On 2 February 1677, the famous Amsterdam professor of anatomy Frederik Ruysch (1638-1731) executed a complicated operation during which the patient, Lysbeth Jans, nearly died. Subsequently, Lysbeth was brought to the municipal hospital, where the chief physician, Bonaventura Dortmont, observed her wounds. Dortmont, a man of disputed reputation, accused Ruysch of medical malpractice. The result was a war of pamphlets, in which virtually the entire Amsterdam medical world became involved. Ruysch was by that time already famous for his collection of anatomical preparations, in which were displayed artful compositions of human bodies (or parts of them) and all kinds of *naturalia* and *artificialia* (figs. 1, 2). In an anonymous pamphlet, written by a group of hostile colleagues, Ruysch’s skill and integrity were called into question. The accusations were without doubt the result of professional jealousy, but they also touched upon important epistemological questions. A physician, his opponents insisted, should read the works of Hippocrates, Galen and all other classical authors. Instead, Ruysch, ‘a person of little study’ (‘een Persoon van weynig studie’), used his hands ‘in order to dissect parts of dead animals as well as human bodies’. Even worse was the fact that the professor devoted much of his time to the art of painting (‘syn overige tijd noch besteed aen de Schilderkonst’). Obviously, a *medicinae doctor* should just use his mind, and not dirty his hands.

However, in a pamphlet written in defence of Ruysch, another anonymous writer made a twofold claim. Referring to Karel van Mander (1548-1606), the writer maintained that the art of painting was a noble occupation for kings and princes. Moreover, ‘I say that neither an *Anatomicus* without the skill of painting, nor a painter without [the knowledge of] *Anatomy*, will be able to climb the ladder of perfection’. The painter must extensively study the outward appearance, form, structure and functioning of the human body as a whole, as well as of its respective parts. And, vice versa, the anatomist should be trained in the art of drawing and painting:

Which *Anatomist* will be able to approve of, or improve the engraved images of this or that part of the human body (...) if he has never practised the art of drawing and painting (...) And which dissector will