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### **Nearly Departed: The Seams Between Life and Death in the Artwork of Annette Messenger**

The 19th century craze for taxidermied trophies that proudly hung above the mantle or dioramas staged in natural history museums reflected an interest in the classification and preservation of nature in an industrial age. It's within this context of classification and preservation that I'd like to open up and dissect the implications of this taxidermic history on two installations by the French artist Annette Messenger: *Nameless Ones* (1993), a gallery of impaled birds with their heads replaced with fanciful hand-knitted ones belonging to different creatures and *Boarders at Rest* (1972), a glass covered case that holds dozens of tiny stuffed sparrows shrouded with pastel hand-knit jackets. My paper will explore how taxidermy is a space of interregnum - in between life and death, in between destruction and preservation, in between the beautiful and the grotesque. Rather than order seen in dioramas, Messenger's works reveal contradictions and ambiguities in classifications of disciplines, gender, and beauty. Both works rearrange and undo knowledge through cutting and stitching. It's this place of trauma and suture where Messenger's birds begin to create meaning. Messenger uses this in between state to ask complicated questions about why we kill to preserve. My paper also argues that taxidermy can be used metaphorically to explore the larger context of art history as place between life and death. Museums, for example, serve to maintain a dead culture and temporary performances and installations are preserved or stuffed through photography and video.