



SNAPSHOT

Beneath the skin

Anatomy was rediscovered during the Renaissance when artists such as Leonardo da Vinci needed to be scientists — and scientists, such as Andreas Vesalius, needed to be artists. They measured proportions and features with mathematical precision. And when dissecting corpses, they systematically drew what they saw — there was no alternative method. The results were practical: precise anatomical knowledge informed both painting and the early studies in physiology. These paintings and studies were also beautiful. The presentation of human anatomy continued to be highly aestheticized over the centuries — and now, it seems, it is highly collectable.

A remarkable collection of more than 200 books, prints, drawings and wax models depicting human anatomy is being auctioned by Christie's in New York on 5 October. Put together by the US physician-broadcaster Dean Edell, the collection includes items from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Included, for example, is a 1528 edition of Albrecht Dürer's *Hierinn sind begriffen vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion (Four Books on Human Proportions)* which is reserved at \$20,000, a 1543 edition of Vesalius' seven-volume *De humani corporis fabrica (On the Fabric of the Human Body)* which is expected to go for at least \$250,000 and a series of photographs of brain preparations dissected and stained by the nineteenth-century neuroanatomist Carl Wernicke, at just a few hundred dollars.

The collection also includes several rare books and prints by the eighteenth-century illustrator Jacques Gautier d'Agoty — a pioneer of colour printing. The picture here (left) is typical of the d'Agoty style of exposed internal anatomy in an otherwise quiet, everyday composition. ■

Alison Abbott

Arctic melt opens Northwest passage

The most direct shipping route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, connecting Asia and Europe, is fully navigable for the first time since records began, data show. Warming has led to a record retreat of Arctic sea ice, which covers about 16 million square kilometres during March each year and melts to a minimum sometime in September or October. The previous record minimum was 5.32 million square kilometres, set in 2005, but this year it has already reached a low of 4.24 million square kilometres, according to the US National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado.

The drop may have been caused by warmer ocean waters over the past few summers, says John Walsh, a climate scientist at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. This summer has been unusually cloud-free, and spring temperatures over the Russian part of the Arctic were higher than usual, he says. Lack of sea ice itself contributes to warming, since ice reflects the Sun's heat better than the sea. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that if current trends continue, a summer without sea ice will occur in the next 40 to 100 years. ■

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