

Case study: Mythic Creatures helps Holstebro Museum re-position as a place for everyone

DRAGER

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Holstebro Museum is the museum of archeology and recent times in Holstebro, Denmark and the surrounding area. The museum seeks to inspire curiosity about history through providing unique and memorable experiences to locals and visitors.

Re-opening offers new opportunities and challenges

In 2019, the Museum was re-opened after being closed for rebuilding and refurbishment for two and a half years.

The Museum took this opportunity to consider its role in the community and reposition itself as a place where everyone can learn, play and explore. Prior to the closure, the Museum's core audience was predominantly scholars and history experts, and the Museum was looking to attract new and different types of audiences.

Now open with a refreshed vision, the Museum was looking for ways to entice new visitors, as well as hold current audiences close.





Partnership with AMNH a way to reach new audiences

Holstebro Museum partnered with the American Museum of Natural History to bring *Dragons, Unicorn and Mermaids: Mythic Creatures* to Europe for the first time. Holstebro Museum hoped that an interactive, engaging exhibition like *Mythic Creatures* would appeal to a broad audience, and act as an accessible 'way in' to museums for non-traditional museum visitors.

A collaboration between American Museum of Natural History, The Field Museum, Canadian Museum of History, Australian National Maritime Museum and Fernbank Museum, *Dragons, Unicorns & Mermaids: Mythic Creatures* explores the relationship between science and legend, tracing the origins of mythic creatures and their enduring hold on the imagination. This exhibition combines dramatic models, cast fossils, cultural objects, and absorbing multimedia and interactive technology to tell the stories behind the alluring mythic creatures that continue to fascinate visitors of all ages.

Mythic Creatures was a natural fit for Holstebro Museum, because the town Holstebro rests on a founding myth of a dragon ruling the river, and making the crucial passage impossible. The dragon is killed by the local knight Holst; and thereafter the town is named Holst' Bro (bridge in Danish). The myth is parallel to the widespread myth of St George and the Dragon; and in the permanent exhibition the museum proudly tells the local version, and have even displayed a replica of the dragon skeleton.

There are also a number of places around the museum where mythic creatures have been spotted. In the exhibition, the museum shows visitors the locations where one might be lucky to meet a mythic creature today.

Mythic Creatures provided a ‘way in’ to history for a broader audience

The exhibition helped the Museum in achieving its goals to reach new audiences. Mythic Creatures was well received by visitors, and enjoyed strong visitation despite Covid-19 disruptions and **declining visitor numbers across visitor attractions in Denmark** – including breaking the Museum’s record for most visits on any single day.

The proportion of paying visitors increased significantly from 25% to 39%, indicating the exhibition helped drive visits. As shown through visitor studies the Museum conducted, the visitor profile of exhibition attendees reflected a broad audience, with a good balance of young and older audiences (where previously there was a skew towards older visitors), and an even gender balance. Visits made by locals and first-time visitors – both key target audiences for the museum – increased. The Museum was also successful in attracting families, with 45% of visits made by children.

‘We have been very satisfied with the exhibition of Mythic Creatures in the museum. This was a major investment for our small museum, and it has really proven worthwhile: We have both learned new things about designing exhibitions from translating and looking at the work from our professional colleagues, and then above all, we have welcomed a lot of new visitors, primarily from our local area – and I am sure they will come back to our wonderful museum at a later stage.’

– Ingeborg Svenning, Director, Holstebro Museum.

In part due to Mythic Creatures, Holstebro Museum now has a new audience to develop and nurture, and is working on new initiatives to retain and engage its new local audience.



Mythic Creatures will be on display at the Natural History Museum in Aarhus from June 2022. Find out more about the exhibition [here](#).

All photos © Holstebro Museum.

Dragons, Unicorns & Mermaids: Mythic Creatures is organized by the American Museum of Natural History, New York (amnh.org) in collaboration with The Field Museum, Chicago; Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau; Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney; and Fernbank Museum of Natural History, Atlanta.

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