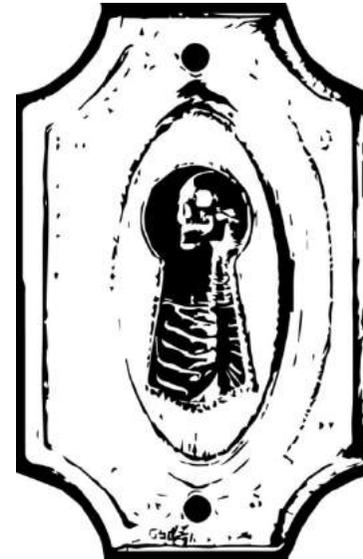


Our Insides

A collection guided by curiosity; filled with histories, artworks and stories that explore the human anatomy

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Introduction

As a child, have you ever put your ear onto your mother's belly and listened to the sounds and felt the warmth or the slight movements of her abdomen, while wondering *what is going on in there, what does it look like?* An innocent curiosity about the human anatomy, a curiosity I hope to stimulate and expand.

What does it look like? A question many of us could still not fully answer. We tend to visualize the human anatomy as a collection of colourful organs and cartoon-like bones wrapped up in bright red muscles and skin. Illustrations from high school biology classes, also games such as *Operation*, partly form the image and concepts we have of our bodies. By blending different images and concepts together, we create a vague portrait of what we might think our anatomy looks like.

What does it look like? Is not only asked by children, but is still a question many scientists, authors and artists try to answer. We still have not

completely discovered and objectively illustrated every part of the human body. Because of this, in the past, now and most likely in the future, there was and is room for interpretation. Room where fantasy, influences from cultures and concepts of society reign free. These interpretations can be seen in scientific research, literature and art. Subjectivity and objectivity that arrive from these interpretations are in a constant tug of war and influence one another.

While I was trying to answer the question *What does it look like?*, I realised that anatomy is a topographic visualisation of the human body, a map. When exploring it, one could take different paths due to the mix of objectivity and subjectivity. There is not one true track to take, as I noticed during my dive into my fascination of the human anatomy analysed by scientists, writers and artists. When I came back up to the surface, several stories, interpretations, images, artworks and histories floated next to me. Together they formed a collection, a personal reflection, showing the path that I chose. I placed my collection into a cabinet of curiosities and categorized it into certain drawers. I labelled these drawers into four categories: *celebration, sex, weakness and death*. The collection was picked out by the little Shakespeare in me, the homunculus version. It loves the drama and subtlety that can be found in the more loved and feared elements in life, which are deeply rooted within our anatomies. Considering that the blood rush to our heads is the reason why we become furious, it is the bones in our bodies that make us dance, our lips that make us kiss and our hearts are the ones that stop beating.

Celebration, sex, weakness and death are not only categories set by me; they also represent common notions, symbols, societal and cultural concepts that can be found among the scientific research, literature and art when delving into the human anatomy. A mix between objectivity and subjectivity can be found in this cabinet of curiosities. Adding my personal insights to a traditional form with an artistic viewpoint, a cultural historical context and an interdisciplinary setting; the cabinet of curiosities will continue to expand and indulge the innocent curiosity about the human anatomy that started with the rumbling sound of my mother's belly.

*The skeleton in the closet, took the upper hand, put his best foot forward and walked out, but got off on the wrong foot.
So he fell head over heels. He tried to save face by keeping his head up.
He decided to bone up and to keep walking until his heart's content.*

Celebration

*They say she's a baroness or marchioness,
And the callow gallant a poor cartwright.
Good God! And now she's giving herself,
As though the bumpkin were a baron!*

*Tap, tap, tap, what a saraband!
Circles of corpses all holding hands!
Tap, tap, tap, in the throng you can see
King and peasant dancing together!*

*But shh! Suddenly the dance is ended,
They jostle and take flight--the cock has crowed;
Ah! Nocturnal beauty shines on the poor!
And long live death and equality!*

Fragment from *Égalité Fraternité* by Henri Cazalis. ¹

Celebration is a prominent aspect of our lives and, according to Henri Cazalis, once we have died we can truly party as equals. However, celebrating our bodies and especially our insides is not commonly glorified. How we look at our bodies has changed a lot during the course of history. During the Middle Ages the body was seen as if it was made in the image of God, as some still do of course. This meant that cutting a human body open to see what is inside was illegal. And most illustrations that

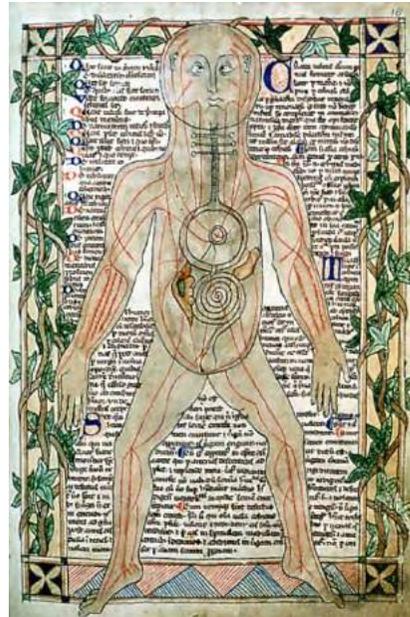


Figure 1. 13th century anatomical illustration showing the veins

dissections. Criminals convicted to death were given an even worse punishment by letting anatomists dissect them.

However, it was not as if fresh bodies were available to every physician. Therefore anatomy books were crucial and a rebellious Flemish surgeon Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) wanted to show his ground-breaking research to the world, created an anatomy book called *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* filled with wonderful illustrations made by the students of Tiziano Vecellio, more famously known as Titian. Especially one student of Titian called Jan

were made were filled with a lot of fantasy to make up for what they lacked in knowledge which was also done in maps during the Middle Ages. Adding fantastical monsters in the oceans and shaping countries in the form of petals. An illustration made in the thirteenth century, is an example that shows how interpretation can create a fascinating concept of the human body. How the vocal cords are portrayed with what you can presume is the stomach and the heart, together resemble a lute. Perhaps trying to visualize what instrument our voice could be.

Coming from the notion; we should not research the body because it would bring us too close to god, the notion became; we should research the body to celebrate his most divine creation. During the Renaissance the Catholic Church became less strict concerning human



Figure 2. Muscle man in the Fabrica

Stephan Calcar created many illustrations in the book.² Vesalius wanted to convey 'the dignity and beauty of man'³ in the illustrations of the book and worked very closely with the artists. So how do you show this beauty and dignity of man? When we look at some of the illustrations, many of the dissected figures seem to be positioned in lively composition: exposing muscles in a very elegant manner and creating playful compositions with skeletons. Vesalius and his artists would have needed to think about how the body would be placed and dissected before making the illustrations in order to correctly portray the anatomy of the figures, being positioned in these lively poses. This procedure would have been time consuming and would not have benefited the accuracy of showing the human anatomy. It was an active choice to spend time and effort on the artistic aspects of the illustrations. Also, in certain illustrations the background has been paid close attention to, drawn with much detail and at times depicting recognizable locations, certain landscapes in Padua where Vesalius worked at the time can be seen.⁴

In addition to the aesthetical part in the illustrations, Vesalius and his artists also wanted to show the dignity of man. An element that Vesalius and his artists highlighted as trait fitting to a

dignified man, is to philosophise about death. In one of the illustrations a skeleton is leaning on a tomb holding a skull and seems to be contemplating. On the tomb a Latin text has been engraved *Vivitur ingenio, caetera mortis enrunt*, Genius lives on, all else is mortal. This thought does fit the legacy that Andreas Vesalius left behind; he is still famous, even after all these years. Scholars say that Vesalius became so well-known because, compared to his contemporaries; he made sure that the beauty of the illustrations, and therefore the anatomy of the human body, was featured heavily.⁵

Having created a new way of looking at the human body, which was in such contrast compared to how most medical scientists and many others thought about the body at that time, it seems that Vesalius and his artists made a statement about how we should celebrate our anatomies.

A more modern approach to celebrating the aesthetical side of the human anatomy can be found at the *Olympus Bioscapes*, a digital imaging competition, which has been around for almost a decade: a contest that focusses on life science subjects which are captured through light microscopes.⁶ This also includes microscopic images of the human body. The images that are created tend to look very abstract and colourful.

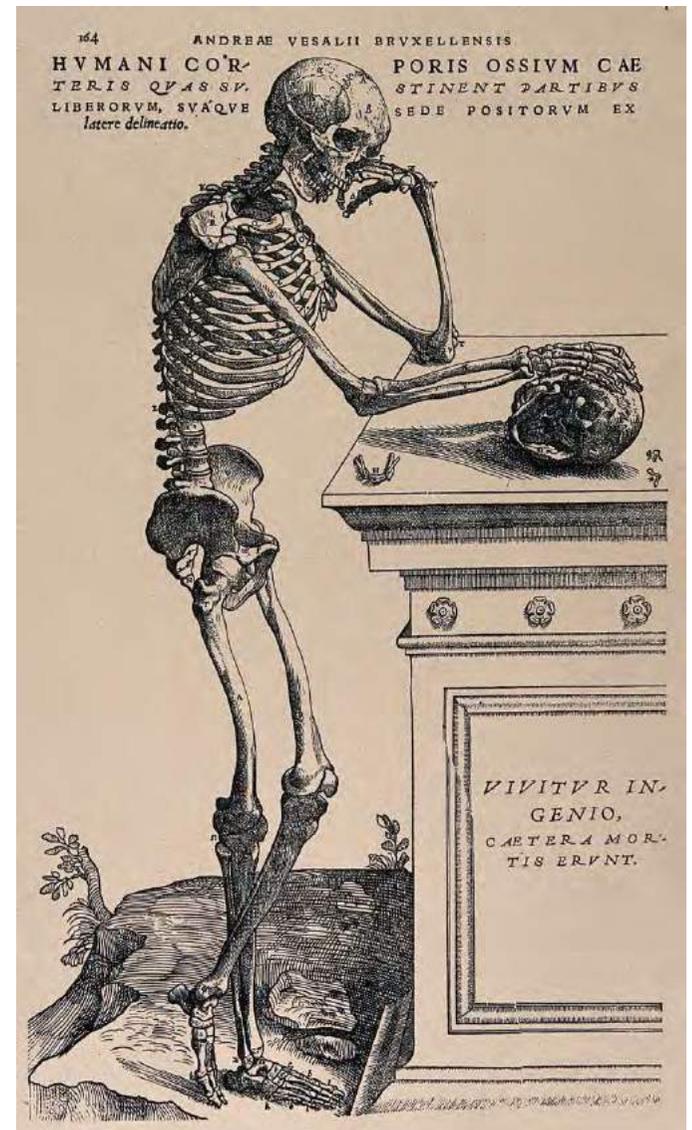


Figure 3. Skeleton in the Fabrica

The abstraction comes from the zooming in on the specimen/subject and colour dyes are added to create a clear and readable image. The procedure to create these images is time consuming and the costs can be immense. The images that are created by using light microscopes can show the human body in a completely different perspective. It can show certain neurons in our brains as a landscape filled with trees dyed in wonderful colours.⁷ These kinds of images were first and foremost, created to expand the knowledge about the human body. But it is as if the scientists became Alice in Wonderland, fell down the rabbit hole and found a strange yet beautiful world inside our own bodies.

The Bone Chair (2006) created by Joris Laarman is a design not based on micro anatomy, but anatomy we can see with the naked eye if one looks carefully. A design that can show off the strength, strangeness and beauty of a fundamental element of our bodies it can be seen as a tribute. A celebration of how complex and perfectly adapted our bodies are. *"The chair was actually formed by using an algorithm to translate the complexity, proportion and functionality of human bone and tree growth into a piece of furniture. Its shape, which started out as a chunky block of material, was carved and altered just the way a bone would grow, into a branching series of supports, strong where they need to bear loads, open where no*

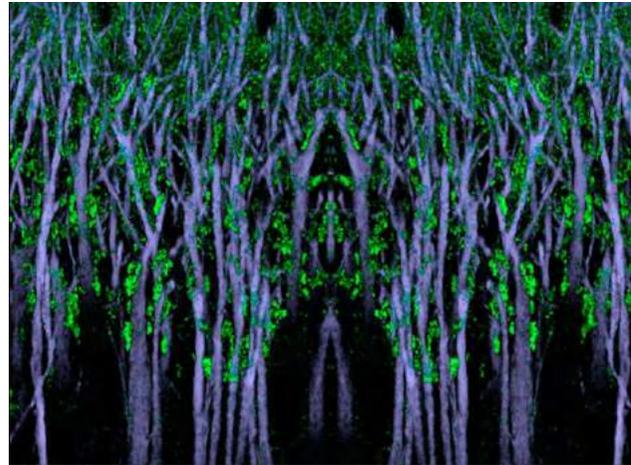


Figure 4. Hippocampal neurons.



Figure 5. Bone Chair

*material is necessary".*⁸ In this work not only the aesthetic side of the human anatomy is utilized, but also its complex yet functional assets, its strength. Our bones are seen most of the time as symbols for weakness and death, yet as can be seen in this design, they can also stand for firmness and stability. It is because of the sponge-like textures in bone, which can be seen even with the naked eye if a bone is split in the centre, that bones are so incredibly light and strong. An average male skeleton only weighs about 5.9 kilograms and a female skeleton around 3.8 kilograms yet they can support them for a lifetime.⁹

Our bones are popular when it comes to symbolism, yet there is one other part of our anatomy that takes the crown. Even in Egyptian and Greek times, the heart was seen as the source of identity, life, fertility, loyalty and love.¹⁰ In the Middle Ages the heart became a religious icon and the organ was associated with thinking and the brains with understanding.

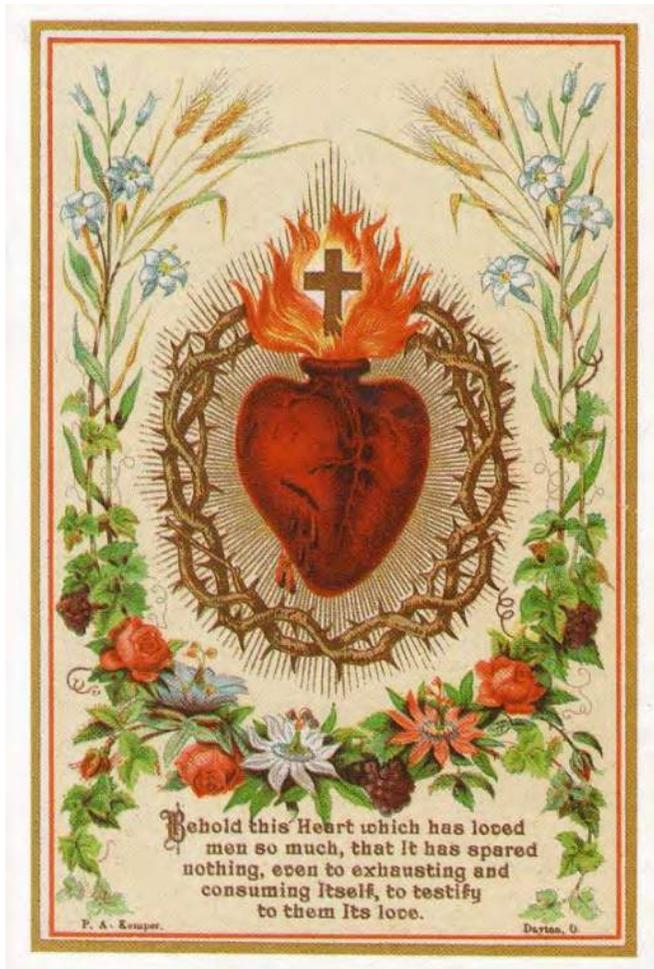


Figure 6. Sacred Heart holy card

The Sacred Heart is a much used symbol of the Christian belief, and is thought to be the beginning of the modern heart symbol we use nowadays. The story in which the Sacred Heart gains its distinct symbol came from Marguerite Marie (1647-1690). She claimed that Jesus appeared to her. Jesus permitted her to lay her head on his chest and told her; she had the task to bring new life into the devotion of Christianity. Almost as if it was a love scene, he took his own heart and placed it inside Marguerite while taking hers. The heart is surrounded by sacred flames which consume her endlessly symbolizing Jesus divine love for mankind. The heart also has a crown of thorns and wounds which represent the death of Jesus.¹¹ The Sacred Heart is in illustrations and in art not pictured as an anatomically correct heart, since it would distract the believers. The Sacred Heart stands for an idea, the symbolic aspect had to be more prominent than anything else.¹² The story and, therefore, the symbol became incredibly popular and the cult was made official by the Vatican.¹³ The symbol became, for certain Christians, a means to celebrate their religion.

Although the heart symbol has a much more complex past with influences from around the world, the heart symbol ♥ we are so used to seeing today found its origin in New York. Designer Milton Glaser had no idea how successful putting the ♥ in 'I♥NY' would turn out to be. Not soon after Glaser used the line 'I♥NY' for the city slogan in 1976, the rest of the world would follow and use the ♥ for all kinds of purposes.¹⁴

One story, that illustrates a very unique way of celebrating our anatomy, comes from Augustus Hare (1834-1903). In his book *The story of my life* (1896) he describes an experience he had during a very special dinner party. At this dinner party, a family heirloom was presented; the preserved heart of the French monarch Louis XIV. At a certain moment, the heart was presented to a rather eccentric guest called William Buckland (1784 –1856). Buckland was a zoologist, and was known for having an interesting palate, having eaten several unusual animals such as hedgehogs, puppies and fried mice. When it was presented to him, he almost immediately devoured it and leaving the guests in shock.¹⁵ It seems as if Henri Cazalis was right in this case, whether you were the monarch of France, at a dinner party you can be nothing more than an amuse.

Sex

Would you feel naked if you saw an x-ray of yourself? What we might not see as sexual in current times, could be interpreted differently and perhaps even as pornographic not so long ago.

An important development in the visualisation of the human anatomy caused an interesting reaction. In the book *The Magic Mountain* (1924) by Thomas Mann, the main character Hans Castorp goes to visit his cousin in a sanatorium in Switzerland, because his cousin suffers from tuberculosis. During this time taking x-ray photos became part of regular treatment, yet many had not seen such pictures. The x-rays gained a special status in the story; they became intimate portraits and were carried around in pockets. They were also used as a sort of membership card. The most fascinating reaction towards these x-ray photos is when Hans Castorp gets his hands on an x-ray photo of a woman he is heavily in love with. The x-ray shows the woman's ribcage and lungs, yet Hans Castorp gets sexually aroused from just looking at it and keeps it with him.¹⁶

Even before the discovery of the x-rays, the sexualization of anatomical images, illustrations and models occurred. Strange as it may seem,



Figure 7. and 8. Medici Venus

a type of anatomical models became very popular in the eighteenth century. One of the most famous anatomical model sculptors at that time, Clemente Michelangelo Susini (1754–1814) made over two thousand Anatomical Venuses. Even kings demanded him to create sensual reclining anatomical models. The *Medici Venus* (1782) model is the most well-known of his works. The model is elegantly placed up on a silk bed, with flowing hair close to her shoulders and soft looking skin. She even wears a pearl necklace, covering the cut where her top layer can be removed. While her intestines are showing, her grace and expression cannot be unseen. Her anatomy has even been subjected to this beauty standard; she has no fat layers and with a correct anatomy that should be showing. Another element which gives the model an added layer of sensuality is her facial expression. She seems to be experiencing a mixture between agony and ecstasy. It portrays this actual macabre image into an idealized moment of the death of a beautiful and young woman.¹⁷



Figure 9. Close up of Ecstasy of St Theresa

Agony and ecstasy were a common theme at that time, and was used frequently in art; for example the sculpture *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* by Giovanni Bernini (1652).

The Anatomical Venuses is an example of how cultural views of the body and the sexualization of it, can be seen even in scientific anatomical models. Especially the female anatomy has been incorrectly portrayed in history due to ignorance and sexualization. Even female scientists have made mistakes illustrating the female anatomy. Marie Geneviève Charlotte D'Arconville (1720-1805) created an illustration of a female skeleton with a small skull, very narrow ribcage and broad pelvis; a skeleton that would fit perfectly into a corset.¹⁸ There were some scientists at the time

that did not agree with this depiction of the female skeleton, yet the illustration was frequently used by the majority of other anatomical scientists in Britain.

Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring (1755-1830) was one of the scientists who disagreed with D'Arconville, even still when he selected a skeleton to illustrate, he was searching the most sublime female body according to him: *"Above all I was anxious to provide myself the body of a woman that was suitable not only because of her beauty and aptitude for procreation, but also because of the harmony of her limbs, beauty, and elegance, of the kind that the ancients used to ascribe to Venus."*¹⁹

In these anatomical models and illustrations, the female anatomy is not just subjected the ideal standard of a Venus-like beauty, but also the corruption that sexual desire can bring. Although, most times curiosity towards sexual desire and how the anatomy fulfils this desire can be completely innocent. When talking about medical students first experiences of being present at human dissections, Eleonore Kühler, (Associate professor and Department Head of the department of Anatomy & Embryology, Maastricht University), mentions that during this moment, a lot of the female students tend to first look into a cadaver to see the uterus and many male students are interested in seeing how large the vagina actually is.²⁰

Many of the models and illustrations tend to not fully acknowledge the sexual element in the work, a man who

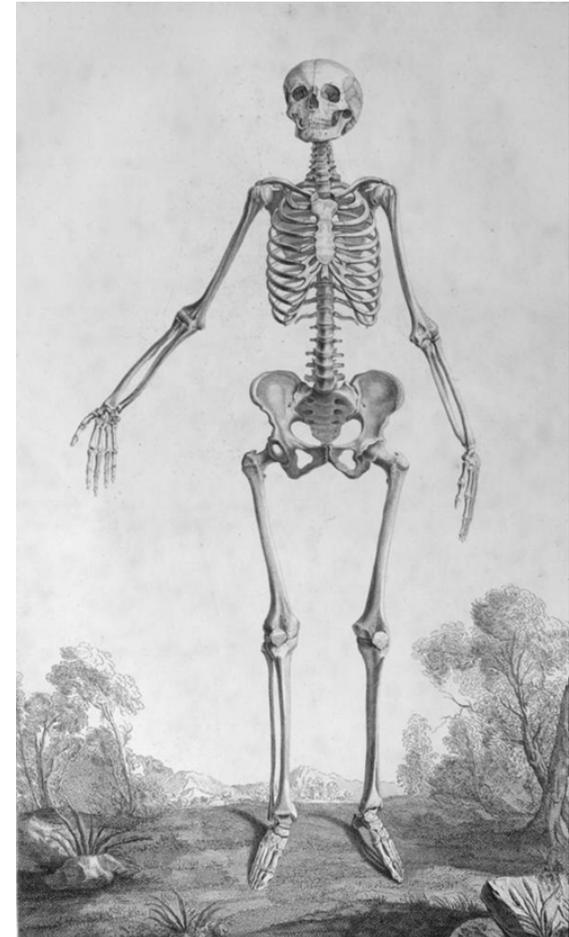


Figure 10. Female skeleton of D'Arconville

consciously choose to use a human body part as a symbol for sex was Nikolaj Gogol (1809-1852). In a humorous and satirical short story called *The Nose* published in 1836 in Russia, Gogol writes about a man who has a runny nose, meant in the literal sense. His main character a collegiate assessor named Kovaliov, wakes up and realizes that his nose is no longer on his face. It disappeared in the night and decided to become the nose of a man with a higher civil service rank. Kovaliov desperately tries to get his nose back, but fails and in the meantime he tries to find someone to blame. Before this all happened he was flirting with a girl he did not intend to marry, and therefore he thinks that her mother, who was not pleased with his flirting, was the cause of the loss of his nose. While Kovaliov was occupied with confronting the mother to blame her, his nose was enjoying his new more privileged life. After two weeks, the nose surprisingly comes back to Kovaliov. After the reunion with his nose, he goes around town and feels smug about the size of his nose compared to others.²¹ The story seems nonsense and it is meant to be seen in a symbolic fashion. When you read it, you might expect that the nose stands for another body part. The Russian word for nose can be interpreted as another word; *khui*, a Russian taboo word for penis.²²

An artist named Fernando Vicente, who saw the sexual element in illustrating the human anatomy, decided to emphasize it. In the *VENUS print collection* (2012), he paints several women showing their anatomy in a tantalising fashion. Sometimes referring to great pieces of art, in which the symbol Venus plays a part. A piece out of this collection is called *American Housewife* (2012), he created a playful looking woman with a sensual stare. She seems to be comfortable and proud of her body and anatomy. He shaped a fascinating way to embrace this sexual element in visualising anatomy.²³

As diverse sexuality is, the assumptions about how and in what way the human anatomy is sexual, is just as varied.



Figure 11. American Housewife

Weakness

We do blame our bodies for many of our daily flaws. Getting up too late, eating and drinking too much, taking the elevators and not the stairs. The spirit might be willing but the flesh is weak. So we claim that our flesh is responsible for many of our actions and mainly the bad ones. Yet, weakness is not only something to fear or to blame. It can reflect elements in one's life that have been ignored, hidden deep inside. Only when it aches it is given attention. Similar to how we treat our actual insides.

One writer, who loved to focus on the bad deeds that we humans do, and especially the bloody ones, was William Shakespeare (1564- 1616). Shakespeare is known for being an incredible writer and poet, yet not so many know that he was also well informed about advances in medical science and the human anatomy. In many of his plays he refers to bloody deaths and vicious attacks, and he portrayed these incidents with remarkable accuracy.²⁴ He uses his knowledge and insights about the human anatomy to create allegories to connect a scene to a certain topic or history, some scholars claim that he did. In one of his bloodiest plays; *Titus Andronicus* (1592), an example can be shown in which he uses the human anatomy as an allegory. In the play a Roman

general Titus Andronicus returns to Rome after fighting in a long war with the Goths. At the time, the Roman emperor died and his two sons are in a power struggle of who gets to be the new emperor. The reappearance of Titus causes quite a stir, because he is also seen as a possible candidate, and he brings along some very dangerous war hostages, who were Goths. During this power struggle many people died and horrible incidents happened. One of which is said to portray the decay of the city of Rome:

Marcus Andronicus: *"Speak, gentle niece, what stern ungentle hands have lopp'd and hew'd and made thy body bare of her two branches, those sweet ornaments, whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in, and might not gain so great a happiness as have thy love? Why dost not speak to me? Alas, a crimson river of warm blood, like to a bubbling fountain stirr'd with wind, doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips, coming and going with thy honey breath. But, sure, some Tereus hath deflowered thee, and, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue. Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for shame! And, notwithstanding all this loss of blood, as from a conduit with three issuing spouts, yet do thy cheeks look red as Titan's face blushing to be encountered with a cloud."*²⁵

In this scene, the daughter of Titus and the niece of Marcus Andronicus, Lavinia was found after being brutally raped and having her tongue and hands chopped off by two brothers, who were among the war hostages. The reason why the brothers removed Lavinia of her hands and tongue was in order to make sure she could not accuse them of their crime. The brothers were ordered to perform this horrible act out of revenge. The state, in which Lavinia was found, could represent a hostile invasion filled with extreme brutality; the same which happened during the sacking of Rome by the Goths in 410. Further into the

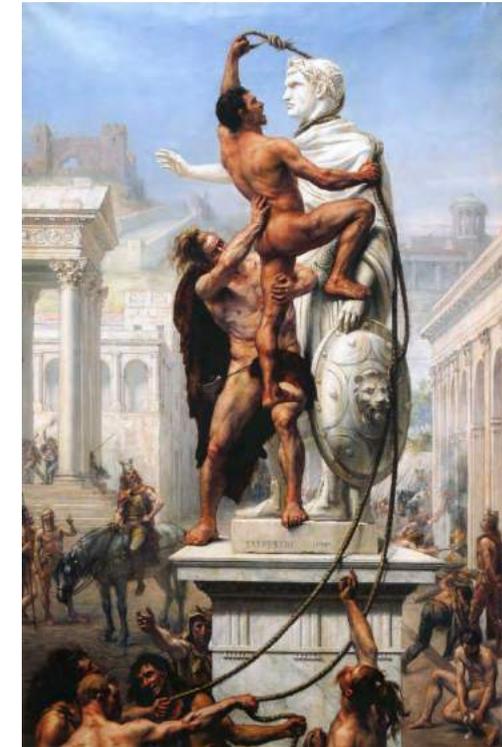


Figure 12. The sacking of Rome

play, a very dramatic reaction towards the rape of Lavina takes place. Titus kills his own daughter Lavina, for it was so shameful that she was raped, that in his opinion, she had to be taken out of her misery. This reaction represents a certain cultural moral which seemed normal during the time of Shakespeare, and sadly in some parts of the world, even today. It speaks for how we tend to deal with weakness; we must hide it or get rid of it. In that sense it reminds us of how we also deal with the appearance of our bodies and especially if the body is in a sort of weakened state. If it is only slightly irregular we are almost forced to hide. It is almost in our nature to reject weakened individuals, always afraid that it might rub off on us somehow.

The Roman Empire had left much history and stories behind, yet another empire, the Third Reich had left its unmistakable marks. The science of anatomy was affected by it as well. The history behind the science of human anatomy is often very dubious, yet one of the darker episodes was during the Second World War. Eduard Pernkopf (1888 – 1955) plays the main role in this story. During the rise of the Third Empire, Pernkopf was rising as well, and was being promoted from an associate professor to the director of the Anatomy Institute of Vienna in 1933. Later that year, he also became part of the Nazi Party and used his position to help develop his research.

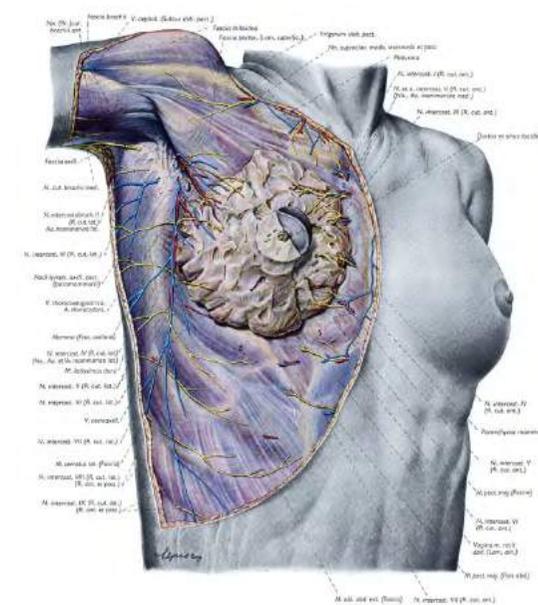
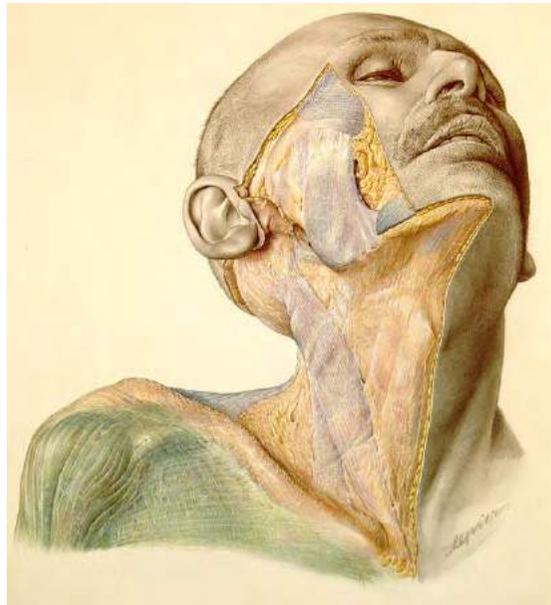


Figure 13. and 14. Illustrations in Pernkopf's Atlas

At least 1377 bodies of executed prisoners were shipped to the institute, unknowingly and without permission from their families were used for dissections.²⁶

These dissections were performed to help write and illustrate a human anatomy book series, called *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen* (or *Pernkopf's Anatomy Atlas* 1933- 1941) and is still used till this day, although there have been many ethical discussions whether the book needs to be removed from medical libraries.²⁶ Even on the illustrations, signs used by the Nazi Party can be seen. In modern versions of the atlas, these signs have been wiped away, yet in some of the illustrations the horrific past cannot be unseen. An illustration created by Erich Lepier (1898-1974), showing the superficial layer of the cervical fascia, shows the body of a man who is very slender and his head is shaved. In some of the illustrations, the bodies tend to be very lean and show signs of being mistreated. The illustrations tell indirectly, the story about how fear and indoctrination can cause people to see others as inferior, weaker and their bodies as simple tools.

Another example of the effect a society can have on the human anatomy is shown warts and all in the book called: *The Sick Rose; Disease and the Art of Medical Illustration* (2014), created by medical historian Dr Richard Barnett. The book displays how the nineteenth century filled with epidemics such as cholera and diphtheria, caused by industrialisation, urbanisation and bad hygiene, physically affect the body. The illustrations demonstrate how a weakened body is something strange and icky. The illustration of the boy with severe untreated leprosy somehow gives the impression of a sad hound dog. The boy is someone to pity and you would rather not see him. The boy might have been sick, but the portrayal of this sickness contains interpretation from its maker. The expression of a hound dog could have been avoided.²⁷

Not only can human anatomy portray weakness of the physical kind, it also can show the mental kind. Francesco Albano used the human anatomy and more specifically the skin to portray feelings of sadness, exhaustion and other emotions that can make you feel deflated. He took that concept quite literary. He made sculptures of strange looking and rather creepy deflated humans. A work called *On the eve* (2013) is part of this series of sculptures.

The skin in the sculpture might look real, even though it is actually made of wax, latex and

polyester. Fake as that might be, the impression that it leaves behind is an extreme representation of how someone could feel. Using skin, which is not often connected to emotions such as depression or sadness, yet can reflect them in a unique manner.²⁸



Figure 15. Thirteen year old boy with leprosy



Figure 16. On the eve

Unique is a word to describe the short film *He Took His Skin Off for Me* (2014). This film is based on a story written by Maria Hummer and directed by Ben Aston, the film also uses the skin as a symbol. Unlike the sculptures of Francesco Albano, it does not only symbolize weakness that can be caused by negative emotions, but also by love. The film shows a man and a woman who live together, and at one point the man takes off his skin, which he then hangs up in the closet. The rest of the story shows the changes that occur in their daily life and relationship because of the man's skinless appearance. The film can be interpreted in many ways, although the topic of sacrificing for one's lover has the overtone. With the tagline *Love is sticky*, it has been pointed out that getting attached to somebody can bring along unwanted consequences. Making you more fragile towards the person you are involved with or to others. The quite realistic portrayal of the skinless man truly intensifies the emotion of being vulnerable.²⁹

Weakness does not only affect an individual, it can even influence great empires. The same goes for the human anatomy as a metaphor; it can represent very large historical events, but also one person trying to express his or her vulnerability.



Figure 17. Still from *He Took His Skin Off for Me*

Death

Some see death as the beginning of the end and others see it as the end of the end or a never ending story. In what manner one might think about death, thinking about it seems unavoidable. As unavoidable as it is, we must find ways on how we deal with or better yet how we might avoid it. We try to answer questions about death in medical research, religion, stories or art and many other forms.

“Creativity comes from the soul, it’s what keeps you alive.”³⁰ A bit ironic coming from model and performer Rick Genest. His performance or what he calls his project, is him being inked on most areas of his body, portraying a mix between a skeleton and a rotting corpse. A living *memento mori* is a way to describe him. As a fifteen year old, he was diagnosed with a life threatening brain tumour, luckily he survived a dangerous operation and became cancer free. When he started to get a bit older, he was still under the influence of the impact that this brain tumour had on him. He started looking for ways to deal with the experience and started to get into the world of punk, which is filled with art and tattoos. After having some tattoos, he realised that death was so much part of his life that a skeleton on his body could help him to deal with it. For him it is a form



Figure 18. Rick Genest



Figure 19. Skeleton Joseph Merrick

of expression of his inner struggles between life and death, good versus evil and anarchy against authority.³¹

The skeleton is in addition to being a strong organic matter that forms the internal construction of our bodies, used in folklore, religion, symbolism and art as well as a form of expression according to Rick Genest. If it is not one of the most used symbols we humans have thought of. Perhaps it became such a well-known symbol, because skeletons look similar and it is what we all leave behind, if left to natural surroundings; it does not reflect an individual but a common shared fate. Although there might be a few exceptions concerning the similarity of skeletons, such as the skeleton of *the Elephant Man*.

A man actually called Joseph Merrick (1862-1890), who lived a hard life with having a rare genetic disease called the Proteus syndrome. This syndrome caused an overgrowth of body parts and structures.³² As well as in his skeleton, of which a replica is still on display at the Royal London Hospital Museum.³³

Skeletons are arguably the most displayed parts of the human anatomy. Even though the skeleton usually symbolizes death, accompanied with sober thought, it is displayed very often. Especially, when the *memento mori* notion was heavily promoted during the Middle Ages by the Catholic Church. Although, it was not always completely sombre. In some Roman Catholic churches in Northern Europe, more specifically Germany, certain skeletons were given some very precious gifts as a commemoration of the good deeds they have done. Saints were lavished with rubies and gold. Bedazzled skeletons with clothes fit for a king.³⁴

A reason to all this decoration might have to do with the glorification of the afterlife, during that time and this particular religion. Death being the means of how you get there, it could be something to appreciate.



Figure 20. Saint Valentinus



Figure 21. La Calavera Catrina, an icon during Día de Muertos

In the western cultural approach, there is very little humour to be found in death, but during the holiday *Día de Muertos* mainly celebrated in South America, Death gets to wear a more festive outfit. Skeletons and skulls are decorated with colourful patterns and exuberant flowers. On the graves of departed friends and family, picnics are held and sugar skulls and other

attributes are offered. The reason why families place offerings on altars and graves is because of the origins of *Día de Muertos*. It is believed that when we die, we go to the land of the dead; *Chicunamictlán*. In this land there are nine dangerous levels that the soul of the deceased needs to go through in order to reach the final resting place called *Mictlán*. The offerings are intended to help the souls. A beautiful notion that is believed by the people who celebrate *Día de Muertos* is that life is actually a dream and when you die, it is the first time you wake into reality. In which death is only the beginning.³⁵

Another approach to death can be read in the humorous fantasy novels of Sir Terence David John "Terry" Pratchett. Frequently mentioned in his books, a character named *Death* is portrayed as a skeleton dressed like the Grim Reaper. The character is more sympathetic than to be expected, loves cats and curry. The anatomy of Death had been given thought. Since he lacks vocal cords because he is a skeleton, when he speaks to you, you can hear him directly into your mind. Pratchett wrote his lines in small caps in order to portray this. For example; "DON'T THINK OF IT AS DYING" said Death. "JUST THINK OF IT AS LEAVING EARLY TO AVOID THE RUSH."³⁶ For Pratchett this line might have been a very personal one. He already knew in 2007 that he would die from an early-onset form of Alzheimer, which he did later on the 12th of March 2015. Maybe he is sharing a curry with his own version of Death?

Death and skeletons have been very closely tied together, and still are in current society. Although, not only the bones of our anatomy are used to tell stories about death. Artist, philosopher and scientist Helen Pynor used several internal organs to visualize death. In a series called *Liquid Ground* (2011) she explores the use of sculptural photographs in order to give an experience of human tragedy. The river Thames in London and its dangerous currents were the initial source of

inspiration for her work. She gathered many articles, mentioning drowning incidents that happened over the years in the Thames. The reason why she used internal organs in her work, was because it added a tactile dimension and it depicts something that could be realistic. She wants us to be confronted with our interior selves and get a sense of wonder, yet not disrupt the biological nature of it.³⁷

In addition to being confronting, the illustrations from Jan van Rymsdyk (died 1790) also include a sense of wonder. The illustrations were created for two ground-breaking anatomy books about the pregnant female body created by William Hunter (1718 –1783) and William Smellie (1697- 1763). Hunter's, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* was published in 1774 and Smellie's book *Treatise of the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* in 1754. Researching in the same field, around the same time and in the same city made Hunter and Smellie great rivals.³⁸ Both authors even hired the same artist; Jan Rymsdyk, to produce the illustrations for their books. Perhaps because his images were so realistic, yet have an aesthetic element to it. Next to their shared field and artist, they also shared the same accusation.

Death surrounded many anatomists before, and accusations often made against them for grave robbing or burking (refers to a famous story of Burke and Hare for murdering people such as beggars and



Figure 22. Liquid Ground

prostitutes and then selling the bodies to anatomists). This however was usually done around the time they were alive. However, in 2010 Don Shelton wrote a research article called *The Emperor's new clothes* and accused Hunter and Smellie of mass murder.³⁹ He claimed this with the reasoning that the two anatomists could not have legally found that many bodies of women in the state of before, during or just after childbirth. In the quantities of cases which were described in the books, according to Shelton do not add up. However, there has been much evidence that Shelton made rash conclusions, and that the accusations are most likely untrue. Even so a touch of doubt has been added to the ethical side of their work, which is so renowned for having improved midwifery and therefore helped to save many lives.

Perhaps the illustrations of both books can be a metaphor about the double edged sword of the kind of work Hunter and Smellie performed. Certain illustrations in the books capture an interesting moment. A moment when life should have started but death came instead. Yet, the knowledge that the illustrations bear has given life to others.

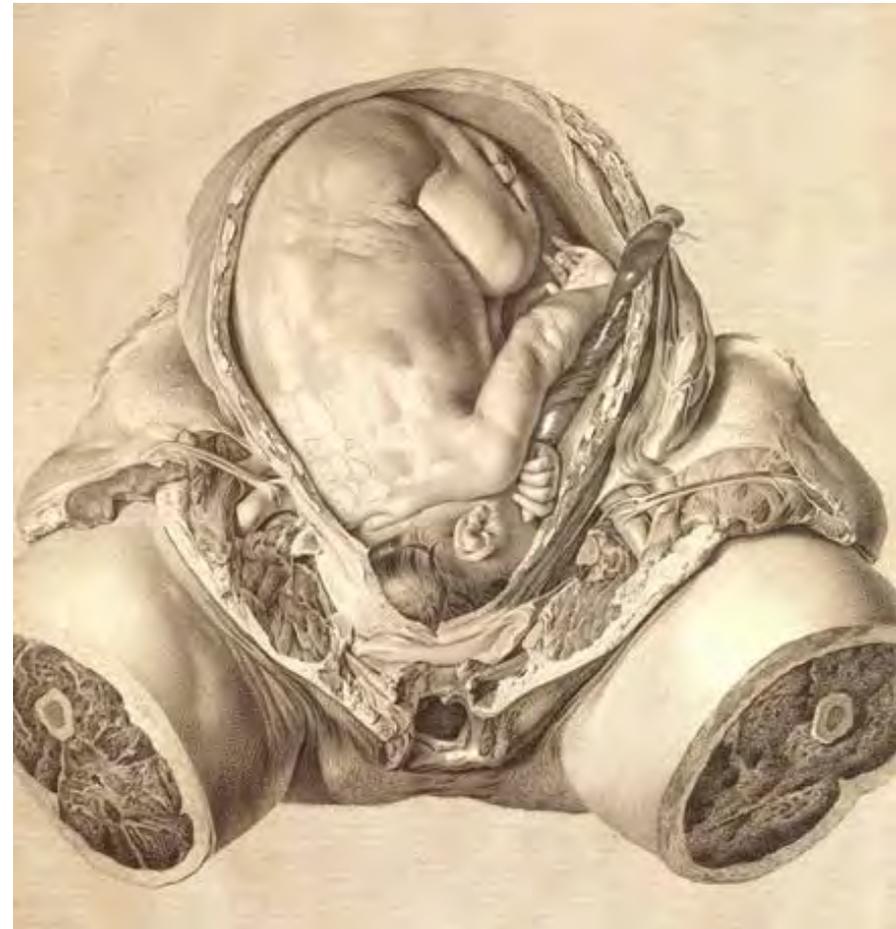


Figure 23. Plate VI of *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*.

Conclusion

If we do not fear, what we can see in the inside and look at the body with a sense of its composition, its structure and complexity we will discover the opportunity to celebrate our anatomies.

Celebration can stimulate curiosity and enable us to apply the biological mechanics of our insides in fields other than the anatomical sciences, for example in architecture or engineering.

When we set aside our stigmata on **sex** and openly explore its nature, we can avoid misunderstandings and stimulate innocent curiosity towards the sexual aspect of our anatomies. We can then discard the notion of a sinful body. Creating more opportunities for scientists, artists, writers and others to continue analysing what role our insides play in our complex and dynamic perspective on sex.

Seeing our anatomy and actually viewing its fragile interior is often accompanied by fear. Fear of being vulnerable. Fear of being different. Although showing individuality is becoming more 'normal' in our current western society, having an anatomy different from the standard, is still seen as abnormal and at times as a **weakness**. Our insides can show this perceived weakness and therefore we want them to remain hidden.

Death is approached in different ways. How we perceive death also reflects on how we treat the remains. This then affects not only the scientific research concerning the human anatomy, but also how the human body is portrayed in art and literature. Thoughts about what happens after death caused a certain mystification about the bodies we leave behind. This leads to the creation of symbols and meanings which are connected to our anatomy.

Celebration, sex, weakness and death together create, influence and show what our insides look like. They add a different dimension to diverse and multi-layered perceptions of the human anatomy. The topics are the legend to a complex map in which there is no one true path to follow; they are markers which certain perceptions can cling on to. Together they form the contents of a collection that, along with their own individual conclusions, also have one in common.

It is often believed that in our current time most technology and scientific methodology has almost reached a level of true objectivity. Yet, looking at some patterns that occur in the anatomical sciences, we tend to have blind spots that are created by natural, artificial and cultural surroundings; the blind spots are then filled up with fantasy or interpretation. The blind spots have manipulated the image of our bodies in such a way that it fits to a certain era and culture. Pointing out where the blind spot currently is requires specific and extensive knowledge of the human anatomy, yet also a completely unspoiled perspective of our insides. This combination makes it incredibly difficult to shed light on the blind spot. The interpretation or fantasy that is created by this blind spot gives birth to wonderful and disruptive concepts which feed science, literature and art to create ever-changing and varied portrayals of our insides.

Inside perspective

With this chapter I aim to give a more personal reflection upon the collection that I have made, how I experienced researching the topic, why I believe it is relevant and to give an outlook on what I plan to do during the rest of the graduation project.

While looking at or reading about realistic images, information or stories of the human anatomy, I experienced certain primal feelings. At times it was shocking or disgusting; yet, it also gave me a sensation of seeing the true nature of what we really are and of what I really am. While researching the topic, it felt as if I stood on a thin dividing line between the natural and unnatural feeling of exploring the human anatomy. This thin dividing line was one of the first elements that attracted me to the topic of exploring the human anatomy. The tension that I found on this thin line was also strengthened by the connection that I made between anatomy and death: it feels as if you are looking at death with a sheet of glass in between. Perhaps this might change when I experience seeing an actual dissected body; then this distance might disappear.

The apparent contradiction that these emotions produce was the initial attraction to this topic, but further into the project, I realised that another factor had caused me to be interested. The image

that I have of my body and more specifically my physical appearance is often negative. I am sure that I am not alone in having this, at times, negative approach towards your own body. By looking at the body on the inside, I tried to find a new way to appreciate the body that I have. During the research and production of the collection, I became aware of the impact that culture can have on my thoughts about my physical appearance and even my insides. Which I partly knew, yet seeing how deeply it runs inside our system was an eye opener. I am now more aware of how subjectivity is part of looking at the human anatomy and that this subjectivity is guided by society, and has changed and will change. I am not under the impression that if you learn more about the human anatomy that you can completely change the body image you have, yet I do think that it helps to create a broader spectrum of looking at your own body, as well as those of others.

An element which stood out from my research was how contradicting the scientific field of the exploring of our anatomy is. I was aware that the lack of knowledge about the human anatomy created inaccurate assumptions, but in what manner this was filled up with fantasy or interpretation was new to me. Science aims to show the researched topic in an objective way, yet during the course of history, it has been injected with scientists' interpretations. This struggle between objectivity and subjectivity also brought me to certain thoughts about how science treats the body as an object, a carrier of information, and yet some of the conclusions that the scientists draw represent their own personal views about the human anatomy.

Another contradictory aspect that stood out for me during the research and production of my collection was the thought: does my anatomy represent a certain individuality or a particular commonly shared blueprint? From two anatomists (Dr. Eleonore Kühler and Dr. Joop van der Straaten) I learned that all 'normal' anatomies are slightly different. Yet, when researching the human anatomy you learn to see the body as a map. The nature of a map is that it is an abstracted version of reality; this abstraction then also affects how I see the human anatomy. During the project I gained knowledge of a general human anatomy. This paradox instigated questions such as: is the human anatomy an equalizer? Can showing similarities that we share on the inside create empathy? Or in what way do our differences in our anatomy create individuality? Could we perhaps in the future highlight this internal individuality, or is this already happening now?

Relevance

The exploration of the human anatomy in science, literature and art is fascinating to me, but why should people besides me try to answer the question *what does it look like?*

In current times, the demand for information is growing due to more accessible sources and better understanding of information. When being more knowledgeable about a certain topic, we can draw benefits from it, besides becoming more educated. This also applies to the knowledge about the human anatomy. A study by Mieke Aarts of The Netherlands Comprehensive Cancer Organisation shows that higher-educated cancer patients receive better treatment. Because these kinds of patients are able to better discuss treatments with their doctors, and do their own research about the type of cancer and possible treatments. They also tend to risk taking more experimental treatments⁴⁰. But in order to be able to do your own research about such a specialized area in medicine, you need to be able to understand the human anatomy.

When being asked where the future lies for medical illustrators, Amanda Gautier mentions that, because of the increased interest in self-taught knowledge about the human anatomy, the need for accurate, trustworthy and easy-to-

understand illustrations or models of the body is growing. For non-professionals to be able to read such medical illustrations, the human anatomy is often visualised by medical illustrators in a simplified and abstracted manner, even more so than for medical professionals. I believe that these abstracted and simplified images and information have affected not only the general public's scientific knowledge about the human anatomy but also other aspects of society, such as literature, design and art. Especially in design, abstract forms of the human anatomy are used and are becoming more popular. For example, when visiting the website etsy.com (the most popular website for artists, designers and amateurs to sell their products) and searching for objects with an anatomical aspect, you can find 17,757 products.⁴²

Even if elements of the human anatomy seep through into aspects of society other than science, why should people also think about what their insides look like from the perspectives of art or literature? I believe that the perspectives that come from art or literature also add to one's body image. The perspective that art or literature brings might be more subtle but it can add a dimension to the way you look at your own body, a more subjective one. Seeing how other people perceive the human anatomy could enrich your own body image.

A certain time, place, individual and group can leave their temporary mark on how we look at the body. This marking will without a doubt still happen today and in the future. Therefore, being aware that change in perspective will continue and develop, will help us to be more open to new ways of looking at the human anatomy, without losing a critical mind-set.

After my dive into the field of exploring the human anatomy, did I find out what my insides look like? No, the image that I have now is even vaguer than the one I had before. I did, however, find plenty of new ways to look at my insides. I am more aware of how complex and layered this body image can be and how much my surroundings influence it. The vague image triggers me to dive even deeper in order to answer the questions that were not there before.

Outlook

Many interesting aspects came along during the project so far; however, there are two elements that I want to investigate further and which will guide the rest of the project. I am curious about how individuality and intimacy can be found within our anatomy. These two aspects were touched upon in the pages 8 and 16 of this paper, the x-ray photos that were used as intimate portraits in the story by Thomas Mann. Also a passing reference to individuality is made about Joseph Merrick and his unique skeleton. I have only scratched the surface of these two aspects in the anatomical context so additional research will be necessary. I intend to combine these two aspects and create intimate anatomical portraits. But the term portrait is meant in a more metaphorical sense: the actual form that these 'portraits' will have is not clear yet.

In order to find this individuality and intimacy within our anatomy, I want to investigate which methods the anatomical scientific community uses to describe or visualize differences between human anatomies. I also plan to analyse whether there are certain intimate moments within the anatomical scientific community, when a person is examined and how they deal with these moments. Then I want to delve into the way individuality and intimacy are portrayed in art and literature. Also, I will research the aspects of individuality and intimacy in a more general sense.

The next step will be to research and develop methods as an interdisciplinary artist for portraying these two aspects in an anatomical context, by experimenting with methods, materials and techniques that I will get to know from the research. I intend to create a portrait of myself but also of others to help highlight the differences between our anatomies and how that represents a particular individual.

I am convinced that this work/project is relevant, because it could provide a different way of perceiving another human being. Not only in a skin deep manner, but further into what we consist of. The work/project can start to develop another approach on how to be intimate. After all, everybody searches for some form of intimacy with others.

A warning from Queen Victoria to her daughter Vicky portrays my drive for pursuing this direction, and will hopefully become a reason for others to join me: *"I would venture to warn against too great intimacy with artists as it is very seductive and a little dangerous"*.⁴

For helping me create this paper and giving me insights into a fascinating field, I want to thank my graduation coaches Romy Roelofsen and Dr. Bert Weltens along with the lovely people that agreed to have interviews with me; Lucas Boer, Amanda Gautier, Dr. Eline Kooi, Dr. Eleonore Kühler, Arjen van Prooijen, Dr. Joop van der Straaten and Dr. Robert Zwijnenberg.

*Placing his foot in the door, having found his flesh and blood, no longer bone dry.
He enters the room showing a twinkle in his eye.
It might have cost an arm or a leg, yet having an able body finally made his heart content.*

Leana Bekker

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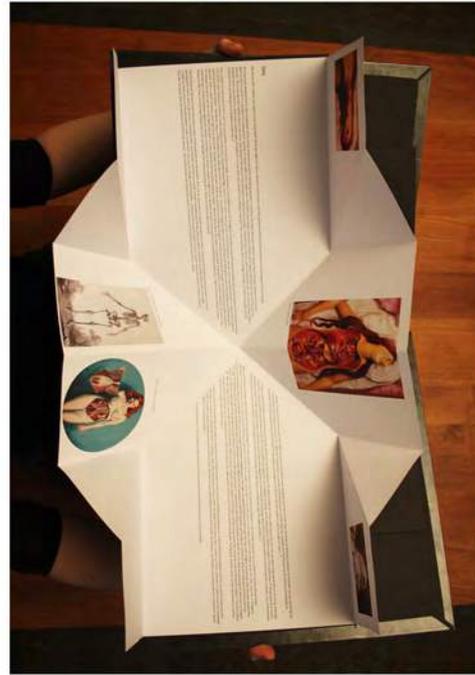
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Our Insides

A collection guided by curiosity; filled with histories, artworks and stories that explore the human anatomy

Design by Leana Bekker