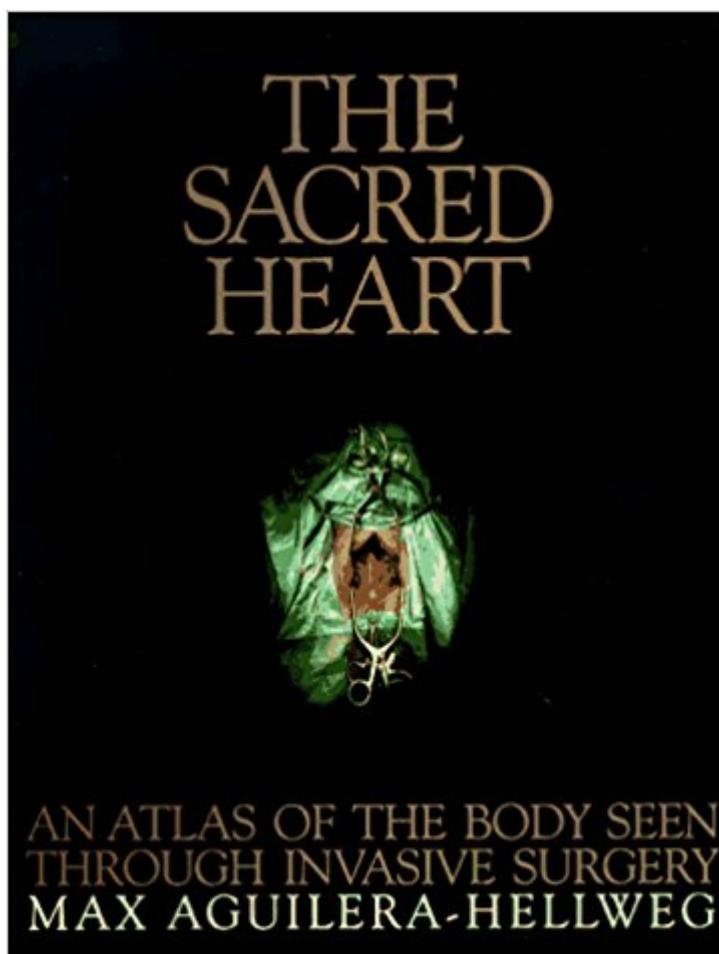


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# The Sacred Heart: An Atlas Of The Body Seen Through Invasive Surgery



## **Synopsis**

...a 'shocking, yet strangely beautiful' presentation of the inside of the human body with never-before-seen views of major surgery, including liver transplant, modified radical mastectomy, spinal cord surgery, brain tumor removal and more.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

An accident cost professional photographer Max Aguilera-Hellweg the use of his right arm for a year. Forced to work with a tripod and the larger format of 4-by-5-inch film, he was providentially assigned to photograph a neurosurgeon as she worked. This ultimately gave birth to *The Sacred Heart*, a magnificent and utterly disturbing collection of photographs of the human body seen through invasive surgery. There is nothing like this collection either in the annals of medical photography or the arts. Almost 50 surgical procedures--a liver transplant, a mastectomy, the harvesting of organs after death, a cesarean birth, and others--cause us to look away and immediately look back. Surgeons' hands hover gracefully over gaping wounds, and lighting on gloves, instruments, and bare flesh is both theatrical and holy. Aguilera-Hellweg's essay integrates the photographs and historic information about early surgical procedures with his own philosophic musings. *The Sacred Heart* inspires terror, pity, and awe as our gaze lingers on these horrific images.

This book is absolutely stunning. I am still quite shocked that no photographic anatomical atlas of live healthy tissue exists. With all of the bodies donated to science or explored for transplants, a few

minutes set aside, before preservation or closing, to capture educational photos would be invaluable to medical students worldwide. Cadavers simply do not represent the fidelity of live tissue. While they are real bodies, they no longer provide an example of what human tissue looks like once preserved. Structures are difficult to differentiate due to color loss and texture change from chemicals. Plastinated specimens retain color, but still lose texture. Medical students have to rely on either colored cadaver tissue or various forms of artists representations via drawings or 3D renderings. This book at least offer some views of real living tissue under surgical conditions. The photographs are beautifully shot and the information captured within is invaluable for appreciating what lies under the skin.

Brilliant, terrifying, unease, visceral, humbling, exquisite liberating and appreciative. These all describe the truly vivid, beyond words, photographs and stories of The Sacred Heart. I think it is our basic survival nature to pull away from such images and become physically and existentially nauseated since they often connote disease, death and the suffering and obliteration of the self. However after meditating on them within the larger context of life beyond the self and self referential judgments, a sense of awe may come to pass. This aesthetic is truly magnificent and liberating. A great book for those interested in healing and healthcare. I highly recommend it to those in the field and aspiring to go into healthcare and healing.

Initially I bought this book through the association with the Fantomas album borrowing images from this book for it's cover. It was exactly what I wanted it to be, profound, beautiful, visceral, disturbing, unnerving, grotesque, and awesome. This was the nature of this book for me until my grandfather abruptly committed suicide and completely shattered all notions of what death was to me. No longer was death this rare exotic bird people whisper about in the dark, it was completely real, and I had seen it first hand. It totally destroyed me for months. I dwelled for weeks in the terrible places your mind goes to in that despondent state. It was the hardest time of my life. Fast forward to when I was slowly adjusting back to normal life and I encounter The Sacred Heart again. Just a glance at it's spine in my bookshelf made me nauseous. Opening the book again all my fears of what happens to you after you cease to breathe came washing over me again. The pictures were no longer of pieces of meat to scoff at but of human beings departed from this realm and in another place entirely. And wherever they were, my grandfather was there with them. Make no mistake, this is an incredibly beautiful important book, but know that it is completely unflinching in staring directly into the infinite void beyond where anyone on this plain of existence has traveled. Most people aren't strong

enough to look there, but if you are, buy this book.

song@SanFrancisco There is a religiosity to the pictures that can only be seen to appreciate it. M. Aguilera-Hellweg portrays the awe and majesty of the inner physical self w/ such seduction and grace, we are enchanted by otherwise grotesque images of spines, sutures, and exposed craniums. Were it not for the perceptive and humanistic prose and accidentally dramatic lighting of the photos, most would distance themselves from the connotations of morbidity that such images would lend. Instead we are left enraptured by a secret inner world. I felt like a privileged patron, allowed access to a forbidden zone. Morbid curiously might have been my initial inclinations but it developed into a profound sensibility that we are estranged from our own bodies much of the time. The ambiguity of an open cavity stretched out by latex covered hands in a scene that seems sensually mystifying makes you either question your sense of normalcy or it makes you reevaluate this inner landscape that you and most others revile in most other settings. There is an attempt to place the "soul" within these organs and cavities and the argument is persuasive; however, depending upon your metaphysical outlook (i.e., christian, atheist, mind-body dualist...), you may be open to it or taxed by it but the end result is the same. You are awed by the photos.

Bought this for my surgeon girlfriend, she does not like it as much as I do. Very beautiful photos that are unlike anything I've ever seen.

Pretty gory stuff. Beautifully shot, but I had to return it.

This isn't the type of book for the "easy-veiwing" crew but the photography, quality of printing, & subject matter is top notch! Not for everyone but if you're curious what the inside of your chest cavity or skull looks like (after it's been cut & clamped open, of course!)this is the book for you!

This book is brave, and very well put-together. The work of photographer Max Aguilera-Hellweg, whose shots can also be seen in the yearly calendar issued by Philadelphia's Mutter Museum, is brilliant in its lighting and composition. The subject, as revealed in the subtitle, is invasive surgery. Those who say the book is exploitative since the photographs are disturbing, probably need a Hallmark Card version of truth, and reality. Invasive surgery invades the body. There are not photographs of Kate Moss, though it might be of Kate Moss later in life after the effects of her smoking finally rear their ugly head. But the photos in The Sacred Heart really come to terms with

the ugliness and contradictory beauty of the human body in its most elemental stage. The introduction is by Richard Selzer, whose other extremely readable books achieve direct paths to the most curious and disturbing aspects of what is seen by the doctor of medicine.

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