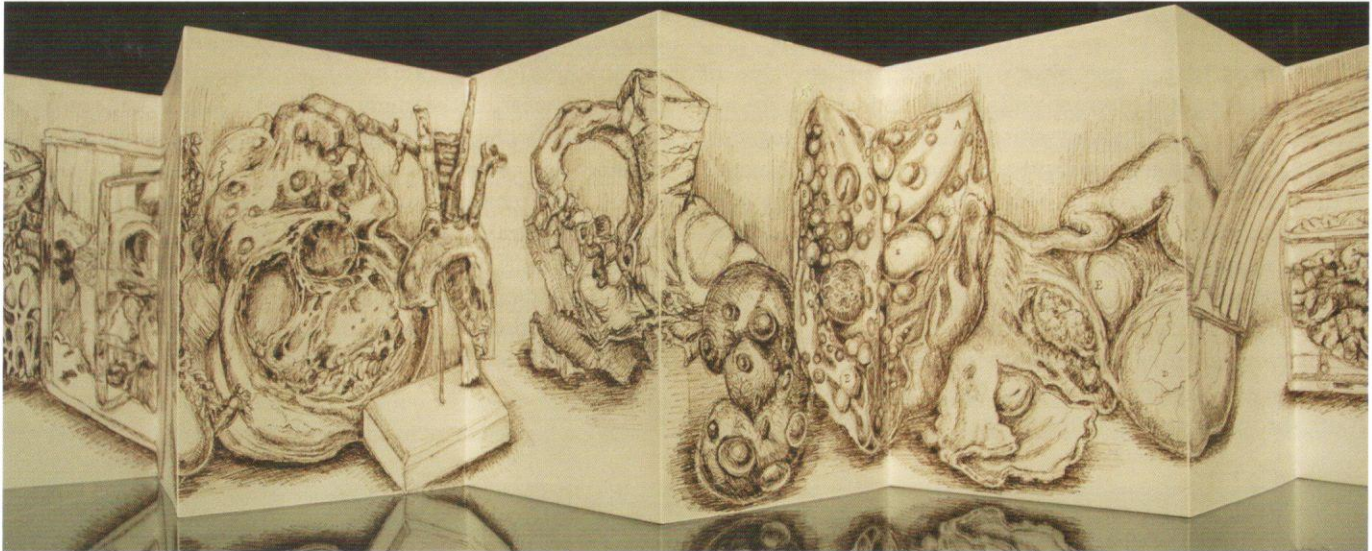


# IMPOSSIBLE

## PATHOLOGIES

/ by PHILIP FINE /



ARTWORK BY LUCY LYONS, PHOTO COURTESY OF LUCY LYONS

**A** diseased lung, an excised mole, a lopped-off polyp, these are not usually associated with beauty, except where British artist Dr. Lucy Lyons is involved.

An accredited medical illustrator, she mines medical archives for inspiration. At the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, she immediately struck gold. “One of the first things I came across was the Robert Hooper archive. I saw some boxes. I went ‘What’s in there? It says uterus. Let’s have a look.’”

Hooper was a British physician and medical illustrator working in the early 1800s, who made the eccentric decision to cut out his prints in the shape of the specimens depicted.

Lyons took Hooper’s images and applied a technique she calls “old-school Photoshop” to create a rough photo montage. She then redrew, printed and reconfigured, before sewing—or suturing—the pieces together in a long collage. To this, she also added her fantastical take on specimens from the University’s Maude Abbott Medical Museum.

The result is a collection of happy monstrosities, reminiscent of the pastiche approach of Monty Python animator Terry Gilliam.

Lyons’ theory is that medical specimens are too often overlooked. Redrawing and reconfiguring them allows us to better see and appreciate these discarded fragments.

In so doing, she says, “you give respect and dignity.”

Lyons, a teacher of drawing at the City and Guilds of London Art School, was the inaugural holder of the Michele Larose—Osler Library Artist-in-Residence award, made possible by Dr. Michele Larose, PGME’90, artist and pediatric neuropsychiatrist.

In 2017, Montreal visual artist and photographer Loren Williams took over the role from Lyons.

For the Osler staff, who rolled out the red carpet for both artists, it has been a pleasure to see the collections used in new ways. “It opens us up to new communities who might not have considered our materials,” says Osler Head Librarian Dr. Mary Yearl.

Lyons says medical illustration has always been an important aspect of medical education and taking a long, artistic look at these specimens helps people appreciate what is normally reviled. “You can say almost all fragmented parts are monstrous because they’re what you don’t want to have. But I’ve always seen them as fascinating and beautiful and instructive.”