

## OLAVIDE MUSEUM

# The Olavide Museum (IV): Restoration

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As explained in the previous article in this series, on December 27, 2005 the bulk of the collection was found in a storage area in the Hospital del Niño Jesús, along with all sorts of other objects such as beds, tables, typewriters, and other unusable hospital equipment. The place lacked the basic conditions necessary for proper storage. In addition, it was slated for demolition to make way for the construction of a new wing.

Our joy at the discovery soon turned to concern over the state of some of the crates, and our ignorance of their contents. Before they were moved from the warehouse, the 120 crates were counted and classified. Their sizes varied considerably, some of them taller than 1.80 m. As we were later able to confirm, each one contained between 6 and 10 wax models, although some contained only 2 large figures. In general, they were in good condition, although some of the crates were broken or open.

The 120 crates, protected by special wrapping, were moved to a storage facility of the Gil Stauffer removal and storage company where they were kept under appropriate conditions.

Once this “treasure” had been recovered, the next question was what to do with it, and how and by whom it should be done. Prior study by professionals with expert knowledge of wax sculpture was necessary, but to our surprise, after much searching, we could find no art restoration professionals specializing in wax models.

A solution presented itself when the restorers who had previously recovered the models and done a magnificent job of restoring them expressed a desire to participate in the project. A project proposal for the restoration of the models, a budget for the cost of the work, and a possible means of financing it was presented to the governing board of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (AEDV) and its president, Professor José Luis Díaz Pérez. After studying the report, the board approved it, and named L Conde-Salazar Gómez as director of the museum and the person responsible for its operations.

We contacted the restorers David Aranda Gabrielli, Amaya Maruri Palacín, and Adriana Mora Sánchez, all from the Reverte Museum (Museum of Medical and Forensic Anthropology, Universidad Complutense de Madrid), where they had worked for the previous 4 years. These restorers had experience with other art objects relating to medicine (book illustrations, drawings, etc.) and all had training in paramedical fields (physical therapy, biological anthropology, and pathology laboratory technology). During their 4 years in the Reverte Museum, they had restored, under the supervision of Professor Reverte, some wax models which reappeared in the 1990s, and their professional ability was firmly established. There was no reason why they should not continue to work on the restoration, cataloguing, and preservation of all the models in the Olavide Museum.

## State of Preservation and Description of the Pieces

The state of the models varied widely; while some were found practically intact, only covered with a thick layer of dust, in other cases we found the organic remains of animals such as cats and mice, the actions of which had seriously affected the wax models (Figure 1).

In many cases the wax models appeared unsalvageable because of multiple fractures, many in tiny fragments (Figure 2). To this we should add that the state of preservation of the cloth and wood suffered a similar fate; we found some textiles to be in better than acceptable, even good condition, while in others there were tears involving loss of the warp and weft to a greater or lesser extent. The condition of the wood ranged from small cracks to rot, with the presence of termites and other insects.

In general terms we may describe a piece as formed by the following parts, which vary in composition:

1. A wax model on a 1:1 scale, polychromed, representing a skin disease and its surrounding area; this is surrounded by a white gauze or linen cloth used to secure the figure to the third and last part, a wooden backing painted brown with a black frame.
2. In the lower right-hand corner, a cardboard label indicates the pathology, the clinic, the physician, and the sculptor. The models created by Zofio also include a number on the upper part of the front of the frame. On several of

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**Figure 1.** Organic remains in the crates.



**Figure 2.** State of preservation.



**Figure 3.** Opening of the crates.

the pieces by this sculptor there is also, on the back, a detailed medical history with a number at the top corresponding to the numbering of the catalogue published in 1903.

It should be pointed out that over the years from the creation of the first models at the end of the 19th century by Enrique Zofío to the middle of the 20th century, when the models were created principally by José Barta and José Luis López Álvarez, the information included with the pieces changed. By the end of this period, the models lacked numbers and medical histories. For the pieces we assume were sculpted by José Luis López Álvarez, there is no information at all.

3. Variation in the size and weight of the pieces is limited, as previously explained, to the representation of the disease. Pieces were found with relatively small dimensions, for example “Syphilitic chancre of the nipple,” which measures 40 × 27 cm and weighs 1.5 kg. Others are much larger, such as “Darier disease,” which measures 110 × 87 cm and weighs more than 14 kg.

## The Restoration Process

Because of the varied composition of the materials as well as variability in the size and state of preservation of the pieces, a restoration project was developed to unify different criteria and emphasize, above all, the reversibility of the intervention and respect for the original piece. In general terms, the process of restoration consisted of the following steps:

1. Unpacking: the pieces were found packed in large wooden crates which had deteriorated badly as a result of the conditions under which they were stored and the time elapsed since they were packed. This made removal of the models difficult (Figure 3).
2. Initial general cleaning: cleaning began with vacuuming to remove sawdust and superficial layers of dust from the model. This was followed by a second, deeper cleaning of the different parts of each piece (Figure 4).
3. Separation of the components: the wax model was detached from the wooden backing in order to facilitate its cleaning and restoration.
4. Restoration of the different components: a) wax model: cleaning with a solution of 2% neutral soap in distilled water. This cleaning was followed by a second and more specific cleaning with a solution of 10% ammonia in distilled water to eliminate more persistent grime. Once cleaned, the fragments of the model were joined together, and the lost parts were reconstructed and cracks and other cavities filled in with melted wax of the same color and texture as the original (melted and re-used in cases where this was possible). Following reinforcement of the piece, the wax was colored with acrylic pigments in areas where color had been lost, using books and an atlas of dermatology as a guide<sup>1,2</sup>; b) wooden backing: this was first vacuum-cleaned, then

the cracks were filled with wood putty and sanded with medium-fine sandpaper. Finally, the wood was painted in the original colors: brown for the backing, and black for the frame (Figure 5); c) cloth: microvacuuming to remove grime. Following this, the cloth was painted white using acrylic paint (a procedure followed when some of the figures in the collection were found to have been restored in this manner); d) paper: cleaning of superficial dirt with brushes, followed by fixing of the fragments and reinforcement with a 50% solution of glue in distilled water; e) assembly: this was done using stainless steel tacks to mount the figure on the framed wooden backing.



**Figure 4.** Cleaning the wooden backing.

## Documentation of the Pieces

At the same time as the restoration of the figures was being carried out, the entire collection was catalogued in order to create a database that would facilitate the use of computerized documentation, providing easier and quicker access to the most frequently used information. This, in turn, is useful for writing articles and for research on the objects catalogued.

The format chosen was created by Joaquín María Navascués (whose name appears on the file) and forms the basis of the DOMUS system, used in the majority of Spanish museums.

This file is composed of a series of fields and subfields to be filled in with the principal characteristics of the object being catalogued. Among them are the following:

1. Heading
2. Registration number
3. Generic classification
4. Name of the object
5. Author
6. Characteristics of the object
7. Measurements
8. Material

In the upper right-hand corner of each file a photograph is attached, which makes identification of the object even easier.

In addition to cataloguing, a restoration file was created for each of the pieces restored. This is indispensable for a more in-depth knowledge of the collection. It includes, among other things, the techniques used in the process of restoration (very similar to the process of creation by the original artists) and the conditions of treatment and preservation of the models.

Finally, we should mention the creation of a computerized museum collection, which constitutes the “memory” of the future Olavide Museum. It consists of



**Figure 5.** Restoration of the model. Generalized exfoliative erythroderma, restored.

documents referring to the collection, from the creation of the models to their history in the Museum. This is intended as a way of keeping the collection in good order and passing it on to later generations with its records in the best possible condition.

## Conclusions

Over the past years it has been our privilege to restore the pieces in the Olavide Museum. We should stress that it has been exciting to participate in both the process of recovery and the parallel research process that shed some light on this little-known and amazing project that originated in the mind of Dr José Eugenio Olavide. None of this would have been possible without the faith the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology placed in us. We wish to make special mention of Dr Luis Conde-Salazar Gómez, whose support and dedication made it possible for this historical legacy to be exhibited.

In the course of preparing this summary, we have tried to transmit to the reader the discoveries we encountered every day in the field of art restoration, so that the enigma of the Olavide Museum will at last be resolved and the complete collection of wax models will yield the information necessary for a better understanding of dermatology in this historical period, still unknown to many of us.

## References

1. Fernández Berengué L, Pugés Dorca M, Zarsoso Orellana A. La restauración de una Venus anatómica de cera. p. 10-3. Available at: [www.museudelamedicina.cat](http://www.museudelamedicina.cat)
2. Corrado Maltese. Las técnicas artísticas. Manuales Arte Cátedra. Escultura. Madrid; 2003. p. 51-9.

## ANNEX

### FILE NO. 55



**Institution:** Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (AEDV)  
**Date of entry:** November 2005  
**Form of entry:** CE  
**Topographic signature:**  
**Inventory:** 0055  
**Piece number:** 441  
**Collection:** Collection of the Museo Anatómo-Patológico, Hospital San Juan de Dios  
**Generic classification:** Sculpture  
**Common name of object:** Model  
**Specific name of object:** Framed wax model  
**Title:** Ringworm of the scalp

**Dimensions:** 49 cm high × 32 cm wide × 14 cm deep

**Material:** Wax, wood, pigments and agglutinants

**Techniques used:** Modeling, moulding, incising, coloring, gluing, tacking

**Description:** This is a wax model representing a bust of a boy oriented toward the right. His skin is very light, his hair fine and chestnut in color, and his face wears a sad expression. On the top of his head close to the crown appears a light-brown circular lesion some 5 cm in diameter with well-defined edges, containing small raised round formations of the same color as the lesion, covering its whole surface, causing alopecia in the area where it is located. Likewise, on the rest of the head there are small scabby formations, undoubtedly the result of continued scratching. The model of the head is framed in gauze which is painted white. In the lower right-hand corner is a paper label with the name of the clinic, diagnosis, physician, and sculptor of the model, and in the upper right-hand corner, another label showing the number 441. All the parts described are glued and tacked onto a wooden backing painted brown, with a frame painted black.

**Inscriptions:** Museum of the Hospital San Juan de Dios/Dr Olavide Clinic

**Sculptor:** E. Zofío

**Date:** Late 19th century

**Use/function:** Educational, academic

**Place of production:** Madrid

**Provenance:** This piece is one of the 1500 that comprise the collection initiated by Olavide at the end of the 19th century and expanded during more than a century by various artists such as Zofío, Barta and López. Because of its quality, variety and quantity, it constitutes one of the best and most important collections of wax models of skin diseases in the world.

**Observations:** Restored. Medical history affixed to the back.

## RESTORATION FILE NO. 68

**File no.:** 0068r.

**Title:** American leishmaniasis. Espundia (Breda disease).

**Sculptor:** E Zofio

**Restorer:** Adriana Mora

**Sponsoring institution:** Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (AEDV)

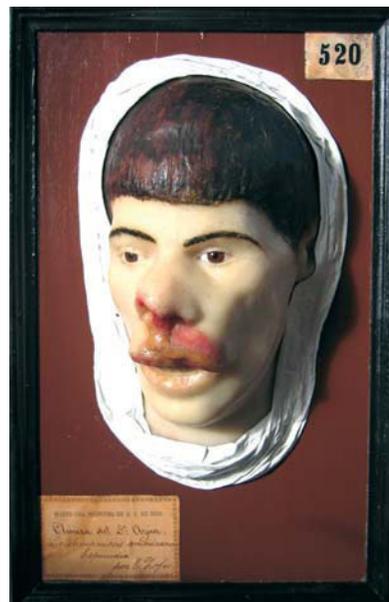
**Description of the piece:** The piece consists of a wax model representing the face of a man in frontal position. The area of the nose and mouth appear deformed. The nose is enlarged, reddened, and ulcerated, with loss of skin from the nasal septum and the right nostril. This lesion extends to the upper lip, which is indurated and swollen. The figure is surrounded by gauze painted white. In the lower left-hand corner there is a paper label with the name of the clinic, the diagnosis, the physician, and the sculptor of the model, and in the upper right-hand corner there is a cardboard label showing the number 520. All parts of the piece are glued and tacked to a wooden backing painted brown, with a frame painted black.

**State of preservation prior to restoration:** The piece was found covered by a very thick layer of dust and grime especially affecting the right side, produced by the organic remains of animals found in the original packing materials in which the pieces had been stored for a long period of time. The state of the cloth was good, darkened by grime only on the upper part and right side. The wax appeared to be in perfect condition despite the thick layer of dust and loss of color in the area of the lesion. There were small cracks in the wood. The paper labels were covered with a thick layer of dust and grime. In general, the piece was in good condition.

**Intervention:** Restoration began with cleaning and separate treatment of each of the parts, and ended with complete reconstruction of the piece. The wax model was cleaned by microvacuuming, followed by 50% neutral soap in distilled water, and finally a 10% aqueous ammonia solution. Restoration of the cloth proceeded according to the same methods used in prior cases. The cloth is vacuum-cleaned, reinforced, and attached to the model with pins. Finally, the cloth is painted white according to the same criteria established when traces of paint indicating use of this method of textile restoration were found in most of the models in the collection. For the backing, wood putty was used to fill in the cracks with 5 hours between each application in order to ensure that the putty would dry and set properly. The wood was then sanded and painted in the colors established earlier. The paper was reinforced with a mixture of 50% glue and distilled water. Finally, the entire piece was sprayed with a protective acrylic to prevent dust and grime from adhering to it.



Before restoration.



After restoration.

**State of preservation following restoration:** Good

**Observations:** Avoid exposure to direct light and direct or indirect sources of heat

**Bibliography:** du Vivier A. Atlas de Dermatología clínica. 2nd Ed. Harcourt Brace. Dieppen SB, Fartasch S. Atlas of Dermatology. Springer. 2nd Ed. DVD-ROM. Jessner S. Enfermedades de la piel. Tomos I-II. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe; 1927.