

Odd Jobs |

Critter Preserver

From a flock of graceful geese in flight to cringe-worthy preserved roadkill, taxidermist Alicia Goode's work is a highlight of Oakland Museum of California's newly renovated Gallery of Natural Sciences.

Early Aptitude

Goode isn't squeamish. Before working at Berkeley's Bone Room and the Cal Academy, she grew up cleaning skulls for her dad, a hunter, and collecting insects. "I had a pet black widow spider that my mom 'accidentally' killed," she says.

Office Space

Her shared, windowless workroom at Oakland Museum is filled with art supplies, taxidermy catalogs, animal forms, and drawers of glass eyes. On the table, a skunk specimen dries while orb weaver spiders are pinned. In the back is an SUV-sized deep freezer.

Tools of the Trade

From the ordinary (hair dryers and brushes) to what sound like medieval torture devices: the fleshing wheel, a wire wheel that scrapes off fat and tissue, and the tumbler, a spinning drum filled with ground corncob that dries skins.

Just Another Day at the Office

"Sometimes, there will be a dead squirrel in a bag next to my sandwich in the refrigerator."

On-the-Job Training

Taxidermy forms are commercially available for wild animals, but when Goode had to prepare a goat for the Oakland history exhibit, she got creative. "I ordered a bighorn sheep form, measured the goat, and sculpted the form to be the right size and shape."

Safety Hazards

In addition to preparing new specimens (often donated from wildlife rehab centers), Goode restores old ones, like a 1960s grizzly bear whose matted fur needed vacuuming and styling. "I have to be careful because these old mounts have arsenic in them."

FAQs

Most people ask how she ended up in taxidermy. "It's not like I thought, 'I want to be a taxidermist.' I just followed the road, and this is where I wound up. But I love my job: It encompasses all the things that I'm passionate about: art, natural history, and science."

—LeeAnne Jones



Bio

—Name: **Alicia Goode** —Age: **30** —City: **Oakland** —Job: **Taxidermist for Oakland Museum of California**

TERRY LORANT