Contemporary Artists:

Ælab: Gišèle Trudel and Stéphane Claude
Jack Burman
Jack Butler
Andrew Carnie
Dana Claxton
Joyce Cutler-Shaw
Orsho Dzridik
Eric Fong
Terry Kurgan
Patricia Olynyk
Maria Wishart

Body Beyond by Nina Czegledy

SPLICE: At the Intersection of Art and Medicine

SPLICE: At the Intersection of Art and Medicine presents a scientific gaze of the human body by showcasing historical anatomical art as both complemented and challenged by contemporary artworks.

The human figure has been an integral part of art, presented in the arts from time immemorial. Nevertheless, the realm of medical imagery and the depictions of the human body in the arts inherited by tradition different domains. During the last century, numerous paradigm shifts have revealed significant questions about the potential loss of agency, while at the same time allowing us new opportunities for expressions of identity. The increased use of technologies has changed how we see ourselves and the world around us. Thus, the intertwined integration of historical medical art with a careful selection of contemporary works in SPLICE represents a significant benchmark marking in addressing issues of conjecture.

The archival images in the exhibit highlight works that have been preserved for over 50 years. They are rooted in classical traditions yet form a boundary between the history of scientific representations and contemporary interpretations. It was the early anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) who broke with medieval traditions and taboos by systematically dissecting the human body so that a detailed scientific view of the interior body could emerge. During the last five centuries, a more intimate, private landscape of the human body has been charted in greater detail. Today it is viewed with a far wider range of scientifically derived and technically supported methods disclosing features of a previously unknown inner scale and complexity.

Although traditional anatomical education has changed profoundly during the last century, Maria Wishart’s establishment in 1925 of the Department of Medical Art Service at the University of Toronto remains a pioneering progressive initiative. Now called Biomedical Communications, it continues to be facilitated by contemporary technologies to this day. Once every medical faculty in North America used one of two anatomical textbooks produced in Europe. Then in 1941, Dr. J.C. B. Grant from the University of Toronto initiated the first anatomical atlas developed in North America. Grant was working with a team of highly skilled, predominately women artists including Maria Wishart, Eila Hopper-Ross, Nancy Joy, Dorothy Foster Chubb, Elizabeth Blackstock, and Marguerite Drummond, who all became major contributors for this atlas — which is still in print. A selection of their works is featured in this exhibit.

In contrast to such historical illustrations as exhibited in SPLICE, contemporary artists take vastly different approaches. Today the body is frequently policed, symbolized, and even digitized by way of manipulation, dissection and provocation. The medical gaze is clearly evident in Dana Claxton and Orsho Dzridik’s work. Claxton wavves together ancestral history, landscapes, and beauty, taking us on a socio-political journey exploring identity, self, and spirit. Point Op #1 (2010) presents a close up of the dancer Joseph Paul’s face, painted in criminal colors, contrasting the visitors’ gaze leveled at him. Claxton remains an exceptional spokesperson for indigenous self-determination and what she calls the “politics of being aboriginal.” In turn, Orsho Dzridik’s Brion On High Heat (1999) questions the exclusive and generalized viewpoints of pastoral science by utilizing a range of tools often dubbed “women’s devices” that has critically analyzed textual and visual models of authenticity from a women’s perspective.

Deconstructing particularities between scientific and artistic representation, Ælab, Eric Fong, Patricia Olynyk, and Joyce Cutler-Shaw all engage with immediate and technically-mediated perceptions, making us aware that the body has itself become a medium. The works by the artist collective Ælab reflect their deeply rooted interest in art, science, and ecological issues. Dork Zone (2001) is designed for the space and time we spend in the space of the body. “Our singularities,” explains Ælab, “lies in the association of experimental and documentary genres as well as interdisciplinary collaboration, elements, and guidelines that we have explored since the unit’s inception.”

Trained as both physician and artist, Eric Fong brings to his work—such as Phantom RHO (2000)—such elegant, aesthetic considerations and a distinct analytical point of view. He focuses on the exploration of the body as a technological, ideological, and aesthetic construct, regarding himself as “an artist, rather than attempting to solve problems and looking for consensus, [for] I aim to create new ways of asking questions and encouraging debate about various issues concerning the human condition.” In parallel, Orb (2008) by Patricia Olynyk reveals an exquisite composition combining the artist’s own retina scans with scanning electron-micrographs. She notes “my installations frequently call upon viewers to expand their awareness of the worlds they inhabit—whether those worlds are their own bodies or the spaces that surround them.”

By Joyce Cutler Shaw’s own admission, What Comes to Mind (2010), part of a larger project titled The Anatomy Lesson, is an examination of the physical self and human life cycle. “Expanding across the disciplines of art and medicine, I have discovered the medical field to be an arena for the newest forms of body representation,” says Cutler Shaw. “It is at the intersection of art and medical science that new insights in interpreting the physical self can emerge.”

Notions of corporality directly inform the work of Terry Kurgan, Andrew Carnie, Jack Burman, and Jack Butler. Terry Kurgan’s multi-platform works, such as Body Ports (1994), are derived from her photographs. She reveals: “As I try to capture something of the photographic by way of the making of a drawing, the effect I have invested in the photo is put on Stanley. In concentrating on the object rather than trying to dig out anything that was buried, I have found myself thinking that a photo reveals nothing of the temporal substance it ostensibly captures.”

Based on interviews, Andrew Carne demonstrates in Lacuna (2010) the vulnerability, exposure, and resilience of heart transplant patients where “What I am interested in from the science is a spark, an idea that will make a work, the little ‘nub’ of an idea that will allow me to make an artwork that has a resonance in the cultural domain.”

In comparison, Jack Burman deals with ossuaries of the dead, where the preserved and dissected body becomes an object of ambivalent beauty and poetic elucidation. Simultaneously riveting and repelling the audience, he presents a close up of the dancer Joseph Paul’s face, painted in criminal colors, contrasting the visitors’ gaze leveled at him. Claxton remains an exceptional spokesperson for indigenous self-determination and what she calls the “politics of being aboriginal.” In turn, Orsho Dzridik’s Brion On High Heat (1999) questions the exclusive and generalized viewpoints of pastoral science by utilizing a range of tools often dubbed “women’s devices” that has critically analyzed textual and visual models of authenticity from a women’s perspective.
Eric Fong,
Phantom RH0
2001, clear acrylic resin, 12 x 7 7/8 x 6 inches.

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Curated by
Nina Czegledy

September 20–November 9, 2013
Opening reception: September 19, 6–8 PM

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