

The human body, how it is understood and what it can endure, is the art for this exhibit

By **Erin Blakemore**

March 13, 2021 at 7:30 a.m. CST

The human body is complex and intricate — and the way we see it affects how we treat it. That simple premise informs Healing, Knowing, Seeing the Body, a new exhibition at the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas. The art in the exhibition shows how understandings of the body have changed over time and illustrates how much artists themselves contribute to knowledge about the body, inside and out.

The exhibit is even accessible to those who can't get to Lawrence, Kan., to see it in person. You can view it at bit.ly/seeingthebody.

Highlights include Sean Caulfield's riffs on the 16th-century scientist Andreas Vesalius's influential illustrations of human anatomy, a Ming-dynasty "medicine Buddha" used in meditations thought to bring well-being, Melania Mazinyani's depiction of a traditional n'anga healer of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, and physician and photographer Jon O'Neal's haunting photographs of late-1980s AIDS patients.

But the art doesn't always go from the outside in. Dylan Mortimer, a St. Louis-area artist, has cystic fibrosis and has undergone two double lung transplants. His collage "The Ceiling Can't Hold Us" depicts his lungs, faith, aspirations and even the surgery itself. He calls the piece a "self-portrait in surgery . . . an exercise in humility, vulnerability, and hope."

The same could be said for the exhibition as a whole. By confronting everything from illness to racism, medical progress to ancient healing modalities, it points to the vastness of meanings each body can hold. The result is as ambitious and multilayered as the body itself.

Healing, Knowing, Seeing the Body is on display through May 16. The online version will be up indefinitely.