

In the shadow of Vesalius

The concept behind the book “In the shadow of Vesalius” is probably best described by the opening address of the author; Professor Bob Van Hee , here are a few excerpts from his transcript;

“The quincentenary of Vesalius’s birthday in 2014 has been characterized by a flow of colloquia and publications on the Flemish anatomist, often presenting new insights concerning his life and death, as well as concerning his works and iconography.

This revival of interest has subsisted and induced new symposia and initiatives, resulting in new congress proceedings and publications, reflecting the search of an increasing number of scholars into the anatomical, social and artistic influences of Vesalius and his Fabrica on 16th century and later scientific evolution.”

“This book focusses on some of these anatomists, artists, publishers and other personalities, who in different ways remained ‘in the shadow’ of Vesalius. This is most pertinent in the case of Vesalius’s collaborator and artist Jan Steven van Calcar, whom Vesalius only mentioned as ‘his friend’, but was probably responsible for at least an important number of the plates and figures in the famous Fabrica and Epitome.. This gradually gains momentum enhanced by a recently found drawing (figure 1) which is commented on in the book by Caiati and co-workers, and is believed to be a preliminary sketch by Jan Steven van Calcar of one of the most iconic drawings in the Fabrica, namely the so-called ‘Philosopher’ ”.



Fig.1 a. Sketch by Jan Steven van Calcar of one of the most iconic drawings in the Fabrica, namely the 'Philosopher'. Recently found by Caiati and co-workers.

It is in this light that I would like to take a few people out of the shadows and bring them into the spotlight, and by this, explaining how this book came about.



Fig. 2. table of contents “In the shadow of Vesalius”

I first was introduced to Bob Van Hee in 2006 by Ann Van de Velde. Professor Robrecht H. Van Hee who is a surgeon and medical historian, with over 160 publications to his name, has always had a special interest in Andreas Vesalius.

In 2005 he promoted Vesalius for a television contest programme about “Who’s the most famous Belgian in history”.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Grootste_Belg

In 2007 Ann and I were organising the AEIMS conference <https://www.aeims.eu/congress/> “confronting Mortality with Art and Science” This conference brought together a group of artists, scientists and medical illustrators.

Bob van Hee and anatomist Francis Van Glabbeek both gave excellent lectures on Vesalius, Triverius and Philip Verheyen during a nocturnal visit to the Plantin Moretus museum in Antwerp.

It was also at this conference I invited Joanna Ebenstein to give a talk on her then new project "The morbid anatomy library blog" which has grown into the amazing art /science platform it is today.

The conference was such a success that we decided to set up BIOMAB, Biological and Medical Art in Belgium, <https://biomedicalart.blogspot.com/> with a teaching programme ARSIC (art researches science international collaborations) .

Biomab would never have seen the light of day if it wasn't for the energy, and drive and fearless enterprising spirit of haematologist and medical artist; dr. Ann Van de Velde. Over the years we have organised many dissection drawing workshops, exhibitions, conferences, made films and books and have written many articles and given many lectures. Our article in the book "Anatomical Drawing From Cadavers – Limb By Limb Removed -- Brought Us Together" elucidates our collaborations and our intension and achievements.

Anatomist and surgeon Professor Francis Van Glabbeek, founding member and currently President of Biomab, and a passionate collector of antiquarian medical books, has been a driving force in continuing Vesalius's legacy by bringing artists together with scientists, and, in the spirit of Vesalius, teaching anatomy from direct observation. I remember the first meeting with Francis with much fondness. He lovingly showed me a first edition of the Fabrica and spoke with so much passion and knowledge about the work and influence that Vesalius and the Fabrica still have on anatomy today.



Fig. 3. Prof Francis Van Glabbeek and Dr. Ann Van de Velde at the Plantin Moretus Museum

Here a small excerpt from our article in the book; fig 4, fig 55

After many years of observing dissections of the hand and arm Pascale Pollier contributed to a manuscript, submitted for publication, by plastic surgeon Andrew Burd titled 'The history and evolution of functional and aesthetic upper limb replacement'. Her part in it was on 'The hand, where art and science meet'. This is her view on the art and the science of drawing: *"It is said that thought is the purest form of creation. The exact science of how a thought spontaneously occurs in the mind is still one of life's great mysteries."* The creative process involved in the physical manifestation of thought that is imbued with emotion, is a complex undertaking. There is an added complexity when the communication is conducted in a non-verbal manner. The artist inevitably utilizes the perfect biological tool to create his work his hand. The hand is perfectly equipped mechanically and biologically, with its somatosensory feedback system, to transform and translate a fleeting and intangible abstraction, such as thought, into a work of art. The electro-chemical impulses of firing neurons in the



Fig. 7. Participants of BIOMAB Dissection Drawing Days in Antwerp.

brain work their way through the nervous system and then run through the flesh, muscle, skin and sensory nerve endings to the hand. The hand now can materialize the thought and the work of art is realized. When the act of creation is conceived with sincerity, integrity and pure intentions, the

Fig. 4. Van de Velde A., Pollier P., Kashtiara A. & Quisenberts T. Anatomical drawing from cadavers – Limb by limb removed brought us together.

concepts are on their way to becoming works of the heart, works of dedication (Fig. 6).

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) wrote “Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious idea of beauty or God; it is not, as the aesthetical physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy; it is not the expression of man’s emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and, above all, it is not pleasure; but it is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and is indispensable for life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity.”¹⁶.

It is a delight to see how many people are attracted to the art of anatomy and the human body. This feeling of attraction to this science and art of anatomy is what drives us, what drove Vesalius and what is clearly able to bring together a crowd (Fig. 7). It is a desire to learn more about it all, to truly grasp it and to see something, which is all so inherent to us, yet is almost never seen because it is hidden from the eye, in plain sight, by our skin. This attraction is why the barber surgeons at the medieval fairs, the anatomical lessons in the renaissance as practiced by Vesalius and depicted by Rembrandt, the surgeons in modern times and organisations like BIOMAB, ARSic and CHIMES are able to bring together so many people to observe the synergy of art and science¹⁷.

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Fig. 5. Van de Velde A., Pollier P., Kashtiara A. & Quisenarts T. Anatomical drawing from cadavers – Limb by limb removed brought us together.

One of the most important conferences that BIOMAB initiated and co-organised was without doubt “Vesalius Continuum” which took place in 2014, on the island of Zakynthos <https://www.vesalius-continuum.com/>. This joint AEIMS conference was organised in collaboration with Dr Mark Gardiner and the ‘then’ Consul at the Belgian Embassy in Greece - Theo Dirix , and brought together many prominent scholars and Vesalius experts who presented papers on the life, work and death of Vesalius, and the influence of the Fabrica on modern anatomy , and the influence of the Fabrica on medical art and

contemporary art. https://www.vesalius-continuum.com/uploads/3/9/4/0/3940429/final_programme.pdf

Without the organizing skills and drive and energy of Dr. Mark Gardiner and the countless meetings and emails with Theo Dirix, the conference Vesalius Continuum would not have been the huge world class event it became.



Fig. 6. Prof. Mark Gardiner, Consul Theo Dirix, and Dr. Ann van de Velde, during a conference organising team meeting in Athens Greece

In 2013 Dr. Mark Gardener and I first introduced ourselves to Professor Vivian Nutton who was giving a lecture at Warwick University about the incredible find of a hand written (by Vesalius himself !) edited version of the Fabrica's second edition, which would have become the third edition, ...had Vesalius not met his untimely death. Mark and I were blown away by this wonderfully exciting lecture and we asked Professor Nutton to be a speaker at our conference in 2014, which he accepted gladly. He was invited again in 2017 for the triennial and has now especially for this publication written an exciting account of Vesalius in England, 1544 to 1547..



Fig. 7. Professor Vivian Nutton and Professor Omer Steeno looking at a first edition of the Fabrica



Fig. 8. Mark Gardener and myself (Pascale Pollier) meeting with Ruth Richardson in London 2013; Ruth Richardson is Wellcome Research Fellow in the History of Medicine at University College, London. Ruth was one of our Vesalius continuum speakers.

Vesalius's 500th anniversary celebrations did not end with the organisation of the conference, but became a collection of several events.

My colleague and dear friend forensic medical artist Richard Neave and I sculpted a bronze monument to commemorate Vesalius's death on the Island of Zakynthos on 15th Oct 1564. This monument might never have been erected if it were not for the wonderful idea of Antwerp GP and president of Vesaliana Dr Marc de Roeck together with William Nagels, who devised a way of self-funding this large undertaking. We had countless meetings discussing the monument and agreed with Dr. de Roeck that by making a bronze facial reconstruction portrait (made by Richard Neave and myself) and selling 12 copies we would gather enough money together to make the monument, pay to have it cast in Bronze and drive the sculpture from Belgium to Zakynthos ready to have its grand inauguration at the start of the conference. This was all achieved successfully and the sculpture now stands on the Island of Zakynthos's Vesalius square, facing the Ionian sea.



Fig. 9. Sculpting the monument in Richard Neave's studio .



Fig.10. Bronze Vesalius sculpture on Zakynthos

In 2009 I had completed a facial reconstruction course at the academy of fine arts in Maastricht , the Netherlands, and as Vesalius had always been my big inspiration and the reason why I chose to become a medical artist, it was my dream to make a facial reconstruction of Vesalius. The dream soon turned into a passion, and the passion into an obsession to go in search of the grave of Vesalius and find his skull.

Ann suggested to Marc we sailed to Zakynthos with the MYC-Medical Yachting Club to start the quest for the grave. I will never forget the day that Marc gave me the ships wheel as we got closer to the island and I sailed into the harbour of Zakynthos! An amazing feeling!



Fig.11. Dr. Marc De Roeck and I sailing to Zakynthos

After our first visit to “ what we thought then was “ the grave site “ at Laganas, I wrote a letter to the Belgian embassy in Greece, asking for help with our quest, a year later when Theo Dirix took office as Consul he wrote back to me, my letter had ignited a flame in the heart of taphophile Theo Dirix, and soon the quest became an official scientific research collaborative project between the Belgian School of Athens (Jan Driessen, Apostolis Sarris, Sylviane Déderix) and the Greek authorities, together with the invaluable research of Omer Steeno, Maurits Biesbrouk and Theodoor Godeeris, who all share their latest findings in this book. With this wonderful collaborative effort, even though we have not yet found the actual grave, we can truly claim that we have made some history. Theo Dirix wrote 2 books on the quest of the grave and now will reveal some new insights with his article “In the shadow of Vesalius”.

I would like to shine a light on my husband poet /sculptor Bryan Green , who wrote a poem on Vesalius that is published in Theo’s book; [“ In Search of Andreas Vesalius: The Quest for the Lost Grave”](#) and gave a performance at the Fabrica Vitae exhibition opening.. Bryan has constantly worked behind the scenes editing many letters, articles books, and leaflets, I couldn’t have done it all without his help and advice. He also made the long lorry journey to Zakynthos from Belgium with me and our friend James Gatehouse to deliver the monument.

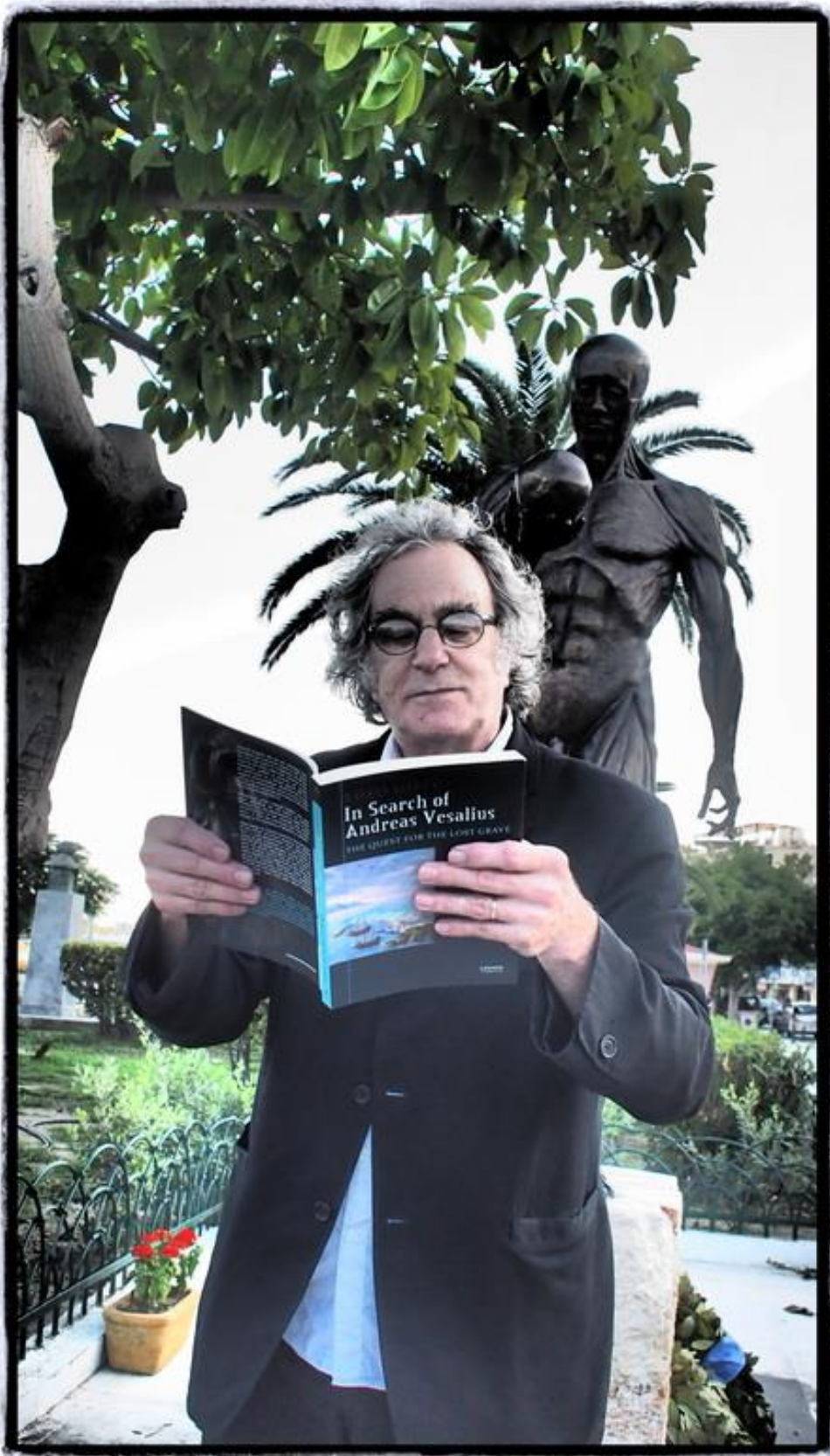


Fig.12. Bryan Green reading his poem in the book of Theo Dirix “ In Search of Andreas Vesalius”

Vesalius Continuum also marked the start of our touring exhibition “ Fabrica Vitae” curated by Eleanor crook, my sister Chantal Pollier and myself. The exhibition toured all over Europe and the US with the help and support of Theo Dirix and Belgian Embassies world wide <http://www.fabrica-vitae.com/>

The conference and accompanying events could not have happened without financial funds and I hereby would like to thank all our sponsors: Robert Jordan; St Georges University of Grenada, Ruth Richardson and Brian Hurwitz and Mark Gardiner for getting funding from the Wellcome trust, Marie Dauenheimer and the Vesalius Trust, BIOMAB, Ann van the Velde and The University of Antwerp, The AEIMS and MAA, William Nagels, warmly thank the local authorities and the mayor of Zakynthos, ARSIC, Theo Dirix, and Stephen Joffe, and a special thank you also Stephen for writing a beautiful foreword for our book In the Shadow of Vesalius.

You can imagine after such an exciting and wonderful adventure, which took quite a few years to organise, and a quite a few years to reminisce over, we decided we wanted to keep the momentum going and thus the Vesalius triennial was born.

In 2017 BIOMAB, in collaboration with Vesaliana, organised the first triennial in Zakynthos ‘Uniting Medicine with Poetry, History and Culture’

It seems like another world in which we made our plans for the 2nd edition of the Vesalius Triennial Congress, 4 months before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. From the vain belief that COVID-19 would not hit most countries, to hopes that everything would have blown over by 13th November 2020 (the day when the next Vesalius Triennial Congress would take place in Antwerp) to realizing that we were going to have to take action, the scientific committee has transformed from one in which everyone knew their time-tried and perfected role, to one requiring invention in uncharted territory. Cancelling the 2nd Vesalius Triennial was not a welcome prospect , since facilitating human communication is the corner stone of a scientific community. So we set sail for the vast virtual- reality realm. To discover just how far we could delve into virtual communication with a dedicated but small organising committee, was an eventful, insightful voyage. Sadly after long and careful consideration and several online meetings we finally decided to postpone all international congress keynote lectures and educational sessions until 2023

However we would like to invite all the friends of Vesalius for a virtual book launch on Nov 13th we will soon post the event details on how to register for this event on social media, and on [Vesalius continuum](#) website

The book In the shadow of Vesalius can be ordered here <http://garant.be/shadow-of-vesalius/>

Finally I would like to thank everyone who has been part of this adventure, special thank you to Professor Dr. Efrain Miranda (Clinical Anatomy) for his continuous support, EBSA, Prof. Stefanos Geroulos, Vasia Hatzi (MEDinART), Pavlos Plessas, Nicos Varvianis, Maria Sidirokastriti-Kontoni & Fr. Panagiotis Kapodistriasis, the many wonderful speakers, the local organisers, Eleni Andrianaki; ibis el greco s.a., the wonderful delegates, the artists of the Fabrica Vitae exhibition, the museum and universities where we took our exhibition, a special thank you to Juris Salaks and Ieva Lebiete for hosting our exhibition at the Stradins museum and for all the help and support, Apostolis Sarris, Nikos Papadopoulos, Sylviane Déderix, Jan Driessen, Theo Dirix, Chr. Merkouri. ‘ and to the all the friends of Vesalius, who like to keep his spirit alive.

Pascale Pollier

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