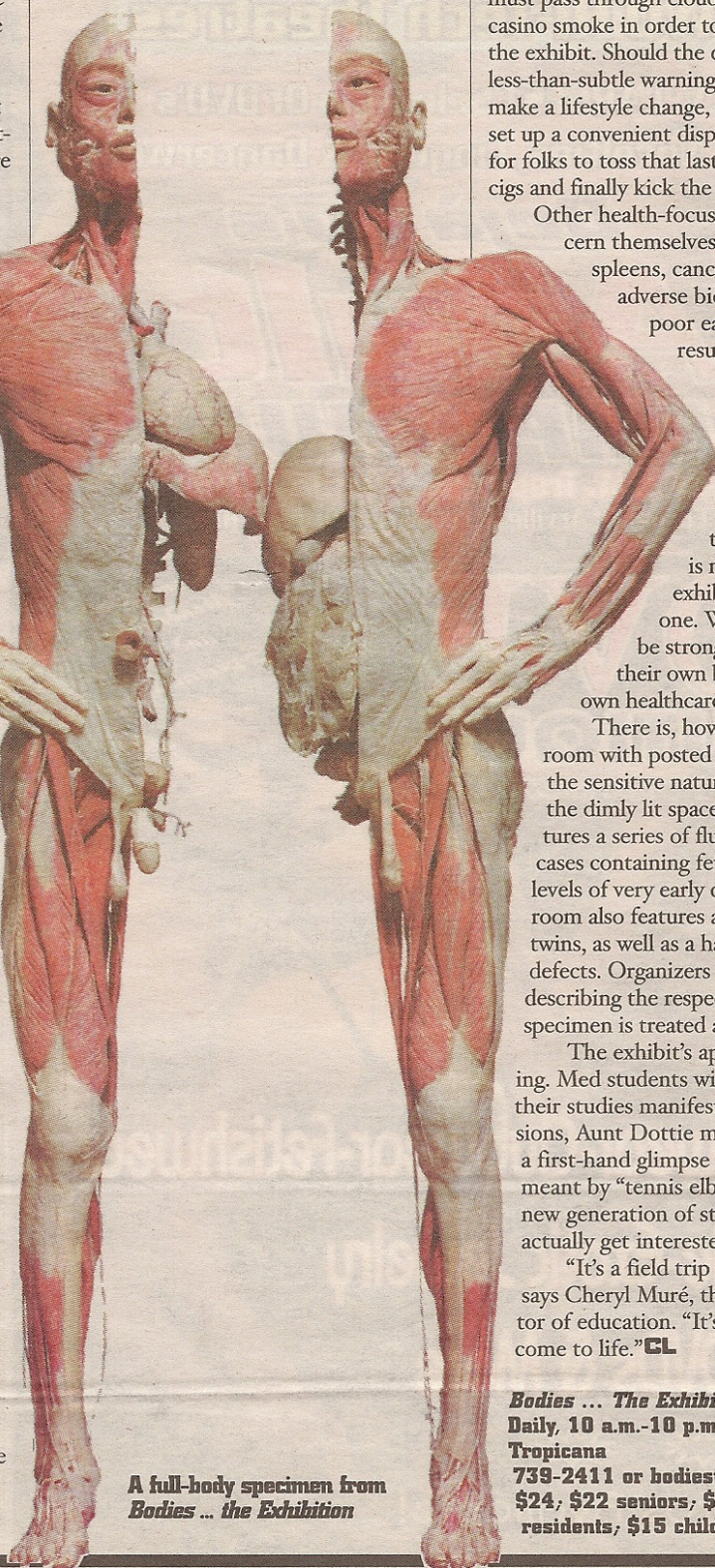
Daily, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.

Tropicana

739-2411 or bodiestickets.com

\$24, \$22 seniors, \$21 Nevada

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A full-body specimen from *Bodies ... the Exhibition*