CERE ANATOMICHE
LA SPECOLA DI FIRENZE
DAVID CRONENBERG

Fondazione Prada

Milano

CERE ANATOMICHE

"Cere Anatomiche" (Anatomical Waxes) is the second exhibition project in which Fondazione Prada highlights an important cultural institution with a strong, well-defined identity, and promotes an unusual interpretation of it by setting it in a contemporary, multidisciplinary context. The human anatomy collection of "La Specola" Museum in Florence—established in 1775 for scientific purposes and opened to the public at an early date—is a collection with an educational bent, which not only constitutes a detailed historical and scientific study, but also an artistic one. Indeed, the wax models and drawings, made by the Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History in Florence during the 18th and 19th centuries, have a dual nature and as such allow for multiple interpretations and perspectives.

Like the exhibition "Il sarcofago di Spitzmaus e altri tesori" (Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures) curated by Wes Anderson and Juman Malouf and organized in collaboration with the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 2019, "Cere Anatomiche" is the result of an encounter with film imagery, through a joint venture with director and screenwriter David Cronenberg (b. 1943, Toronto), whose exploration of the human body offers an alternative viewpoint to the perspective that gave rise to the Florentine collection.

On the two floors of the Podium, the artist and the museum offer visitors complementary visions: a creative one and a scientific one. In the short film *Four Unloved Women, Adrift on a Purposeless Sea, Experience the Ecstasy of Dissection* (2023), shown in a setting inspired by anatomical theaters, Cronenberg places the four La Specola Venuses in an alternative narrative and develops themes present in his work, such as bodily wounds and mutations, pleasure, and the aesthetic and sensual value of the body's insides. The museum's scientific narrative, on the other hand, is housed on the upper floor, in an arrangement of display cases that points to the rigor of the science museum and presents wax models of 4 entire female figures and 9 body sections from the Obstetrics Room, along with a selection of 72 drawings representative of the different rooms and scientific sections of the collection: Digestive and Respiratory System, Osteology and Arthrology, Cardiovascular Apparatus, Urogenital and Genital System, Lymphatic System, Cranial Nerves and Sensory Organs, Central Nervous System, Peripheral and Autonomic Nervous System, Myology.

The project focuses on the female body and how it has been represented for scientific purposes but using artistic means. Cronenberg's short film and the models selected for the exhibition testify to the cultural references and medical knowledge at the root of the collection of wax models, but also reveal aspects related to the image of women, sexuality, and pleasure that are still valid today. The result is simultaneously an art exhibition, an anatomy lesson, a video about desire, and an educational experiment aimed at recounting the significance of a collection and its history, revealing the contribution of creative thought to knowledge, and promoting interest in scientific studies.

THE EXHIBITION

PODIUM, PODIUM +1

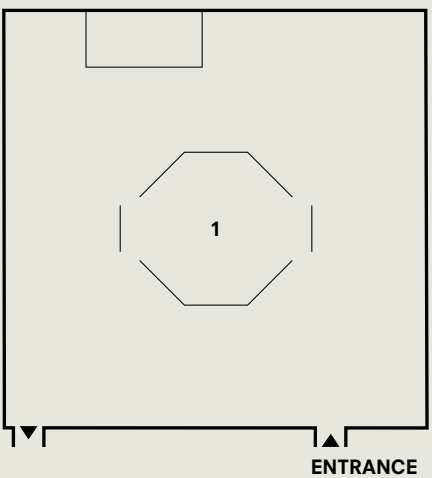
The works on display on the two floors are accompanied by progressive numbers that refer to the printed and digital guide for the relevant texts and scientific captions. In addition to the waxes, drawings are also on display, included here as expository copies as they are in Florence. The old display cases and frames are integral parts of the works as well and attest to the production of the Ceroplastic Workshop and the history of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History of Florence. Consequently, they are protected by alarms and visitors are asked not to get too close to the glass and cases nor touch them.

DAVID CRONENBERG

PODIUM

"The wax figures of La Specola were created primarily as teaching tools that unlocked the mysteries of the human body for those who could never access the relatively rare corpse dissection sessions of universities and teaching hospitals. But in their effort to create certain partially dissected full figures whose body language and facial expressions did not display pain or agony, did not suggest they were undergoing torture or punishment or even surgery. They happened to produce living characters who seemed to be in the throes of ecstasy. It was this startling choice on the part of the sculptors of these figures that captured my imagination: what if it was the dissection itself that induced that ecstasy, that almost religious rapture?"

David Cronenberg, 2023



1 FOUR UNLOVED WOMEN, ADRIFT ON A PURPOSELESS SEA, EXPERIENCE THE ECSTASY OF DISSECTION
2023
A film by David Cronenberg, produced by Fondazione Prada
Video 4K, sound, 3'54"

LA SPECOLA IN FLORENCE

PODIUM +1

The natural history museum, in a modern sense, was founded in the 18th century as part of a long process that had seen the establishment of scientific academies and botanical gardens within universities during the previous centuries. "La Specola" Museum represents a milestone on this path, as the first scientific institution open to the public with an educational function.

It was the Grand Duke of Tuscany Peter Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine (1747–1792) who made the first significant distinction between artistic and scientific heritage—drawing on the assets accumulated since the time of the Medici and housed in the grand-ducal galleries—and made both accessible to the uneducated public within the framework of an Enlightenment project of popular acculturation. Thus, the Uffizi Gallery opened to visitors in 1769 and, a few years later, on February 21, 1775, the "Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History" was inaugurated in Palazzo Torrigiani, a short distance from Palazzo Pitti.

The museum, which later became known as "La Specola" (a reference to the astronomical observatory housed in its tower), encompassed all scientific disciplines, with a layout that took the visitor from the earth (mineralogy) to the sky (astronomy), via botany and zoology. Under the direction of the eclectic scientist and anatomist Felice Fontana (1730–1805), La Specola rapidly became a leading international scientific center.

The museum premises also housed the Ceroplastic Workshop, which was active for about a century. The Workshop was founded in 1771 following the Enlightenment educational project of Grand Duke Peter Leopold and at the behest of Felice Fontana himself.

In order to make the human anatomy models, dissections were performed on cadavers supplied by the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence. A plaster cast was made of each anatomical piece, into which wax mixed with resins and dyes was subsequently poured. The models were then crafted with great accuracy by skilled sculptors and wax modelers, including Clemente Susini (1754–1814), Francesco Calenzuoli (1796–1829), Luigi Calamai (1800–1851), and Egisto Tortori (1829–1893), under the supervision of an anatomist. The latter included the illustrious Paolo Mascagni (1755–1815), Filippo Uccelli (1770–1843), and Tommaso Bonicoli (1746–1802), as well as Felice Fontana himself.

By 1775, when the museum was opened to the public, a considerable number of models had already been made. There are now over 1,400 waxworks, contained in 562 display cases, which are housed in eight rooms accompanied by their drawings and the associated explanations. The exhibition in Milan presents wax models of 4 entire female figures and 9 body sections from the Obstetrics Room.

Numerous models were produced over the space of almost 100 years, including some for other institutions, both in Italy (Bologna, Cagliari, Modena, Pavia, Pisa) and abroad (Budapest, Leiden, Montpellier, Vienna). One of the most important wax collections, in addition to that of La Specola,

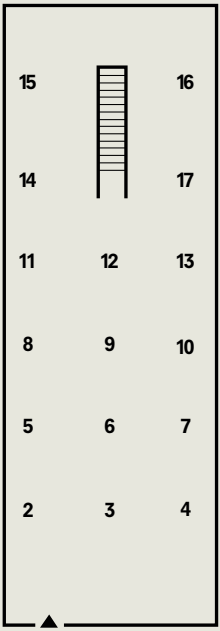
is that of the Josephinum Museum in Vienna commissioned by Peter Leopold's brother, Emperor Joseph II of Austria (1741–1790).

The strongly educational emphasis of "La Specola" Museum's collection of more than 1,400 anatomical waxes is attested by the coeval iconographic apparatus, consisting of anatomical drawings and explanatory sheets closely associated with the individual wax models. The drawings faithfully reproduce the human body and contain numerical references paired with explanatory sheets featuring a description of the subject depicted and originally available in a special drawer in the display cases. Visitors thus had all the necessary tools to deepen their knowledge: the wax anatomical models, the plates that were displayed on the walls above the models and the associated explanations to be found in the drawers.

Many of the plates, made with mixed media (pencil, watercolor, tempera), are signed and the authors include: Antonio Serantoni (1780–1837), noted illustrator and author of the human anatomy plates published in *Anatomia universa* (1823), a posthumous work by Paolo Mascagni, Basilio Lasinio (1766–1839), Stefano Molinari or Mulinari (1741–*c.* 1790), Ferdinando Moretti (1784–1807), and Giuseppe Sacconi (1762–1800). Some of these artists came from the Uffizi Gallery, as can be deduced from a letter written in April 1774 by Felice Fontana to the Grand Duke Peter Leopold, with a request for five illustrators for the iconographic apparatus of the anatomical models.

A total of 828 plates referring to 546 models are now kept for conservation purposes in dedicated rooms, while copies of the drawings are displayed on the walls of the museum in the original *bois de rose* frames trimmed with gold. On display are 72 of the copies grouped into 9 anatomical sections: Digestive and Respiratory System, Osteology and Arthrology, Cardiovascular Apparatus, Urogenital and Genital System, Lymphatic System, Cranial Nerves and Sensory Organs, Central Nervous System, Peripheral and Autonomic Nervous System, Myology.

Scroll to read more about the works on display on the Podium +1 floor



2 CASE 968
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History, Clemente Susini and Giuseppe Ferrini
***Recumbent female statue, the so-called 'Venus,'* 1782**
Decomposable polychrome wax model, *bois de rose* display case trimmed with gold, glass
Obstetrics Room

This life-size recumbent female figure, commonly called 'Venus,' is decomposable and displayed 'closed.' The statue lies on a fine silk drape and mattress and is contained in a precious *bois de rose* display case trimmed with gold. Around the neck is a string of wax pearls, the complexion of the face is rosy, and the hair lies neatly along the body, reaching to the hips. The portion of the torso is decomposable, and inside it the successive layers of viscera are visible until reaching the uterus, in which a fetus is depicted, also removable. The various layers show different internal organs, as the original description of the work cites: "ribs, superficial layer of muscles; lungs, diaphragm, and intestine; heart, diaphragm, and intestine; dissected heart, stomach, kidneys, and genital apparatus with gravid uterus; dissected heart and stomach, kidneys, dissected uterus with fetal membranes evident; dissected heart and stomach, kidneys, open uterus with fetus; dissected uterus with fetus."
The first layers extend over the whole torso: lifting the outermost, the superficial muscles appear on the left, the platysma running along the sternum and ending before the mammary gland, then the rectus abdominis and external oblique muscles, with the linea alba clearly evident; on the right, the muscle layers are deeper and the costal arch and transverse abdominal muscle with its sheath and the inferior epigastric artery can be seen. Lifting this

layer, the rib cage is dissected and the thoracic viscera are visible, with the heart partially covered by the pulmonary lobes, the diaphragm, and, in the abdomen, the viscera are hidden by the greater omentum, or omental apron. At this point, the viscera are individually removable, and by lifting the peritoneum of the omental apron, the anterior wall of the stomach, transverse colon, and intestinal loops appear; in the thorax, removing the lungs reveals the heart with its vascular pedicle. Lifting the intestinal skein, the viscera of the retroperitoneum, pancreas, kidneys, ureters, and sigmoid colon are visible, along with the abdominal aorta, while in the lesser pelvis is visible an enlarged uterus that—when opened— reveals a fetus, ovaries, and the genital vessels that flow from it. In the chest, the open heart shows the two atrioventricular valves and the right atrium cavity.

3 CASE 745
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
***Recumbent female statue showing the distribution of the lymphatic vessels of the pelvis, liver, ventricle, bronchi, and breasts*, late 18th century**
Polychrome wax model, *bois de rose* display case trimmed with gold, glass
Room XXIX

The life-size female figure lies on a mattress and a silk drape edged with precious braid. The complexion of the face is rosy and the blondish hair is partially arranged in braids, according to the style of the time; the pose is graceful and natural. As the original description of the work cites, the belly is open to show the anatomy of the "lymphatic vessels of the liver, ventricle, spleen, kidneys, bladder, uterus, lungs, heart, and breasts. The lymph vessels of the aforementioned viscera serve to absorb excess substances, and thus further refine the various separations, which are performed in some of them, and to take everything to the glands to form, and refine the lymph." In greater detail, looking at the model we can see the overturned breasts; the trachea and the main bronchi are visible and, in the thorax, the heart with the pericardial sac and the medial aspect of the lungs; the esophagus is dissected. In the abdominal cavity, the stomach and liver are overturned and the duodenum dissected; deeper, the kidneys can be seen with the renal fascia on the right; below, the large vessels are dissected and the suspensory ligaments of the ovary with the genital arteries and veins, the dissected rectum, the uterus with the tubes distended, and the urinary bladder are visible. The abdominal lymphatic networks are highlighted in the model.

4 DIGESTIVE AND RESPIRATORY SYSTEM
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Digestive and Respiratory System, late 18th century – 19th century

GO TO MAP ▲

8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera Exhibition copy

The digestive system provides energy to the organism through the ingestion of food, its digestion, and the successive absorption of elemental constituents; the respiratory system is dedicated to the oxygenation of blood through gas exchanges with air.

5 OSTEOLOGY AND ARTHROLOGY
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Osteology and Arthrology, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy

Osteology and Arthrology concern the study of bones that make up the skeleton and the articulations that join skeletal segments.

6 CASE 746
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
***Recumbent female statue showing the lymphatic vessels of the heart, digestive system, and uterus*, late 18th century**
Polychrome wax model, palisander display case trimmed with gold, glass
Room XXIX

The life-size female figure lies in supine position on a mattress and a silk drape edged with precious braid. The complexion of the face is rosy and the blondish-brown hair is partially arranged in braids, according to the style of the time; the pose is graceful and natural. The figure is depicted "with the thorax and the lower belly open with the purpose of showing the confluence of the lymphatic vessels of the small intestine in the mesenteric glands, and their relation to those of the liver, ventricle, and spleen, and to the thoracic duct."
In detail, the heart and left lung are visible in the thoracic cavity of this model of a female figure with open chest and abdomen, and, below the diaphragm, the abdominal viscera: stomach, liver, and spleen. The transverse colon has been dissected and the small intestine distended to show the mesentery with the vascular and lymphatic networks.
The hepatic and gastric lymphatic vessels are also visible. Lower down, the uterus is visible with the tubes and ovary raised and exposed, and the urinary bladder.

7 CARDIOVASCULAR APPARATUS
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Cardiovascular Apparatus, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy
It is composed of the heart, the central organ with a pump

GO TO MAP ▲

function, and the blood vessels, that is to say, arteries, capillaries, and veins. It carries oxygen and nutrients to all body structures and withdraws carbon dioxide and catabolites.

8 UROGENITAL AND GENITAL SYSTEM
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Urogenital and Genital System, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy

The urinary system is responsible for filtering blood removing waste and regulating the concentration of solutes and electrolytes. The genital system is devoted to reproduction, namely the production of gametes (spermatozoa and egg cells) and sex hormones. The female genital apparatus ensures the development of the fetus from the fertilized egg to the delivery of the newborn.

9 CASE 747
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
***Recumbent female statue showing the milky vessels of the large intestine, ventricle, liver, uterus, and lungs*, late 18th century**
Polychrome wax model, *bois de rose*
display case trimmed with gold, glass
Room XXIX

The life-size female figure lies in supine position on a mattress and a silk drape edged with precious braid. The complexion of the face is rosy and the blondish-brown hair is partially arranged in braids, according to the style of the time; the pose is graceful and natural. As the original description of the work cites, the belly is open to show the anatomy of the "Lymphatic vessels of the intestines, ventricle, liver, and uterus with those of the lung." Specifically, in the thorax, the heart has been removed to highlight the underlying lymphatic network; the medial aspects of the lungs are visible, with the hilum and vessels that penetrate it, the aorta, and the vessels of the neck. In the abdominal cavity, the colon and small intestine have been distended and overturned to reveal the vascular and lymphatic networks; the first portion of the jejunum has been dissected; the right kidney is clearly visible and, in the lesser pelvis, the uterus, uterine tube, and bladder dome with the blood and lymphatic vessels.

10 LYMPHATIC SYSTEM
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Lymphatic System, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy
It consists of capillaries, collectors, and trunks that

GO TO MAP ▲

transport lymph from peripheral tissues to the venous circulation. The lymphatic system also includes lymph nodes generally grouped in specific locations. Its function is thus to drain fluids and provide defense.

11 CASE 1016
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
State of the urinary bladder in the ninth month of pregnancy Act of natural childbirth
***Right anterior portion of the uterus, cut, separated and inverted*, late 18th century**
Three polychrome wax models, *bois de rose* display case trimmed with gold, glass
Obstetrics Room

The models lie on a mattress and are individually wrapped in silk cloth. The model on the left side of the case shows the entire open abdomen of a woman in the ninth month of pregnancy; from top to bottom there is the diaphragm muscle, below which the liver protrudes with the round ligament (of the liver) emerging between the two lobes, the dissected omental apron, and some loops of the small intestine resting on the fundus of the enlarged uterus. On the right side of the uterus, the distended uterine tube with its vessels and ovary is visible, and on the two sides, the round ligament (of the uterus) that engages in the inguinal canal. Below the uterus, the urinary bladder is visible. In the central model, the uterus is open and the fetus is engaged in the birth canal. The model on the right side of the case shows a uterus at full term with the muscular layer (myometrium) removed, on the left the basal portion of the placenta is visible, and, on the right, the inverted endometrium. The urinary bladder is dissected and open.

12 CASE 1014
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
***Natural situation of the nine-month fetus in the uterus Vertical section of the pelvis and gravid uterus Natural situation of nine-month twins in the uterus*, late 18th century**
Three polychrome wax models, *bois de rose* display case trimmed with gold, glass
Obstetrics Room

The three models lie on a mattress and are individually wrapped in silk cloth. The model on the left side of the case shows the lower part of the torso, with the pelvis and perineum of a pregnant woman at full term. The front wall of the uterus has been removed to reveal the fetus in cephalic presentation and the placenta, normally implanted in the uterine fundus. On the right, the uterine tube descending on the side of the uterus. Next to the latter, on both sides, the round ligament extends to the deep abdominal ring of the inguinal canal, crossing the inferior epigastric vessels, and then continuing its course

GO TO MAP ▲

in the fold of the groin to terminate in the subcutaneous tissue of the labium majus. The vesicle lumen is visible, with the vaginal cavity behind it. The ischiopubic and iliopubic rami are dissected.
The central model represents a paramedian sagittal section of the pelvis with uterus immediately following delivery and expulsion of the afterbirth. Below the uterus, there is the dissected vaginal canal, with the rectum visible behind it and the bladder cavity in front. The model on the right side of the case shows the open uterus of a twin pregnancy at full term. The dichorionic diamniotic twins and the partially dilated uterine cervix, that opens into the vaginal canal, are visible.

13 CASE 275
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Female pudenda of an adult virgin
State of the lower belly in the ninth month of pregnancy
Deflowered female pudenda, late 18th century
Three polychrome wax models, *bois de rose* display case trimmed with gold, glass
Obstetrics Room

The models lie on a mattress and are individually wrapped in silk cloth. On the left side of the case, there is the lower part of the torso, with the pelvis and perineum of a virgin woman. The external genitalia are visible, constituted by the mons veneris, the labia majora, and the labia minora, which meet, above the clitoris, to form the prepuce and, below, the frenulum. The crescent-shaped hymen is clearly visible in the vaginal vestibule.
The central model depicts the same body region of a pregnant woman at full term. The abdomen has been opened to reveal the anterior aspect of the gravid uterus, to the right of which several loops of the small intestine are visible. Below the uterus, there is the urinary bladder. The model on the right depicts the same situation as the one on the left, but in a woman who is no longer a virgin, i.e., in whom the hymenal membrane has been ruptured.

14 CRANIAL NERVES AND SENSORY ORGANS
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Cranial Nerves and Sensory Organs, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy

Cranial nerves are part of the peripheral nervous system and sensory organs represent receptors of specific perceptions (smell, sight, hearing, balance, and taste).

GO TO MAP ▲

15 CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Central Nervous System, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy

It includes the encephalon, contained in the skull, and the spinal cord inside the spinal cavity. It controls and regulates the functions of organs and apparatuses and it is the seat of the most complex integrated and cognitive activities.

16 PERIPHERAL AND AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Peripheral and Autonomic Nervous System, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy

The peripheral nervous system constitutes the nerves that link the central nervous system to the peripheral area, that is, every organ inside the body. The autonomic nervous system is devoted to control every activity that does not involve the cerebral cortex (involuntary smooth muscles and glands).

17 MYOLOGY
Ceroplastic Workshop of the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History
Myology, late 18th century – 19th century
8 drawings, pencil, watercolor, tempera
Exhibition copy

Myology is the study of skeletal muscles, that is, the voluntary muscles that are engaged and act on the skeleton and are hinged by articulations. Skeleton, muscles, and articulations together make the musculoskeletal system, which provides support and movement to the body, protection of internal organs, storage of minerals and ions, and, in general, together with the skin, aesthetic shaping.

*** All exhibited wax models, historical display cases, drawings, and frames are part of "La Specola" Museum, Museum of Natural History of the University of Florence, University Museum System.**

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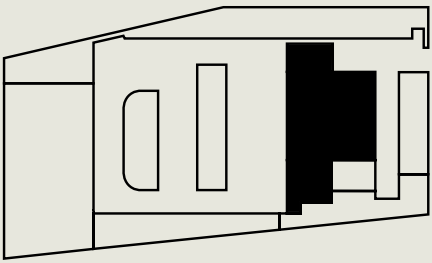
IN COLLABORARION WITH

SISTEMA MUSEALE
DI ATENEO
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI
STUDI DI FIRENZE

This exhibition includes images that some visitors may find offensive or disturbing. Minors should be accompanied by an adult during the visit. For additional information about the content of the exhibition, please ask a staff member.



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24.3–17.7.2023