

# ACTAS

## Derma-Sifiliográficas

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### OPINION ARTICLE

## The Olavide Museum: Past, Present, and Future

### Museo Olavide. Pasado, presente y futuro

L. Conde-Salazar,<sup>a,\*</sup> F. Heras Mendaza<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Director of the Olavide Museum, Madrid, Spain

<sup>b</sup>Servicio de Dermatología Laboral, Escuela Nacional de Medicina del Trabajo, Madrid, Spain

### Introduction

At different moments in its history the Olavide Museum has been cast either into the limelight or into the shadows. The Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (AEDV) has spent the past 5 years engaged in the arduous and costly task of restoring the museum's existing figures in an attempt to recover the prominent position it held in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In this opinion article we aim to outline the current status of the Olavide Museum and the measures that might be taken to preserve and promote an institution that instills tremendous pride in Spanish dermatologists and that is an endless source of information about the history of dermatology in Spain.

### Past

On December 26, 1882 the museum of Hospital de San Juan de Dios was officially opened as the Hospital San Juan de Dios Anatomopathologic, Chromolithographic, and Microscopic Museum, although there is evidence that it had already been set up as a micrographic laboratory in the 1870s by Drs José Eugenio Olavide and Eusebio Castelo Serra. Reliable data are unavailable, but we believe that this was the first time sculptor Enrique Zofio Dávila's

models were exhibited in a mixed museum setting. Over time, the museum was gradually lost and when Hospital de San Juan de Dios moved to Dr Ezquerdo Street in 1897 only the wax figures and their corresponding documentation remained. On the death of Dr Olavide in 1901 the museum was renamed in his honor.

The museum continued to function until the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 but then fell into decline and was eventually closed in 1966. During its active period, the museum was highly considered, much visited, and cited in numerous publications of the time, as its sculptors, Zofio in particular, enjoyed an excellent reputation worldwide. It is interesting to note that this museum was opened before the L'Hôpital Saint-Louis Museum in Paris, inaugurated for the First International (World) Dermatology and Syphilology Conference in 1889. The 90 figures the Olavide Museum took to that event were much admired by the likes of Kaposi, Boeck, and Morris, among others.

Another event of consequence that reveals the importance of this museum took place in 1919 when Dr Florestan Aguilar organized the International Medical Exhibition at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid. The figures exhibited were so striking that the German delegation offered 30 million pesetas for them, a considerable sum, particularly so when at that time Germany boasted outstanding wax museums (Dresden, Munich, Berlin) that were subsequently destroyed in the Second World War.

By way of anecdote, during the Spanish Civil War, Olavide Museum was much visited by conscripts who could witness the ravages of venereal disease, which at that time caused more casualties than enemy bullets.

\*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [lconde43@yahoo.es](mailto:lconde43@yahoo.es) (L. Conde-Salazar).

## Present

On December 27, 2005 (recalling the date of the museum's inauguration on December 26, 1882), the boxes the last sculptor, Rafael López, had packed away for safekeeping in 1966 were located in a basement of Hospital del Niño Jesús, which was destined for demolition: that discovery followed years of research to locate the pieces. For more than 40 years the museum pieces had suffered in the course of various removals, until they finally reached Hospital Niño de Jesús. Little official information is available regarding the transfer of the figures to various locations. What is known, however, is that when the Hospital San Juan de Dios was demolished to make way for the construction of the Hospital Francisco Franco, the figures were dispatched to adjoining buildings belonging to the Provincial Council (Diputación), including the Colegio de La Paz (today a residential home for the elderly). Photographic evidence eventually came to light showing the damaged state of the boxes, with a number of figures scattered over the floor.

During all this time, several dermatologists did their best to ensure that this treasure of Spanish dermatology did not disappear or end up dispersed all over the country. A key figure was Dr Lázaro, whose considerable efforts to recover the figures and prevent their disappearance met with little success. In 1987, however, in collaboration with Prof García Pérez, he arranged for 20 figures to be exhibited at the Eleventh Iberian and Latin American Congress of Dermatology in Madrid. At that time, Prof Calap received authorization from the Community of Madrid to photograph several figures for Dr JJ Padron's thesis, which he was directing. Prof García Pérez, the driving force behind this recovery process, was unable to see the happy outcome of a project to which he had dedicated much time and interest in his final years.

For reasons unknown to us, Prof Feverte, curator of the former Museum of Medical and Forensic Anthropology in Madrid, contacted the local government and succeeded in recovering and restoring a significant number of figures with the aid of several restorers, including Amaya Maruri and David Aranda. The figures were exhibited in that museum for a few years and this encouraged us to continue our quest to discover the museum's main collection.

What has been accomplished after all this time? From the very beginning the various boards of directors of the AEDV were aware of the cultural and historical value for Spanish dermatology of the collection and the importance of bringing it to light. The AEDV board, chaired by Prof Díaz Pérez, accordingly set out to ensure that everything possible was done to recover and restore the figures along with related documents. After much negotiation, Prof Feverte agreed to transfer them, also specifying their provenance, a clue that eventually led investigators to storage locations.

The efforts of the subsequent board, chaired by Prof Julián Conejo Mir, ensured that the Olavide Museum would be counted among the AEDV's main objectives and the current board, chaired by Prof José Carlos Moreno, has continued to provide support even in these economically challenging times.

The creation of the AEDV Foundation, which has housed the Olavide Museum since 2009, was particularly significant for administrative purposes and for the survival of the museum, one of the foundation's main aims. A fortunate outcome was the recruitment of excellent curators/restorers Amaya Maruri and David Aranda, who are the real driving force behind this project.

What else has been done in the last 5 years? It would be difficult to list everything. However, we would like to thank Dr Jerónimo Maqueda, director of the National School of Occupational Medicine (Escuela Nacional de Medicina del Trabajo), for granting free of charge the use of 100 meters of workspace, including preparation (temperature, humidity, lighting) and office supplies and equipment at the same school (Block 8). This museum workshop ensures the daily tasks of restoring and cataloging each figure (400 to date).

The workshop also houses a small exhibition of figures now restored or undergoing restoration work. Visitors include doctors, students, and private individuals, and guided tours are arranged for foreign doctors, particularly visitors from Latin America. The restorers lead these tours and have also provided audiovisual supporting information. This year a group of Spanish medical resident dermatologists paid a visit during their annual conference held in Madrid.

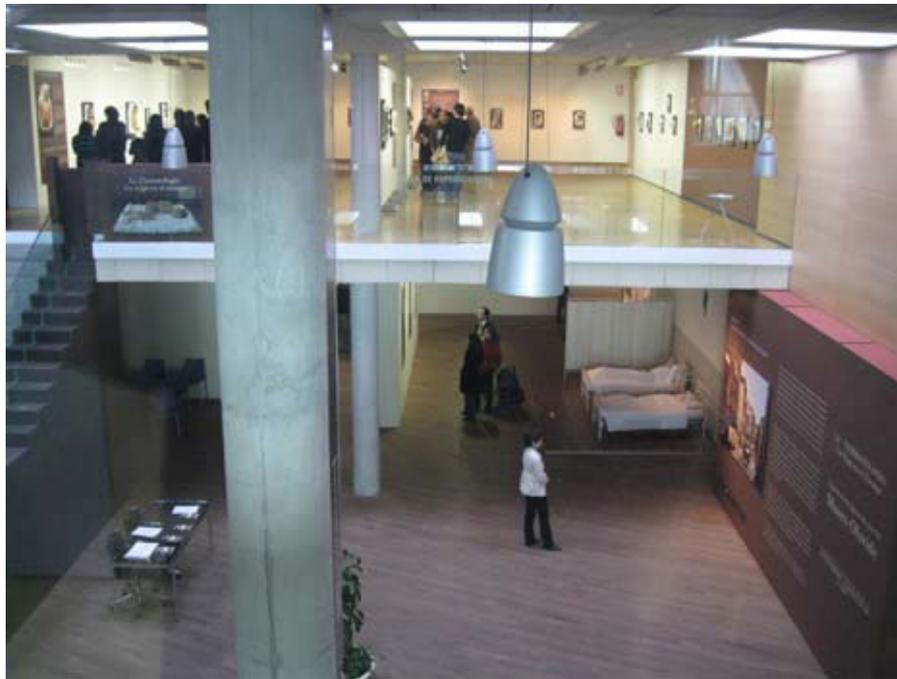
Several visits currently in the pipeline include one on January 14 by medical and nursing students from Molloy College, New York.

Another important task involves the cataloging of documents in boxes (installments of the Olavide atlas, original drawings by Dr Olavide, and several books of medical records from the museum and from Hospital San Juan de Dios).

Storage of the restored figures and the numerous unopened boxes has been highly problematic since they had been kept in unsuitable conditions at the premises of the AEDV on Santísima Trinidad Street, Madrid. On the recent sale of the premises, a new storage area had to be found for the material. Negotiations with the buyers led to their granting use of a section that was subsequently adapted in terms of temperature and humidity; an alarm system was also installed. The safety of the reconditioned figures and those soon to be restored is therefore guaranteed.

## Research

During this time the museum has been the subject of several studies, which have mainly been published in *Actas Dermo-Stillográficas*,<sup>1-4</sup> and Dr Felipe Heras used the available materials to carry out his doctoral thesis, *Figures and Medical Records from the Olavide Museum: A Dermatological Study* (Figuras e historias clínicas del Museo Olavide: estudio dermatológico).<sup>5</sup> The thesis was awarded the highest distinction and was selected for the annual prize for the best doctoral thesis of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Similarly, several chapters of the book *Piel de Cera* (Skin of Wax)<sup>6</sup> describe the museum, its revival, and the most important sculptors and dermatologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Olavide, Azúa, Sánchez Covisa, Sainz de Aja, and Bejarano). Presentations and



**Figure 1** General view of the 2009 Murcia exhibition.

posters associated with the Olavide Museum were part of the 2008 and 2009 conferences of the European Society for the History of Dermatology and Venereology (ESHVD) in Paris and Berlin, respectively.

## Exhibitions

Another of the museum's priority missions is to make itself known in the world of medicine and culture. To that end, exhibitions have been held at national AEDV conferences, the first of which was in May 2006 in Madrid, where 50 figures were displayed for delegates. Exhibitions were also held at the Granada and Barcelona conferences in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

There had been plans to hold an important exhibition by way of tribute to Dr Olavide and his museum, which had always been located in Madrid, at the 2009 Madrid conference at which the centenary of the AEDV would also be celebrated. However, the previous board of directors of the central area of the AEDV did not think it appropriate, the irony being that the city that was home to both Olavide and the museum was now deprived of this display.

Nevertheless, in March 2009, the Murcia branch of the AEDV, chaired by Dr Brufau in collaboration with Drs Frías, Clemente, and other dermatologists from that region, decided to celebrate the centenary of the AEDV by holding a large exhibition about the Olavide Museum. Organized at the Public Record Office (Archivo General), the display turned out to be an important cultural and medical occasion, with the attendance of the President of the Autonomous Community of Murcia and dignitaries from the academic and cultural life of the region (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Beyond the confines of dermatology, we believe the museum deserves recognition as a cultural and historical symbol of Spanish dermatology and should therefore

**Table 1** Murcia

Title: Dermatology: A Journey Through Time  
(La Dermatología: un viaje en el tiempo)  
Date: March 2-7, 2009  
Location: Murcia Public Record Office (Archivo General de Murcia)  
Type of exhibition: Monographic  
Number of figures exhibited: 50 (including Generalized Tinea Favosa)  
Number of visitors: 1150

### Observations:

- The first monographic exhibition to bring dermatology closer to the general public through the figures of the Olavide Museum and an overwhelming success
- Particularly important were the confidence, initiative, and above all the enormous educational efforts made by Drs Brufau, Frías, and Clemente from the AEDV's regional section in Murcia
- The inauguration was attended by the President of the Autonomous Community of Murcia, Ramón Luis Valcárcel, the Mayor of Murcia, the vice-chancellor of the university, the regional ministers for Health and Education, and our colleague, dermatologist and councilor for Health, Fulgencio Cervantes

The exhibition was featured on the front pages of leading local newspapers *La Verdad*, *El Faro*, and *La Opinión*

**Table 2** Granada

Date: From November 3, 2008, to the Present  
 Location: Science Park (Parque de las Ciencias) Journey Around the Human Body Pavilion (Pabellón Viaje al Cuerpo Humano)  
 Type of exhibition: Collaboration. Loan  
 Number of figures exhibited: 18  
 Number of visitors: 400 000 people since November 3, 2008

**Observations:**

- The first important loan of some of the figures from the Olavide Museum collection to a regional institution like the Granada Science Park (Consorcio Parque de las Ciencias de Granada)
- The park extends over 70 000 m<sup>2</sup> and boasts 9 themed pavilions and numerous halls that offer a wide range of activities. There is also a planetarium, an observatory, and a tropical butterfly house
- Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Asturias attended the official opening of the Journey Around the Human Body Pavilion on November 3, 2008

be represented in artistic and cultural environments. Accordingly, in agreement with the AEDV's board of directors, 18 figures depicting a broad spectrum of dermatological diseases were loaned for display to the Science Park in Granada (Parque de las Ciencias de Granada), starting November 3, 2008 (Table 2).

In late 2009, the president of the Spanish Royal Academy of Medicine (RAEM), Prof Manuel Díaz-Rubio García (who had

**Table 3** Madrid

Title: Olavide and His Work: The Beginnings of Dermatology in Spain (Olavide y su Obra. El comienzo de la Dermatología en España)  
 Date: January 1-March 3, 2010  
 Location: Patio de Honor and Library of the RANM  
 Type of exhibition: Monographic  
 Number of figures exhibited: 13 (including *Generalized Tinea Favosa*)  
 Number of visitors: Around 500

**Observations:**

- First monographic exhibition in the commemorative series celebrating the 275th anniversary of the RANM
- The exhibition also coincided with the centenary of the founding of the AEDV
- Those present included the former regional minister for Health, Juan José Güemes; the President of the RANM, Dr Manuel Díaz-Rubio; the former Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, Dr Albert Sanson; and the former Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor Zaragoza.

**Table 4** London

Title: Skin  
 Date: June 9-September 26, 2010  
 Location: Wellcome Collection. Wellcome Trust  
 Type of exhibition: Temporary  
 Number of figures exhibited: 3 (including *Generalized Tinea Favosa*)  
 Number of visitors: Around 300 000

**Observations:**

- The first temporary loan of several works from the Olavide Museum collection to an international exhibition
- Curated by Javier Moscoso, Professor of History and Research at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), the exhibition looked at history and art through skin from a multidisciplinary perspective
- Critics described the exhibition as follows:
  - “Critics' choice”, according to Time Out
  - “A revelation”, The Daily Telegraph
  - “Fascinating”, The Guardian
- It was enormously successful with the general public and received thousands of visitors

been highly impressed on a visit to the museum workshop), entrusted us with the preparation of an inaugural exhibition of 13 selected figures and documentation for the 275th anniversary of the founding of the RAEM. This event was held in early 2010 and was a success throughout its 2-month duration (Table 3).

Finally, London's prestigious Wellcome Trust was the site of the second showing of the Olavide Museum's figures outside Spain this year (the first was in 1889, in Paris, for the First International Dermatology Conference); the Olavide figures were included in the Trust's Skin exhibition, curated by Javier Moscoso, Professor of History and Research at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). Prof Moscoso visited several European museums, including our workshop, where he chose three of our figures to be shown in London. On June 9, the curator and restorers of Olavide Museum attended the opening of this important event in the cultural life of the British capital. Later, on September 19, Prof Moscoso gave the board of directors of the AEDV and the Olavide Museum's director and restorers a guided tour of the exhibition (Table 4, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4).

According to the organizers, the Trust's Skin exhibition was a great success, receiving more than 300 000 visitors during the first 3 months and excellent reviews in the most important newspapers, including *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*, and articles in the medical journals *Science* and *British Medical Journal*.

We are currently in negotiation with the CSIC, Parque de la Ciencia de Granada, and Caixa Fórum about a special exhibition for 2011.

**Website**

Thanks to the disinterested assistance of Félix Von Feiswitz, we are currently creating a website for Olavide Museum in



**Figure 2** Members of the AEDV at the Skin exhibition, London 2010.

Spanish and English. It can be accessed through the AEDV website or directly at [www.museoolavide.es](http://www.museoolavide.es).

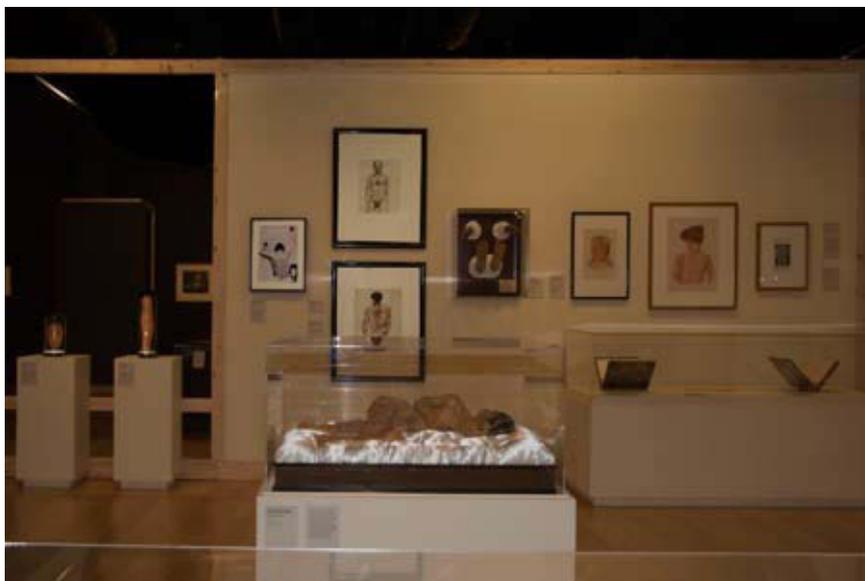
### Exchanges With Other Museums

From the beginning, we have been in direct contact with other European (Paris, Dresden, Berlin, Vienna) and North and South American (Mexican, Columbian, Brazilian, US) museums to exchange information. At the 2009 meeting in Dresden—*Wax Moulages: Precious Craftsmanship in Danger of Extinction* (Table 5)—attended by our restorers, it was

agreed to create a network of medical wax museums and to exchange restoration know-how and techniques. A direct result was the subsequent visit to our workshop of Lisa O'Sullivan, Senior Curator of Medicine at the Science Museum in London, to observe our restorers' methods.

### Future

Recovering the Olavide Museum is a momentous event for Spanish dermatology and is today one of the AEDV



**Figure 3** A room at the Skin exhibition, London 2010.



**Figure 4** A room at the Skin exhibition, London 2010.

Foundation's top priorities. The museum was established in the late 19th century purely for educational purposes—for teaching future doctors about the science of dermatology.

Photography has still not succeeded in making the same impact on reality as these 3-dimensional figures do. The plasticity of wax renders the color, relief, and textures of skin lesions perfectly. At present, in certain countries such as the United States and Germany where medical technology is highly advanced, there has been a return to basics with a resurgence of model making, this time with more modern materials, including some used in medicine, such as alginate, resins, and silicones.

**Table 5** Dresden, Germany

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| <p>Location: Deutsches Hygiene-Museum<br/> Date: September 24-26, 2009<br/> Event: Wax Moulages as Cultural Artefacts<br/> Description: First International Conference on Research, Conservation, and Restoration of Wax Models<br/> Presentation of the project <i>Wax Moulages: Precious Craftsmanship in Danger of Extinction</i>, attended by conservators of wax moulage collections, medical historians, museologists, custodians, and medical scientists from leading European museums and universities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prof Thomas Schnalke. Director of the Berlin Medical Historical Museum Author of the book: <i>Diseases in Wax: The History of the Medical Moulage Berlin 1995</i></li> <li>- Michael Geiges. Associate researcher at the Institute and Museum for the History of Medicine, University of Zurich</li> <li>- Johanna Lang. Conservator at the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum and promoter of the project: <i>Wax moulages: Precious Craftsmanship in Danger of Extinction</i></li> </ul> |
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These pieces allow us a true glimpse of the past, since they contain a great deal of information which is not just medical. They capture the lives of real people, conveying their habits and customs, their desires and fears. The patient's medical history on the back of the figure is a snapshot of 19th-century Spain, explaining the case in simple, direct, and highly evocative language that lets us see the patient through a doctor's eyes and become part of the patient's world.

The singular nature of the figures also makes them appropriate for a more artistic or humanistic exhibition as was the case with the recent London-based exhibition, *Skin: A Journey Through History, Science, Art, and Philosophy Through Skin*.

The possibilities, then, are enormous, encompassing science, art, history, and philosophy, as well as education. How can we marshal our efforts to realize the full potential of this resource?

Due to the considerable numbers of figures found and the work still needed to restore and catalog them, the Clavide Museum should ideally be attached to a public body. We are currently negotiating the possibility of joining with the future Museum of Medicine of the Royal National Academy of Medicine (RANM), where the majority of the pieces could be located, the workshop set up, and restoration and conservation could be more visible.

In this instance, the AEDV would continue to own the collection, which would be deposited and on permanent display at the future RANM. Meanwhile, the remaining pieces would be on temporary loan to other institutions as part of exhibitions, conferences, and meetings.

There would, then, be a recognized public place to house the collection for all to visit, as well as a more mobile section that would publicize and raise awareness of the collection and AEDV alike.

It falls to us to enhance public understanding of this new concept of museum, some of whose exhibits can be visited in a fixed setting (for example, the RANM) though not all

will be on view. The Olavide Museum is a living museum, constantly on the move, at once everywhere but nowhere, now in a museum gallery, now at a conference, now part of an exhibition.

As for funding the project, we must acknowledge that the economic crisis has also affected culture and museums in particular. Public funds are scarce, even for prominent museums which have numerous works of art in storage with no means of restoring or even exhibiting them. The case has arisen where works of great artistic value have been sold so that a museum might survive. It would, therefore, be unrealistic to believe that the Olavide Museum could be supported by the public coffers.

Foundations may be a funding source but are also currently experiencing economic hardship, most already being committed to major projects in the world of culture and museums. At first, pharmaceutical laboratories provided help to restore the figures, but the ensuing economic crisis reduced initial optimism for more involvement and now the contribution is merely symbolic.

Applications for assistance have been sent to all kinds of official bodies associated with medicine but the response has been disheartening. A case in point is the Madrid medical association (Colegio de Médicos), which not only refused any offer of assistance, but also wanted to charge an exorbitant sum for an exhibition at their main offices to celebrate the centenary of the AEDV. To make matters worse, we were expected to cover all setup costs (insurance, transport, security, and so on).

Many dermatologists wonder whether the exhibitions have been economically viable. Unfortunately to date this has not been the case. The only support we have managed to obtain has consisted of an organizing entity or museum's willingness to meet all the expenses (transport, packaging, insurance). In some cases we have been able to make further use of the packing material, which is useful for preserving the figures.

That said, we believe this is the moment to mention the creation of the Olavide Museum brand as a medium-term project. Creating and registering the Museum's name as a brand will help establish and define its existence in the absence of any physical location (we remember that the collection deposited at the RANM, for example, will simply be one of many others at the museum's future premises).

Branding will also help to market and build a name for the museum. Attractively designed products including T-shirts, mugs, and diaries could be created to project the Olavide Museum's image and sold through the main distribution channels (not only at museum shops) such as stores, shopping malls, and on the Internet, as well as

through medical and specialist publications. This approach would combine wide-ranging activities targeting the general public with more focused ones that would encompass the medical, and more specifically, the dermatological sector.

Creating a brand, however, is a slow process that requires new investments of human and economic resources, solid support, and careful marketing to transmit the whole message of what the Olavide Museum truly means with all its nuances.

These and many other ideas are gradually emerging with every new step towards the future of a great museum yet to be discovered. That we find the means and make the effort needed at this new stage before us is vital, but above all we must give the best of ourselves to return this living, active, and fascinating collection to its full potential.

An initial appeal went out to all dermatologists to make a voluntary donation and become Friends of the Olavide Museum, a diploma being issued by way of acknowledgment. However, the idea met with little success, since fewer than 40 dermatologists participated.

Another solution could be for the board of directors to approve an annual charge of €10 to €20 per dermatologist as part of the Academy's fees. The resulting sum would amount to between €20 000 and €40 000 per year and could be allocated to upkeep in the form of new cabinets and equipment, for example. However, surprisingly, this proposal to collect only €10 per dermatologist was initially rejected as being onerous.

In the end, the future of the Olavide Museum must lie in the hands of dermatologists. May it be the future that all of us would want it to be.

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