THE *MEDICI VENUS* AND THE LEGACY OF

THE RENAISSANCE AT LA SPECOLA

by

TAYLOR KAY GLENNON

(Under the Direction of Shelley Zuraw)

ABSTRACT

The eighteenth-century wax models, commonly referred to as "anatomical Venuses," at the Museo di Storia Naturale "La Specola" in Florence, recreate significant aspects of the ideal female body as depicted in the Renaissance. These sculptural depictions of female anatomy revivify the erotic female nude. The eroticism permeating the Venuses originates from the historical hyper-sexualization of women by medical professionals. Humanist scholars and physicians perpetuated ancient misunderstandings of female anatomy which became embedded in early modern medical and visual culture. These carefully arranged poses of the anatomical Venuses were visually informed not only by famous images, such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino,* but also by contemporary publications, such as the prints in Andreas Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543). By tracing this tradition and its relevance in the eighteenth-century, this paper situates the wax anatomical bodies in the broader art historical narrative of sculpture.

INDEX WORDS: Anatomical Venus, Medici Venus, Wax anatomy, Venus, Florence, La Specola, Eighteenth-century anatomy

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DEDICATION

For my parents and everyone who listened to me talk about my research.

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I. Introduction

The nude figure reclining on white cloths and silk cushions in a glass and rosewood box at La Specola seems shockingly alive (fig. 1). But as you come closer the figure becomes less human and you see that the woman in the case is a wax model. Having accepted that the waxen woman is not real, the viewer's attention turns to the edges of the chest and abdomen plate with its silk handle that give away that this is no ordinary wax figure. The so-called *Medici Venus*, a life-sized eighteenth-century anatomical model, and other similar reclining female anatomical models of this type are collectively referred to as anatomical Venuses (fig. 2).[1] These models, housed at the Museo di Storia Naturale, "La Specola," in Florence, which at its inception was one of the first public science museums in the world, recreate significant aspects of the ideal female body as depicted in the Renaissance.

The eroticism permeating the Venuses originates from the historical hyper-sexualization of women by medical professionals. Humanist scholars and physicians perpetuated ancient misunderstandings of female anatomy that eventually became embedded in early modern medical and visual culture. Depictions of the female body in sixteenth-century medical illustrations, such as the prints in Charles Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (1546), utilized already existing iconography established by paintings and sculptures of the goddess Venus. The wax modeling workshop at La Specola took this precedent of erotically charged medical illustration

[1] As of yet there is no volume cataloging all of the anatomical Venus type models in existence in various European institutions. The exact measurements of the *Medici Venus* and the other anatomical Venuses are rarely discussed. Instead they are referred to simply as "life-sized" which likely refers to a length of approximately five feet.

further with the use of colored wax and the inclusion of other materials, such as human hair, which result in an uncannily "life-like" reclining nude. Yet the extent of the anatomical Venuses' aesthetic qualities depend on Renaissance ideals has not been adequately examined. Anna Maerker and Rebecca Messbarger have discussed the anatomical Venuses through an analysis of the political and cultural climate of Tuscany.[2] Joanna Ebenstein's study of the history of the anatomical Venuses strives to place them in a larger narrative context, stretching from eighteenth and nineteenth-century anatomy museums and fairgrounds, to contemporary images of the uncanny.[3] This paper attempts to address the missing visual component by examining the anatomical models through the lens of Venus imagery in the sixteenth century. In order to appreciate the significance of the association between the eighteenth-century Venuses and sixteenth-century paintings and prints, it is necessary to consider the history of anatomy studies, the complex changes in the function and meaning and use of wax as a medium as well as the Renaissance artistic precedent of reclining nudes. This approach allows the anatomical models to be rightly understood as aesthetic objects rather merely medical objects.

II. Anatomical Models in the Eighteenth Century

At La Specola the anatomical models were displayed in conjunction with zoological specimens, animal anatomies, and scientific equipment from the Medici collection.[4] In

[2] Anna Maerker, *Model Experts: Wax Anatomies and Enlightenment in Florence and Vienna, 1775-1815* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) discusses the anatomical model collection at La Specola, seeing it as a reflection of the politics of eighteenth-century Florence. Meanwhile Rebecca Messbarger, "The Re-Birth of Venus in Florence's Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History" *Journal of the History of Collections* 25, no. 2 (2013): 195-215, expands Maerker's argument, claiming that the Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo, the founder of La Specola, used the collection to emphasize his position as custodian to the intellectual and artistic legacy of the Medici.

[3] Joanna Ebenstein, *The Anatomical Venus: Wax, God, Death, and the Ecstatic* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc. 2016): 14-171.

[4] Maerker, *Model Experts*, 55.

the eyes of Pietro Leopoldo, the Grand Duke of Tuscany and founder of La Specola, the large and varied collection at the museum communicated the scope of Enlightenment Era scientific advancements.[5] Since their conception in the 1760s, the anatomical waxes have been used to display human anatomy without the need for constant dissection. The act of selecting wax models to teach anatomy allowed the mess of the cadaver, both ethical and practical, to be neatly avoided. The anatomical Venuses, given the form of the eternally beautiful women, not only effectively demonstrates the biological systems that captured the interest of the eighteenth-century viewer, but also creates a spectacle that bridges the gap between art and science.[6] This analysis will focus on the *Medici Venus* as the culmination of this duality between art and science (fig. 1). This specific reclining female often referred to as the "demountable Venus," can be dismembered into dozens of parts to reveal a tiny fetus in her womb. This vivid rendering of anatomy attracted many visitors to La Specola because it empowered the viewer to visually dissect the model in a way that mimicked the dissection of an actual cadaver.[7]

The anatomical Venuses at La Specola are a reflection of Florence's esteemed medical history that was well established by the eighteenth century. The Grand Duke's involvement with the health and well-being of his city, specifically with the reformation of Florentine hospitals in the 1760s is extremely important for understanding the

[5] The Grand Duke sought to establish Florence as a jewel of Enlightenment ideals on the Italian peninsula. For further details on the ties of politics and scientific exhibitions in Florence during the eighteenth century see Maerker, *Model Expert,* 19-84.
[6] Joanna Ebenstein, "Ode to an Anatomical Venus" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 3 &4 (Fall/Winter 2012): 346. Also see Idem, *The Anatomical Venus: Wax, God, Death, and the Ecstatic* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2016) for an overview of cultural connections associated with the anatomical Venuses.
[7] Maerker, *Model Experts*, 121, fn. 9. While the museum was accessible and free to everyone from its opening, the director of La Specola, Felice Fontana, and the Grand Duke regulated the times certain people were allowed to visit.

anatomical Venuses.[8] Many of the Grand Duke's public health policies were based on the writings of the physician Antonio Cocchi (1695-1758), who later became the director of the Uffizi in 1775.[9] Cocchi's firm beliefs in the utility of anatomical knowledge impacted the Grand Duke's reformation of medicine and public education, leading to the establishment of La Specola, and ultimately the anatomical models.[10]

The Grand Duke appointed the anatomist and physicist Felice Fontana (1730-1805), who would eventually become the first director at La Specola, as his court physicist in 1766.[11] Fontana and Guiseppe Querci, Cocchi's successor as director of the Uffizi from 1769-1773, consolidated and moved all the natural objects and scientific instruments from the Medici collection at the Uffizi to La Specola, the newly established natural history museum.[12] In the 1770s, the Florentine obstetrician Giuseppe Galletti (1739-1819) proposed a collaboration with Fontana to establish the collection of anatomical models for La Specola.[13] Galletti proposed that the collection at La Specola be prepared for the medical community of Florence and Pisa as a continuation of the region's professional medical training, but Fontana also saw an opportunity for the advancement

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[8] For more general information about Florentine hospitals see Katherine Park*, Doctors and Medicine in Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985; and John Henderson, "The Hospitals of Late-Medieval Florence: A Preliminary Survey" in *The Hospital in History* ed. Lindsay Granshoaw and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1989): 63-92

[9] Paula Findlen, "Uffizi Gallery, Florence: The Rebirth of a Museum in the Eighteenth Century" in *The First Modern Museums of Art: The Birth of an Institution in Eighteenth and Early-Century Europe*, ed. Carole Paul (Los Angeles: The Paul J. Getty Museum, 2012): 82.

[10] Maerker, *Model Experts*, 53-55. See Benedetto Lanza, Maria Lusia Azzaroli Puccetti, Marta Poggesi, and Antonio Martelli, Le *Cere Anatomiche della Specola* (Florence: Arnaud, 1979): 31-34 for information on the use of corpses from the local hospitals for the modeling process. For more information on Antonio Cocchi see Saverio Mattentti, "Una lettera con notizie sula [sic] vita del Cocchi, la sua morte e l'autopsia" (1759), reprinted in Weber, *Aspetti poco noti*; Miriam Fileti Mazza and Bruna Tomasello, *Antonio Cocchi: Primo antiquario della Galleria fiorentina, 1738-1758* (Modena: F.C. Panini, 1996).

[11] Peter K. Knoefel, *Felice Fontana: Life and Works* (Trento: Società di Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche, 1984): 31.

[12] Findlen, "Uffizi Gallery, Florence," 98.

[13] According to Maerker, *Model Experts*, 65, Galletti was particularly interested in establishing a collection of anatomical models because he saw it as a way to elevate his specialty of obstetrics to its own medical field.

of the Grand Duke's reforms.[14] While in Bologna, Galletti had been exposed to a variety of anatomical models made by Ercole Lelli (1702-66) and the husband-wife team Giovanni Manzolini (1700-55) and Anna Morandi Manzolini (1714-74).[15] The models Lelli created for the Bolognese Museo di Palazzo Poggi were commissioned by pope Benedict XIV.[16] These models were intended to be used by artists and reflected both anatomical and art historical interest (fig. 3). Lelli's multi-case installation depicts a series of the male and female models that illustrate their bodies in layers—displaying the superficial musculature, deep musculature, and eventually the skeleton itself. Other models within the Bolognese museum present fragmented wax anatomies divorced from the context of whole bodies. The workshop at La Specola took the idea of the Bolognese models, like the nude female figure known as Eve, and created similarly full-figured wax anatomical models, but ones that included various interior organs now encased in a single sculpted form. These new Florentine models, the anatomical Venuses, allowed the viewer to understand the entire body's anatomy instead of isolating one part at a time.

The tradition of three-dimensional colored wax models for anatomical instruction had begun almost a century earlier with the abbot Gaetano Giulio Zummo (1656-1701), commonly known as Zumbo, who was hired by Cosimo III (r. 1670-1753) in 1691.[17] Zumbo created the miniature series "Theaters of Death" which included scenes titled *The Plague* featuring corpses and tortured bodies (fig. 4). The theaters were likely relocated to La Specola during the reorganization of the natural science objects during the early

[14] Maerker, *Model Experts*, 67, fn. 88-89.
[15] For more on wax modeling in Bologna, especially Anna Morandi Mazolini see Rebecca Messbarger, *The Lady Anatomist: The Life and Work of Anna Morandi Manzolini* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). See also Attilio Zanca, *Le Cere e le terrecotte ostetriche del museo di storia della scienza di Firenze* (Florence: Arnaud, 1981): 11-13 for more discussion of Galletti's involvement.
[16] Maerker, *Model Experts*, 65.
[17] Roberta Ballestriero, "Anatomical Models and Wax Venuses: Art Masterpieces or Scientific Craft Works?" *Journal of Anatomy* 216 (2010): 224-5.

years of the museum.[18] Later, in France, Zummo employed his skill depicting bodies in wax when he was commissioned by the French surgeon Guillaume Desnoues (1650-1735) to preserve a likeness of an unusual medical dissection that was beginning to decompose.[19] Zumbo's wax dioramas and his early anatomical waxes can be understood as the origin of artistic-medical collaborations.[20] Nearly a century later, Fontana had embarked on a similar collaboration that would ultimately spawn the anatomical Venuses.[21] When Fontana began working in Tuscany, the earlier tradition of small-scale wax imagery, like Zumbo's theaters, was no longer practiced in Florence. In order to showcase the Florentine history of such anatomies, under Fontana's direction, the "Theaters of Death" and the new wax anatomies were intentionally displayed in the same room.[22]

The full body anatomical models at La Specola were the culmination of several attempts to create the most visually legible models for the general public. By the end of the 1780s, Fontana was dissatisfied with simple wax anatomies of singular body parts developed in Bologna and instead shifted his focus to dissectible models that showed all the ways bodily systems related to each other. In a report from 1789, Fontana wrote that the wax models of individual body parts "are of no use when one wants to relate parts to parts" in the body.[23] This led to the creation of a statue that could be disassembled by

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[18] Benedetto Lanza et al., *Le Cere Anatomiche della Secola*, 23.
[19] Alessandro Riva, Gabriele Conti, Paola Solinas and Reancesco Loy, "The Evolution of Anatomical Illustration and Wax Modelling in Italy from the 16th to early 19th Centuries" *Journal of Anatomy* (2010): 212-217. See Francois Cagnetta, *Gaetano Giulio Zumbo*, ed. Paolo Giansiracusa (Milan: Fabbri, 1988), for more on the Zumbo's biography.
[20] Ebenstein, "Ode to and Anatomical Venus," 347.
[21] The attribution of the anatomical Venuses is typically assigned to Clement Susini, modeler at La Specola by 1782. In this paper, I have chosen to loosely assign the waxes to the workshop at La Specola, avoiding a discussion of the artistic hand.
[22] Maerker, *Model Experts*, 37.
[23] Renato G. Mazzolini, "Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections" in *Models: The Third Dimension of Science*, eds. Soraya de Chadarevain and Nick Hopwood (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004): 56-64, addresses the this shift between wax and wood models at La Specola. For more on the phenomenon of touching objects in collections, especially anatomical collections see Anna Maerker, "Towards a

hand to reveal detailed views of the anatomy. Fontana's idea of a dissectible figure in the 1780s also reflects the theories of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac as recorded in his *Traité des sensations* (1754). Condillac insists that vision was dependent on coordinating sight with touch. But wax was too fragile to accommodate the hands of curious visitors, so Fontana's first dissectible models were made of wood. Fontana made a colored wooden model of a hemisected bust and life-sized human figures.[24] He intended these wooden models to be used as didactic tools. In 1791, he wrote, "My opinion is…that a student who could make more progress in six months with the waxes [referring here to the waxes made of individual body parts] then in six years with cadavers, would learn more in [several] weeks with the anatomy in wood."[25] But after Fontana completed the initial wooden models there was resistance from the museum's staff and the Grand Duke. Tommaso Bonicoli (1746-1802), dissector at La Specola since 1781, asserted that "in imitating with some exactitude the elegance of animal nature, either in its color or in its most delicate modifications and thinness" wood could not compete with the wax models.[26] This evaluation of wax as the best medium for anatomical models reflects its ability to imitate the variable shapes and colors of living forms, an aspect of wax that was evident already in the Renaissance.

Comparative History of Touch and Spaces of Display: The Body as Epistemic Object," *Historical Social Research / Historiche* Sozialforschung 40, no. 1, Special Issue: Law and Conventions from a Historical Perspective (2015): 284-300.

[24] For further discussion of Fontana's wooden models see Mazzolini, "Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections," 57-59.

[25] English translation by Mazzolini, "Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections," 58-59.

[26] Ibid., 60.

III. The Development of Wax as a Sculptural Medium

The anatomical Venuses present a fascinating moment in the historical timeline of sculpture where the traditional mediums of wood, bronze, and marble were set aside in favor of wax. This choice, however, has history. The adoption of wax as a sculptural medium during the Renaissance and Baroque came in stages and was used for different purposes. These can be divided into several genres: wax employed as the in-process material for bronze casting, for small study models, and finally for independent wax reliefs, ex-votos, and effigies. In the last examples the goal was to create as naturalistic a figure as possible. The increasing use of wax as the terminal sculptural medium (in conjunction with polychromy and other materials such as cloth, hair, and glass) culminated in hyper-realistic depictions of the human form, as seen in the anatomical Venuses of the eighteenth century.

In *The Lives of the Artists*, Giorgio Vasari discusses how numerous artists employed wax.[27] He notes that the fifteenth-century bronze sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti utilized wax, stucco, and other media to create studies for reliefs and likely practiced this method for the two sets of bronze doors he made for the Florentine baptistry. Ghiberti's bronze doors required an enormous amount of wax; the artist and his shop worked on the wax models for casting for more than four decades.[28] Vasari went so far as to imply the designs in this material were considered to be the equivalent of preparatory drawing

[27] Johannes Myssock, *Bildhauerische Konzeption und plastisches Model in der Renaissance* (Münster: Rhema, 1999): 65-70.
[28] According to Giorgio Vasari, *On Technique* (1568) ed. Louisa S. Maclehose (London: J. M. Dent & Company, 1907), 158-166 and his discussion of the lost wax casting method Ghiberti's bronze doors would have gone through a lot of wax.

designs, and that without these early versions of the reliefs in wax it would be "impossible to bring any work [of sculpture] to perfection."[29]

Bozzetti, models composed of varying materials, were employed by many sculptors to form an early conception of the sculpture.[30] Wax would be used for the first and smallest model, clay would be used for a larger secondary model, and plaster would be employed for the final scale model. When to use specific materials for modelling is determined by physical requirements and practical necessity. Wax was often preferred for preparatory models because it was more forgiving and allowed for adjustments, while the rapid drying quality of clay enforced a strict time constraint on the artist's process.[31] Wax mixed with turpentine, sawdust, and other similar substances could be molded when the warmth from the artist's hands softened the wax. This quality allowed the artist to continue to revise and adjust the design over time. Early b*ozzetti* shown to the patron could be made of either wax or terracotta.[32] These presentation models were often more finished than the previous iterations, with careful attention to specific details to showcase the skill of the artist. By the seventeenth century, these wax and terracotta models were valued as autonomous sculptures.[33]

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[29] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (1568), trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, vol. I (London: Macmillan & Co., 1912): 304.
[30] Charles Avery, *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture* (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Limited, 1987): 63.
[31] Eckhard Marchand, "Material distinctions: Plaster, Terracotta, and Wax in the Renaissance Artist's Workshop" in *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c. 1250-1750*, eds. Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop and Pamela H. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015): 161.
[32] For an example of a well-preserved fifteenth-century presentation model see Verrocchio's *Forteguerri Monument* currently housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum: Bruce Boucher ed., *Earth and Fire: Italian Terracotta Sculpture from Donatello to Canova* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 126-7.
[33] As Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 36 notes, the clay model of the high altar of S. Agnese was valued so much that an agreement between the sculptor Domenico Guidi and Prince Giovanni Battista Pamhili that the prince requested to make a scale model of a piece he commissioned for his personal collection. The prince's insistence on the fabrication of a copy of the altar is evidence of the increasing interest in *bozzetti*, clay, and in some cases wax, as media worth including in collections.

In addition to being a material well suited for early designs by sculptors working in other materials, the use of wax attached a surprisingly spiritual or Christian connotation to any work made of that particular material. The production and consumption of wax during the Renaissance was largely determined by its use in the Church and was strictly regulated. In Italy, the demand for wax was higher than the level of local production and the raw material was imported from Poland, Russia, Romania, Spain, Africa, and Corsica.[34] Wax featured prominently in religious and civic rites which further elevated its status. It is important to note that besides the steady demand for wax to make candles, the same material could also be used in the production of ex-votos. The ex-votos recall the Roman tradition of *immagini*, wax masks of deceased relatives that were brought out of the home for processions.[35] Aristotle's musings on the connection between the impressionable quality of wax and the human mind can be understood as a possible source for the notion that wax, associated with personal stamped seals and, therefore, identity, could also serve as a representation of a specific individual's body.[36] The potential to recreate the body or a part of one in a simulacrum of life requires the malleability of wax and its ability to evoke the texture of flesh. This ties to both the representation of the body and its miraculous potential to be reborn or recreated, making

[34] Marchand, "Material distinctions," 167. See Reinhard Büll, *Das große Buch vom Wachs*, vol. 1 (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2003): 163, 174-6 for information about the imports and pricing of wax in Italy. Raffaele Ciasca, *L'Arte dei Medici e Speziali nella storia e nel commercio fiorentino dal secolo XXI al XV* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1927, reprint 1977): 371 and 377 examines the regulatory bodies that controlled the distribution of wax in Florence.

[35] Pliny, *Natural History*, translated by Harris Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), XXXV, 327 discusses the use of wax for death masks See Julius von Schlosser, "History of Portraiture in Wax (1911)" trans. James Michael Loughridge, in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure,* edited by Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2008), 181.

[36] Megan Holmes, "Ex-votos: Materiality, Memory, and Cult," in *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World,* ed. Michael W. Cole and Rebecca Zorach (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009): 161.

wax the ideal medium for the anatomical Venus because she too ultimately represents the procreative potential of the female body.

Ex-votos were physical representations of prayers made of silver, wood, and wax.[37] Wax ex-votos of fragmented body parts including hands, arms, feet, legs, and breasts were displayed in churches in large quantities in hopes of receiving healing. [38] One of the most famous collection of life-size ex-votos portraits was displayed in the Florentine church of SS. Annunziata.[39] From the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries the number of wax votive portraits at SS. Annunziata made the church seem more a museum of wax than a sanctuary.[40] In 1786, the Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo ordered the clergy to remove the votives from the building and melt down the wax for candles.[41] The removal of the effigies from the church was the result of the lack of maintenance for the figures and the general over-crowding of the church with artificial bodies. The melting down of the wax bodies in SS. Annunziata by the same man who was responsible for the creation of La Specola and the anatomical Venuses illustrates the moment when science adopts the religiously charged wax figure.

By the seventeenth century the strikingly naturalistic qualities of wax ex-votos led to the creation of images that explicitly compete with marbles. Wax busts, such as the *Blessed Soul* and *Damned Soul* made by Giovanni Bernardino Azzolino, allow a glimpse

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[37] Holmes, "Ex-votos," 159.
[38] Louisa Bulman, "Artistic Patronage at SS. Annunziata 1440-1520," PhD dissertation, University of London, 1971, IV, 12 and n. 56 discusses the mass production of ex-votos. Holmes, "Ex-votos," 161, notes that the use of molds for the mass production of wax ex-votos.
[39] Such portraits in wax became popular after the attempted assassination of Lorenzo de' Medici in the fifteenth century. According to Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (1568), vol. I, 556-7 an attempted assassination (the Pazzi Conspiracy) led to commissioning of impressively naturalistic effigies of Lorenzo to be placed around the city "in order to give thanks to God for his escape."
[40] Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (1568), vol. I, 555. While the full body effigies of Lorenzo after the Pazzi Conspiracy do not survive, the terracotta bust of Lorenzo at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. created after a model by Verrocchio and Benintendi can be considered an example of a similar work.
[41] For a brief history of the SS. Annunziata effigies see Benedetto Lanza et al., *Le Cere Anatomiche della Specola* (Florence: Arnaud, 1979): 18.

into the connections between traditional marble sculpture and the often overlooked medium of wax (fig. 5).[42] The soulful portraits can be compared to the *Anima Beata* and *Anima Damnata* by Gianlorenzo Bernini at the Palazzo di Spagna which were intended for the tomb of Monsignor Pedro de Foix Montoya in the San Giacomo degli Spagnoli (fig. 6). David García Cueto has suggested that Bernini's Montoya tomb busts were influenced by the 1605 engravings of a blessed and damned soul by Alexander Mair.[43] Although the chronology of influences among these marble, wax, and printed images remains uncertain, the striking parallels emphasize the growing interest in animation, both physical and spiritual, while at the same time underscoring the distinctions between media. The wax figures reveal an intense interest in naturalistic depictions, even of things unknown, dependent on the use of colored wax along with props including human hair, jewelry and cloth.

These degrees of realism are evident when *Anima Beata* and the *Blessed Soul* relief are compared to one another (fig. 7). While the marble bust of the beautiful soul includes exquisitely carved details such as the cascading ringlets, the swell of the breast, and the slightly open lips, they cannot completely hide the inanimate nature of the marble. The wax relief bust of *Blessed Soul* with her flowing curls, halo of leaves, jewelry, and most importantly the inclusion of actual fabric in the ornately patterned dress, allows for the figure of the *Blessed Soul* to be understood as a soul hovering between life and eternity, rather than a piece of stone manipulated into a recognizable

[42] In the decades since Irving Lavin, "Bernini's Portraits of No-Body," in *Visible Spirit: The Art of Gianlorenzo Bernini*, vol. II (London: Pindar Press, first printed 1993, reprinted 2009): 681-747, the attribution of the wax group has been disputed and reassigned to Giovanni Bernardino Azzolino by Andrea Daninos, "Cere borromaiche e sviste ambrosiane" in *Concorso: Arti e Lettere* eds. Agostino Allegri and Giovanni Renzi (Milan Università degli Studi di Milano, 2016): 59-69. While the attribution has changed, Lavin's discussion of the wax group in relation to marble sculpture is still pertinent to an understanding of wax as a medium.

[43] David García Cueto, "On the original meanings of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Anima Beata* and *Anima Damnata*: Nymph and Satyr," *Sculpture Journal* 12, no. 1 (2015): 37.

shape. By using mixed media for this group of wax reliefs, the artist was able to move beyond the confines of static marble towards a bust that seems alive, not only because of its expression and action, but through colored wax. The role colored wax plays in the creation of a living, yet implicitly dead object—be it a soul in hell or one of Madam Tussaud's recreations of famous historical figures—is explicit, too, in the anatomical model of "living" women who open up like dissected corpses.[44] This idea of naturalistic representations of the personification of various spiritual post-mortem states can also be applied to the *Medici Venus* because she, too, evokes a transitory a state of being especially through the inclusion of the wax plate that covers her chest and abdomen to conceal her organs. However, in this case, rather than emphasizing the natural (rotting) cadaver, the body is deliberately idealized by emulating the perfect female form, that of Venus.

The workshop at La Specola created accurate anatomical models not only with a myriad of homages to the history of medicine, but also to the history of art. Polychromy allows for the wax figure to become a hyper-realistic embodiment of historicized feminine beauty, now seemingly flesh and blood, not paint. The attention to the minute differences in the flesh from one area of the body to another, such as the subtle flush of rosy pink of the knees, elbows, and hands, transforms an anatomically accurate model into a reclining beauty. This careful consideration of the coloring of the skin is heightened by the way the wax mimics the translucent quality of the flesh to create a sensual experience for the viewer. The implication of flesh is essential for the anatomical models as they were intended as a replacement for the cadaver.

[44] See Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks* (London: Hambleton and London, 2003) for more on Madame Tussaud's use of wax and her relationship to its broader historiography.

IV. Scientific Seduction: The Impact of Medical Illustration

Viewers familiar with contemporary medical texts would have seen parallels between the wax anatomical models and illustrations in popular texts such as William Cheselden's *Anatomy of Bones* (1773) and Bernard Siegfried Albinus' *Table of the Human Skeleton and Muscles* (1747) (fig. 8).[45] Albinus, especially, emphasized the need to view organs and bodily systems in relation to the rest of the body. The modelers and anatomists in the workshop at La Specola likely studied contemporary medical illustrations in order to determine what techniques were best suited to convey information to the viewer. Actual body parts from the local Florentine hospitals were used in the process of creating the wax models as references to insure accuracy.[46] Fontana's personal involvement with the dissection process, which he did himself for the first two years, in conjunction with his involvement with the exhibition design of the anatomy rooms at La Specola, hints at his awareness of the historical precedents in didactic methodology through the use of medical illustration.[47]

Many scholars link the reclined posture of the *Medici Venus* to the visual precedent seen in the frontispiece of Andreas Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), a book with woodcut illustrations that likely would have readily available to the elite physicians in eighteenth-century Florence.[48] The well-known frontispiece features a

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[45] Mazzolini, "Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections," 48 discusses the connections between the wax anatomies at La Specola and contemporary medical illustrations.

[46] Interestingly, in Maerker, *Model Experts*, 53 she asserts that the Santa Maria Nuova which was part of the Grand Duke's reforms provided the cadavers for La Specola's workshop. Antonio Martelli, "La nascita del Reale Gabitnetto di Fisica e Storia Naturale di Firenze e l'anatomia in cere e legno di Felice Fontana," in *La ceroplastoca nella scienza e nell'arte. Atti del I congress Internazionale, Firenze,* vol. 1, (Florence: Olschki, 1975): 116. For more on Santa Maria Nuova in the sixteenth century see Katherine Park, "The First Hospital Among Christians: The Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova in Early Sixteeenth-Century Florence" *Medical History* 35 (1991): 164-1888.

[47] Mazzolini, "Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections," 50.

[48] Messbarger, "The Re-Birth of Venus," 195. Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace, *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 50-2 speculate that it is likely the Grand Duke's library owned a copy of the *Fabrica*, to which I believe Fontana would have had access. See Charles Donald O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels 1514-*

female cadaver in the process of being dissected by Vesalius himself in a crowded anatomy theater (fig. 9). Before the *Fabrica,* many medical publications did not include illustrations. Vesalius supported the inclusion of images to accompany medical texts even writing, "How greatly pictures assist in the understand of these [anatomical] matters and place them more exactly before the eyes than even the most precise language, so students of geometry or other mathematical disciplines can fail to understand."[49] Anatomy was studied in universities and dissections were practiced quietly and rarely in the academic setting due to the logistics of procuring an acceptable body, the decaying process, and climate.[50] The illustrations in the *Fabrica* serve an essential didactic purpose. They preserve the cadaver and other body parts, so they are always ready for the eager student. Historians have interpreted the *Fabrica* frontispiece as Vesalius' stance against his colleagues who only read ancient text on anatomy and left the actual dissection to the barber surgeons because of the inclusion of the ink pot, quill, and paper on the table next to Vesalius.[51] The accessibility of medical knowledge is implied through the deliberate placement of the viewer directly in the anatomy theater. The publication of the *Fabrica* indicated a shift in anatomical literature in which the importance of images for medical texts was firmly solidified for the genre. All subsequent publications included illustrations for the demonstration and explanation of human anatomy.[52] The very existence of the wax anatomy collection at La Specola reflects this focus on visual representations of anatomy. In fact, the entire collection and the arrangement of the

1564 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965): 269-282 for a discussion of the various revised editions of the *Fabrica*.
[49] O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels*, 323.
[50] For important information about the practice and status of dissection in the Renaissance, see Katherine Park, "The Criminal and the Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 1-33.
[51] Andrea Carlino, *Paper Bodies: A Catalogue of Anatomical Fugitive Sheets 1538*-1687, trans. Noga Arikha (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1999): 10.
[52] Ibid., 30-2.

models in the museum was designed with the intention that the viewer be able to see and immediately understand anatomy without the need for reading a text.[53] The role of the viewer and the desire for easy communication of information is also acknowledged in the frontispiece Vesalius takes on the role of the dissector next to the partially dissected cadaver as he looks outwards, challenging the gaze of viewer while resting his hand on the edge of the woman's exposed abdomen.[54] Visualized as abstract ideals of beauty, the wax Venuses mute the reality of dissection, allowing the viewer to experience a more palatable version of what, in real life, would have surely included pungent smells.

Another example of this type of attractive medical illustration is the frontispiece to the 1642 Dutch edition of Vesalius' *Epitome*, the student companion manual to the *Fabrica.*[55] The revised frontispiece again features a female figure, but this time in a pose startlingly similar to the anatomical Venuses (fig. 10). The cadaver is presented surrounded by a crowd of five men. She is supine with her legs slightly spread apart and arms by her sides on a pristine sheet. Her head has been removed, discarding any remnants of individuality that might repulse the viewer. The posture of the cadaver could be interpreted as sleeping if it were not for her open abdomen and exposed organs. Two male forms, a skeleton and an écorché, hoist a banner featuring the title of the book and other relevant publication information. This inclusion of explicitly male figures directly over the exposed female cadaver further heightens the contrast between the freshly dead female corpse and the instructional models for death (the skeleton) and life (the écorché).

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[53] Maerker, *Model Experts*, 120.
[54] Gül A. Russel, "Vesalius and the Emergence of Veridical Representation in Renaissance Anatomy," in *The Fine arts, Neurology, and Neuroscience: Neuro-Historical Dimensions* eds. Stanley Finger et al. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2013): 7. For more on the anatomy lesson see Andrea Carlino, *Books of the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 8-68.
[55] For a discussion of the *Fabrica* and the *Epitome* frontispieces in comparison with similar prints see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990): 71-3.

The deliberate inclusion of a looming male presence in both frontispieces of Vesalius' texts also speaks to the unusual display of the dissected female body. Interestingly, the *Epitome* featured several fugitive sheets that allowed readers to flip through successive layers of anatomy (fig. 11). Fugitive sheets were made up of a series of layered illustrated sheets, so the viewer could lift the individual sheets to reveal successive layers of anatomy.[56] This process of revealing by physically moving a sheet is comparable to the required lifting of the wax torso to reveal the anatomy of the *Medici Venus.* The anatomical Venuses create a real tangible version of the frontispieces where now both the male and female museum visitors are able to witness a bloodless dissection.

The location of the 1543 *Fabrica* frontispiece's placement of the dissection in an anatomy theater is significant because of the dramatic implications.[57] In the sixteenth century dissections were viewed as public entertainment and a celebration of the human body.[58] The anatomical theater in Vesalius's frontispiece anticipates the later public fascination with dissection that culminates in the eighteenth century in institutions like La Specola. The frontispiece supports this idea of a dissection as a performance by placing Vesalius in the center of the swarm of male spectators who form a sea of bodies around the cadaver. The steeply sloped seating of the theater causes the figures to appear as if they were falling downwards onto the dissection slab. The theater design itself, with the Corinthian-inspired engaged columns, evokes the wisdom of ancient physicians such as

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[56] Carlino, *Paper Bodies,*1-5, fn. 1, traces the symbiotic relationship of the fugitive sheets and Vesalius' writing ultimately claiming that they are both necessary for a complete understanding of anatomy.
[57] For an introduction to a typical dissection pedagogical procedure, see Cynthia Klestinec, "Civility, Comportment, and the Anatomy Theater: Girolamo Fabrici and His Medical Students in Renaissance Padua," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 434-463.
[58] Luke Wilson, "William Harvey's Prelections: The Performance of the Body in the Renaissance Theater of Anatomy," *Representations* 17 (1987): 68-9. Sometimes the dissections were elaborate events that were followed by banquets, concerts, and theatrical performances. For more on spectacle and anatomical illustrations in Vesalius' *Fabrica*, see the bibliography in Larissa Ariadne Wasylkiwskyj, "Exploring the Spectacle: Analyzing the Anatomical Prints in Andreas Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica.*" Master's thesis, Temple University, 2011.

Galen and Hippocrates.[59] The use of classical motifs in the architecture of the anatomy theater provide a distraction from the dissection in the foreground.[60] Such classical architectural details suggest an air of dignity that can be seen throughout Vesailus' book in depictions of the various stages of male anatomy (fig. 12). Unlike the heroic male figures displayed in front of classical ruins, the treatment of the female body objectifies the cadaver, presenting it as a thing rather than a person. The graphic nature of the dissection is heightened by the male audience. Once alive, her deceased body is now under the control of the male dissector and his students. Like the female figure in the frontispiece, the anatomical Venus is placed on her back, completely exposed to the viewer's gaze.[61]

Charles Estienne, a French physician who studied anatomy with Vesalius in Paris in the 1530s, followed a similar pattern of illustrating male anatomy in heroic poses.[62] The male figures in Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (1546) lift up a flap of flesh to reveal their organs (fig. 13). In both Vesalius and Estienne's texts the male figures regularly appear more life-like and are depicted standing, a pose that implies that they are alive.[63] Usually described as écorchés, these standing figures appear in two and three dimensions. Just as the medical illustrations employ different modes of depicting gender, the wax male écorchés, standing in cabinets with rotating bases and

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[59] Vivian Nutton, "Hippocrates in the Renaissance," in *Die Hippokratischen Epidemien, Verhandlungen des Ve Colloque international hippocratique*, eds. G. Baader and R. Winau (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989): 420-439. For more on Galen and Vesalius see Maria Luisa Garofalo, "Anatomy, Physiology and Teleology: Galen as a Controversial Source for Vasailus' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*" in *Towards the Authority of Vesalius: Studies on Medicine and the Human Body from Antiquity to the Renaissance and Beyond* eds. Erika Gielen and Michèle Goyens (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018): 125-154.
[60] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 72.
[61] For more on the feminine object exploited by men in the eighteenth century see Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).
[62] Domenico Laurenza, "Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy: Images from a Scientific Revolution" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 20.
[63] Ibid.," 10-19, 33. The active pose of the male écorché was well established by the sixteenth century by artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Cornelius Cort.

reclining male waxes at La Specola, employ a different art historical precedent from their female counterparts (fig. 14). The male écorchés stand in contrapposto with one arm outstretched as if gesturing directly to the viewer to demand their attention. This makes the wax figures appear alive. Even the wax male figures that are horizontal maintain a level of liveliness not seen in their female counterparts. The wax male reclining nude who demonstrates the lymphatic vessels, also known as "the flayed man," is positioned in a similar way to the ancient marble *Dying Niobid* or *Dying Gaul* (fig. 15, 16, 17).[64] Even though the flayed man is in a position similar to the two defeated marble men, they still appear more alive than their female counterparts. The flayed man acts as a transition between the standing écorché figures and the *Medici Venus* by allowing the agency to shift from the wax figure to the viewer. This shifting of power occurs in the changing position of the viewer in relation to the wax figure. The viewer must look upwards to see the full body of the standing écorchés. When the viewer encounters the wax flayed man they look down at the case as the wax figure looks up at the viewer/victor. The *Medici Venus* completes this cycle of the living, dying, and dead figures by hovering somewhere between sleep and death as she averts her eyes from the viewer while she lies supine on her back.

Connections between feminine beauty and anatomical images are more obvious in French physician Charles Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (1546).[65]

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[64] Thomas Davidson, "The Niobe Group" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (April 1875): 155 describes the purchase, restoration, and installation of the statues. The *Dying Niobid* specifically discussed above was located at the Uffizi and accessible to visitors and staff at La Specola, giving Fontana ample opportunity to study them for the wax workshop. For an overview of provenance history of the Niobid Group see Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture*, 1500-1900 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 274-279, for more on the history of the *Dying Gaul* see 224-227.

[65] For more detailed information on the production of Estienne's biography and book see K. B. Roberts and J. D. W. Tomilson, *The Fabric of the Body* (Oxford: Claredon, 1992), 168-186. Diane R. Karp, *Ars Medica: Art, Medicine, and the Human Condition* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1985): 156-7 discusses the precedent for the images in Estienne's book.

In the introduction, Estienne insists that pleasure is derived from the knowledge of anatomy, which he presents as an aesthetic and ecstatic experience. Estienne seeks to accomplish this enjoyment for his readers through the juxtaposition of explanations and images that allow for the intellectual pleasure of learning while also providing aesthetically titillating images.[66] Estienne encourages the reader to admire the "beauty of what divine providence has created" in tandem with the text that details the specifics of human anatomy.[67] The aesthetically pleasing illustrations in Estienne's book focus on this ideal beauty as a way to entice the reader to learn more about the human body.

The illustrations depicting female anatomy in Estienne's book promise the inquisitive reader/viewer the same erotic experience as the *Medici Venus.* One of the illustrations showing the anatomy of the uterus places the model in a bedroom lying on luxurious pillows with her hands thrown above her head and eyes downcast (fig. 18). The placement of her hands and the way her body stretches out on the bed suggests a sexual connotation as she displays herself for the reader. By peeling back the abdominal and uterine walls, the illustration reveals the placement of the uterus. This illustration and similar images from the third book of Estienne's treatise were adaptations of the *Loves of the Gods* engravings by Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio after drawings by Perino del Vaga and Rosso Fiorentino (fig. 19).[68] The *Loves of the Gods,* in turn, reference the notoriously pornographic *I Modi*, a series of prints illustrating a series of heterosexual sex acts originally created by Giulio Romano, printed by Marcantonio Raimondi, and

[66] Carlino, *Paper Bodies*, 23, fn. 29.
[67] Translation by Carlino, *Paper Bodies*, 23.
[68] For further information on Estienne's use of erotic mythological scenes see Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 161-188.

accompanied by Pietro Aretino's lewd poetry.[69] Mirroring the energetic scene of fornication from position eleven of the *I Modi*, Estienne's female figure lifts her arm above her head as she suggestively arches her back (fig. 20). The tantalizing pose for the viewer is also influenced by the *Venus and Cupid* engraving from the *Loves of the Gods.* Here, Cupid has been replaced with a vase, a common symbol for the womb (fig. 18).[70] Surgical tools are scattered near the female figure's foot and a small window has been carved out of her abdomen to reveal the placenta, reminding the viewer of the medical nature of the image. Lifting the flap reveals that the goddess of love, in her new incarnation as an anatomical model, is pregnant.

Another illustration in Estienne's series depicts the same woman, now facing the viewer directly, with her legs spread and arms resting beside her on the pillows (fig. 21). This version features a larger view of her anatomy, this time focusing on the blood vessels, kidneys, and the interior of the womb. The placenta has been bisected and is displayed on a footstool. In the final illustration of Estienne's series on the female reproductive system he again appropriates an image of the *Loves of the Gods* series, this time the scene of Mercury entering Herse's bedchamber as she lies with her legs spread open towards the viewer exposing her genitals (fig. 22, 23). The image displays the neck of the womb (now referred to as the vagina), the labial folds, and a portion of the bowel. A decorative lion head is perched on the corner of the bed staring directly at the figure's expose genitalia, mirroring the action of the viewer. The undeniable erotic charge of the image, derived from the pornographic positions of the infamous *I Modi*, makes it difficult to focus on the anatomy when the model (or Venus) is in a pose that can be interpreted as

[69] For more on the history and legacy of the lost *I Modi* images and their reproductions by artists in other media see James Grantham Turner, *Eros Visible: Art, Sexuality, and Antiquity in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017): 354-384.
[70] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 121.

sexual pleasure.The illustrations in these respective volumes perform an anatomical strip tease. As readers hold Estienne's book in their hands, they are free to run their fingertips over the voluptuous naked bodies depicted in the volume. The successive images that reveal a new layer of anatomy invite the viewer to intimately touch the paper body. The woman in the illustration does not assert authority over her own body and does not even meet the gaze of the reader, just as the anatomical Venuses avert their eyes.

During the production of the anatomical Venuses, Fontana replicated the experience of viewing the female body, aesthetically, medically, and erotically in wax. He used the sixteenth- century precedents in medical texts of full-length, visually pleasing figures as a way to express anatomical knowledge on a three-dimensional level by creating an erotically charged anatomical experience in wax. While it is important to understand the medical history that led to these anatomical models, the erotic charge present in the *Medici Venus* goes beyond the historical medical sources. Like them, Fontana's waxes depend on Renaissance imagery, but rather than replacing classical statues, erotic prints, and famous paintings, the waxes link the aesthetic experience of viewing paintings in a museum with the intellectual activity of studying the dissected corpse.

V. Evoking the Goddess: Erotic Voyeurism

The curious moniker "anatomical Venus" first appears in several documents from the La Specola archives after 1780, where the Florentine model is referred to as the "reclining anatomical statue, called the Venus."[71] The comparison of the anatomical

[71] Messbarger, "The Re-Birth of Venus," 195, n. 2. The exact dates for the production of the Florentine models at La Specola is unknown due to the incomplete records from the museum's early years so it is not possible to know exactly which wax model the quote refers to.

models to the goddess Venus was strengthened by the display of the wax versions of the *Venus de' Medici* and the bronze *Idol* or *Apollo* at the opening of the museum in 1775 (fig. 24, 25).[72] Fontana likely would have chosen to include the replicas, especially the wax *Venus de' Medici*, to further emphasize the visual connection to ideals of classical art and the anatomical models to science, especially for those who would not immediately make the connection. The original marble Venus was voraciously studied by Grand Tourists and art historians, including Johann Joachim Winckelmann.[73] In his seminal text *History of Ancient Art* (1764), Winckelmann writes about the perfect proportions of the goddess, "the Medicean Venus resembles a rose which after a lovely dawn unfolds its leaves to the rising sun…Me thinks I see her as when for the first time she stood naked before the artist's eyes."[74] The replicas of the ancient statues arranged alongside the wax anatomical figures tie together artistically venerated products of the classical world with the modern, aesthetically pleasing scientific figures, thus negating the discomfort of seeing the dissected bodies by emphasizing their qualities as art.[75] This understanding of the *Medici Venus* as an idealized, classical beauty can be pushed further to understand the

[72] Messbarger, "The Re-Birth of Venus," 202-4, fn. 52 is the only scholar to mention the document that refers to the wax replicas, but she does not provide the original Italian in her text. It is possible that there has been a mistranslation of the word "Apollino" into "Idolino." It is equally likely that the wax replica was of Apollino, a detail that would support the creation of an anatomical wax tribuna at La Specola that mirrored the installation at the Uffizi. The male nude has been identified under many names including Apollo, Bacchus, Buon Evento, Ganymede, Genius, Idolino and Mercury. The bronze is now part of the collection at Museo Archeologico in Florence, but it was a on display at the Uffizi as a part of the collection from 1646-7 until 1892 and was official moved to the Museo Archeologico in 1897. For more on the *Idol* see Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique,* 240-1, for information on the other reproductions of the *Venus de' Medici, see 235-328.*

[73] Messbarger, "The Re-Birth of Venus," 203.

[74] Johann Joachim Wincklemann, *The History of Ancient Art,* vol. II, translated by Giles Henry Lodge (Boston, 1849): 92-3. It is worth noting there that this material, especially Wincklemann's commentary on the Medici Venus is ripe for analysis, notably the sexualized beauty of the human body in relation to recent publications like Whitney Davis' 2010 book *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud*. Unfortunately, that is outside of the scope of this project and warrants further analysis at a later date.

[75] Messbarger, "The Re-Birth of Venus," 204.

artistic implications of evoking Venus through an examination of the voyeuristically charged gaze of the viewer.

The placement of the wax *Venus de' Medici* and the *Idol (Apollo)* established a physical link between the Uffizi, with its traditional fine art collection, and the anatomy collection at La Specola. This deliberate juxtaposition of the two museums' collections through the copies of the ancient statues, in a display that included both genders, illustrates how the anatomical models represent a new use of art history. The division of the clearly gendered wax anatomical models recalls the binary of bodily depictions, namely the beautiful sexualized female figure and the heroic male figure. For the *Medici Venus* this dichotomy and historicized treatment of the gendered body was epitomized with the inclusion of the wax replica of the *Venus de' Medici*. Historical responses to the *Venus de' Medici* are characterized by discussions of the statue's erotic undertones which are brought to the viewer's attention through the pudica posture: the positioning of her hands covering the pubis and breasts.[76] The marble Venus was relocated from the Villa Medici in Rome to the Uffizi after issues stemming from visitors' treatment of the statue as an object of carnal beauty rather than as an aesthetic sculpture.[77] The source for the Medici marble was the ancient *Cnidian Venus* was so beautifully sculpted that "men were burned up with unholy desire, masturbating as they marveled at this sacred image."[78]

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[76] See Christine Mitchell Havelock, *The Aphrodite of Knidos and Her Successors: A Historical Review of the Female Nude Greek Art* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995) for more on the historical precedent of the Venus pudica type. Also see Paul Barolsky, "Looking at Venus: A Brief History of Erotic Art" *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and Classics* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 93-117 for an overview of Venus and eroticism.

[77] For more on the erotic reception of the *Venus de' Medici* see Stijn Bussels, "Da' piú scorrtetti abusata: The *Venus de' Medici* and its History of Sexual Responses" in *The Secret Lives of Artworks: Exploring the Boundaries between Art and Life*, eds. Caroline van Eck, Joris van Gastel and Elsje van Kessel (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014): 38-55. For the seductive use of antiquity see Patricia Rubin, "The Seductions of Antiquity" in *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality* eds. Caroline Arscott and Katie Scott (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000): 24-38.

[78] Translation by Colantuano, *Titian, Colonna, and the Renaissance Science of Procreation*, 234. For the most recent overview of reactions to the Cnidian Venus type see Turner, *Eros Visible*, 223-269.

Pliny himself describes this event in his *Natural History,* stating that a young man was so enraptured by the statue that he felt compelled to ejaculate on it, leaving a permanent stain.[79] While this recalls the problem the *Venus de' Medici* had in Rome, at both the Uffizi and La Specola there seemed to be a desire to touch the statues, marble and wax model because they were so alluring. The fame and popularity of such images of the goddess, especially with the most famous being just across the river, no doubt influenced the decision to name and model the anatomical figures after earlier Venus imagery.

Yet the deliberate placement of the wax models on their backs in a supine position reveals other models. The wax Venuses all appear on couches and from a distance they seem to be sleeping. Images of the defenseless "sleeping" woman can be traced back to the marble *Sleeping Ariadne* from the second century now located in the Vatican collection (fig. 26).[80] A sleeping figure immediately conjures associations with vulnerability as the unconscious figure is not able to challenge or interrupt the viewer's gaze.[81] The reclining female nude was popularized during the Renaissance by Giorgione

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[79] Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. Harris Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944): VII. 127. For a discussion of Pliny's reception in the Renaissance see Sarah Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance: The Legacy of the Natural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 207-215 and 287-314.

[80] Phyllis Pray Bober, Ruth Rubinstein, and Susan Woodford, *Renaissance Artists and Antique: A Handbook of* Source (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2010): 79-80 discuss the display context and influence of the *Sleeping Ariadne* figure. For a discussion of the classical precedent of the sleeping nymph relief see Elisabeth B. MacDougall, "The Sleeping Nymph: Origins of a humanist Fountain Type" *The Art Bulletin* 57, no. 3 (September 1975): 357-365. The sleeping nude was further popularized in the Francesco Colonna's *Hyperotomachia Polihili* (1499) with his discussion and accompanying woodcut of a sleeping nude and a satyr. For further discussion see Anthony Colantuono, *Titian, Colonna, and the Renaissance Science of Procreation: Equicola's Seasons of Desire* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 231-244.

[81] Maria Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dreams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004): 96. The discussion of sleeping Venuses owes a great debt to Millard Meiss, "Sleep in Venice: Ancient Myth and Renaissance Proclivities*" Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 110, no. 5 (October 1966): 348-382. Associations with eternal sleep can also be understood to link the anatomical Venuses to the tradition of transi tombs but that is outside the scope of this project. For an explanation of transi tombs see Kathleen Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Trans Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), and for transi tombs depicting beautiful women see Marian Bleeke "The Monster, Death, Becomes Pregnant:' Representations of Motherhood in Female Transi Tombs from Renaissance Florence" in *Gender, Otherness, and Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Art*, eds. Carlee A. Bradbury and Michelle Moseley-Christian (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2017): 151-178.

in the *Sleeping Venus* (1510). The painting depicts a nude woman who appears to be slumbering as she lies on a white cloth with red pillows in an idyllic landscape (fig. 27). The anatomical Venuses mirror this position in their glass caskets. The dissected state of the wax models would suggest that the women are meant to be dead, as no human could be cut apart to that degree and survive, especially in the eighteenth century. Yet the visual reference to a beautiful reclining woman captured forever in slumber pushes the interpretation of the anatomical model away from a cadaver and towards a unique stasis between a living body and a corpse. The partially open eyes of the wax models support this interpretation of them as simultaneously both living and dead. In addition to their slumbering pose, the open eyes of the models can be understood as a reference to Titian's famous reclining nude that was housed at the Uffizi.

The nude woman in the so-called *Venus of Urbino* (1538) has been referred to as Venus since Vasari described her in the sixteenth century as simply "una Venere giovanetta*"* (fig. 28).[82] By the eighteenth century, the painting received its now famous name, the *Venus of Urbino*, as it was solidified as a highlight on the Grand Tour.[83] The association with Venus continues to this day. Johann Zoffany's *Tribuna of the Uffizi* (1773) documented the popularity of the Uffizi's most well-known paintings and sculptures, which included Titian's *Venus* and the *Venus de' Medici* (fig. 29).[84] Many

[82] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de'più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, vol. 7 (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1878), 443. Jill Burke, *The Italian Renaissance Nude* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 127-130, fn. 9 most recently summarizes the major arguments surrounding the *Venus of Urbino*. As Vasari likely called the female figure Venus because she is in the same pose as previous incarnations of the goddess like Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* and because she holds a handful of roses, a flower sometimes associated with the goddess. For more on the use of the "sleeping Venus" pose see Daniel Arasse, "The *Venus of Urbino* or the Archetype of a Glance" in *Titian's Venus of Urbino*, ed. Rona Goffen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91-107.

[83] See David Rosand, "So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch" in *Titian's "Venus of Urbino*" ed. Rona Goffen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 38-41 for a discussion of the various ways Grand Tourists referred to Titian's painting.

[84] Findlen, "Uffizi Gallery, Florence," 73-112, esp. 99, notes Zoffany's painting was not created to exclusively celebrate the Uffizi's collection for Queen Charlotte. Instead it functioned as a sort of roster of

visitors to La Specola would have understood the reclining posture of the *"Medici Venus"* as a reference to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* which was on display at the Uffizi along with the *Venus de' Medici*. While the female anatomical models are not a direct copy of Titian's painting, the reference to the sixteenth-century painting is clear.

In addition to the visual similarities between the pose of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and the anatomical Venuses, there is a reproductive connection. A dissection of the anatomical *Medici Venus* reveals a fetus nestled in her womb as a visual representation of how babies are housed inside the mother before birth. Titian's painting of the nude woman in her bedchamber has been discussed as an example of a marriage picture meant to help the young bride understand her procreative marital duty.[85] With the exception of Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*, the majority of marriage pictures like Titian's *Venus of Urbino* depict women that are awake and making direct eye contact with the viewer, inviting them to partake in sexual intercourse. Titian and Giorgione took this a step further by curling the fingers of the woman's left hand towards her genitals to imply masturbation. According to the writings of the ancient physician Galen, the orgasmic pleasure of the woman was thought to increase the chances of conceiving a healthy and beautiful child.[86] The Galenic tradition influenced many physicians well into the sixteenth century. This can be understood as one of the reasons many medical illustrations of the female reproductive system, such as Vesalius and Estienne, feature figures modeled after Venus, the goddess of female sexuality. The implication of carnal

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the European cultural elite by including notable figures of the period mingling in the imaginary tribuna filled with the Uffizi's most prized items.

[85] Rona Goffen, "Sex, Space, and Social History in Titian's *Venus of Urbino*" in *Titian's Venus of Urbino*, ed. Rona Goffen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 63-90. Since its creation there have been many different interpretations of Titan's *Venus of Urbino*. There has been no general consensus and a discussion of the numerous proposed interpretations is outside the means of this paper.

[86] Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 152-3.

pleasure is visible in the anatomical Venuses through the sensual tilting back of their heads on the pillow, as if they are frozen in the midst of orgasm. The link between the orgasm, understood as part of the process of human procreation, is implied through the tiny fetus curled in the womb of the anatomical Venus.

These ideas of erotic voyeurism and the unveiling of the body for the pleasure of the viewer were also in play at La Specola. Just as the viewer of Titian's *Venus of Urbino is* invited to gaze uninhibitedly at the nude figure, the viewers at La Specola were asked to do the same. Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun described how she first encountered the anatomical Venus. She wrote:

> Until that moment I espied nothing to make me feel uncomfortable; but noticing a life-sized female figure that seemed perfectly real, Fontana urged me to take a look; he lifted the sheet covering the model's stomach; underneath lay a perfect replica of human intestines arranged as they would be inside our body.[87]

This spectacle of unveiling is an act of erotic voyeurism orchestrated by Fontana through the design of the wax model. The theatrical exposure of the abdomen by lifting the sheet implicates the viewer, notably in this case, a woman artist, in the erotic exposure of the female's interior. While it is likely that the cloth also served a more practical purpose, to protect the wax figure from dust and light, the intentional covering of the body both suggested and excited revelation and kept the model from prying eyes.[88] In the case of the anatomical Venuses, the idea of the mediating curtain is present in both Fontana's theatrics, with the cloth and the removal of the breast plate of the *Medici Venus.* The

[87] Vigée-Le Brun, *The Memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun*, 123.
[88] A similar circumstance of using a cloth to cover a scandalous image is documented by Joachim van Sandrart, when a curtain was used to cover Caravaggio's *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1601/2). See *Caravaggio,* ed. Claudio Stinati (Milan: Sakara, 2010), 141.

placement of the viewer as erotic voyeur and the implementation of iconography associated with Venus allowed otherwise interested visitors to "commit them to memory in their position and connection much more easily than on a real corpse."[89]

The anatomical models at La Specola took the idealized beauty of Venuses that came before to bridge the gap between the visually appealing Renaissance aesthetics and modern anatomical studies. This mixture of art history and contemporary medical innovation was only possible in eighteenth-century Florence because of the connections between the collections of La Specola and the Uffizi. The precedent of the Uffizi's tribuna, which was internationally known thanks to the dissemination of artistic and cultural knowledge during the Grand Tour, allowed for the creation of a new wax tribuna, now a temple to science. Ultimately, it is the use of Venus imagery coupled with the use of erotic voyeurism that allow the anatomical models to be understood as art objects. The references to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and the marble *Venus de' Medici* elevate the *Medici Venus* to the new tribuna of the enlightened eighteenth century, the space where art and science are combined.

[89] Engelbert Wichelhausen, *Ideen überdie beste Anwendung der Wachbildnerei, nebst Nachrichten von den anatomischen Wachspräparaten in Florenz und deren Vergertigung, für Künstler, Kunstliebhaber und Anthropologen* (Frankfurt am Main: J. L. E. Zessler, 1789): 43.

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FIGURES

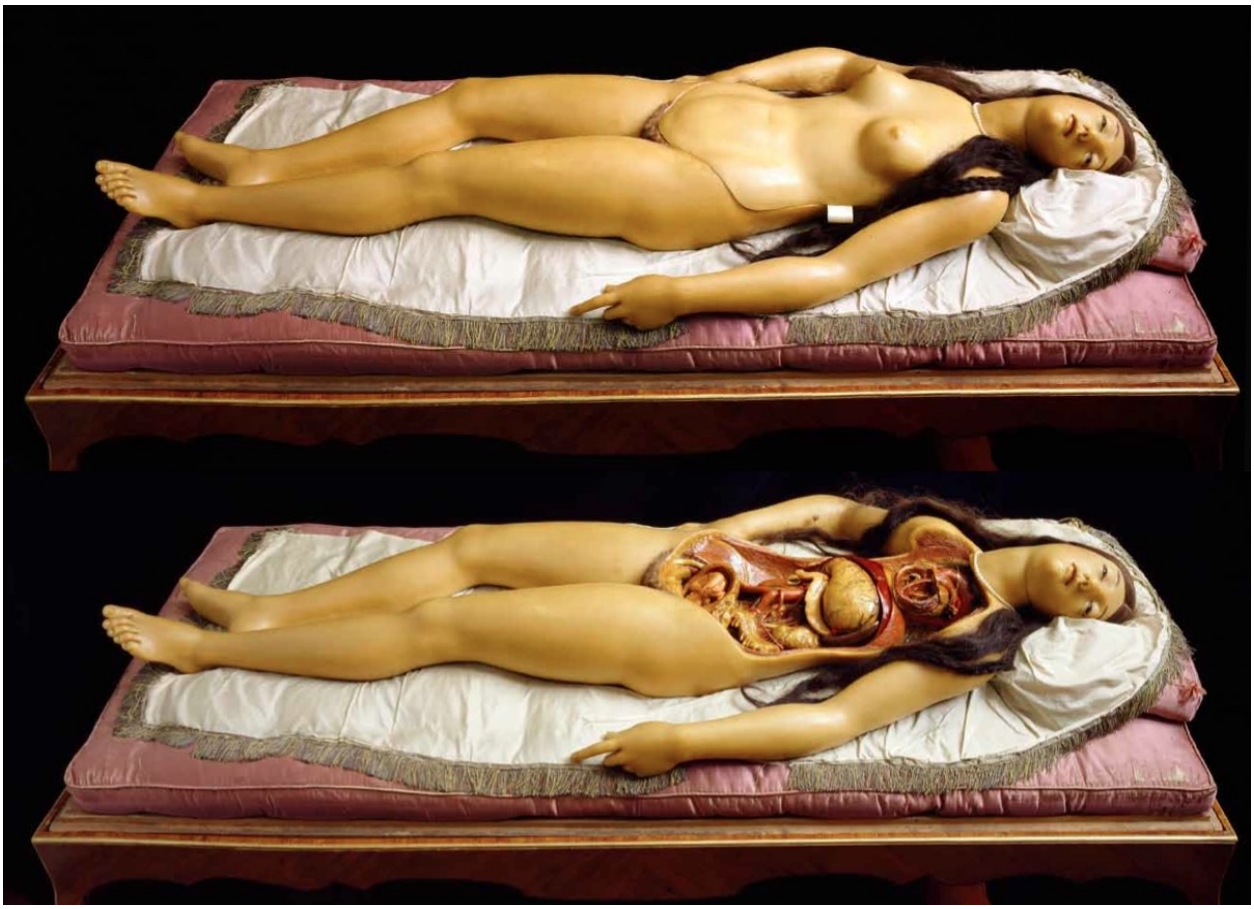

Fig. 1

La Specola workshop, *Anatomical Venus* "*Medici Venus*," wax, life-size, c. 1780-2, La Specola, Florence.

Fig. 2

La Specola Workshop*, Anatomical Venus*, wax, life-size, c. 1780s, La Specola, Florence.

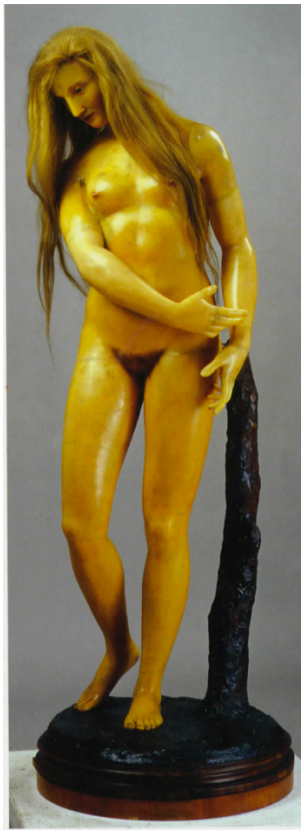

Fig. 3

Ercole Lelli, Anatomical Models (detail of female “Eve” figure), colored wax, c. 1745-1766, Museo di Palazzo Poggi, Bologna.

Fig. 4

Gaetano Giulio Zummo, *The Plague* (detail), colored wax, before 1701, La Specola, Florence.

Fig. 5

Giovanni Bernardino Azzolino, *Blessed Soul* (left) and *Damned Soul* (right), colored wax in gilt box frame, 26 x 22 x 6.5 cm, circa. 17th century, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 6

Right: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Anima Beata,* marble, 41.5 x 29 x 24 cm, 1619, Palazzo di Spagna, Rome.

Left: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Anima Damnata*, marble, 40 x 29 x 25 cm, 1619, Palazzo di Spagna, Rome.

Fig. 7

Left: Giovanni Bernardino Azzolino, *Blessed Soul*, colored wax relief in gilt box frame, circa. 17th century, 22.5 x 22.1 x 6 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Right: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Anima Beata*, marble, 1619, life-size, Palazzo di Spagna, Rome.

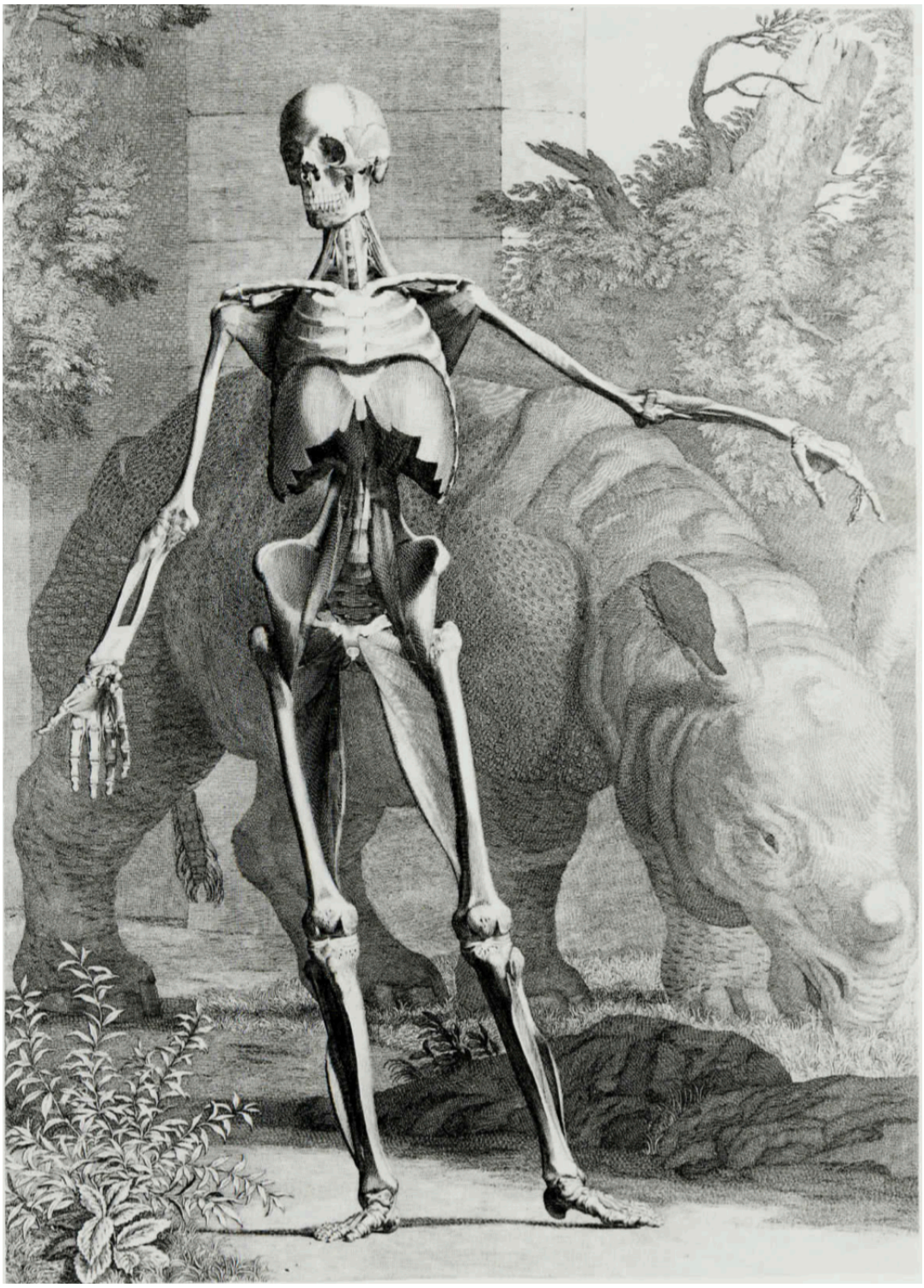

Fig. 8

Charles Grignion after Jan Wandelaar, *Muscle-man seen from the front with rhinoceros*, from Albinus *Tabuale sceleti et musculorum corporis humani*, engraving, 1747.

Fig. 9

Vesalius dissecting the body of a female criminal, Frontispiece from Andreas Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica*, engraving, 1543.

Fig. 10

Frontispiece from 1542 Dutch edition of Vesalius' *Epitome,* engraving, 1543.

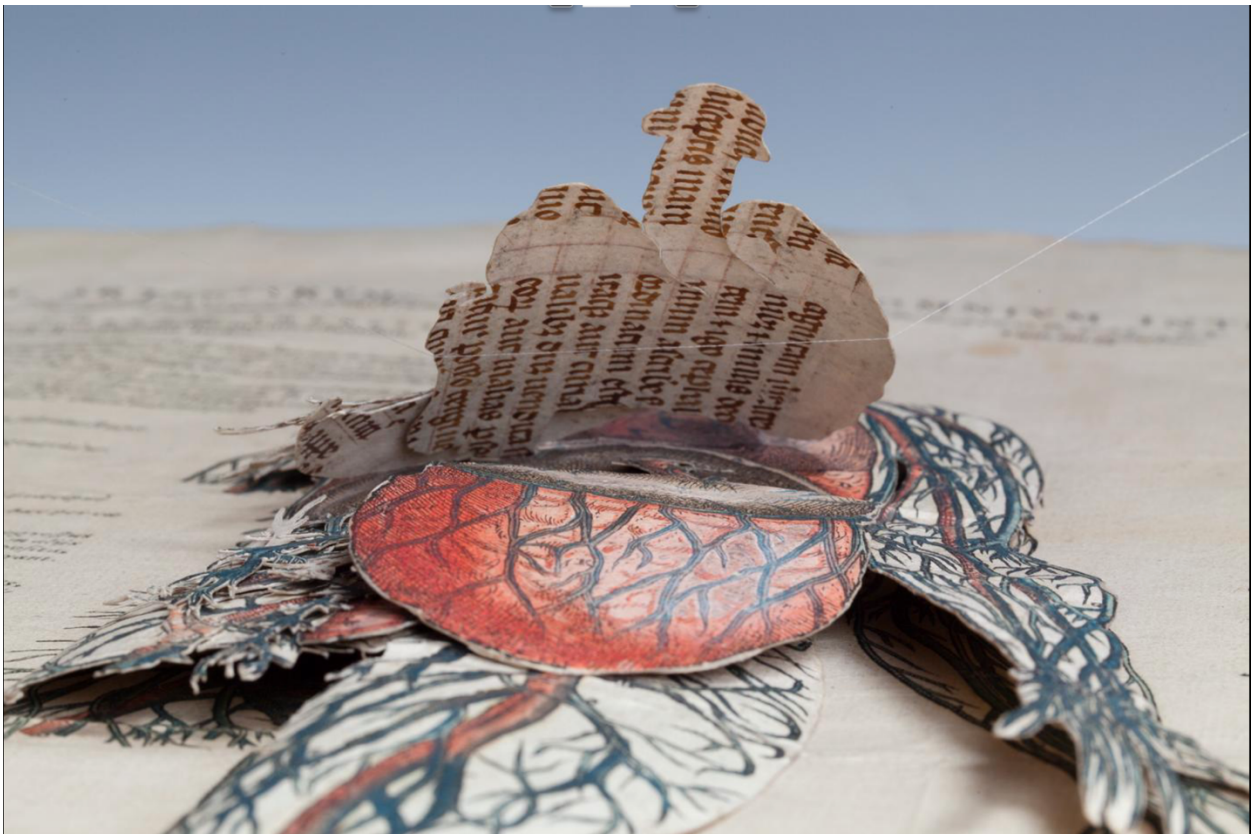

Fig. 11

Fugitive sheet from Andreas Vesalius' *Epitome*, 1543, colored engraving, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge.

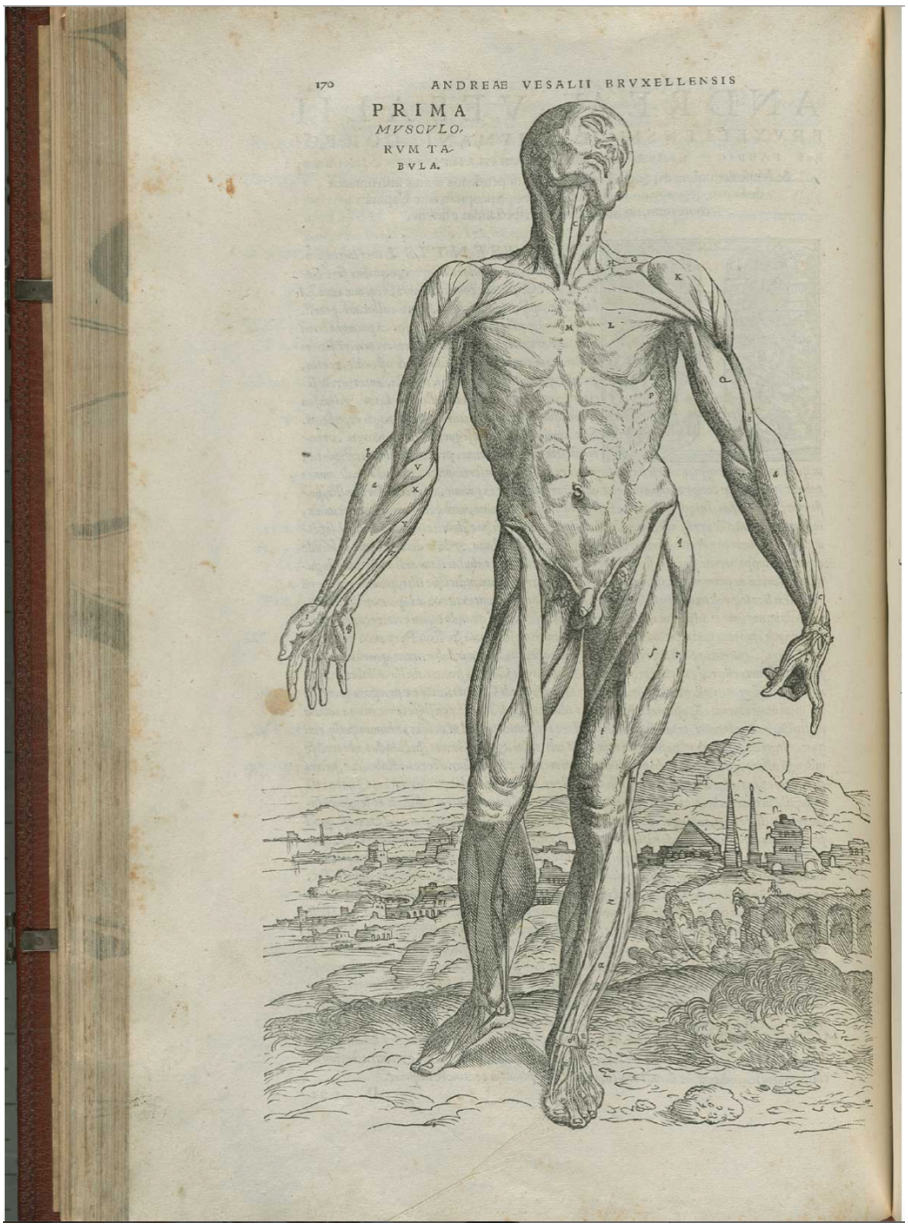

Fig. 12

"Muscle Man" from Andreas Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica*, engraving, 1543.

Fig. 13

François Jollat, Dissection of a Man's lower abdomen and genitals, Charles Estienne's *De dissection partium corporis humani*, woodcut, c. 1546.

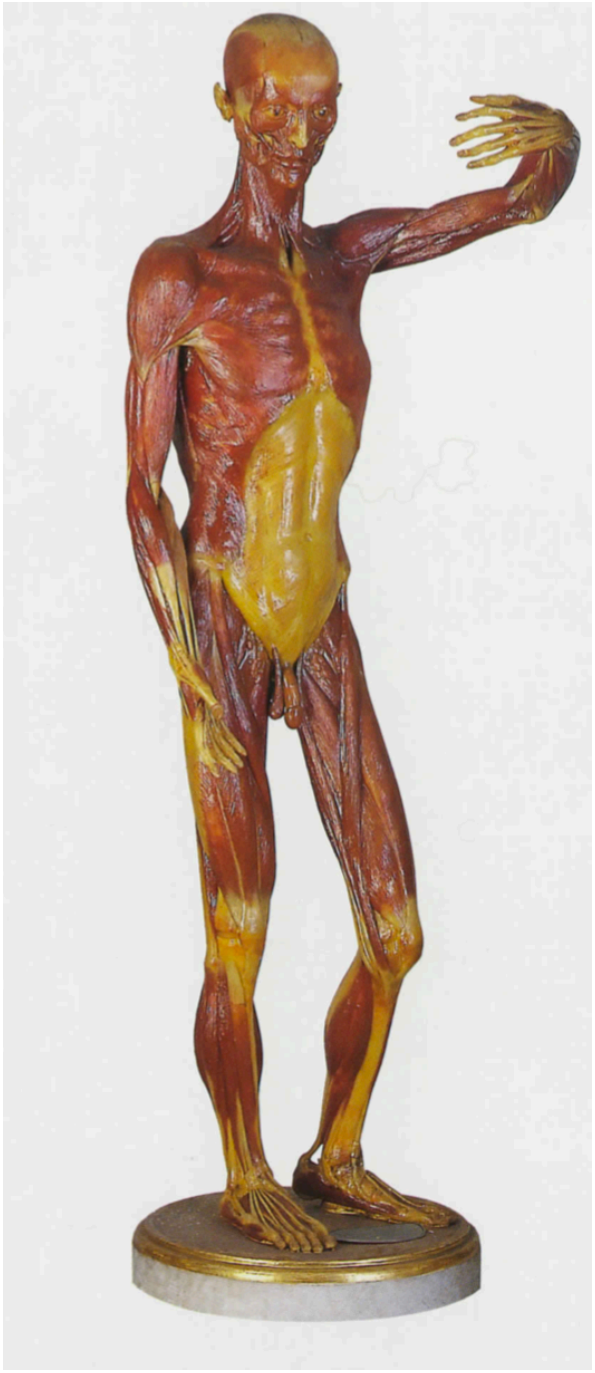

Fig. 14

Male écorché figure, wax, life-size, c. 1780, La Specola, Florence.

Fig. 15

Workshop at La Specola, "*Lo scorticato" (the flayed man),* wax, life-size, 18th c., La Specola, Florence.

Fig. 16

Top: *The Dying Gaul*, marble, Roman copy of bronze original (3rd c. BC), 93 cm, Capitoline Museum, Rome.

Fig. 17

Dying Niobid, Pentellic marble, 2-3rd c. copy of Greek original, Galleria degli Uffizi, 185 cm, Florence.

Fig. 18

Female figure from Charles Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain,* engraving, 1546.

Fig. 19

Jacopo Caraglio after drawings by Perino del Vaga and Rosso Fiorentino, *Venus and Cupid* from *Loves of the Gods* series, engraving, c. 1515-1565, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

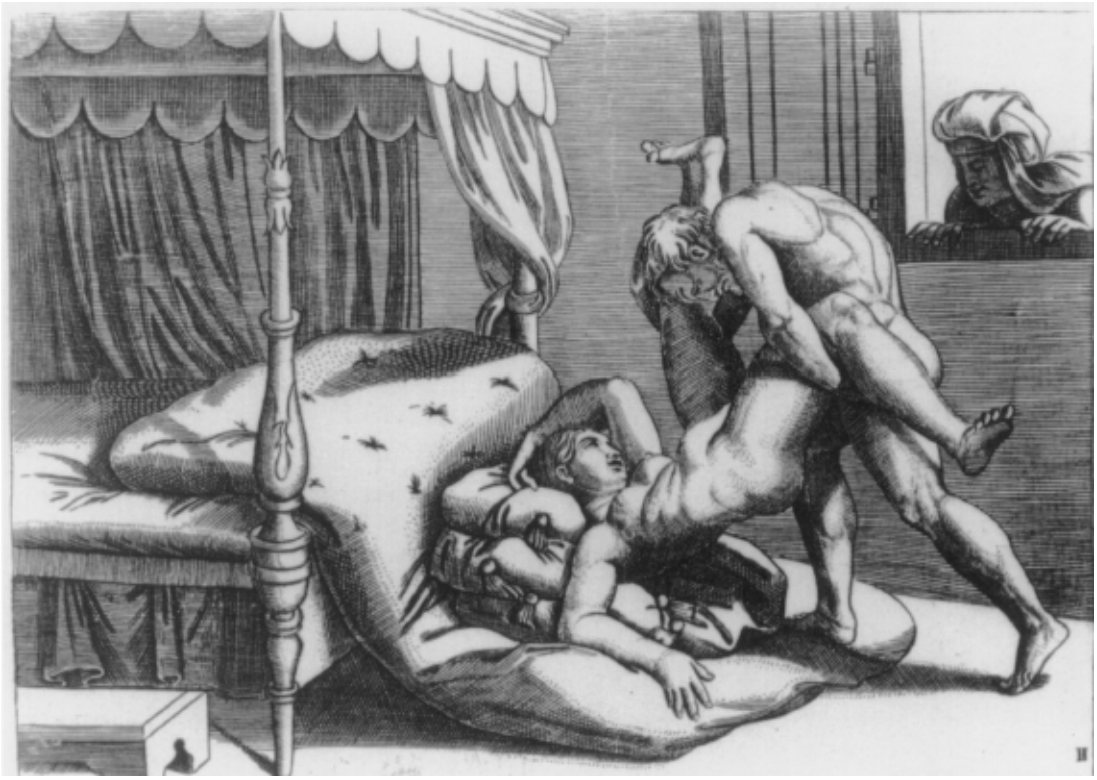

Fig. 20

Unknown Engraver after Marcantonio Raimondi and Giulio Romano, I *Modi no. 11,* c. 1530, Albertina, Vienna.

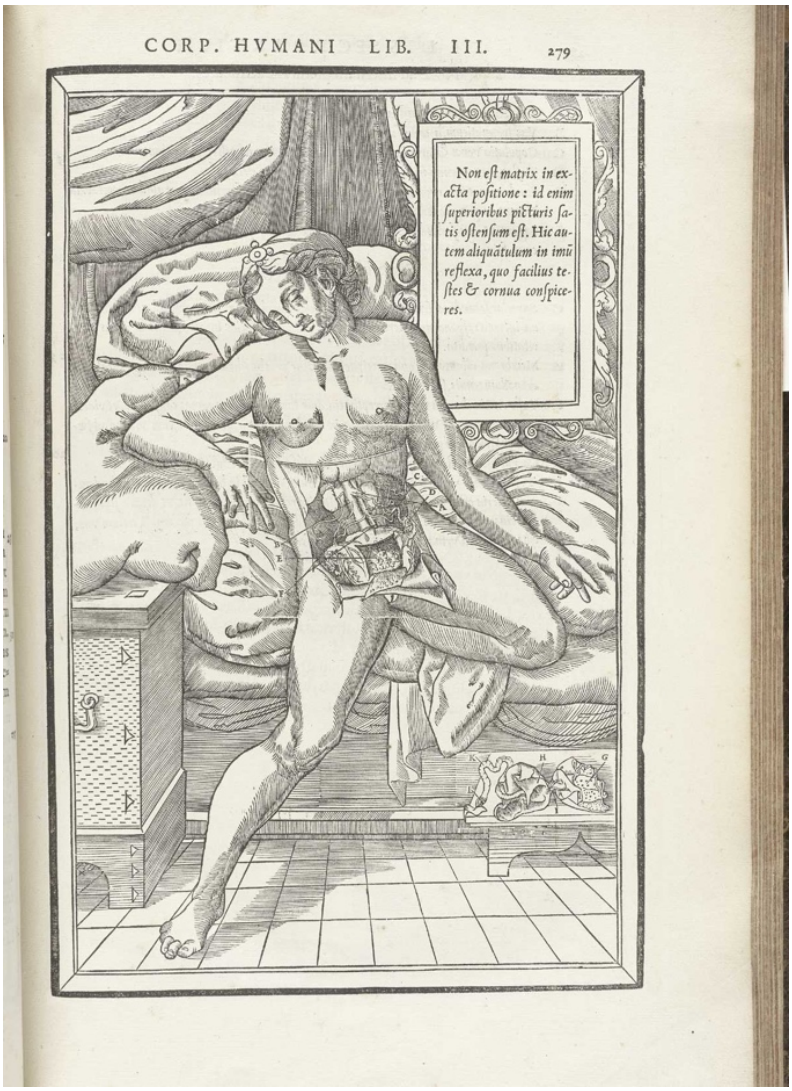

Fig. 21

Female figure from Charles Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain*, engraving, 1546.

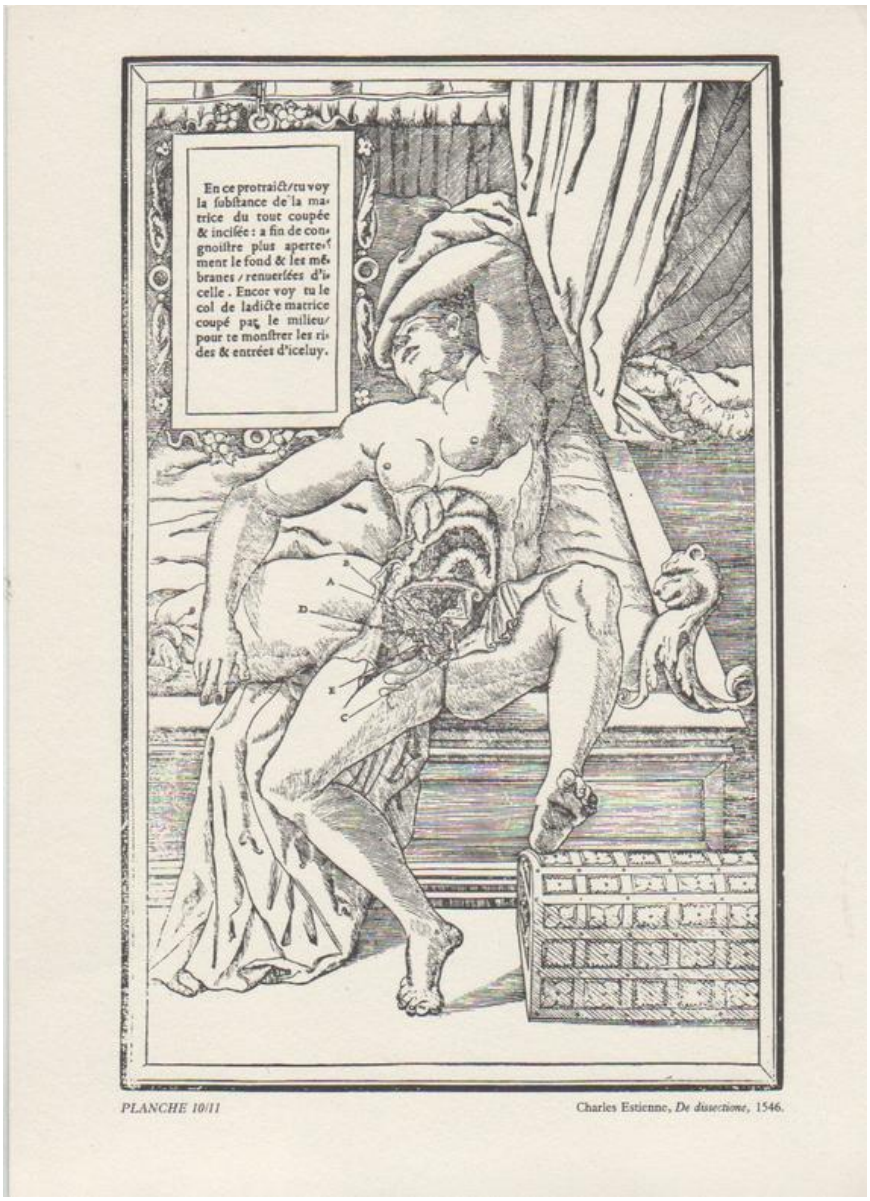

Fig. 22

Female figure from Charles Estienne's *La Dissection des parties du corps humain,* engraving, 1546.

Fig. 23

Copy after Jacopo Caraglio (after drawings by Perino del Vaga and Rosso Fiorentino), *Mercury and Herse* from the *Loves of the Gods* series, print, 1520-1539, British Museum, London.

Fig. 24

Venus de' Medici, Parian marble, h 153 cm, c. late 2nd c. BC to early 1st c. BC, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence.

Fig. 25

Nude male (“the Idol”), bronze, 150 cm, 5th c. BC, Museo Archeologico, Florence.

Fig. 26

Sleeping Ariadne, phrygian marble, 162 x 195 cm, Roman copy of 2nd c. BC original, Vatican Museums, Rome.

Fig. 27

Giorgione, *Sleeping Venus*, oil on canvas, 180.5 x 175 cm, 1510, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.

Fig. 28

Titian*, Venus of Urbino*, oil on canvas, 119 x 165 cm, 1532-1534, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence.

Fig. 29

Johann Zoffany, *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, oil on canvas, 123.5 x 155 cm, 1772-8, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, London.