

The Heart

Wellcome Collection's First Major Temporary Exhibition

...Leonardo da Vinci Drawings, Andy Warhol Prints, Live Heart Surgery, Sacred Heart Imagery Never Before Seen In Europe, Egyptian Book of the Dead, Foundling Cards, Venous Anatomy Tables...

- The Heart book announced; writers include Jonathan Miller -

The Heart is the first major temporary exhibition in the new £30m Wellcome Collection. The exhibition explores the medical and cultural significance of the heart featuring exhibits from the **Egyptian Book of the Dead**, **Leonardo da Vinci** and **Andy Warhol**, through to **live heart surgery**.

The Heart: 21 June until 16 September 2007

The Heart brings together contemporary and historic artefacts from across the world to form an exhibition that traces the history of our medical understanding of the heart and examines its extraordinary symbolic and cultural significance.

The exhibition follows the development of man's understanding of the heart: the theories of the Greek surgeon **Galen**; dissection drawings of the heart by **Leonardo da Vinci**; mid-17th century anatomical tables from Padua onto which entire human venous and arterial systems have been varnished; the work of **William Harvey**, the physician who in 1620 published his discoveries of how the heart pumps blood around the body; through to a **modern perfusion machine** that can take over the function of the heart and lungs during heart surgery; and recent films that deal with the ethical and personal dilemmas faced in the age of heart transplantation.

The powerful cultural symbolism of the heart is illustrated through a range of ancient and contemporary artefacts, such as: the ancient **Egyptian Book of the Dead**, which shows the heart being weighed against the 'feather of truth' in order to determine the deceased's suitability for the afterlife; **Aztec sacrificial knives** and an offertory vessel used for offering up the heart of a sacrificial victim to replenish the power of the sun; a rich selection of **Christian Sacred Heart imagery**, including paintings from Mexico **never before seen in Europe** and 19th Century heart playing cards cut in half, so that one half could accompany an orphan given up to a **Foundling Hospital** while the child's mother retained the other half so that she might be able to reclaim her child in later life.

The Heart also looks at the stories of individuals such as **Thomas Hardy** and **David Livingstone**, whose hearts were removed from their bodies after death in order to be buried in a place of particular emotional significance.

Visitors will be able to compare the scale and capacity of the human heart with the hearts of other animals. A 1.75-metre-high sperm whale's heart is displayed for comparison with those of other animals – from an elephant to a hummingbird. The whale's heart beats as slowly as 10 times a minute while the hummingbird's can achieve an extraordinary 1,200 beats a minute when hovering.

Curatorial team and exhibition design

Exhibition Curators: Emily Jo Sargent and James Peto

Curatorial Advisors: Louisa Young and Francis Wells

Exhibition Design: Coombe Architecture and Nick Bell Design

Live Heart Surgery Event, 5 July, 19.00

The first interactive broadcast of a UK hospital operation to a public audience will take place in support of ***The Heart*** exhibition. Heart surgeon Francis Wells and his team at Papworth Hospital will perform a complex reconstruction of a heart valve. The audience at Wellcome Collection will be able to speak to Francis as he operates and handle some of the equipment used in the operation with help from members of the Papworth medical team. The audience will also be able to learn more about the patient and the impact the surgery will have on their life, and why preserving the natural heart valve, rather than replacing it with an artificial valve, allows the heart to function more efficiently.

The Heart book

To coincide with this pioneering exhibition, the Wellcome Trust and Yale University Press are publishing *The Heart*, a richly illustrated 250-page hardback book of nine essays and eight interviews exploring the medical and cultural importance of the heart. Writers include **Jonathan Miller**, **Louisa Young**, **Francis Wells** and **Michael Bracewell**. *The Heart* will be available nationwide from May 2007 and sold at Wellcome Collection.

James Peto, Curator, *The Heart*, said: *“As well as being at the centre of all things anatomical, the heart has always been key to the question of the relationship between body and soul. Today, forty years after the first heart transplant, our understanding of where human character, and indeed life itself, is located has shifted firmly from the heart to the brain. Yet we remain reluctant to let go of the belief that the role of the heart is somehow of much greater significance than that of a bio-mechanical pump. Drawing on material from everyday life and from the history of art as much as the history of science, the exhibition is an opportunity to try to understand the heart’s anatomical and its symbolic power.”*