

# Artistry in the Spaces of Medicine

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For hundreds of years, artists and physicians have influenced each other's work; through collaborations, partnerships and ad hoc junctures, they have expanded the scope of each other's fields. This session examines such intersections by exploring artistic practice in, and with, medical spaces, including the clinic, the waiting room, the operating theatre, the hospital ward, the autopsy room and the medical museum, as well as related commercial venues. By investigating these sites from the perspectives of art history, visual culture and the history of photography, we hope to shed new light on how and why artists have used these spaces not only for anatomical and pathological study but also for ideas and inspiration – many of which have pushed disciplinary boundaries. What role did medical spaces have on artistic practice, visual representation and the writing of art and medical histories? What role do they continue to play in art-making and medical learning?

This session intends to spark a dialogue about artistry in the spaces of scientific medicine between 1850-1950 in Europe and the United States. The papers in this session use approaches that expand the field of art history through an analysis of medical visual culture and explorations of how artists, photographers and medical professionals expanded the field through their 'medical' work, understood as artworks with medical themes or any type of image, object or technology made for medicine.

## Speakers and Abstracts

### **Uncanny Optics: Touching three-dimensionality in the sensational stereoscopic visions and morbid medical waxes of 'modeller extraordinaire' Joseph Towne (1806–79)**

*Kelly M Freeman (University College London)*

Throughout the 1860s, Mr Joseph Towne – resident *ceroplastica* of Guy's Hospital from 1825 to 1878 – published a series of optical experiments that attempted to objectively test and observe the various aspects of monocular and binocular vision, such as double vision, colour perception, and optical illusion. One illusion in particular was exhaustively tested: the *stereoscopic effect*, an optical phenomenon that creates the impression of three-dimensional space by exposing each eye to the same, but slightly offset, two-dimensional image, and which the art historian and theorist Jonathan Crary described as the most 'uncanny' of optical illusions. That the eyes could be manipulated so that 'flat' images were imbued with a perceptual depth was a relatively recent discovery that proved to be most fascinating for a man like Towne, who was widely celebrated for his skilful modelling of medical waxes and the 'uncanny' illusions of human cadaveric dissection that he achieved.

Historians of science have continued to take an interest in Towne's medical waxes as well as in his stereoscopic activities. However they have yet to bring together these two distinct aspects of Towne's work in any sort of meaningful dialogue. Forging original connections between Towne's material practices of 'making' and his colourful optical experiments in stereoscopy, this paper argues that the potent visual illusionism detected in Towne's uncanny wax models is reflected in the way he perceived, conceived and tested the physiology of vision. This influenced the questions he asked, the experiments he conducted, and even informed his (oftentimes incorrect) 'scientific' deductions.

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### **Photographic Entertainments in the Asylum, and the Asylum in Photographic Entertainments in the 1850s**

*Michael Leja (University of Pennsylvania)*

Dr Thomas Kirkbride, Superintendent of the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane, was an advocate for humane treatment of the mentally ill. In 1843 he instituted the practice of magic lantern evenings at the hospital for the instruction and amusement of the patients. Lantern slides were projected as illustrations for readings, lectures, and travelogues delivered by Kirkbride, his assistants, and guest lecturers. When the

Philadelphia-based photographers Frederick and William Langenheim invented and patented in 1850 a process for printing photographic positives on glass, which they called hyalotypes, Kirkbride entered into a collaboration with them. The Langenheims presented many of their hyalotypes to Kirkbride for use at the hospital, and the doctor was delighted to replace (or supplement) his older, painted slides and to publicise the work of the Langenheims. The list of lectures and evening entertainments presented in 1858 featured not only a great deal of the Langenheims' photographic work but even a presentation by Frederick himself. During this time the Langenheims made many hyalotypes and stereographs of the hospital's facilities and staff, which they offered for sale through their distributors and catalogues. Kirkbride's patronage of the Langenheims was emulated by other hospital administrators, who became important supporters for the Langenheims as they tried to develop a mass market for photographs in a variety of formats. My paper will explore the symbiotic relationship between Kirkbride and the Langenheims.

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**'The Lady Anatomist': Fragmented bodies, photographic assemblage, and the 'art' of dissection at Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, 1895–98**

*Jessica M Dandona (Minneapolis College of Art and Design)*

In western medical practice, the study of human cadavers has long functioned as the primary means through which knowledge of the body is produced. In the 19th century, this practice of dissection became coded as an implicitly gendered one – male 'science' uncovering the secrets of a female 'nature'. Yet as women entered medical schools, they engaged not only in anatomical study, but also in the wide array of visual practices associated with this science, disrupting the longstanding association of the female form with mute matter. This paper examines a series of photographic albums created by students at Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in the late 1890s. In these albums, students' intimate relationship with death – in the form of skulls, skeletons, and human remains – is highlighted in ways both earnest and, at times, humorous. These photographs speak to the establishment of professional identity by commemorating a shared rite of passage. At the same time, however, by visually transforming living students into ghostly, inanimate images and cadavers into potentially animate subjects, they restore a measure of agency to the nameless dead upon whose bodies the text of anatomy is written. Finally, I argue that the albums mark the ways in which viewing the body's interior, a deeply transgressive and culturally circumscribed process, had the potential to reveal forms of knowledge often inaccessible to contemporary women. These photographs thus trouble the conventional relationship between medicine's subjects and its objects, highlighting connections between the living and the dead, and blurring the lines between 'science' and 'nature'.

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**'A Warning to Women': Skin tonics, consulting rooms, and the pursuit of whiteness in art and medicine**

*Keren Rosa Hammerschlag (The Australian National University)*

In 1891 the American 'Complexion Doctor' Anna Ruppert arrived in London and through the savvy use of public lectures, advertisements, and shops that functioned like consulting and reception rooms, she built a successful cosmetic enterprise. Her most notorious product was Mme Ruppert's Face Bleach. Mrs Ruppert claimed to have studied medicine and practised dermatology for 16 years; she also repeatedly stressed in her lectures and advertisements that her face bleach was not a cosmetic but a cure. Two years later, in 1893, the *British Medical Journal* reported that Mrs Ruppert's 'skin tonic' contained mercury, which could cause harm, even death. Taking as my starting point advertisements for Mme Ruppert's Face Bleach and other Victorian and Edwardian skin-whitening products, in this paper I examine the intersections among medical authority, medical spaces, quackery, aesthetics, cosmetics and commerce in the pursuit of whiteness at the height of Empire. I examine the widespread use of chlorine as a cleaning and bleaching agent in cosmetics and medicine at the time, and find traces of it in paintings as seemingly remote from each other as James McNeill Whistler's *Symphonies in White* and William Orpen's portrait of the surgeon Ivor Back. I conclude with a discussion of Giorgio de Chirico's surrealist canvas *The Song of Love* (1914) and its juxtaposition of a decapitated white classical marble head of Apollo and a limp handless surgical rubber glove.

## **Egon Schiele's Clinical Modernism**

*Gemma Blackshaw (Royal College of Art, London)*

In 1910 Egon Schiele completed a series of life-studies of pregnant women at the Second Women's Clinic within the University of Vienna's General Hospital, one of two public clinics and teaching institutions for obstetrics and gynaecology within the hospital which had opened to international acclaim just two years previously. The drawings were connected to a portrait of Dr Erwin von Graff, assistant to the clinic's director, whom Schiele painted in the same year. Depicted 'at work', in the short-sleeved shirt that identified surgical dress in the clinic's culture of gendered medical hierarchies, Graff's bared and bloodied arms and hands signify both the realities of modern obstetric and gynaecological care, and the corporealities of Schiele's 'clinical modernism'.

Whilst Graff's portrait has received a level of attention commensurate with its importance in Schiele's career, its connection to the clinic and the images of patients that were produced both in and with it has yet to be fully considered. Combining analysis of Schiele's artistry with an investigation of the clinic's 'progressive' facilities, practices and pedagogies, the paper will reflect upon the entanglement of clinical medicine and modernist figuration, and its occlusion in modernist art history. How does a retrieval of the clinical context for Schiele's work enable us to engage with the social and sexual politics of medical specialisation and modernist representation? And how do these politics problematise the historicising of Schiele's images of the female body that was the object of such medicine as the pursuit of fundamental human truths?

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## **Harlem Hospital and the Medicine of African American Modernism**

*Tanya Sheehan (Colby College)*

In the early to mid-20th century, African American modernist artists posed pressing questions about public health, medicine, and their representation. Who could treat the sick? How, where, and to whom should healthcare be provided? What suited avant-garde art, moreover, to commentate on the physical and social condition of the medical body?

This paper explores such questions through the art of Charles Alston and his student Jacob Lawrence. The pair worked together on the famous Harlem Hospital mural project in the 1930s and continued to paint medical subjects through the 1950s as part of a shared concern with the African American community, race relations, and the human condition. My argument focuses on the visual and political vocabulary that the spaces of Harlem's public hospital offered Alston and Lawrence. I argue that their images of crowded waiting rooms, operating theatres, and clinics forced viewers to confront the freedoms that such spaces both promised and denied in urban America. In so doing, I consider the implications of bringing the realities of the public health system into conversation with the formal experiments of American modernism.