

# Museum Portrays Medicine Through Art

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[Lindsay Toler, AP Writer](#)

**LONDON** — Imagine looking at Leonardo da Vinci's heart sketch while listening to Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin Heart," or viewing a sculpture of an HIV-positive woman in a cast made from wax laced with the retroviral drugs she took to stay alive.

This is London's newest museum, where science, medicine and art meet.

Artifacts stand side-by-side with medical technology at the Wellcome Collection, a nine-story building that opened Thursday that houses more than 1,500 exhibits in three galleries, including a special exhibition examining the heart's role in medicine and culture.

"It's not science for the scientists," said Ken Arnold, head of public programming. "It will appeal to anyone who has got an interest in their body and their identity."

The Wellcome Collection sprang from the legacy and vision of Sir Henry Wellcome, an American-born pharmacist who collected more than 1 million medical and archaeological artifacts from throughout the world. In 1932, he put up the building to house his personal collection, but died four years later before the bulk of it had even been unpacked.

The building became the offices of the Wellcome Trust, the largest charity in the United Kingdom, which funds biomedical research. In 2005, the offices of the trust moved next door.

"We do start with medicine, but this is a broad vision, a broad journey," Arnold said. "It's connected with the world of art and other aspects of our lives. It's medicine, but large."

Take the spiral staircase from "The Heart" collection's intimate showcases and dim, quiet corners, and step into the loud, garage-sale clutter of the "Medicine Man" exhibit, where shelves and large glass cases are packed with over 500 items from Wellcome's eclectic personal collection.

Across the hall, rooms give way to enormous white cubes in "Medicine Now," where visitors can examine works of art and science exploring current medical issues, such as the sequencing of the human genome.

In an effort to encourage dialogue, many of the articles in the permanent exhibits feature three audio commentaries from experts in a variety of different backgrounds.

Take the lock of hair believed to be from King George III. The tangled brown and blond fibers sit behind a small window inside one of the walls of the "Medicine Man" exhibit. Below the display is a drawer, which, when

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pulled out, offers three buttons featuring audio opinions from a playwright who wrote about the king's life, a historian who examined the use of hair in art and a scientist who performed experiments on the hair.

"If you're an art historian, a scientist, a medical doctor or a playwright, you'll react to (the exhibits) very differently," Arnold said. The multiple commentaries may embolden visitors to express their own opinions on the pieces, engaging in dialogue based on their own perspectives as well as what they learn in the museum, Arnold said.

"We hope to be the house where people come together to share their expertise, rather than pitting one against the other," he said.

Case in point is Mark Quinn's "Silvia Petretti — Sustiva, Tenofivir, 3TC (HIV)," a sculpture of a woman named Silvia Peretti who was HIV positive. As Quinn combined wax and polymer to create a cast of her body, he added one dose of the retroviral medications she took to battle HIV into the mixture.

"It is full of life, but contains a hint of the fragility of her life," Arnold said.

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