

ArtiFactsheet: Anatomical model

Anatomical models are representations of the structures and organs found in an organism, most often humans. While their main purpose has usually been educational in nature, anatomical models have also been used as a means of communicating with patients by doctors as well as for entertaining the public. Throughout the history of their manufacture and use, they represent the changing relationship between society and the medical culture.

In the Western world, the creation of the first educational anatomical models occurred at the end of the 17th century. Initially models were mainly made out of wax due to its malleability and its resemblance to actual human flesh. But as time went on, wax models became less and less favoured due to such things as its high costs and its tendency to be easily deformed. As a result, in the 19th century, anatomical models began to be made out materials such as wood, plaster and papier-mâché. In particular papier-mâché was popular due to its low cost and ease of manufacturing. Now, models are commonly made out of plastic and can even be entirely digital. This has allowed people to explore the human body in a whole new way, such as through transparent models, interactive computer programs and 3D printing.

Many artifacts related to anatomical models can be found in the collection of Ingenium – Canada’s Museums of Science and Innovation:
ingeniumcanada.org/ingenium/collection-research/collection.php.

Fun Fact

Ingenium’s artifact collection contains a 1931 wax hand model made by Maria Wishart, the founder of the medical illustration program at the University of Toronto.

Artifact Details

Anatomical model, circa 1930 - 1950
Manufacturer: Unknown
Artifact no. 2002.0539.001

The anatomical model seen here is of a female torso and head and was distributed by Clay Adams, Inc. It is predominately made out of papier-mâché on wood and had a height of 51 cm and a width of 30 cm. While the torso is relatively sturdy, the models of the organs are fragile. It was originally owned by a Dr. Yankoff of Toronto, who used it to communicate with his patients.

