

The Art of Anatomy: artists and scientists in conversation - exhibition 14-25 July 2018

The University of Oxford's Ruskin School of Art and the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics (DPAG) jointly present this exhibition Art & Anatomy, to celebrate the happy relationship that the Ruskin has enjoyed with DPAG for over forty years, and to explore the continuing relationship between artistic and scientific study, and of how art transforms anatomy, both historically and in contemporary practice. The exhibition will open on Saturday 14 July in the galleries at Kendrew Barn, in St John's College, Oxford which is hosting the Anatomical Society's Summer Meeting 23rd-25th July, 2018.



Emily Stevenhagen, *Dissected Forearm And Hand*, 2018 Photograph: The Artist

'In medicine anatomy is applied, in art it is transformed', Cecil Erskine

There has been a historic tradition of anatomical study in art academies, but few fine art programmes now offer it as a subject. One of the unique aspects of the undergraduate degree offered at Ruskin School of Art (Oxford University's Department of Fine Art) is the first-year course in Anatomy. For more than 40 years, the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics has generously allowed Ruskin students access to the Dissecting Room.

It may be considered anachronistic in a programme of contemporary art practice to study anatomy (and we believe that the Ruskin is the last art school in Europe where fine artists - as opposed to medical artists - study directly from cadavers). But the students respond to the subject beyond the technical and scientific, producing dynamic work across many media, including sculpture, textiles, photography, performance and video, as well as drawing.

Dr Sarah Simblet is the Ruskin's Tutor of Anatomy, and author of *Anatomy for the Artist*, where she writes

“The study of human anatomy is so much more than the naming of parts and the understanding of their function; it is a celebration of our wondrous physicality in the world. The biological complexity of the body can be weighed against its aesthetic beauty, so that the life that drives us is seen to

ripple and pulse above and below the boundary of skin. Art is the perfect tool for revealing such knowledge. Throughout history, artists have used their trained eyes to look deep into our lives and into our very existence. They have given much to the history of medicine and they have also removed the taboo from seeing too much.

... Artists and anatomists have for centuries shared their views and have contributed equally to our knowledge. The excitement and sense of achievement evident in learning about the body is always a palpable delight [...], to catch the perfection of form and reveal its magnificent machinery is highly rewarding. Anatomy is a very potent subject and the subject is us.”

The exhibition includes anatomy works by 15 current and recent Ruskin students, who in their first year are set a two-part assignment by Sarah Simblet:

- to make a drawing that is larger than themselves, describing the skeleton of an invented creature;
- and to make an object that either reflects upon the experience of living inside a body, or choose a system or part of the body and make an object to explain how it works.





Adam Story: Untitled (2017): "A Human Body That Has Become Biologically Part Of A Coral Reef." Courtesy The Artist

The brief is very fluid, and the students can interpret drawing broadly and imaginatively, without restriction, using any medium from pencil to video; they can take a mechanical approach to the subject, or a philosophical one - or both; they can be humorous or take on a serious issue - or both. Throughout the entire anatomy course the prime subject is imagination.

The student work will be shown alongside artistic collaborations between anatomists, scientists and artists. Clive Lee is Professor of Anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), and at the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA). Clive has collaborated with the President of the RHA, Mick O'Dea, and photographer Amelia Stein RHA, to create a series *Portraits of the Anatomist as a Middle-Aged Man* demonstrating the transformation of anatomy through the artistic process.

Expanding on the theme of 'Accuracy vs. Artistry', Science and Engineering Academy Award winner, Professor Anil Kokaram, Head of Electronic and Electrical Engineering at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), has made a series, *Old Masters Remastered*, where iconic art works are rendered anatomically corrected.



Above - Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres: *Grande Odalisque* (1814) - Oil On Canvas / Louvre, Paris, France (Digital Print / Bridgeman Images);
Below - Anil Kokaram: *Grande Odalisque Remastered* (Digital Print / Anil Kokaram)

Clive, Anil, Mick and colleagues also joined forces to develop a free, on-line surface anatomy guide - its trailer *Anatomists, Engineers & Artists* is shown here – www.rcsi.ie/surfaceanatomy.

Dr Ciaran Simms, from Mechanical Engineering in TCD and Anatomy in RCSI has worked with artist Mark Wickham to produce a short film which reflects on the real, the ideal and the safe in motor car accidents – *The Biomechanics of Beauty*.

In Japan, artists cannot have access to dissection, but Kyoto-based artist Yoshihiro Takada wanted to be

able to draw and paint cadavers. So he contacted Professor Mitsuhiro Kawata of the Department of Biological Structure at Kyoto University and studied in his Anatomy Laboratory for three years, and has also worked in the Dissecting Room at DPAG under its former Head, Professor John Morris. He has produced new work for this exhibition, combining his explorations of anatomy into his practice in traditional Japanese painting.

This exhibition will reveal to both a large audience of international scientists, as well as the wider public, how the Ruskin integrates the scientific study of anatomy into a fine arts education, and how scientists now work with artists to create an intelligible visual language,

The Art of Anatomy: Saturday 14 – Wednesday 25 July.

Kendrew Barn, St John's College

21 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3JP.

(The Gallery Entrance Is 200m North Of The Main College Lodge, Opposite The War Memorial Where St Giles Divides)

Opening hours:

- Sat 14 July: 2 – 5pm
- Sun 15 July: 2 – 5pm
- Wed 18 July: 5.30 – 7pm
- Thu 19 July: 5.30 – 7pm
- Saturday 21 July: 2 – 5pm

Opening Hours during [Anatomical Society Meeting](#)

- Tue 24 July: 6 – 7pm
- Wed 25 July: 2 - 7pm