Room 7

Morandi and Manzolini's Anatomical Waxworks

- Sala dei concerti e delle fatiche di Ercole -
- Camerino dei putti vendemmiatori -
During the 18th century, Bologna played a leading role in the reproduction of human figures and individual parts of the body. After Ercole Lelli, the leading figures in this art were Anna Morandi (1714-74) and her husband Giovanni Manzolini (1700-55). Starting in 1776, the couple made an important contribution to the Anatomy Room of the Palazzo Poggi. Anna Morandi learned wax modelling from her husband, who had been Lelli’s assistant and collaborated with the surgeon Pier Paolo Molinelli. Manzolini also made the wax obstetric models for Giovanni Antonio Galli. The production of Morandi and Manzolini illustrates the enormous scientific progress that had been achieved in wax modelling and anatomical portrayal. Unlike Lelli’s production, which was limited to osteology and myology, the couple turned to the study and reproduction of sensory organs and the urogenital and cardiovascular systems. The Italian and international scientific communities, as well as institutions such as the Royal Society of London, showed great attention and appreciation for Morandi’s works. Galvani wrote, “That extraordinary lady gave our men and foreigners an example of how to mould, through a single art, even the most insubstantial parts of the human body . . . the finest and most diaphanous, the ones that would almost elude sight . . .”. The tablets created for the anatomists at the institute provide an excellent example of Morandi’s ability to merge effective and elegant renderings with the most up-to-date results of physiological and anatomical research. Almost all of these items are set on cloths – usually dark – that were stiffened with wax and were designed to highlight the models and set off details. In her unpublished, handwritten Catalogo dei preparati anatomici (“Catalogue of anatomical models”; Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, ms. 2193) Morandi prepared a detailed description of the part represented by each of her models and its function, often including her own scientific commentary.
Anna Morandi's wax-modelling work revolved around studying and depicting the sensory organs.

Anna Morandi's panel illustrating the eyeball and a representation of the extrinsic muscles: "of these six muscles, four are straight and two are oblique. Among the four, the first is called the levator or supere; the second depressor or unde; the third adductor or adductor; the fourth adductor or adductor; both of the oblique muscles are called adductor, but the superior one is also called treater" (A. Morandi).

A. "Although the sense of touch generally involves the entire human body... it is most specifically situated in the hand... As a result, we see that when any object is presented to us to examine its tangible qualities, nature immediately puts forth the hand as the suitable and sincere member that, more than any other, can form an opinion about it." (A. Morandi).

The jaw and tongue muscles by Anna Morandi.

The muscles of the face and nasal cavity by Anna Morandi and Giovanni Manzolini.

Demonstration of the "ear completely detached from the head to provide the names of its external parts, in addition to the illustration of the glands and muscles" (A. Morandi).

Anna Morandi, "Foot cut from the leg". The arteries, veins and muscles are shown (MPP photo).

Anna Morandi and Giovanni Manzolini, "Study of a forearm". Below, detail of a hand (MPP photo).
Anna Morandi, "Uterus" (MPP photo).

Anna Morandi and Giovanni Manzolini, "Pair of foetuses in the amniotic sac" (MPP photo).

Giovanni Manzolini, "Foetus at term with the placenta" (MPP photo).

Anna Morandi and Giovanni Manzolini, "Cleft thorax; heart with the arch of the aorta; posterior view of the heart-lung block; anterior view of the heart-lung block". The work of the husband-and-wife team was aimed mainly towards supporting the research of the professors who held the chairs of Obstetrics and Anatomy at the Università di Bologna and the Istituto delle Scienze. Consequently, the two wax modellers did not limit their production of anatomical models to osteology and myology, but also reproduced sensory organs, the cardiovascular and respiratory systems, and the urogenital system (MPP photo).
This statue of a recumbent woman, nicknamed “Venerina”, was made by the Florentine wax modeller Clemente Susini (1754-1814) around 1782. The model portrays the body of a pregnant young woman and the internal organs are removable. The bust can be disassembled layer by layer to show the uterus with the embryo in it (MPP photo).

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Camerino dei putti vendemmianti

The long small room is decorated with a frieze portraying scenes of Harvesting putti, delimited by caryatids.

Given the parallels between these works and the style of Niccolò dell’Abate, it has been theorized that he did the preparatory drawings and that the murals were painted by his assistants after the artist left for France, commissioned by King Henry II (1552).

The restoration work revealed that the symbols of the Passion of Christ (the cross, ladder, nails and tongs) visible amidst the vine leaves are later additions.