

Bodies and Diseases in Museums. Hidden Heritage at the Complutense University of Madrid.

The Complutense University of Madrid (UCM) hosts several museums related to the history of medicine, including the Javier Puerta Museum of Anatomy, the Reverte Coma Museum of Medical and Forensic Anthropology, Palaeopathology and Criminalistics, and the Olavide Museum (of Dermatology). The Dermatology Museum is named after its creator, the 19th-century dermatologist José Eugenio de Olavide, while the Anatomy and Forensic Medicine Museums are named after their last curators —both professors at the UCM— who made an indispensable contribution to the functioning of the museums in previous decades. These museums offer a glimpse of the scientific and medical heritage that the UCM and its collaborating institutions have preserved.

The collection of the anatomical museum dates back to the end of the 18th century, when the Royal College of Surgeons was founded in Madrid. It consists mainly of polychrome wax sculptures of the Italian school, but made by local anatomy professors, such as Lacaba, under the auspices of the royal authorities. In the context of the new medical schools created by the liberal state, there is also a collection of polychrome sculptures in other materials, such as plaster, wood and papier-mâché, made by Spanish doctors alongside anatomical sculptors in the 19th century. There are also collections of bones from different stages of pre- and post-natal life, including numerous skulls for anthropological purposes, which will be discussed later. In addition to anatomical, natural and artificial parts, there are several surgical instruments. Of particular note is the series of anatomical wax models depicting the various stages of pregnancy, from conception to delivery. In the central location of the exhibiting hall, we find a life-size wax model of a full-term pregnant woman, reclining on a chair as if fainting, her uterus wide open, revealing a head-down foetus. The tissues and layers of muscle around the placenta are clearly visible. Some of the wax sculptures are mixed preparations —artificial and

natural— as they use human hair and possibly human nails. Most of the objects are only identified by a reference number, with only a few accompanied by anatomical or pathological explanations, the name of the model maker, date, and material used.

The collection seeks to encourage visitors to reflect on how medical knowledge is constructed in distinct ways at different times. In the 18th and 19th centuries, a more complete anatomical science continued to play a fundamental role in the training of physicians. Due to the scarcity of cadavers for medical practice, wax models were designed and fabricated for didactic purposes, not only for medical students in schools, but also for the general public, as they were circulated in popular museums and fairgrounds. This use of wax models was gradually superseded by new techniques, but the three-dimensional visualisation of anatomy leads contemporary visitors to think about the historical use of the human body. The flayed faces, open wombs and anatomical «Venuses» etc. strike our modern sensibilities and challenge us to make sense of these models and human remains as «artefacts» on display. This is where the delicacy of medical museums lies, as they deal with sensitive objects that have a special meaning. The human remains, once unique, different for each individual, are no longer connected to their life owner, but rather transformed into an anonymous, depersonalised, scientific object. How to deal with human remains has long been a problematic issue in both historical and contemporary contexts. Some social and cultural functions of the body do not seem to cease after its death, but rather continue on another journey as it is acquired, dissected, preserved, painted and finally exhibited in medical museums.

The exhibition also invites the visitors to grasp the ideologies communicated and framed by the objects. Most of the anatomical positions embody the ideal beauty of classical works of art — they are well-proportioned bodies, muscular in men and curvaceous in women. Moreover, a large number of female models are mere torsos, with a clear emphasis on the reproductive organs. Beyond the literal anatomical representation, women's bodies are often charged with certain cultural meanings and aesthetic values in order to convey a tacit message about the social functions of women of their time, as well as to facilitate the construction of masculinity by looking at idealised femininity. On the other hand, the skeletons of individuals suffering from gigantism and other alterations in size and structure of the body provide examples of a comparison between the healthy and the pathological. Not only in the physiological sense, but also to show the «normal» body as opposed to the rare, the different or even the «freak». How we should understand «normality» is still a relevant issue today. Indeed, whether or not normality exists is an open debate, as it is to a large extent culturally and politically constructed.

While anatomical wax is mainly used to represent the internal structures of the body, the Olavide Museum features another use of wax models in medicine: the dermatological moulage. The museum is housed in one of the pavilion buildings behind the Faculty of Medicine, somewhat out of sight and off the main walkways of the university campus. It

has a total of 663 dermatological moulages from the 19th century, but many of them are stored in an accessible warehouse next to the exhibition space. Some are still in their original packaging, but many have been restored and placed in new wooden cases. The museum also has a historical library containing more than a thousand treatises on dermatology and venereology from its beginnings to the present day. David Aranda, one of the coordinators and restaurateurs, explained the boxes to us as chronological files, as they reveal the troubled history of the collection, telling how it was lost and transferred over the past centuries before being found and rescued.

The museum presents the creation of medical moulage as an important technique in 19th-century medicine, which required the triple involvement of the living patient, the doctor who diagnosed and treated him, and the sculptor who reproduced the illness with the greatest accuracy. The exhibition area is divided into eight thematic rooms, named after the most important doctors at the San Juan de Dios Hospital, where the museum was originally located. According to the speciality and practice of each doctor or sculptor, the corresponding room contains wax figures of different diseases, plaster casts, medical instruments, medical records, and documents. Dr Castero's room, for example, presents the four major dermatoses of the 19th century: syphilis, leprosy, tuberculosis, and ringworm. The figures are displayed in their original wooden frames with their original labels giving information about the author, clinic, and classification. In addition, the clinical history of each piece can be consulted in the museum's full catalogue. A brief history of the diseases and the steps taken to investigate them are also provided, giving visitors a clear idea of how the diseases were viewed and tackled at different times. It is noteworthy that, in the centre of the room, a wax 'child' lies prone in a glass case, its skin covered with honey-like exudate, showing a severe stage of *tinea favosa*. The figures demonstrate a high level of modelling skill and are striking in their resemblance to the colour and texture of human skin. However, they are not objects that are easy to interpret. Moulage made illness and pain visible and palpable through vivid expression. It dares us to witness and feel what could be considered as macabre, and to make sense of these objects, which can be repulsive and fascinating at the same time.

With regard to the skulls mentioned above, due to the fragmentation of the original collection, we find some skulls in the Javier Puerta Museum and others in the Museum of Medical and Forensic Anthropology, Palaeopathology and Criminalistics. The latter was created by Federico Olóriz Aguilera (1855-1912) in 1884 with his 14 original pieces and 2,250 specimens. When the faculty transferred its location to Ciudad Universitaria the collection was divided and distributed between the two departments of Anatomy and that of Legal and Forensic Medicine. The bone sections on sexual differentiation and cultural anthropology are of particular interest. The former focuses on the comparison of size, shape and density between male and female skulls and coxal bones, the latter of fetishes and deformed skulls. These collections complement the anatomical representation of bodies and

help us to understand the historical construction of masculinity, femininity and normality from a different angle.

Finally, the exhibitions provide visitors with a unique perspective for observing and reflecting on our own existence through the historical making of anatomy and pathology. These are not just ontological facts that seem obsolete in today's medical practice, but are vibrant in our perception of the self and modernity. The collections have considerable didactic and scientific value and are currently used by professors at the Faculty of Medicine to teach the history of medicine, anatomy and art history. However, the anatomical museum is the only one of the three that is open to the public upon request at the moment. It should be noted that the University has not yet effectively utilised the collections. The anatomical and forensic medicine museums are lacking in organisation, adequate exhibition space and a cataloguing system, which makes it difficult to carry out further studies on the models, pieces and specimens. The situation with the Olavide Museum is just as regrettable, if not more so. Although the models are catalogued and available for consultation on its website, the majority of the physical collection is packed away in a basement of the UCM and has become invisible. The restaurateurs are receiving little support in their efforts. The difficulties faced by these museums may reflect a broader issue with heritage management at the UCM. The University possesses a wealth of collections, yet it lacks an operational and active museum of its own, which is a symptom of the absence of policy for the preservation, care, and study of the UCM's scientific heritage in general.

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