

INTO THE GREAT WIDE OPEN!

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The most important collections of the Anatomical Museum in Groningen are those of Petrus Camper (1722-1789) and Pieter de Riemer (1769-1831), later on supplemented with smaller collections from professors of Anatomy and Embryology. Also worth mentioning are the great numbers of models, especially the wax models from the Ziegler Company.

The Laboratory for Anatomy and the Anatomical Museum had been in one building for almost 100 years, when, it was decided to remove it to the obstetrics clinic in 2000. This building had to be renovated and the whole of the Medical Faculty had to be housed there as well as the anatomical collection, the dissection rooms and lecture rooms. It was then regular local news, but despite protests the decision remained a fact.

Finally, it was decided that the three University museums -the Ethnological Museum, The Anatomical Museum and the University Museum- would merge into the University Museum, which had to be enlarged. The greater part of the joint collections was kept in the already existing depot of this museum; the rooms there were climatized and not exposed to (day) light. A special room was designed for liquid preparations.

In 2003 the anatomical collections were moved to the new depot. But before that the entire collection was photographed and 360 degrees pictures were taken in four different spots. The old building was eventually demolished and only a small part was saved, a tower and a bay window.

Virtual visibility

Meanwhile, an important issue came up: how do we keep the attention of the general public and how can we attract new visitors. With the help of a webdesigner, and the computerprogramme *Dreamweaver* it was possible to open a link to the “Virtual Anatomical Museum” on the website of the University Museum. On the four earlier fixed places in the former museum one could see 360 degrees round and since every showcase and specimen had been photographed, it was possible to surf along the shelves and have a close look at preparations. The overall idea was that we would lose a lot of visitors by showing the collections on the internet. The result, however, was quite the opposite; when people get acquainted with objects, they want to see them for real! And there is another great advantage: people may be surprised and bring on new ideas to your collection. Soon after having gone worldwide a colleague from Amsterdam found out that the University Museum had three skulls of members of the notorious Gang Zwartjesgoed, from the late 18th century, that plagued the Netherlands for many years. The Gang Zwartjesgoed was his hobby and soon he was able to lead me to portraits of the gang members that were in the archives of the City of The Hague. After their execution by the breaking wheel, Pieter de Riemer, Doctor and Professor, became the owner of these skulls and examined them according to the latest phrenology theory of Franz Joseph Gall. Gall’s theory primarily focused on measurements of the skull, based on the concept that the brain consists of different organs that form a person’s virtues and vices. All this culminated in an exhibition on the subject; the gang, their portraits and the phrenology. At the opening of the exhibition we even sang a sentimental song from the late 18th century about the crimes of the Zwartjesgoed Gang.

The second chapter of digitization started in 2010 with the collaboration in the Netherlands between universities, their libraries and archives. The universities are joined together in The Academical Heritage Foundation (SAE). We began with a historical footage collection which was rather easy to deal with. A proper registration and quality photography are essential and thus necessary for a good result. All data have to be delivered on a basis of strict rules, since the various members work in various institutes. In the end all content is imported in a database by the Digital Production Centre of the University library of Amsterdam. Three things were crucial for the final result:

- Converting data from the Adlib registration system to XML computer language

- Converting high-resolution photos to a smaller format
- Producing so-called concordance lists that tie photos and data together.

The result is a summary of the collections in the Netherlands, consisting of an overview of 10 collections within the University Museum. Since the release of the website a much more extensive exchange has taken place between researchers, those in charge of collections and regular visitors. And, what is more, there have already been more requests for exhibitions elsewhere, publications and specific knowledge.

Physical visibility

One of the means to improve knowledge and awareness of the anatomical, pathological and obstetrical collections was to organize exhibitions. Some of those exhibitions opened up discussions and gave room to an exchange of views and opinions.

- 2004. Traces of the Treasure Grabber. Reopening of the University museum. As guest curator, Wim T. Schippers, a famous Dutch artist, opened the first exhibition in the newly built pavilion. The anatomical collections also got a prominent place here and for this special occasion a ball pit was installed with small skulls in a white room.
- 2005. The Museum Gallery
- 2005. The Genius and the Bottle
- 2006. The Zwartjesgoed Gang
- 2010. Inside Out
- 2012. The Anatomical Room
- 2014. For Infinity: 400 years Groningen University
- 2017. Healthy aging

In 2010 curators, a contemporary assistant and I organised the Anatomy Exhibition "Inside Out". The catalogue that came with it was quite extensive. The exhibition lasted a year and people were queuing during the last (free of charge) weekend.

The 400-year anniversary of Groningen University was celebrated in the Der Aa-church, one of the biggest churches in town. For three months this church was piled with collections of the university together with modern techniques and applications.

In 2012 the University Museum opened the Anatomy Room (a permanent display). A 'reversed' Anatomical Theatre is used: the spectators are in the centre and the objects are shown from the spots where the spectators used to stand. The Anatomy Room has been a great success from the very start in 2012. In 1999, a well-known Groningen artist, Geurt van Dijk, started making huge wall paintings in the new Medical Faculty, next to the lifts that were frequently used. In 2014, it took several years to finish this project; a well documented and illustrated reference book was published. This is one way to attract the attention of outsiders.

In the old part of the former Anatomical Laboratory which was saved, two original iron, riveted museum drawers were placed with preparations and models. One could call this a tiny satellite museum.

Besides exhibitions and digitization it is also important to use knowledge and related historical objects for educational purposes. The museum also lends wax models for practical lessons of embryology for 400 medical students, in the building of the Medical Faculty, twice a year. This means handling the models carefully, taking care of good transport and making a continuous display in the dissection room.

The exhibition "Healthy Aging" will be in the large room downstairs until the latter half of July, 2018. The central theme is in fact everything that has to do with health and well-being but also medical and therapeutic treatment and medical history. There is also a catalogue and the anatomical collections have a (modest) place here too.

Conclusion

At this moment an extensive refurbishment is taking place in the University Museum and the building is closed down for 4 months. The display will be taken to the depot and be examined, photographed and stored. This can be a starting-point for a rethink about improvements. Modern media can be very useful to improve the knowledge of the University Museum and its collections, but we also have to reconsider how to take collections to the internet, so that we are not dependant on other institutes. One of the possibilities is the hosting of our registration system *Adlib* which can expose collections with limited data directly from their server.