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Natasha Ruiz-Gómez, *Pathology and Visual Culture: The Scientific Artworks of Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot and the Salpêtrière School*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2024. xv + 207 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $99.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-271-09680-3.

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In *Pathology and Visual Culture: The Scientific Artworks of Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot and the Salpêtrière School*, Natasha Ruiz-Gómez makes a valuable and carefully researched contribution to our understanding of the deeply entangled histories of art and medicine. Focusing on the last few decades of the nineteenth century, she examines a broad range of visual sources--including but not limited to pathological drawings, photographs, casts, and sculptures. The works discussed were created by clinicians at the Paris Salpêtrière hospital, perhaps best known as the site of Jean-Martin Charcot's pioneering and controversial studies of hysteria. Many of these objects, which straddle the boundaries between art and medicine, are reproduced for the first time since the nineteenth century in this abundantly illustrated study.

In bringing to light these largely forgotten works, Ruiz-Gómez explores the Salpêtrière School's crucial role in describing, identifying, and defining diseases of the nervous system. As the author notes, Charcot was a well-known public figure in fin-de-siècle France, his renown second only to Pasteur in the fields of science and medicine. Charcot's so-called anatomo-clinical method, which sought to correlate clinical observations with anatomical investigation of the cadaver, helped to define the nascent field of neurology. It was his study of hysteria that first brought Charcot to the attention of an eager Parisian public fascinated by the perceived links between nervous diseases and the modern condition. This work has been the focus of numerous recent studies, in which scholars such as Georges Didi-Huberman have explored Charcot's conflation of the pathological and the feminine in his "invention" of the hysterical body.[1]

While Ruiz-Gómez acknowledges the enduring significance of Charcot's work in shaping contemporary understanding of mental illness, *Pathology and Visual Culture* moves away from a narrow focus on Charcot in order to consider the Salpêtrière School's intensive and wide-ranging use of visual imagery. The visual was central to clinical practice at the Salpêtrière, Ruiz-Gómez contends, and she argues persuasively for the need to employ the tools of art history to better understand how such medical images and objects both shaped and reflected medical practice. Ruiz-Gómez writes, "The fact that the Salpêtrière School created artworks as they conducted research--and not just to publicize their findings--means that…the way they visualized pathology

had an impact on how they understood it" (p. 8).

Throughout her study, Ruiz-Gómez pays close attention to the materiality of images and objects, including how their use, form, and significance evolve over time. She also gives careful consideration to how the history of a given medium such as wax casting impacts works' meaning and reception. Through her analysis of the collaborative processes involved in the making of works at the Salpêtrière, Ruiz-Gómez also examines how medical images and objects function within a nexus of relationships that connects patients, physicians, and the public in at times uneven and inconsistent ways.

Ruiz-Gómez begins each chapter of *Pathology and Visual Culture* with a consideration of André Brouillet's *Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière* (*A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière*), a painting exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1887 and widely reproduced in print form. By organizing her argument in relation to Brouillet's nearly life-size painting of Charcot lecturing before a crowd of curious observers, she links two parallel notions: realism and objectivity. Both were central to Charcot's practice: he famously declared, "I am absolutely nothing but the photographer [at the Salpêtrière]; I register [*inscris*] what I see" (p. 58). In their influential study *Objectivity*, Lorraine Daston and Peter L. Galison argue that nineteenth-century science was characterized by a reliance on "mechanical objectivity" as a marker of truth.[2] Yet the notion of truth embraced by the Salpêtrière School, Ruiz-Gómez argues, paired references to mechanical objectivity with a surprising emphasis on subjectivity as an essential element of the scientific endeavor.

In the book's first chapter, Ruiz-Gómez looks at the organization, design, and exhibitions of the Musée Charcot, an "anatomo-pathological museum" created by Charcot himself (p. 22). Relying on first-hand accounts and photographs, Ruiz-Gómez reconstructs the interior of the long-vanished museum. She pays particular attention to the ways in which art historical references, evident in the prominent placement of portraits and reproductions of famous artworks, influenced the medical imagery created by Charcot and other clinicians. Ruiz-Gómez links the museum's design both to Charcot's clinical method, including his intensive scrutiny of the body, and to his passion for collecting, which she argues resulted in the creation of an idiosyncratic medical museum reminiscent of early modern cabinets of curiosities. Linking the practice of collecting and the idea of pleasure, Ruiz-Gómez introduces a theme that structures much of the book, namely the coexistence of "artistry and objectivity" in works produced by the Salpêtrière School (p. 55).

In chapter two, Ruiz-Gómez compares three albums of photographs and drawings produced by clinicians at the Salpêtrière. These include a little-known album depicting patients suffering from hysteria and epilepsy published by Charcot's protégés Paul Regnard and Désiré-Magloire Bourneville (1875), a handmade album of unpublished photographs (ca. 1875-76), and the first volume of the well-known publication *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1876). Ruiz-Gómez focuses her attention on the material dimensions of the albums, including penciled annotations, marks of use, and above all evidence of photographic retouching. By examining the connections between these three albums, she highlights the changes made by Charcot and his clinicians, choices that often reflected primarily aesthetic considerations and, in many cases, utterly transformed images purported to be objective, indexical representations of Salpêtrière patients.

The book's third chapter looks at one of the most famous works associated with the Salpêtrière, the so-called *Ataxic Venus* (1880) cast from the body of a recently deceased patient by Albert Londe. This polychrome wax cast captures the likeness of a patient named Berthelot, a 60-year-old woman suffering from locomotor ataxia likely caused by tertiary syphilis. Ruiz-Gómez contextualizes the work within the long history of wax sculpture, comparing it with anatomical models such as those displayed by Pierre Spitzner in his traveling museum, the Anatomical Venuses of eighteenth-century Florence, and early modern relics and effigies. These comparisons reveal the work's paradoxical nature as an object that pairs the allure of the nude female body with notions of degeneration, death, and disease. Returning to the theme of realism, Ruiz-Gómez notes that the *Venus* is poised between a portrait of an individual and a portrait of disease, suggesting that it may also serve as a portrait of "pain itself" (p. 113).

The book's final chapter is devoted to the pathological sculptures of Paul Richer, the head of the Musée Charcot and a professional sculptor whose works were exhibited at the Paris Salon. In the late 1880s, Richer developed a kind of realist sculpture that sought to reproduce the physical manifestations of nervous afflictions ranging from Parkinson's Disease to muscular dystrophy. In these works, Ruiz-Gómez argues, Richer sought to invent a new kind of specimen, what his colleague Henri Meige termed a "scientific artwork" that was at once "indexical and artistic, objective and subjective" (p. 117). Many of the resulting works were reproduced as illustrations in scientific studies, in some cases alongside photographs of the patients they depicted. Ruiz-Gómez explores the resulting tensions inherent in Richer's effort to capture the particularities of individual patients as a marker of the works' truthfulness, while at the same time seeking to render bodies legible in their display of specific symptoms.

The author ends her study of the Salpêtrière School with a coda exploring Richer's move from a clinical setting to a position at the École des Beaux-Arts, where he taught artistic anatomy beginning in 1903. If at the Salpêtrière his scientific works were deeply informed by aesthetic criteria, Ruiz-Gómez argues, at the École des Beaux-Arts, Richer's "objective" understanding of the body would in turn shape his artistic endeavors as well as those of his students.

Throughout her study of the Salpêtrière School, Ruiz-Gómez makes a compelling case for art history's ability to bring to light elements of the history of medicine that would otherwise be overlooked or poorly understood. *Pathology and Visual Culture* builds on the work of scholars such as Mary Hunter, Ludmilla Jordanova, Susan Sidlauskas, and Anthea Callen, each of whom has sought to apply the methods of art historical inquiry to the study of the visual culture of medicine.[3] These authors offer valuable contributions to the visual medical humanities, a field devoted to fostering a historically and critically informed understanding of the role of the visual in medicine. While previous studies have often foregrounded painting and sculpture, however, Ruiz-Gómez's book breaks new ground through its extensive scrutiny of medical imagery, while at the same time highlighting scientific illustration's connections to the realm of fine art.

The author's focus on the visual and material dimensions of the study of pathology is also notable. Closely associated with the rise of the Paris School in the early nineteenth century, the study of pathological anatomy involved "the systematic correlation of clinical observations of the external manifestations of disease with the lesions found in the organs at the time of autopsy."[4]

The growing interest in pathology would give rise, among other things, to a rapid increase in the number of prepared specimens decorating the shelves of European anatomical museums such as the Musée Charcot and to a vast literature documenting pathological case studies. Despite the pivotal importance of pathological anatomy for nineteenth-century medicine, however, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the visual and material parameters of its study.[5] *Pathology and Visual Culture* therefore not only expands the field of art historical inquiry in its focus on unconventional objects of study but also offers new insights to those working in the history of medicine and in museum studies.

The diversity of sources analyzed in *Pathology and Visual Culture*--ranging from contemporary guidebooks to drawings, technical manuals, novels, and oil paintings--is impressive and provides a useful model for art historians working in the fields of visual and material culture. Ruiz-Gómez's analysis moves between bodies living and dead, written and visual texts, and a variety of two-dimensional and three-dimensional media, highlighting points of tension and convergence. Throughout her study, the author pays close attention to process, including acts of making *and* the production of scientific knowledge, and casts both art and medicine as deeply creative endeavors. Ruiz-Gómez also looks closely at the process of translating *between* media, examining how the same image might function as a photograph, a drawing, or even a wax tableau.

Pathology and Visual Culture reflects sustained engagement with relevant historical archives and provides valuable insights into the world of fin-de-siècle medicine. Nonetheless, the book leaves certain questions unanswered. At times, the sheer pleasure of uncovering previously unstudied archives seems to take the upper hand and description takes precedence over analysis of the works' use of visual conventions or their relationship to similar images produced in this era. No doubt finding answers to many of these questions is rendered challenging by absences and omissions within the archives themselves. In some cases, it is unclear whether works such as an unpublished album circulated or were viewed outside the narrow confines of the Salpêtrière. Despite information about how works such as the *Ataxic Venus* were displayed, for example, there is relatively little discussion of how they were received by the broader public. Nor is it clear how the patients depicted in these works understood the images created of them. Were clinical patients shown photographs from the albums, for example, to explain their own diagnoses?

In the introduction, Ruiz-Gómez writes, "I am aware of the sensitive nature and ethical dangers of illustrating--or re-illustrating, since many were published at the time--the images of patients who did not give consent in ways that would be acceptable today" (p. 14). Throughout her study, the author seeks out opportunities to restore a measure of agency, or at least individuality, to the patients who appear in works created at the Salpêtrière. In some cases, this means calling attention to an individual's biography, as with a patient named Henri Bonnet who served as the model for Richer's *Buste de myopathique* (*Bust of a Myopathic Patient*, 1893). In other cases, it means seeking to understand patients' collaboration in or resistance to the fashioning of their own image through a reading of pose and gesture. In the absence of first-hand accounts from a patient perspective, Ruiz-Gómez is often forced to speculate regarding patients' emotional states. This task is rendered all the more complex by clinicians' efforts to transform images so that they more clearly reference visual convention, creating for example an exaggerated expression of

sorrow that recalls Titian's *Penitent Magdalene* (1560s).

Many of the works reproduced in *Pathology and Visual Culture* are profoundly unsettling, and yet it is difficult to turn away from the pain and vulnerability they convey. Such images render it all the more imperative to ask: what do we, as readers and viewers of these representations, owe these subjects? How do we mitigate the inevitable voyeurism entailed in recounting this history? *Pathology and Visual Culture*'s retelling of these stories is perhaps all the more powerful because it does not and cannot answer these questions, which continue to resonate long after the reader has turned the last page.

NOTES

[1] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

[2] Lorraine Daston and Peter L. Galison, *Objectivity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[3] Mary Hunter, *The Face of Medicine: Visualising Medical Masculinities in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Susan Sidlauskas, "Inventing the Medical Portrait: Photography at the 'Benevolent Asylum' of Holloway, c. 1885-1889," *Medical Humanities* 39 (2013): 29-37; Anthea Callen, *Looking at Men: Anatomy, Masculinity and the Modern Male Body* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018).

[4] Ann La Berge and Caroline Hannaway, "Paris Medicine: Perspectives Past and Present," in *Constructing Paris Medicine*, ed. Ann La Berge and Caroline Hannaway (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 4.

[5] For an example of scholarship in this area, see Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, *Morbid Curiosities: Medical Museums in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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