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'Body Worlds' exhibit coming to The Leonardo

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"Body Worlds" is coming to Salt Lake City.

Leonardo executive director Mary Tull on Wednesday announced plans to host the third installment of the popular human-body exhibit for a limited engagement beginning Sept. 19.

"Body Worlds 3: The Original Exhibition of Real Human Bodies" and companion exhibit "The Story of the Heart" will span nearly 20,000 square feet and feature more than 200 human bodies, allowing visitors to learn about anatomy, physiology and health by viewing the real thing.

The exhibit will run for about 4 1/2 months in the old Salt Lake City library building, 209 E. 500 South, where The Leonardo science-art museum ultimately will be housed.

Since debuting in Japan in 1996, "Body Worlds" has been viewed by 25 million people in 47 countries across Asia, Europe and North America. Leonardo officials estimate that hundreds of thousands of people will pay to see the exhibit in Salt Lake City, much like previous tour stops in Los Angeles (665,000 visitors), Boston (553,000), Phoenix (420,000) and Chicago (380,000).

"Bringing an exhibit like this to Salt Lake City will continue to establish Salt Lake as a hub for the Intermountain West," Tull said during a press conference at the Salt Lake City Library. "As Utahns, we are ready to host this world-class exhibition and important educational and cultural event."

"Body Worlds" takes visitors on a journey through major systems of the body, including the locomotive, nervous, reproductive, digestive and cardiovascular systems. In addition, "The Story of the Heart" reveals through the lenses of anatomy, cardiology, psychology and culture how the heart nourishes, regulates and sustains human life.

"Everywhere it opens, it creates a buzz," Tull said of the exhibit. "Why? Because it deals with some of the most important personal, human issues we face — our mortality, our health and the personal choices that we make for ourselves and our families."

The specimens in "Body Worlds" are created from a process called plastination, in which body fluids are replaced with chemicals that harden and preserve the body. The process was invented in the 1970s by Dr. Gunther von Hagens, the exhibit's creator.

All specimens were donated to von Hagens' Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, Germany, by adults during their lifetimes. The institute has more than 8,000 donors on its roster, including nearly 800 Americans. The bodies — or plastinates — are posed to emphasize certain systems of the body, such as athletic poses highlighting specific muscle groups.

"The lifelike poses of the full-body specimens enable visitors to see with their own eyes the staggeringly complex network of muscles, neurons, bones, tendons and blood vessels that make up our body," Tull said.

Visitors also will see the stark differences in structure and function of bodies that are healthy and those that are not, she said.

"It's a remarkable and unprecedented opportunity for Utahns to expand their understanding of anatomy, physiology and their personal health," said Dee S. Brewer of University Health Care, the exhibit's presenting partner.

Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker said he's wanted to see "Body Worlds" since he first heard and read about it several years ago.

"All of us in this region will be able to experience something that the rest of the world has been marveling about for more than a decade," Becker said.

By hosting the exhibition, Salt Lake City continues to solidify itself as "the cultural hub of the region," the mayor said, "and as the destination for people who are looking for cultural and educational opportunities."

"Body Worlds" also presents a "tremendous economic opportunity" for Salt Lake City, Becker said.

Tickets for "Body Worlds 3" are on sale online at www.theleonardo.org or by calling 888-695-0888. Cost is \$22 for adults (ages 19-64), \$19.50 for seniors (65-older) and students with a school ID, and \$16 for children (3-18). Special rates are available for groups of 12 or more.

The Leonardo is a planned science-art museum where visitors can explore the world from new perspectives. The museum is still in development and hasn't officially opened. Renovations of the old library will not begin until Salt Lake City's "Body Worlds" tour stop is complete.

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