The quest for scientific accuracy in describing the structure of the human form and the application of artistic and graphic means to depict this structure is the theme of our exhibition. The adaptation of artistic traditions to the requirements of a new science occasionally resulted in an uneasy combination in which the creative impulses of the illustrator competed with the less subjective interests of the anatomist-scientist. The tension thus created presents a striking array of images that blurs the boundaries of art and science.

The name of this exhibition is taken from the title of Andreas Vesalius’ consummate work on the human anatomy first published in 1543. The Human Fabric follows the development of anatomical illustration in print from its beginning as a primitive record of early explorations in gross anatomy in the late fifteenth century to the highly refined studies published just prior to the advent of photography. The books chosen for exhibition come chiefly from the collection of Dr. Mortimer Frank (1874-1919), a Chicago physician who had an earlier career as a civil engineer. Once he turned to medicine and a specialty in eye diseases and surgery, he also became active as a scholar in the history of medicine. He produced various historical papers and in 1915 became Secretary to the Chicago Society of Medical History and editor of its Bulletin. About the same time he began his translation of Ludwig Choulant’s Geschichte und Bibliographie der Anatomischen Abteilung which had first been published in 1852 in Leipzig. Frank’s effort, which was to become more than a direct translation, was published posthumously by the University of Chicago Press in the year of his death. It remains a standard and useful book to this day.

The Frank Collection, of over five hundred volumes, is one of the outstanding history of medicine collections in the United States. It was the first medical collection acquired by the University Library and thus helped establish a pattern for the future development of the Library’s history of science resources.

BOOKS IN THE EXHIBITION


Cover: Reisch. Margarita philosophica.