

Human Anatomical Preparations History, Manufacturing Techniques and Ethics in Conservation

International Symposium at
Dresden University of Fine Arts

Degree Course in Conservation

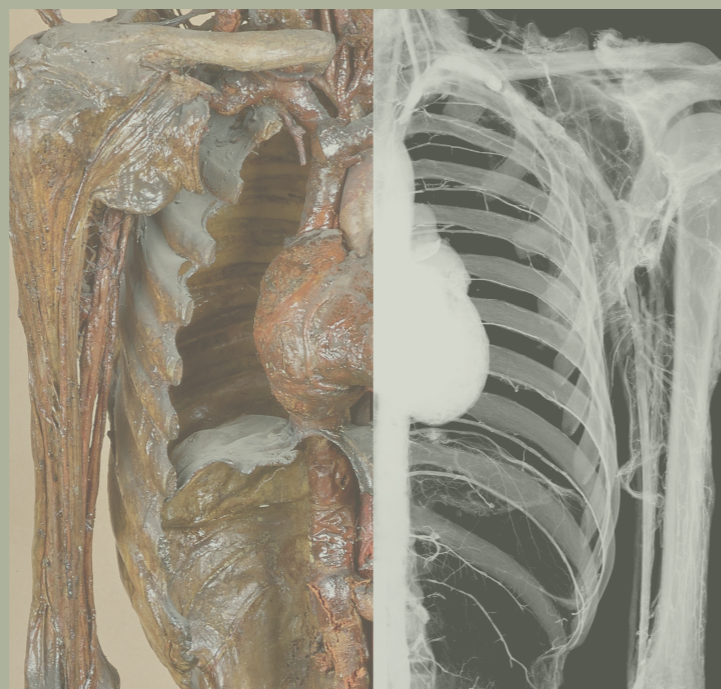
11th / 12th
November 2021

Human Anatomical Preparations

Human anatomical and pathological preparations have been serving science, research, and education for centuries. At least since the 16th c., anatomists, prosectors, and preparators have used continually improved and sometimes elaborate manufacturing techniques, often requiring interdisciplinary knowledge, to create increasingly sophisticated and durable preparations. Collections of these items, established and expanded over centuries in European centres for medical education, are invaluable today. A closer look at such anatomical and pathological collections in Europe reveals, however, that the state of their conservation is often precarious; in some cases there is danger of losing the entire inventory.

As a result of the research project “Körper und Malerei” (2017 – 2020), the Anatomical Collection of the Dresden University of Fine Arts is now accessible to the public and for education and research. Founded over 200 years ago, the collection contains more than 500 preparations and models. Within the framework of the research project, numerous problems were defined and discussed and appropriate plans were developed and implemented. Nonetheless, many questions remain open and are to be the central focus of discussion in this conference.

The two-day international symposium at the Dresden University of Fine Arts will begin with an introductory session highlighting the history and significance of human anatomical and pathological preparations. Manufacturing techniques will be closely examined, and future utilization will be discussed. Special focus will be on the issue of successful transfer of historical preparations from an actively-used teaching collection to a secure exhibition collection.



Panel I

A comprehensive knowledge of historical manufacturing, preparation, and conservation techniques for anatomical specimens is not only of great interest from a medical history perspective but is also a prerequisite for appropriate conservation of the preparations. Therefore the first panel will present research results regarding historical manufacturing techniques, using case studies. In particular the influence of the manufacturing technique on preservation will be examined, including for instance whether a technique has beneficial or adverse effects on the aging process. The following questions will also be addressed: What problems will arise from current and future intensification of legal regulations regarding pest control, storage of certain wet preparations (e.g. containing formaldehyde), biocides, or dry preparations containing heavy metals? How will this development impact the preservation of historical collections?

Panel II

The preservation, use, and future presentation of human anatomical preparations based on scientific standards require establishment and maintenance of an ethically appropriate handling of the collections. The second panel will focus on current ethical issues within this context: What socially conditioned changes in our ethical appreciation for human remains have taken place in the past decades? How has our attitude been (or will be) influenced and changed by discussion of travelling expositions such as “Körperwelten” (since 1995) or of preparations deriving from a context of injustice? How does such discourse influence methods for presentation, perception, and assessment of the state of preservation of human preparations? How do issues of conservation violate or protect post-mortem human dignity? What areas of conflict are opened by interventive conservation of human anatomical and pathological preparations and can they be brought into harmony with international rules on conservation and restoration of artistic works and cultural assets?

Panel III

The third panel will focus on the practical situation regarding preservation of human anatomical and pathological preparations and the lack of specialized restorers and training schools in Europe: Who is currently responsible for maintenance, care and preservation of historical collections of human preparations? How can sound scientific research and conservation and restoration plans (up till now extant only in isolated cases) be developed and appropriate methods and techniques be established? How can the international community of preparators, curators, and conservators-restorers cooperate to improve the situation in the collections? What contribution could be made by educating specialized preparators /conservators-restorers in this field at a university level?

Evening Event

The symposium will conclude with an evening event during which the historical Anatomical Collection of Dresden University of Fine Arts can be visited.

Information / Registration


Conference languages: English, German, French. All presentations and discussions will be simultaneously translated in English-German and German-English. Interpreters will be available for contributions to the discussion in French (French-English and English-French). Travel expenses for speakers will be covered.

registration by E-Mail: HAP@hfbk-dresden.de
information: hfbk-dresden.de/human-anatomical-preparations

11th Nov. 3.00 p.m. - 7.30 p.m.
12th Nov. 9.00 a.m. - 10.30 p.m.

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