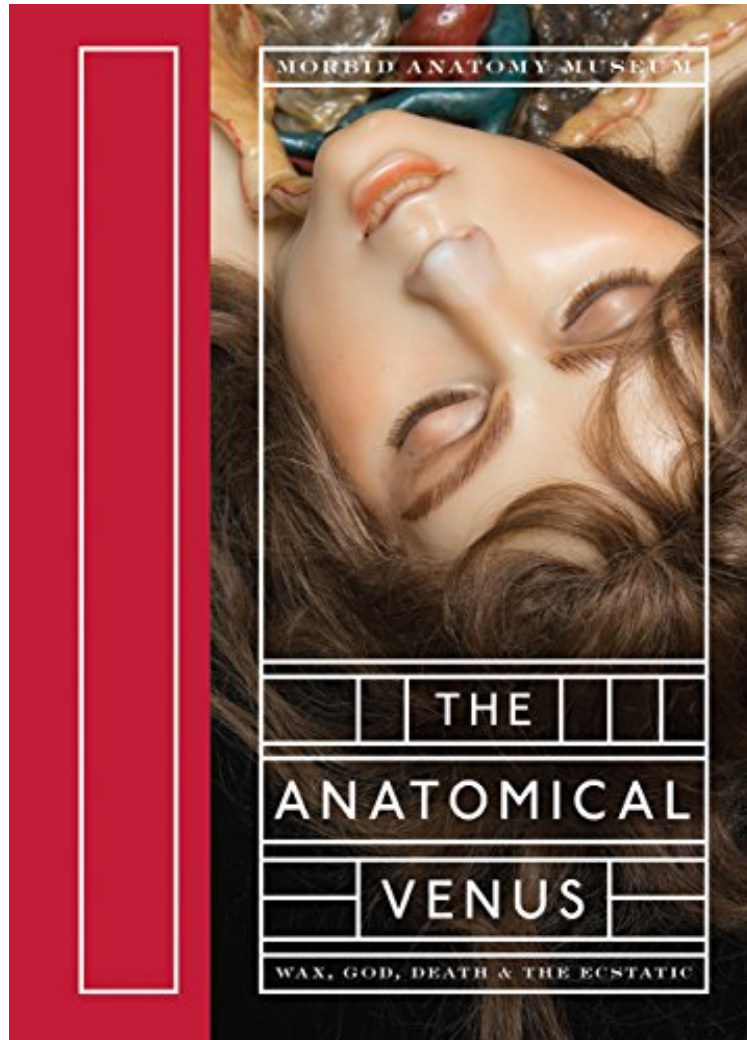


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The Anatomical Venus: Wax, God, Death the Ecstatic

Joanna Ebenstein

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Of all the artifacts from the history of medicine, the Anatomical Venuswith its heady mixture of beauty, eroticism and

death is the most seductive. These life-sized dissectible wax women reclining on moth-eaten velvet cushions with glass eyes, strings of pearls, and golden tiaras crowning their real human hair were created in eighteenth-century Florence as the centerpiece of the first truly public science museum. Conceived as a means to teach human anatomy, the Venus also tacitly communicated the relationship between the human body and a divinely created cosmos; between art and science, nature and mankind. Today, she both intrigues and confounds, troubling our neat categorical divides between life and death, body and soul, effigy and pedagogy, entertainment and education, kitsch and art. The first book of its kind, *The Anatomical Venus*, by Morbid Anatomy Museum cofounder Joanna Ebenstein, features over 250 images many never before published gathered by its author from around the world. Its extensively researched text explores the Anatomical Venus within her historical and cultural context in order to reveal the shifting attitudes toward death and the body that today render such spectacles strange. It reflects on connections between death and wax, the tradition of life-sized simulacra and preserved beautiful women, the phenomenon of women in glass boxes in fairground displays, and ideas of the ecstatic, the sublime and the uncanny. Joanna Ebenstein is a multidisciplinary artist, curator, writer, lecturer and graphic designer. She originated the Morbid Anatomy blog and website, and is cofounder (with Tracy Hurley Martin) and creative director of the Morbid Anatomy Museum in Brooklyn, New York. She is coauthor of *Walter Potters Curious World of Taxidermy*, with Dr. Pat Morris; coeditor of *The Morbid Anatomy Anthology*, with Colin Dickey; and acted as curatorial consultant to Wellcome Collections *Exquisite Bodies* exhibition in 2009. She has also worked with such institutions as the New York Academy of Medicine, the Dittrick Museum and the Vrolik Museum.

The embodiment of the uncanny, the Anatomical Venus thus exists somewhere between the aspirations of Enlightenment reality and the alcoves of human fantasy. (Alicia Inez Guzmán *THE Magazine*) The waxworks are spectacularly photographed, in rich color, from intimate angles. One is rarely so privileged to peer so closely into the interior reaches of the body. The photographs capture the astonishing beauty of these objects along with their equally astonishing capacity to horrify. (Diane Josefowicz *The Victorian Web*) The elaborate and beautiful volume, entitled *'The Anatomical Venus: Wax, God, Death and the Ecstatic'* compiles 250 images of these Venus figures - some extremely rare - collected by the author from around the world. (Gregory Burkart *Blumhouse*) From beginning to end, the beauty of this book and the brilliance of its author will leave you in awe. (Dianca London *Lenny Letter*) This fabulous book by the co-founder of the Morbid Anatomy Museum features over 250 images of seductive yet disquieting waxworks - many never before published: golden tiaras crowning real hair, glass eyes with real eyelashes. A mesmerizing marriage of art and science. (Sebastian Shakespeare *Tatler*) enchanting and repulsive book. (Priscilla Frank *Huffington Post*) The Strangest Book of 2016... seductive and confounding. (*Publisher's Weekly*) Hey Barbie, take a backseat in that pink convertible of yours! Anatomically correct female wax figures were the O.G. of dolls in the 18th century. If you were a kid in the 1700s, you'll remember these awesome dolls from your childhood. Because most of us weren't... Morbid Anatomy museum co-founder Joanna Ebenstein has put together a book of haunting photos of these dissectible dolls. (Courtney Bissonette *Bust Magazine*) Today, it is tempting to see the Anatomical Venus as a tragic victim, a disturbing symbol of men's desire to possess a passive woman. But *The Anatomical Venus* also offers convincing reasons to see the startling *Sleeping Beauty*, lovely even with her entrails showing, as something much more significant. 'Perhaps the draw of the Anatomical Venus comes from an unspoken, intuited resolution of our own divided nature,' Ebenstein writes, 'an unconscious recognition of another avenue abandoned, in which beauty and science, religion and medicine, soul and body might be one.' (Lauren Oyler *Vice Magazine*) In her new book, *The Anatomical Venus: Wax, God, Death, The Ecstatic*, Morbid Anatomy Museum co-founder Joanna Ebenstein digs deep into the fascinating story behind this beautiful oddity, and lays it all bare in tight, engaging prose that spans centuries and takes us from the artisan workshops and cathedrals of 18th century Italy into the dusty dime museums of turn-of-the-century New York and deep into the uncanny valley inhabited by sex dolls and surrealism in search of an answer: Who was the Anatomical Venus? (Kim Kelly *Salon*) Simply put, a relic of another time. (Bria Smith *Milk*) What Ebenstein argues is beguiling to our contemporary brains is that the figures weren't strictly medical, but beautiful as well. (Lauren Oyler *Vice.com*) *The Anatomical Venus* is literally uncanny, by Freud's definition, everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden has come into the open. (Zoe Williams *The Guardian*) Wonderful and epically illustrated book. (Gaby Wood *The Telegraph*) 1 of 25 Amazing New Books for Spring. (Bess Lovejoy *Mental Floss*) In this exquisitely illustrated study, artist Ebenstein, founder of the Morbid Anatomy Museum in Brooklyn, finds her peculiar subject at the intersection of science and art in 18th-century Florence. The original Anatomical Venus is a life-size, dissectible female figure, meticulously sculpted from delicately pigmented wax by artist Clemente Susini for Florence's Natural History Museum. The Venus and her subsequent wax sisters were created with the aim of teaching anatomy to a popular audience. The placid faces of these figures are framed by human hair, and they are often bedecked with necklaces and silk bows. They recline languorously on satin cushions. Various sections of these *Slashed Beauties*, as they came to be called, can be removed to show the organs and the muscles beneath the skin. Created in Europe at a time when public executions and dissections were forms of entertainment and the Paris morgue was considered a major tourist attraction, these wax creations were not perceived as disturbing to viewers. This book

raises intriguing questions about science, religion, philosophy, beauty, sex, desire, and art while tracing the influence of these macabre sculptures through the centuries. Ebenstein touches on fetishism, necrophilia, dancing dolls, sex toys, and even Resusci Anne, the doll created in the 1960 to teach CPR. The subject is explored just as astutely visually, with images that evoke a range of emotions, including horror, awe, and, most of all, deep interest. (Publishers Weekly)