

# 2011 International Symposium on Poetry and Medicine

Saturday 7th May 2011

Medical Teaching Centre  
Building 37  
University of Warwick  
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## ABSTRACT



### **Venus Heart: La Specola's waxworks in verse**

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This talk will discuss 'Venus Heart,' a poetry project exploring the creation of what is arguably the most famous and beautiful collection of anatomical wax models ever made: that of La Specola, the Florentine Museum of Natural History. Shaping characters from real historical figures pivotal to the running of the 18th century workshop, 'Venus Heart' is being crafted for four voices, engaging with poetic form as a reflection of the mental and physical dispositions of the characters. The 'Venus' of 'Venus Heart' is inspired by the gems of La Specola's collection: life-sized anatomical wax beauties with Botticelli faces, real human hair, and sometimes even pearl jewellery - these Venuses are dissectible and each comes apart to reveal a foetus in the womb. The verse novel blends fact and fiction to tie in the scandalous practice of body-snatching, specifically that of pregnant women for foetal specimens. The poetry aims to create a new mythology in the tradition of Pygmalion and Frankenstein. It also aims to maintain poetic integrity (through form,) and scientific accuracy (through communicating the craft of the workshop). 'Venus Heart' will illuminate La Specola, from chemical pigments and human specimens, to strict anatomical knowledge - and potentially murderous undertakings - required in creating the famous waxworks.