

## Écorché. Anatomical Body Models in Medical and Art Education Throughout the Centuries

What is an écorché? An écorché is a human or animal depiction stripped of its skin. The skinned figure, usually in the form of a plaster cast, wax or marble sculpture, allows studying the arrangement and shape of muscles, veins, and joints.

While there are écorchés of animals, especially of skinned horses, the great majority of écorchés are depictions of the human male figure. Their creation often resulted from collaborations between doctors and artists. The figures are usually shown in animated poses to express muscle tension and often include decorative elements such as columns, plinths, and pedestals.

The first écorchés appeared in the Renaissance period, essentially as drawings and chalk sketches made by authors like Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci. However, the popularity and widespread use of these anatomical figures came later at the end of the 18th and throughout the 19th century. In this period of rapid scientific development in Europe, écorchés became compulsory tools in artistic training.

Previously, they were considered more like art chamber pieces (much like the human skull at that time) with an added dimension of *memento mori*, the reminder of everyone's unavoidable death. Along with antique book collections, an écorché was an additional symbol of an educated person – you would occasionally see one in their studies.

The esthetical depiction was as significant as anatomical precision, with compositions often becoming idealized or even canonical. It was a time of Neoclassicism, the movement in the arts that drew its inspiration from the Classical art and culture of Ancient Greece and Rome. It was a rather complex task to render the correct anatomy and at the same time not to be too naturalistic and lose the esthetic dimension.

By looking at various écorché examples, we will see how the tradition of representation has developed over time. What is the place of écorché today? Professionals from seemingly unconnected fields such as medicine and visual arts may look at écorché from entirely different angles. In my view, écorché is an excellent example of a multidisciplinary phenomenon.

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