

Anatomical iconography in the thirties in Padova: Mario Alfonsi and cardboard, ink and watercolour

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The image in Anatomy has a pivotal role, due to the need of the student to learn on images the anatomical structures. This need is unchanged from the past to nowadays. In the last century Mario Alfonsi, a fine illustrator, was the official designer at the Anatomical Institute of Padova, working closely with Professor Tullio Terni. Terni was removed from teaching because of the racial laws and was rejected by the Jewish community and expelled from the Academy of the Lincei. The removal of Terni is the principal reason why the school of anatomical drawing was not founded in Padova. Mario Alfonsi is author of about 300 illustrative plates of Anatomy and the major part of his collection is kept in the archives of the institute of Human Anatomy of Padova. The tables are large (100 x 200 cm), illustrating the systems and organs of the human body, and were used as a teaching tool for lessons to students of Medicine till 1970. They are made of cardboard supported by a rod wood which allowed their exposure in the Falloppio Classroom. The drawings are made with ink and coloured with watercolour or tempera and date back to the thirties. They are signed and report the date expressed in the fascist calendar. They are in good condition, classified and stored in special cabinets. Alfonsi in his career also made drawings for texts of Anatomy and Surgery. In fact, he worked also with surgeons, illustrating step by step innovative surgical procedures.