

FONDAZIONE PRADA PRESENTS “CERE ANATOMICHE”, A PROJECT IN COLLABORATION WITH LA SPECOLA DI FIRENZE AND FILM DIRECTOR DAVID CRONENBERG, AT ITS MILAN VENUE FROM 24 MARCH TO 17 JULY 2023

Milan, 3 March 2023 – Fondazione Prada presents “Cere anatomiche: La Specola di Firenze | David Cronenberg” at its Milan venue from 24 March to 17 July 2023 (Press preview on Thursday, 23 March). The project is conceived in collaboration with La Specola, which is part of the Museum of Natural History and Museum System of the University of Florence, and the Canadian film director and screenwriter David Cronenberg.

“Cere anatomiche” (Anatomical waxes) is the latest iteration of a research project with which Fondazione Prada reveals collections of great value from ‘guest museums’, offering unexpected interpretations and visions of cultural heritage by including a historical collection in a contemporary culture context.

This project develops in two complementary parts. An exhibition features a selection of thirteen eighteenth-century ceroplastic works from the renowned collection of the Florentine museum, focusing on the female wax models and the way women’s body has been represented for scientific purposes. A new short movie, shot by David Cronenberg at La Specola, will be shown in dialogue with the exhibition. In this film the director uses digital editing to introduce four works on view into an alternative narrative. His new short movie explores recurrent elements and themes of his creative vision, particularly his fascination for the human body and its potential mutations and contaminations.

“Cere anatomiche”, therefore, takes the form of a double contribution in which the scientific narrative and the artistic one are shaped in two independent set-ups designed by creative agency Random Studio. On the upper floor of the Podium, the main exhibition space of Fondazione Prada, La Specola’s waxes will be displayed with a scientific museum-like approach. In contrast, on the ground floor, the same works will merge with the director’s imagery and become the protagonists of an enigmatic process of metamorphosis.

As stated by David Cronenberg, “The wax figures of La Specola were created primarily as teaching tools that unlocked the mysteries of the human body for those who could never access the relatively rare corpse dissection sessions of universities and teaching hospitals. But in their effort to create certain partially dissected full figures whose body language and facial expressions did not display pain or agony, did not suggest they were undergoing torture or punishment or even surgery, they happened to produce living characters who seemed to be in the throes of ecstasy. It was this startling choice on the part of the sculptors of these figures that captured my imagination: what if it was the dissection itself that induced that ecstasy, that almost religious rapture?”

As underlined by Miuccia Prada, President of Fondazione Prada, “The museum and the artist thus propose complementary visions to the public. The result is, at the same time, an art exhibition, an anatomy lesson, a video about desire, and an operation of educational experimentation with which we

intend to tell the value of a collection and its history, reveal the contribution of creative thinking in knowledge, and promote interest in scientific studies.”

“Cere anatomiche” represents a further attempt for Fondazione Prada to investigate scientific knowledge by situating it in a broader cultural framework, following the multidisciplinary project “Human Brains” dedicated to the foundations and new developments in neuroscience. At the same time, it offers a deepen reflection on corporality after the exhibition “Useless Bodies?” by Elmgreen & Dragset, which explored the role and value of the body in today’s society.

La Specola, currently closed to the public for redevelopment works of its historic venue, was created in 1775 and is one of the oldest science museums in Europe. It contains over 3.5 million animals, the world’s most extensive collection of eighteenth-century anatomical waxes and the unique collection of Sicilian wax modeller Gaetano Giulio Zumbo (1656-1701). 1.400 pieces of the extraordinary collection of anatomical waxworks were made between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to obtain an actual educational-scientific treatise that, without the need to resort to the direct observation of a corpse, would illustrate the anatomy of the human body.

“Cere anatomiche” features four reclining female figures—three from Lymphatic System section and one from Obstetrics—and nine detailed waxes on gestation, also from Obstetrics, produced in the Age of Enlightenment with didactic purposes, and a series of seventy-two exhibition copies of anatomical drawings gathered in nine vitrines. The Milan exhibition includes one of the most relevant works of La Specola’s collection, the so-called Venus, a rare model with detachable parts famous for its beauty. Through his short movie, David Cronenberg will provide an alternative gaze on the four female wax models on display, liberating them from their academic function as medical demonstrations and educational tools. His film will reveal the vivid and unexpected dimension of the ceroplastics, so far known for their static and severe nature, to generate a plurality of new emotional responses, intellectual impressions, and intense feelings.

On the occasion of this project, Fondazione Prada will publish an extensive and illustrated volume designed by Irma Boom. The book includes two introductions by Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli, Presidents of Fondazione Prada, and Marco Benvenuti, President of the Florence University Museum System; a statement by David Cronenberg; two conversations between Claudia Corti and Mario Mainetti, and between Eva Sangiorgi and David Cronenberg; a series of newly commissioned essays by Roberta Ballestriero, Paul Brown, Riccardo Venturi, Sandra Zecchi; and an anthology of previously published texts. These contributions examine the remarkable heritage and the current resonance of La Specola’s collection from historical, academic, and artistic perspectives and investigate David Cronenberg’s vision of the body, to underline the relevance of the scientific research and its connection to the creative practice.

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