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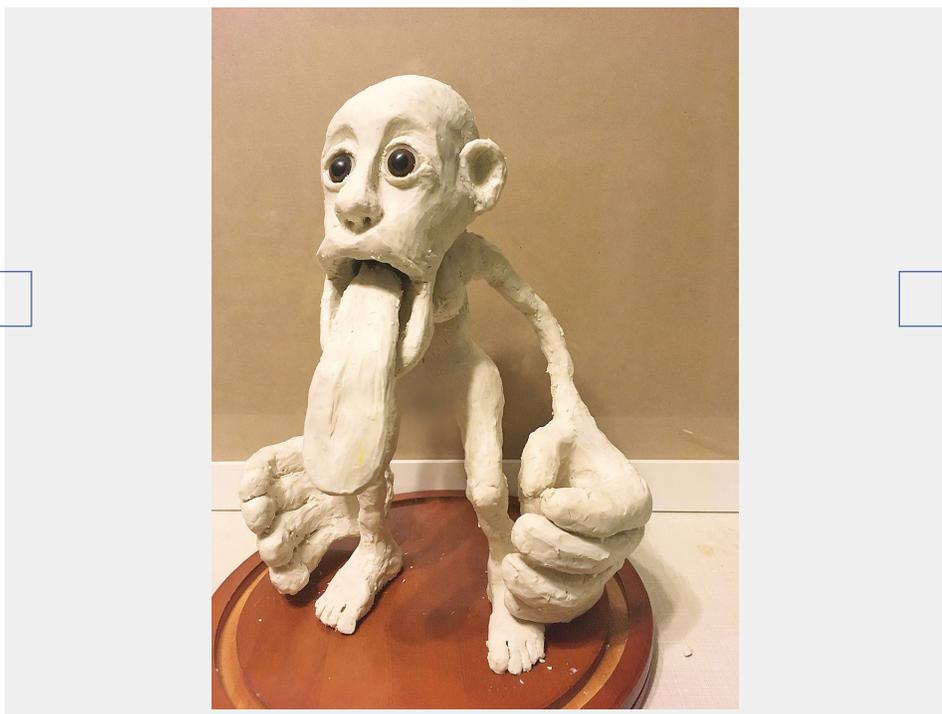
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# Alchemy in art: UTC student creates possible first female homunculus

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THIS HOMUNCULUS is potentially the first female of its kind and was created by UTC psychology and art student, Haven Wright. The hands, mouth and tongue are enlarged to symbolize the brain's intense focus on these areas of the body.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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Posted Wednesday, May 15, 2019 2:10 pm

By COLBY DENTON

A local art student, Haven Wright, has possibly made history by creating the first sculpture of a female

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homunculus, since prior to this, all homunculi were male.

The 22-year-old is a senior at UTC, and is a double major in psychology and art. Through this major, she hopes to go into art therapy and work with people in a therapeutic setting using art to facilitate comfort.

The newly created homunculus statue was for her biopsychology class. Students were given a project requiring them to take anything previously discussed in class and transform it into a physical representation using a creative element.

She got the idea to create a female homunculus after hearing her professor, Dr. Foerder, describing them in lecture, adding how all homunculi created in the past have been male.

A homunculus is a representation of a small human being. Popularized in 16th century alchemy and 19th century fiction, it's most widely known as the creation of a miniature, fully-formed person. The homunculus first appears by name in alchemical writings by Paracelsus, however, Carl Jung believed the concept first appeared in the Visions of Zosimos, written in the third century A.D. In his personal commentary, Jung equates the homunculus with the fabled Philosopher's Stone, and the "inner person" in parallel with Jesus Christ.

Homunculi also appear in popular culture, such as anime programs like "Yu-Gi-Oh! GX" and "Fullmetal Alchemist." Some versions are even created with the goal of the creator transferring their soul from their own, ailing body into the newly created homunculus body. While these purposes are highly contested as to their possibility, models of homunculi have been used in biology for quite some time; however, Wright states they've all been male.

"During one of our lectures, Dr. Foerder was telling us how there's never been a female one made. And since I'm the art major in class, I knew I could do it," Wright said.

The statue was created by first establishing a bendable wire skeleton, then coating these wires with moldable clay. The process took around 12 hours.

Since research is constantly being published and adding to the already-established knowledge of neuroscience, the field is ever-changing. Wright's professor told the class that the information he teaches them this semester could be irrelevant in the near future since more knowledge is likely to come out.

As recently as 2018, Wright had read an article about a study displaying the various differences between the male and female brains. Having access to this research, she wanted to incorporate these factors into her homunculus, and make its features larger or smaller depending on what portions of the brain a female uses most.

The time period when most homunculi were being created factors into why females were never made, but Wright said male and female brains were mostly treated as identical for most of history.

"As far as it goes, women are normally underrepresented in research, and they're trying to fix that now. With the new research coming out, they're seeing that there are differences and that's motivating study into that field as well," she said.

Wilder Penfield, a Canadian neurosurgeon born in 1891, conducted a study focused on localized function in the brain, which meant that specific parts of the body have specific parts in the brain controlling them. For instance, the mouth, tongue and hands require more to be able to control them. To represent this, Wright's homunculus has enlarged hands and an enlarged tongue and mouth. She described this as being "how the brain views the body."

There are three major functions of the brain, including motor, sensory and sexual. There is no difference between the brains as far as motor functions go; however, with sensation, there are differences due to the differences in the two sexes.

Although she'd previously watched the show, "Fullmetal Alchemist," Wright didn't make the connection between her project and alchemy until a friend heard about the homunculus and drew the conclusion to the anime show.

"I don't know very much about alchemy, but what I do know is it's very interesting and I'm glad people can draw those cultural connections," Wright added.

In addition to its pop culture references, Wright believes her project will add emphasis to the differences between males and females, especially concerning medical care. She hopes it will prevent doctors from treating the two sexes' brains as identical, as they're obviously different in a variety of ways.

"Maybe there are things in our body that react differently based on our sex, and that's something I wouldn't want to just be universal if there needs to be discrepancies," Wright said.

She's already presented her homunculus to a very impressed Dr. Foerder, who went on to show numerous other professors her work and the implications its creation may hold.

While she's unsure of what to do with her creation, Wright has several professors who have connections to interested parties such as museums who may want the piece due to its background and potential historical prominence. If it does gain publicity, she hopes this will raise the question, "What else don't we have the female version of?"

For those interested in following Wright on her alchemic and artistic journey, you can go to her website at <https://havenawright.weebly.com/>. You can also follow her art Instagram @lunairium.

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