



Book Review

Medical Art: Principles and Techniques for the Creative Medical Artist

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Author: Joanna Cameron

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In *Medical Art*, Joanna Cameron begins with a quote by Leonardo da Vinci:

“Dispel from your mind the thought that an understanding of the human body in every aspect of its structure can be given in words; the more thoroughly you describe – the more thoroughly you will confuse – it is necessary to draw as well as describe. I advise you not to trouble with words unless you are speaking to blind men.”

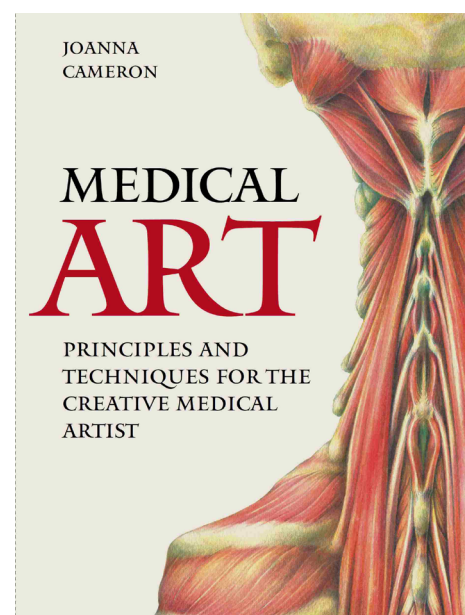
Reading this, I knew immediately that I was going to thoroughly enjoy Cameron's thoughtful and detailed exploration of the core principles and techniques in medical illustration. As a surgeon in training and medical illustrator (thankfully for patients, I am self-trained only in the latter!), I approached this book as both an admirer and a peer, intrigued to discover how the author balances scientific anatomical accuracy with artistic creativity.

Cameron structures her book into 15 clear and engaging chapters. The initial chapters navigate anatomical terminology and the human skeleton. For surgeons and clinicians, these chapters will be familiar territory. For

artists dipping their toes into the medical field, these chapters are fundamental. I particularly loved Cameron's delicate hand-drawn sanguine pencil illustrations, bringing both warmth and precision to the chapters.

Chapter 3 addresses a skill essential for any clinician venturing into illustration: human proportions and key anatomical landmarks. Cameron thoughtfully includes interactive exercises (self-portrait drawing, life drawing and museum visits to study pathology specimens), encouraging readers to practically apply their newfound skills.

The author's checklist in the chapter on museum resources was a standout for me, offering practical guidance I wish I had had earlier in my career, when I frequented the Gordon Museum at my medical school (King's College London) to draw specimens in order to cram for anatomy exams, and, later as a foundation doctor, sketching specimens at the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS England) anatomy and pathology museum for my MRCS exams. These experiences inspired my free anatomy e-book series *Anatomy, Illustrated*, aimed



at supporting doctors and surgeons in training with their anatomy knowledge. While currently working on the lower limb volume, I look forward to utilising Cameron's excellent museum checklist and guidance from this chapter.

The later chapters introduce readers to various artistic media, such as ink drawing (a technique still intimidatingly foreign to me) and creating your own skin colour watercolour swatches, which Cameron breaks down beautifully. Her nuanced discussion on skin tone particularly resonates: the skin, she points out, is a marvel – with endless texture and colour variations. Cameron delves deeper than just the surface, highlighting how

underlying structures and conditions affect skin appearance. She provides numerous illustrative references and practical projects designed to help readers closely observe and appreciate the rich complexity and subtleties of their own skin.

Towards the end, Cameron provides valuable insights into professional medical art pathways, notably discussing established courses such as the Medical Artists' Education Trust diploma. Although I have not yet managed to squeeze such formal medical illustration training in with my surgical training, I look to role models (like consultant plastic surgeon and medical illustrator Julia Ruston) who have successfully

navigated these paths, balancing the diploma with surgical training. It can be done!

While Cameron's work left me thoroughly inspired and enriched, it provided me with pause to reflect on the rapidly evolving landscape of medical illustration. As I am currently engaged in healthtech illustration projects like creating a visual library of surgical procedures for a digital consent platform (Concentric Health), I find myself especially fascinated by how traditional artistic skills intersect with emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence-generated art, three-dimensional modelling and augmented reality. Cameron's work, however, rightfully

emphasises foundational artistic skills; these are timeless tools that remain universally relevant and adaptable, irrespective of the future directions the field may take.

Overall, *Medical Art* is an engaging, practical and beautifully illustrated book. As a self-taught medical illustrator, I particularly valued the guidance provided by this book and thank RCS England for the opportunity to review it. Cameron skilfully equips readers with foundational artistic skills adaptable to any medium, making her book invaluable for anyone passionate about medical illustration and visual medical education.



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