

TINGET I SIG (THING-IN-ITSELF). THE TEMPORARY EXHIBITION CURRENTLY ON DISPLAY AT THE MEDICAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF GOTHENBURG

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Tinget i sig (Thing-in-itself) is a project initiated by the Medical History Museum of Gothenburg. We invited nine artists, writers and researchers to come into our depot and choose one object each to relate to within the frames of an anthology.

Inspiration for the project has been taken from many different projects but especially from a small book of poems that was produced to celebrate the quincentenary of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (*The Hand that Sees – Poems for the quincentenary of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh*, 2005). Dawn Kemp, then Director of Heritage at The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, introduced it to us at the EAMHMs congress in Edinburgh 2008. Poets had been invited to each choose an object in the collections and write a poem about it.

The idea of the current project was to gather a wide range of perspectives and expressions. The objects that were chosen were both everyday objects and rare items from the collection. Some of them were very specific technical objects and some more “human” – worn and torn by long use. How the participants approached the task differed a lot, not just when it comes to which discipline they represented but also how they looked upon historical objects and what they might “tell” them. Some wanted to know as much as possible about the object, some almost nothing, some had a clear idea of what to do even before choosing an object, and some changed their mind after finding something completely different from what they first had thought of.

Louis Jules Duboscq (1817–1886) invented one of the most popular models of colorimeters (Fig. 1). When Niklas Mattsson, a specialist in clinical chemistry, did some more research about him, an intriguing story of the combination of scientific research and marvel was revealed. Duboscq had alongside his work with medical inventions also worked with optics in other ways. For instance he invented optical machines for the opera and the theatre. He was also an eager photographer, which we illustrated in the anthology with a daguerreotype of his from around 1850. In his contribution to the book, Mattsson has intertwined the fascinating story of Duboscq and his time with an account of the fact that the analysts of today still have to rely on what they actually see in the ocular, despite new techniques and methods for diagnostics.

These shoes, three of them, are larger than the picture can mediate (Fig 2). All we know about them is that they were worn by a person whose feet were disfigured after surgery. The shoes were chosen by the artist Linda Spåman who imagined in her drawings who it might have been that would have worn this kind of shoes (Fig. 3).



Figure 1. Colorimeter according to Duboscq



Figure 2. Shoes



Figure 3. Work by Spåman

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When the book was released we opened an exhibition displaying the objects that had been chosen. We aimed to focus on the objects, making it possible for the visitor to just stand and observe in awe and wonder. The label is only naming the item and presenting what materials it is made of. If the visitors want to know more they can turn to the book and choose to read the museum's more thorough description or the participants' interpretations.

I see the project as a means to open up more public interest for historical medical objects, to show the variety that our museum's collection holds and what an important part it is not just of our history of science but also of our cultural heritage.

To invite guests into the collections and get new perspectives on things is both invigorating and inspiring. For a museum worker, it is also satisfying to produce something that lives longer than the temporary exhibitions. I hope that

our book will be spread and that it will find its place on bookshelves and coffee tables.

The Medical History Museum of Gothenburg is a part of the Sahlgrenska University Hospital. The museum is located in central Gothenburg in a building that functioned as Sahlgrenska hospital in the early 1800's. More information can be found on the Museum's web page: www.sahlgrenska.se/museum or on facebook: Medicinhistoriska museet i Göteborg

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