



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



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Diorama Accuracy

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A Reality too Accurate for Modern Times

Recently, the media reported an outcry from some critics about a work of art. They are insisting a Pittsburgh museum remove a diorama from public view, one that has been at the museum since 1899.¹ It was created in 1867 by two brothers from France, Edouard and Jules Verreaux. The museum director's comments align with the protests of the diorama protesters.



The diorama is depicted in the figure above.² It shows a lion attacking a camel and its rider. It is titled, “Lion Attacking a Dromedary.” According to camel experts, a dromedary is distinguished as having “one hump on its back.”

The camel authorities also call this type of camel the Arabian camel because it was domesticated in southern Arabia for thousands of years, later migrating to the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

I bring up these facts because the naysayers claim the diorama is insulting as it depicts a lion attacking a man, but not just any man. They are not happy because this violence was against a man who was of Arabic descent. The pro-lion lobbyists have yet to lodge any complaints about the lion's humiliation, who appears to be on the verge of receiving a thrust from a very large dagger.

Consulting the photo above, the rider's hand appears to be rather pale, not a trait usually associated with Arabs. Perhaps he was a white-skinned Swiss tourist out to explore the desert

¹ “Diorama raises ethical issues for Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum,” *The Spokesman Review* and *Associated Press*, September 18, 2020, A4.

² Thanks to Wikipedia.

and hunt lions on his Rent-A-Camel. Okay, his face is not Swiss-like, so he was likely a native of the region.

It is an uncontestable fact that Arabic men and women often rode camels in past times. Camels in Arabia were the Toyotas of that day. Arabs still ride camels, although not as frequently as before, as they must make way for tourists who insist on having their photos made of them while they are astride one of the animals.

Until the late 19th century, when lions became extinct in the area, they prowled Arabia and attacked Arab camel riders. Who else but an Arab would have been riding a camel on the Arabian Peninsula in the 1800s? The diorama is historically accurate. Then why the protests? Read on and for the love of camels, keep a straight face.

It is known that white-skinned humans rarely saw, much less rode a camel during those early days, the times around 1867 when the diorama was created. Yet, here is a quote from the museum director. After explaining that other dioramas in the museum had no humans depicted in them, he exclaimed, “and certainly no white European humans being attacked by animals.” Of course not. An Arab on a camel was the only way the diorama could have been created accurately.

Could the creation of another diorama near this one solve the problem? Say, a white man riding a camel being attacked by a lion? Probably not. Most white men likely can’t ride camels without guides leading the camel and preventing it from spitting on the rider. Besides, lions in Arabia are extinct, having been killed off by hunters.

Okay, create a diorama in which a US Army jeep explodes from a land mine in Iraq. After all, it’s also true, and Iraq is next door to Saudi Arabia. Just modernize the mode of violence.

Let’s rid ourselves of any controversy surrounding the admittedly unlikely possibility of there being a white person riding the camel in the diorama. The museum claims the rider’s clothes were “derived from” at least five separate North African cultures.

So, there we have it: The rider was an Arab. He was riding an Arabic camel. He was wearing Arabic clothes. He and his camel were attacked by a lion. Uncontestable historical facts shown in an impressive and accurately rendered work of art.

To make this matter even more out-of-kilter, the museum director also complains that the diorama depicts a male lion attacking the camel and the man. The director says it was more common for the female “to do the hunting.” Look again, director, as seen in the picture below.



The Arab has fought-off the female. She lies at the feet of the camel, vanquished by the Arab. Is this diorama degrading to the Arab, who is depicted fighting-off two ferocious predators? Hardly. If anything, the diorama pays honor to a stalwart Arab.

Here’s another dimension to this situation: The museum performed X-rays on the rider. It was discovered that the rider’s skeleton, following a common human practice in the 1800s,

was of human bones. However, the director said the museum's practice was for a human's remains to "be done" with the permission "of the people whose remains are displayed. So, the director was at a loss about how to proceed with this astounding evidence.

With permission? Where is the rider's documentation declaring his wish for his bones to be part of a diorama? After all, paper and pen existed in the 19th century, although it is a safe bet that camel riders were not camel writers. Besides, how about the camel and those lions? Where was the 1800s' SPCA when it was needed?

What do these sorts of people who protest such trivia do for a living? From my perspective, they appear to have too much idle time on their hands.

The display, more than a century and a half old, is being questioned by a herd of politically correct lemmings who righteously proclaim they are pursuing "ethical issues about its accuracy and appropriateness." Yet what is inaccurate about the diorama? Why is it inappropriate, given the practices of those times? Do they wish to re-invent history?

Why can't we be more appreciative and honor the works of art of our forebearers (in including statues which honor Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, the subject of another report about political correctness)? It was an accepted practice in those days to use human bones for dioramas. A reality of that past also included Arabs riding Arabic camels and being attacked by hungry carnivorous animals.

Modern humans have devolved to the point where many think they must revise or remove their past to make present images of themselves more pleasant. For this situation: Can't degrade a person of color by showing the person being attacked, even though the diorama honors that very person by showing his tenacity and bravery.

This situation would be belly-laughable were it not for the fact that people like the critics of a Pittsburgh museum actually exist and are dead-set on fostering their surreal views onto everyone else.