



The Quick and the Dead: Artists and Anatomy

Deanna Petherbridge, Ludmilla Jordanova

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The human body has long been central to Western art, and in order to represent the body in all its manifestations many artists have studied anatomy: dissecting the dead to better depict the living. *The Quick and the Dead* focuses on a range of artists, among them Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Albrecht Dürer, William Hogarth, George Stubbs, Théodore Géricault, Kiki Smith, Joel-Peter Witkin, and Cindy Sherman to show the great richness and complexity that can result when art and science intersect. The drawings, prints, photographs, and objects in this book span five centuries and mark numerous cultural shifts, yet their imagery is as powerful today as when it was created.

Bodily representation has shadowed Western art since the High Renaissance, particularly in the form of atlases of anatomical prints, detailed drawings, and wax cadavers used for teaching purposes. Studying anatomy was deemed so essential that it was part of the instruction program in the earliest Italian academies. Now contemporary artists interested in cultural constructions of the body are reinvigorating the subject, with the fragmentation of human form being a prime concern.

Since 1858, Gray's *Anatomy* has served to legitimize notions of "serious" science unchallenged by the frivolity of art. But in recent years a kind of rapprochement between medical history and cultural theory has occurred, and new medical technologies have become a wellspring for artists as well as for doctors. As *The Quick and the Dead* makes clear, the human body—symbolic and intimate, material and sacred—is a vital cultural resource and a site where various social constituencies find relevant meaning.

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