The Human Presence was the first major re-examination of the work of Roderick Tye (1959-2009), a sculptor passionate about the visceral nature of human existence.

Curated by fellow artists from the Slade School of Fine Art, The Human Presence was an experimental installation of Tye’s work. Shown alongside his emotionally charged head studies in charcoal, Tye’s wax and bronze heads, severed from their bodies and mounted on metal spikes, infuse the Museum’s recently refurbished Print Room with a latent baroque energy. Interspersed with medical samples from UCL’s pathology collections and drawings from its art holdings, displays consider Tye’s painstaking approach as part of a wider Slade ethos of looking, observing, and valuing culture in the making of art.

The Human Presence locates Tye’s rigour in a long-standing practice at the Slade of an intense examination of the human body, a training that combined rapid, linear drawing of the nude model, with close observation of human anatomy. Entirely modern in sensibility, but regulated by an interest in figuration rooted in the study of the Italian Old Masters, Tye came into his own while a Slade student in the 1980s. His interests were confirmed while at the British School in Rome, inspiring him to explore traditions of Greco-Roman sculpture at a time when his peers were obsessed with originality and veered away from working with the human form directly. The works featured in the exhibition come from this heady period, also when he taught at the Slade in the 1990s, when the focus on the life model had returned. They reveal his ongoing probing of flesh and the fragility of life when working the living presence of the human figure.

The exhibition is curated by Edward Allington, Neil Jeffries and Gary Woodley from the Slade School of Fine Art, in collaboration with UCL Art Museum, UCL Pathology Collections, and the Anatomy Laboratory (UCL Department of Cell and Developmental Biology). Displays feature large-scale anatomical drawings by Charles Bell, UCL’s first Professor of Anatomy in the 1830s and samples from UCL’s teaching collections, including wax models and human tissue remains.
Highlights from the Museum’s collections included a presentation drawing by Henry Tonks, student copies after the Old Masters, and small bronzes of Greco-Roman greats. The exhibition offered a rare opportunity to see the products of Tye’s later passion for reviving Irish Fly fishing techniques, all in keeping with the theme of life and death and his intense belief in the sheer beauty of being alive.

UCL Art Museum was delighted to celebrate our relationship with the Slade to bring the work of this under-recognised artist to light.

Visitors were encouraged to draw and sketch in the space.

For more information about the exhibition please contact college.art@ucl.ac.uk