

## 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

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