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Birth of a Collection: The Vesalius Trust Collection of Art in the Service of Science

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THE BIRTH OF A COLLECTION

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WHAT IS MEDICAL ILLUSTRATION?

- Illuminates the science of life
- Transfers medical and scientific knowledge through nonverbal communication
- Uses visual media to advance scientific understanding, communication, education, and research
“Medical illustrators draw what can’t be seen, watch what’s never been done, and tell thousands about it without saying a word.”

-Bill Gramley, Neil Pointer, Bill Winn (1978)
THE LIFE CYCLE OF MEDICAL ART

Beginning → what → end → to → ?
Painted on hot press illustration board

Graphic white highlights

Airbrushed acrylic with brushwork and spatter paint

Airbrushed acrylic with colored pencil

Handcut frisket used for masking airbrush

Sketch transferred with self-made pastel transfer tissue
WHY NOW?

- A large number of illustrators (baby boomers!) are retiring, downsizing, and closing their studios.
- Some are in ill health or have already passed away; their heirs cannot keep the art, or do not know its value or what to do with it.
- In the digital age, university or corporate illustration departments do not have the space or interest in preserving original material.
- Traditional medical illustration techniques are no longer being taught.
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SAVE THIS WORK?

- Uniquely beautiful, irreplaceable artwork
- History of medical illustration media and methods
- Visual history of medical knowledge and techniques
- Visual history of pharmaceutical knowledge and products
WHY ORIGINAL ART?

- Printed/published version may no longer exist
- All media is temporary
- Reproductions often do not reflect richness and subtlety of original work
- Original art reveals process, theory, and practice
- Legacy of individual medical illustrators (including the historically unacknowledged)
Collection of Art in the Service of Science

MISSION

TO ACQUIRE, CONSERVE, AND EXHIBIT, FOR PURPOSES OF STUDY, EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND ENJOYMENT, MATERIAL EVIDENCE OF SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL ILLUSTRATIONS CREATED TO ILLUMINATE DISCOVERIES, KNOWLEDGE, AND PRINCIPLES OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL COMMUNITIES.
GOALS - 2008

- Preservation and digital archiving of traditional medical and scientific illustrations
- Preservation of a body of knowledge in respect to techniques, materials, and methods
- Provide access for education and research
- Provide for public display
CHALLENGE - 2009

- Identify and find traditional art
- House, digitize, and catalog
- Bring in the funding to do all of the above
- Form a partnership with an existing museum or collection, or strike out on our own
The Vesalius Trust accepted the role of fiscal sponsor

Initial survey of artists (30% response rate) identified up to 6,000 individual pieces of original art without provisions for long-term protection and care

Potential partner institutions contacted
Criteria for a Partner Institution

SIMILAR MISSION

- Collecting philosophy
- Commitment to preservation of original material
- Commitment to availability of material
- Interest in our collection
Criteria for a Partner Institution

FACILITY

- Location
- Physical Space
- Archival Conservation
- Maintenance of metadata
- Accessible for research
- Endowment or other permanent funding source
Criteria for a Partner Institution

EXPERTISE/SERVICES

- Grant writing
- Donor outreach
- Support for digitization
- Support for exhibitions
- Support for collaborations
- Flexibility in re copyright transfer
The Lloyd Library and Museum

- Endowed since 1917 by Curtis G. Lloyd (with the aid of his brothers Nelson Ashley and John Uri)
- A research library that maintains a small museum and art gallery
- 30,000 sq ft facility with over 1,500 linear feet of archives
- Online resources linked to outside databases, university and government research sites
- Grant writing expertise and implementation
- Commitment to research and education
The Lloyd Library and Museum

MISSION

THE MISSION OF THE LLOYD LIBRARY AND MUSEUM IS TO COLLECT AND MAINTAIN A LIBRARY OF BOTANICAL, MEDICAL, PHARMACEUTICAL, SCIENTIFIC BOOKS AND PERIODICALS, AND WORKS OF ALLIED SCIENCES THAT SERVE THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS CONSTITUENTS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC, THROUGH LIBRARY SERVICES AND PROGRAMMING THAT BRING SCIENCE, ART, AND HISTORY TO LIFE.
Lloyd’s Beginning and the End of the Journey

• 2007 – grand re-opening bash after a major renovation
• A chance encounter and serendipity
• A willingness to make it happen and persistence
• Openness
What’s “in it” for the Lloyd?

- Greater exposure
- The addition of a significant collection that enhanced the holdings we already had
- Partnership on a national scale
- The opportunity to steward a significant collection and ensure its longevity
- The opportunity to continue on with the Lloyd’s own legacy
Compromises and the Final Deal

- Digitization? Not wholesale
- Copyright - Lloyd was committed to protecting it
- Vesalius would act as the intermediary between the artists and the library
- Lloyd committed (not just for this reason) to provide appropriate housing and new compact shelving which would enable storage of all kinds of art forms
- Commitment to long-term storage and appropriate care for forever
"The addition of the Trust Collection to the art collections of the Lloyd Library and Museum enhances and explains better than any words could ever do how much more we know about ourselves and the world we live in.

The Lloyd’s collections are filled with illustrations of botany, chemistry, pharmacy, and medicine, with a particular focus on how all those subjects intersect and inform each other.

The Trust Collection complements and expands those focus areas immensely."
The Vesalius Trust
Collection of Art Serving Medicine & Science

Working TOGETHER to Bring Science, Art and History to Life