

ANDREA BALDECK

BONES BOOKS & BELL JARS

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MÜTTER MUSEUM COLLECTION

AFTERWORD

The idea of exploration conjures up visions of travel far afield, of oceans sailed and continents crossed, of new challenges to the senses, of unexpected detours and moments of surprise. Not all such adventures require a long geographic journey: some occur close to home, where distance is measured in time rather than miles, and discovery comes from delving into the past. Such a trip took me behind the scenes at The College of Physicians of Philadelphia, from below stairs to attic eaves, seeking treasures in its library stacks and museum storage.

Medical training and a photographer's sensibility directed my steps and gaze through the labyrinth of *materia medica* occupying cabinets and shelves. Bones, books and bell jars spoke wordlessly yet eloquently, history made visible and palpable. Anatomic atlases celebrated the skill of dissector and artist. Surgical instruments, melding design and utility, evoked the trained hands that wielded them. Arranged in still life photographs, these varied elements engage the viewer in visual dialogues about the nature of illness, suffering, and the healing arts. This imagery conjures up lives and eras beyond our reach, offering visual evidence of the course of medical progress since the founders of the College convened in 18th-century Philadelphia to pool their knowledge and resources. The very tangible evidence of this endeavor continues to captivate the eye, capture the imagination, and contribute to the current and future practice of medicine.

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