



Sculpture & Touch

Friday 16 & Saturday 17 May 2008
Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre

ABSTRACTS

SESSION 1

Geraldine Johnson (History of Art Department, University of Oxford)

A Taxonomy of Touch: Tactile Encounters in Renaissance Italy

The ocularcentric orientation of Modern culture is often traced back to Alberti's codification of linear perspective in the 15th century. While perspective and vision in general were clearly important to the production and reception of art in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy, a concern with touch, both in theory and in practice, is also evident. Likewise, images and objects produced in this period often thematise tactility implicitly as well as explicitly. This paper will propose a taxonomy of touch in order to understand the many ways in which tactility is implicated in the art of this period, from the hand of the artist to the collector's caress and from the humanist's abstract musings to the very real grasp of the religious devotee.

Charles Spence (Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford)

Making Sense of Touch

"How can Anthony Caro's *Sculpture Two* or Canaletto's *Piazza San Marco* be made accessible to people who have never seen or who no longer see?" (Candlin, 2003, p. 101). After more than a century of research by psychologists, psychophysicists, and cognitive neuroscientists on the topic of tactile/haptic perception, we still do not have any concrete answers to this fundamental question. Nevertheless, the necessity of finding practical solutions to this problem has become all the more pressing for museum and gallery curators, given the publication of the Disability Discrimination Act. Museums and art galleries in the UK must now, as a legal requirement, ensure that their facilities and exhibitions are made accessible to visitors with sensory (e.g., visual) impairment. In this talk, I will briefly highlight some of the key findings to have emerged from the scientific study of touch over the last few years. We also highlight some of the most important issues that will need to be addressed in the years to come if genuine progress is to be made in

providing tangible solutions to the problem of how to make the exhibits in museums and galleries more accessible to the visually-impaired. The likely insights derived from the research reviewed (and proposed) here should also help to enhance the experience of sighted individuals in museums as well.

Andrew Benjamin (Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University, Australia)

Endless Touching: Herder and Sculpture

Touch is distanced from the immediacy of sight. As such touch brings into play epistemological and ontological considerations that cannot be reduced to those at work within a conception of the philosophical dominated by the primacy of vision. Touch assumes a different ontology of the object. Equally touch opens up the possibility of an object that cannot only be known within the potential endlessness of its being touched. These considerations will be developed in relation to Herder's writings on sculpture.

SESSION 2

Michael Paraskos (Director of Programmes, Cyprus College of Art)

Bringing into Being: Vivifying Sculpture Through Touch

In Ovid's *Metamorphosis* there are two stories that are of extreme importance when considering the nature and purpose of sculpture. The first is that of Narcissus, the tale of a beautiful young man who saw his own reflection in a well and was transfixed by the image. Unable to leave the sight of his own beauty he wasted away, eventually turning into the narcissus. The second is the story of Pygmalion. Pygmalion was a sculptor of Cyprus who made an image of a woman so beautiful he fell in love with it. Eventually he prayed to Aphrodite to make the sculpture come alive, and his prayers are answered.

In this paper Paraskos places these two stories in opposition as a means to understand a fundamental purpose of art. The story of Narcissus is one of unrequited love, or rather unrequitable love, with Narcissus unable to consummate his physical desire for his own reflection. Try to touch a reflection in water and it simply disappears. The result of this is a failure to achieve existence, and through that failure Narcissus also ceases to exist. The point is made more explicit in the story by the subsidiary tale of Echo, who falls in love with Narcissus, but again is unable to consummate her desire physically because Narcissus does not notice her. So Echo too pines away, becoming no more than an echo. The story of Pygmalion, on the other hand, is one of fully requited love, in which desire is fulfilled and in the most physical of ways. Ovid describes Pygmalion running his hands over the finished statue. 'tempted as to whether it is flesh or ivory, not admitting it to be ivory. He kisses it and thinks his kisses are returned; and speaks to it; and holds it, and imagines that his fingers press into the limbs, and is afraid lest bruises appear from the pressure.' This physicality is the complete opposite of Narcissus, and hints at sexual fetishism, with Ovid even suggesting that Pygmalion sleeps with the sculpture. At the climax of the story, the statue comes alive, turning into Galatea, and still Pygmalion cannot stop touching her: 'The lover... reaffirms the fulfilment of his wishes, with his hand, again, and again.'

Can we say, then, that this is a mythologising of the purpose of sculpture? That sculpture makes things real and give them existence is only a possibility if we jettison an attitude towards sculpture that has dominated for a very long time and which survived intact the transition from historic forms of sculpture to 'expanded field' practices; namely that sculpture is a visual rather than a tactile art form. In Ovid is not the tale of Narcissus a warning against precisely that approach to sculpture, while the story of Pygmalion is an exemplar of the true tactile nature of sculpture?

James Hall (independent art historian)

Michaelangelo and the Cult of the Left Hand

When the issue of sculpture and touch is discussed, little emphasis is placed on the distinction between the capacities of the left and right hands. But in the courtly love tradition, which would have been transmitted to Michelangelo through Lorenzo de' Medici, the left hand is both the most beautiful hand (because it is less used) and the "messenger of the heart" (due to its location on the 'heart' side of the body). Conversely, the right hand is the one that picks fights and is vindictive. In his Commentary on his sonnets, Lorenzo pleads for the left hand to be preferred to the right.

The cult of the 'loving' left hand is manifested in Michelangelo's poetry and art, particularly after around 1530. The clearest expression of this is in his three depictions of left-handed archers - above all in the statue of *Apollo* - which are visual elaborations of ideas found in antiquity and in Lorenzo de' Medici's writings. The so-called Delian Apollo, who shot his bow with his left hand, was a benign version of the God - one who was quick to forgive and "slow to do harm" [Macrobius]. For Lorenzo de' Medici, Cupid is another left-handed archer, whose arrows do not cause lasting pain, and we find just such a figure on top of Michelangelo's design for a salt-cellar.

Michelangelo's Apollo looks to his left and exposes his left side as if he were offering it up to be touched. Many of Michelangelo's late depictions of the dead Christ have a comparable left-ward orientation, such as the Pietà carved for his own tomb, in which the Virgin places her left hand over Christ's heart. In Michelangelo's sculpture, the left side is the one that is most capable of being touched, both emotionally and physically, and in an ideal world, the left hand should do all the touching.

Toby Juliff (School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds)

Untouched Sound: Ventriloquism and the 'Touch' of Sculpture

'He had also contriv'd an hollow Statue, which gave a Voice, & utter'd words, by a long and conceal'd pipe which went to its mouth, whilst one spake thro it, at a good distance, & which at first was very Surprising.' The Diary of John Evelyn (13 July 1654)

Two distinct variants of touch emerge from Edith Lecourt's work on the 'musical envelope' (Anzieu 1990) – a 'touched sound' and an 'untouched sound'. The untouched sound emerges from under the surface, with no visible forms of its own production, like in a good ventriloquist's act. The touched

sound emerges from the surface, as from the skein of a beaten drum. But they are both forms of touching – one that we see and one that we do not see.

Tony Oursler's *Underwater (Blue/Green)* of 1996 is an untouching sculpture; a ventriloquial performance in which the sound – as in Evelyn's 'hollow Statue' – is predicated upon an unseen touch. This paper seeks to explore the function of the 'untouched sound' through an analysis of two works: Oursler's *Underwater (Blue/Green)* and David Rokeby's *Echoing Narcissus* (2000). How might we consider a sculptor's touch that we can hear but cannot see? Juliff will argue that Lecourt's work proffers a model for thinking about the metaphor of ventriloquism that might aid an interrogation of this manoeuvre between the unseen 'touch inside' and the seen 'touch outside' in modern sculpture. What can be seen is 'touch', but an untouched, hidden form of 'touch' which, nevertheless, plays itself out upon the surface of the sculpture.

SESSION 3

Francesca Bacci (Centro Interdipartimentale Mente e Cervello, Università di Trento, Italy)

Either Touch or Look: When One Sense is Better than Two

Rosalyn Driscoll, an artist who creates sculpture for touch, wrote that "touch functions on a continuum between objective and subjective, not only providing knowledge about the object, but also about our selves. The sense of touch generates meanings that emerge from the body as well as the mind." Starting from her work, this paper will consider some neuro-scientific aspects of the multi-sensory experience of art. Integration of touch and sight can often yield conflicting information, when what is seen seems to contradict what is touched. The role of the eye as a "channel" for the sensation of touch will also be discussed.

It is often assumed that the materiality of sculpture automatically renders tactile information indispensable to its full understanding and apprehension. Although much of the history of sculpture is written and taught by considering the works through the sense of sight, observations and information regarding its tactile aspects are commonly included.

This paper will argue that, while the physical nature of statues as three-dimensional objects provides certain unique characteristics, there are many instances in which a direct tactile experience of sculpture can potentially challenge the aesthetic significance of the work or mislead regarding the artist's intention. Some examples are provided by the work of Medardo Rosso, whose final goal was to dematerialize his sculptures to the point of making the viewer "forget the matter", through the use of photography. Another case, as observed by Dewitt H. Parker in his "Principles of Aesthetics", is that of neo-classical sculpture, in which the touch values of the surfaces of statues are destroyed to the point of inducing the public to adopt a visual approach to the works.

Carmen Windsor (Philosophy, University of Reading)

Proprioception and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Sculpture

The question Windsor addresses is whether proprioception, the sensory modality that provides feedback solely on the status of the body internally, plays an active role in our aesthetic appreciation of sculpture. Barbara Montero has argued that proprioception could be an 'aesthetic sense'; that we can proprioceive the actions of others and make aesthetic judgements based on this. Recent neuroscientific research on mirror neurons appears to support Montero's claim. Findings from neuroscience suggest that we neurally simulate the actions of others; Vittorio Gallese calls this 'embodied simulation'. In this paper Windsor proposes that our aesthetic appreciation of sculpture is facilitated by 'embodied simulation'; that we proprioceive the sculpture and make aesthetic judgements based on this. She will demonstrate that this could be easily understood when it comes to sculpture of the human form, and address the issue of whether the claim be pushed to include our appreciation of abstract sculpture or sculpture of non-human forms.

Arie Hartog (Curator, Gerhard-Marks-Haus, Bremen, Germany)

Look as if You Touch

The German philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996) used the term "Mehrsinnigkeit" (meaning both multiple sense and multiple senses) to describe the specific interplay between sight and touch from an anthropological point of view. Although he did not write about sculpture, his phenomenological approach offers a model to describe the intrinsic qualities of this artform. In his paper Hartog outlines such a model and relates it to both art historical discourse on sculpture that has been dominated by sight and to alternative positions focused on haptic experience.

Touch is the ultimate safeguard against deception. So why has it been banned from the experience of (modern) art? Even careful observation and viewing play almost no role as the audience is not allowed to come close to objects. Viewers have to stay out of reach and as a result certain modes of sensual perception are being suppressed. While this is understandable from the perspective of an art industry that sees works of art foremost as valuable objects there seems to be no deeper necessity for art historians or curators to start from such an attitude.

SESSION 4

Julia Cassim (Helen Hamlyn Centre, Royal College of Art)

Touch and the Non-Visual Imagination – Case Studies from the Japanese Museum Experience

Touch has been central to the idea of making art and museum artefacts accessible to visually impaired audiences since the first documented initiatives in the museum sector at the beginning of the 20th century. The handling of original objects accompanied by skilled interpretation has been seen as the most complete and satisfying form of cognitive and physical access for audiences who would otherwise be cut off from the riches of the world's great collections.

The acceptance of this idea has brought with it issues relating not only to conservation but also to the nature of the visually impaired audience and of the touch experience, which has been founded on the idea that *ipso facto* visually impaired audiences have universally high degrees of tactile literacy and are able to decipher the complexity of data delivered primarily by touch. This is belied by any survey of the visually impaired population where the majority lose their sight from mid-life onwards and never develop the high levels of tactile literacy of congenitally or early blind people.

Over a four-year period Cassim worked with a group of visually impaired people in Japan, designing and curating art exhibitions and interpretative materials for this population and running creative workshops to enhance their understanding of the basic concepts of art. On monthly visits to different museums, a wide variety of two and three dimensional artworks and museum artefacts were handled ranging from hard stone ancient sculpture through to multi-media works by contemporary artists. Working closely with this core group, Cassim developed a methodology of combining direct touch with other methods where the touch element was either indirect or metaphorical such as through the use of raised images in combination with audio commentary and interpretative objects. Her paper will look at the issues that arose from this experience and give case studies of particular works along with examples of how the touch experience in museums has developed in the different cultural context of Japan.

Rosalyn Driscoll (contemporary artist, USA)

Crossing Boundaries of Self, Time and Space

Touch, in the most encompassing sense of the word, provides information about the world around us as well as the world within us. We usually focus on an object, but looking inwardly, we become aware of subjective, internal processes: sensations within the skin; muscular activity; the motion and location of our bodies and limbs; the qualities with which we are moving; subtle events like tension, ease, pleasure, breathing, pulses. Touch ripples outward and inward, fusing outer and inner realities.

Access to inner and outer dimensions is also true of the experience of art. Artworks reveal people, landscapes, religions, cultures, passions, ways of perceiving and ways of being. At the same time, artworks reveal internal landscapes: memories, emotions, images and imaginations. They alter our perceptions, engage our psyches, and reflect back to us who we are by what we find in them.

The shared capacity of art and touch to cross boundaries of self, time and space to reveal both inner and outer conditions, both subjective and objective dimensions, makes touch deeply compatible with the experience of art.

There are many aspects of touch that deepen the encounter with art: the sense of creating an artwork, like the artist, through touch; the specific qualities conveyed by touch; the multiplication of meanings; the intimacy of the connection; the possibility of gestural, kinesthetic cues for memory and association; the spatial acuity of touch; the way touch maps an artwork into one's personal space; the evocation of childhood, sexuality, emotion and risk; and the integrative function of touch.

The same reciprocal connection between inner and outer realms holds in the *visual* encounter with art, even when there is no contact. Tactile perception underlies and informs visual perception. The sublimated effects of touch occur in visual perception through memory, dynamization, projection, identification and empathy. Sculpture is touched and touching whether one touches or not.

Fiona Candlin (Birkbeck College, University of London)

Licit and Illicit Touching in the Museum

Museums are often claimed to be paradigmatically visual institutions, as Donald Preziosi writes, they are 'the most extraordinary optical instrument of all; the veritable summa of opticality, of visuality'. They accomplish this paradigmatic visuality by enabling visual learning and subjectivity, and by suppressing other forms of sensory engagement, particularly touch. Taking sculpture galleries at The British Museum as a case-study, this paper examines the strategies and technologies museum uses to prevent visitors from touching the exhibits and asks: what motivates visitors to touch the exhibits without permission, does illicit touch qualitatively vary from licit touch and how do notions of illicit touch change our conceptualisation of the museum?

SESSION 5

Robert Hopkins (Department of Philosophy, University of Sheffield)

Sculpture and Perspective

Painting is a visual art in many ways. One of the more profound among them is that paintings, like other representational pictures, manifest visual perspective: paintings represent their objects within the same structure within which vision itself represents the world. Does sculpture also manifest that perspective? Hopkins divides that question in two: does sculpture *represent* its objects within such a perspective, and *do we see in* sculpture objects presented in that perspective? He then considers various arguments for negative and positive answers to that second question. The negative arguments contrast our experiences of sculpture and of painting. The positive arguments draw on thoughts about visual experience in general, and in particular the way in which the visual appearance of various properties we certainly do see in sculpture, such as three-dimensional shape, is bound up with visual perspective.

The reader may wonder what any of this has to do with sculpture's relation to touch. Framing the question whether sculpture is visual in the sense above raises the related issue whether it is also tactual in that sense (i.e. whether it also manifests the perspectival structure that defines tactual engagement with the world). Moreover, exploring the former question reveals the resources available for answering the latter. Thus, while he will not here discuss whether sculpture manifests tactual perspective, Hopkins hopes that what he does at least helps lay the ground for that discussion.

Claude Heath (contemporary artist, UK)

Islands of Clarity: Drawing Sculpture with a Blindfold

Heath's presentation will cover the works he made between 1994 and 1999 when he was exploring the possibilities of drawing whilst blindfolded, culminating in a residency at the Henry Moore Institute where he was able to work from sculptures chosen for this purpose by the curator Dorcas Taylor. These were objects by Jacob Epstein, Anthony Caro, Austin Wright, and Hubert Dalwood. All the drawings were made by touch, without seeing the objects themselves, and sometimes not looking at the drawings until much later. Heath was following a type of remote-sensing *modus operandi*, the purpose of which was to examine what it might mean to start out from Ruskin's advice to draw what one sees (or feels) and not what one knows. Heath will discuss the technical processes that he developed in the process, and some of the implications of this way of working. The use of the blindfold highlighted an interest in three-dimensionality as well as how to represent tactile values visually, and it will be shown how the desire to remain in contact with the source object while drawing produced a series of works that revealed a movement around, and of, these objects. Thus a type of tactile perspective was seemingly revealing itself.

Fostering this desire to represent space has led to later 'sighted' work that the artist will also present briefly, which incorporates sculptural space in the use of folded structures for drawing upon, and also subsequent drawing made from virtual sources that have an inherent sculptural presence, such as stereoscopic photography both old and new. Lately, the process of extending this use of movement and tactility into works that are to be comprehended visually has led to freehand digital drawing in three dimensions, creating drawings that can be rotated and animated, which will also be shown.

Sebastiano Barassi (Curator of Collections, Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge)

The Sculptor as a 'Blindman': Constantin Brancusi's 'Sculpture for the Blind'

The early 20th century saw a significant rise in investigations into multisensual approaches to the creation and fruition of art, primarily in response to radically new scientific and philosophical ideas. Often animated by what Martin Jay has described as 'anti-ocularcentrism', some of these enquiries resulted in an exploration of touch as a means to enhance the aesthetic experience. Cases such as László Moholy-Nagy's courses at the Bauhaus and Filippo Marinetti's 'Manifesto of Tactilism' are well documented. This paper addresses a lesser-known example, Constantin Brancusi's 'Sculpture for the Blind'.

To this day 'Sculpture for the Blind' remains one of Brancusi's least studied works, in part due to scarce and often ambiguous documentation but also because of its somewhat bewildering nature of visual artwork explicitly associated with blindness. An account of the first public display of the sculpture, a simple marble ovoid, suggested that it was shown in a closed cloth sack with two holes for the hands, so that it could only be experienced through touch. The essentially tactile nature of the work was reaffirmed by Brancusi in 1922, when he presented John Quinn, who had just purchased it, with a companion piece entitled *The Hand*.

Using the sculpture as the starting point, the paper explores the following topics:

- Brancusi's interest in Marcel Duchamp's ideas on non-retinal art;
- the sculptor's habit of feeling works with his eyes shut while making them, and the related practice of obsessively polishing his sculptures, both symptomatic of an interest in tactility and in the notion of the artist as 'blind man';
- the relationship between blindness, touch, simplification of forms and abstraction;
- Brancusi's use of touch as a means to reveal invisible realities within the sculptural forms – he enigmatically described the work as, "an egg with small cubes inside, a human brain".

SESSION 6

Linda Ann Nolan (Bibliotheca Hertziana, Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Rome)

Popular Devotion at St. Peter's Basilica: The Bronze St. Peter, Pope Paul V and Urban VIII

In the midst of the simultaneous destruction and construction of St. Peter's basilica, a bronze sculpture of St. Peter was installed near the new central crossing. The sculpture has a long history of devotion, but the tactile veneration was officially codified in the early 17th century. Given that not all people visiting the basilica had access to the pope's body or the relic of the first pope, St. Peter, the statue served as a substitute body for veneration by means of kissing the feet of the sculpture. To the present day, visitors to St. Peter's basilica line up to touch the feet, posing for a moment while a friend or family member takes their photo with the famous statue.

This paper recovers the culturally specific meaning of religious devotion to objects in early modern Rome, in particular, kissing and touching the feet of sculptures of saints and Christ. Nolan takes as her central example the bronze sculpture of St. Peter. She presents new archival evidence related to the dating of the installation of the object, the people who venerated the sculpture, and the tradition of its tactile devotion. The new information helps place the sculpture within the historically specific context of Pope Paul V's actions to create sites of popular devotion in the new basilica, which included increasing access to the new basilica's confessional and installing objects in the new grottoes. The bronze St. Peter was further popularized during the pontificate of Urban VIII. The analysis also sheds light on the larger question of how objects became (or were prevented from becoming) appropriate sites of tactile interaction within sacred spaces in early modern Rome.

Caterina Y. Pierre (Department of Art, City University of New York at Kingsborough Community College)

The Pleasure and Piety of Touch in Aimé-Jules Dalou's 'Tomb of Victor Noir'

One of the most frequently touched sculptures at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris is the life-sized bronze *gisant* atop the tomb of Victor Noir (born Yvan Salmon, 1848-1870) by the French sculptor Aimé-Jules Dalou (1838-1902). A young French journalist with leftist, Republican leanings, Noir was assassinated in 1870 by Pierre Bonaparte, a cousin of Emperor Napoleon III. The incident was widely reported in the European and American press and was later considered the event that signalled the end of the Second Empire. Dalou depicted Noir as he fell dead, dressed in his wedding attire, referencing his pending marriage that was never consummated. Prompted by travel guidebooks, visitors to the tomb have historically rubbed the sculpture's groin area, an action said to cure romantic ills. Agalmatophilia, or the obsessive human impulse to touch sculptures, is quite common globally in both religious and secular contexts; in contrast to museums, the dual nature of cemeteries as both public and private spaces makes it difficult to curb the temptations of curious hands. In 2004, a barrier was placed around the sculpture to protect it from further damage but public outcry led to its quick removal.

In this lecture Pierre will focus on interactions between Dalou's sculpture and both its original and its modern public audiences with regard to this innate need to touch. Previous studies of the *Tomb of Victor Noir* tend to emphasize the sexual aspects of the sculpture, an approach that ignores Noir's role as a political martyr, the first casualty in the battle for a new Republic. Her investigation of the public's touching of the sculpture on other parts of Noir's body leads to a different analysis of the work from that which has been previously published. As will be shown, touching the *Tomb of Victor Noir* is, for some, less an act of pleasure than an act of piety.

Michael Petry (contemporary artist, UK and Curator, Royal Academy Schools Gallery)

U TOUCH ME: The Body Transposed

U touch me

When to touch (or resist the temptation) when presented with work that aches to be stroked.

Wood u?

U broke it you bought it – the fear factor.

Tied up in knots thinking about it – act!

Is the guard looking? The guard's dilemma.

Worse, are other people looking? Do hipsters engage – the London dilemma.

In his talk Petry will present a selection of his works that deal with the above topics. The pieces will include work made of highly polished wood that viewers are allowed to touch, glass and silver-plated objects that they are not,

but often do, and his knotted rope installation pieces where viewers are encouraged to alter their shape. He will present anecdotal responses to the work, the history of their making and his conceptual stance towards these seemingly minimalist works that are in fact highly sexually and erotically charged.

SESSION 7

Hagi Kenaan (Department of Philosophy, Tel Aviv University, Israel)

Narcissus' Touch: Sculpture and the Phenomenology of the Body

The desire to touch is symptomatic of the kind of spectatorship - the kind of gaze - that sculpture calls for. In viewing sculpture, the eye can never forget - it is obliged to bear witness to - its condition of embodiment. Sculpture can meet the eye only in the form of an intertwining - a "chiasmus" as Merleau-Ponty calls it - of vision and the body. We cannot genuinely be said to see a sculpture as long as our eyes remain bound to a fixed perspective, as long as the framing of the visual is done independently of the body's possible modes of action. In other words, in looking at a sculpture it is clear why seeing is not an event that can occur inside the mind; it is not a relation between an ideal viewer and an image, but a real condition of our moving about in this world. The visual field in which a sculpture appears is not a rear screen of a camera obscura, but a life-world that opens up through the "intersection" between two different, often conflicting, forms of intentionality: one is directed at objects or content while the other opens up as a form of affectivity.

In this paper, Kenaan argues that the unique visuality of sculpture always involves a strong tension between content and affectivity (a tension that can be found in both traditionally figurative and non-figurative sculpture alike). He explains the sense in which this tension is exemplified in the intrinsic desire to touch the sculptures we see and he does so against the background of Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the intertwining of vision and touch, with particular attention to the unique kind of "reversibility" that is involved in both vision and touch and which Merleau-Ponty terms "Narcissism."

Yet, whereas Merleau-Ponty focused on painting as the ultimate exemplification of his later philosophy, Kenaan argues that, in the context of embodied vision, there is an independent philosophical lesson to be gleaned from the experience of sculpture. And, that we must therefore reckon with sculpture as embodying a unique form of visuality that cannot be subsumed under a general understanding of images.

Alison Wright (Department of History of Art, University College London)

'Toccare il vero'? Playing on Touch in 15th-century Florentine Sculpture and the Case of Desiderio

In 15th- and 16th-century Italy, one predominant and powerful notion of touch was related to the idea of direct, unmediated contact with the authentic ('toccare con mano' or 'toccare il vero') of the kind Verrocchio's bronze *Christ and St. Thomas* was intended to thematise. This paper will seek to explore how and why this notion was evoked, above all in religious sculpture carved in relief. At the same time we find that the viewer's desire to touch (a desire that Vasari considered to be perfectly expressed in Verrocchio's *St. Thomas*) was

often, by a variety of strategies, denied. Focussing on the highly innovative sculpture of Desiderio da Settignano, Wright will indicate how his low relief images drew on capacities often associated with painting - esp. Netherlandish works on panel and the work of Filippo Lippi - to produce effects of intimate touch and imminence in a space which is deliberately reticent and liminal. Figures shown in dramatic close-up and often in acutely emotional states are interrelated by a sophisticated poetics of touch, with fingers pressed against flesh or intertwined in drapery (does the Virgin touch the Christ Child's flesh or not?). By powerfully suggesting both pliancy and presence, eliciting prior and pleasurable experience of touching youthful flesh, the viewer's own touch is also invited only to be, in various ways, impeded according to a devotional logic that reasserts that seeing is believing.

Shir Aloni (Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)

'Textures of Memory': Touch and Remembrance in the Works of Mona Hatoum, Doris Salcedo, and Anne Wilson

The paper explores the tactual evocation of absence and longing in the sculptural installations of Mona Hatoum, Doris Salcedo and Anne Wilson, which despite their shared thematic and aesthetic sensibilities, are rarely discussed in relation to one another. The works she will discuss are composed of found objects and fabrics, and strands of human hair, creating textured, corporeal surfaces that narrate stories of displacement, loss, and separation. On the boundary between the living and the dead, the uncanny materiality of the hair in the works of these artists elicits feelings of intimacy and anxiety, while creating a tension between the sensuality of the organic substance and the untouchable relic. Employing domestic furniture and traditional 'women's crafts' such as weaving and sewing, their works also suggest the realm of the 'feminine', the space of the home and the mother's body. As the paper shows, by making us 'read in detail' and pay attention to our bodily sensations through close proximity and tactile impressions, but mostly through the visceral, both appealing and appalling encounter with the hair, the elegiac works of Hatoum, Salcedo, and Wilson stimulate 'involuntary' recollections, transforming the viewer into an active participant in the memory of places lost and lives past.

SESSION 8

Douglass Bailey (School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff University)

Small Things in the Hand: Miniaturism, Figurines and Body-objects

To make a miniature three-dimensional representation of the human body is to stimulate powerful, yet implicit conditions for visual and tactile understanding of artefacts. These conditions have critical consequences for peoples' perceptions of their bodies and of the bodies of others. In southeastern Europe, from 6500 BC, people made small anthropomorphic, fired-clay figurines. There are many regional varieties of these Neolithic figurines and archaeologists have long sought interpretive refuge in the tedious detail of chronological typology or in the fantasy world of the Mother Goddess. It is only recently that we have made any significant progress in understanding these objects in a critical way. The nature of this new engagement rests with the power of miniaturisation as a process and in the consequences of representing the human form at a scale small enough for the

object to be held in hand. In this paper, Bailey argues that via miniaturism (and their three-dimensionality) prehistoric figurines afforded the gradual emergence of particular Neolithic understandings of the human body and of group and individual identity. Furthermore, by thinking about these key characteristics of figurines (as small scale, three-dimensional representations), we gain a clearer perspective on our own modern visual and tactile reactions to these objects regardless of whether they are a part of a fully documented, yet mundane, museum collection or whether they are a prized piece in the more aesthetically exotic collection of illegally acquired antiquities.

**Anne Cranny-Francis (Department of Critical and Cultural Studies,
Macquarie University, Australia)**

Touching Bodies: Ron Mueck's Exploration of (Sensory) Being

Andrea Bolland explains in an article on the work of Bernini (2000) that sculpture was distinguished from the arts of painting and poetry "by its ability to give pleasure and to grant certain knowledge through the sense of touch" (Bolland, 2000: 318). Sixteenth-century sculptor, Nicolo Tribolo claimed that a blind man would recognize a sculpture of a man by touch as it has the form of a man, but would find a painting a faulty representation as it is a flat surface.

Susanna Greeves identifies touch as a major characteristic of the work of contemporary sculptor, Ron Mueck: "Touch, the sense which Mueck's rendering of warm, heavy, flesh or fine, downy hair most arouses, has been deemed unreliable, dangerous or even morally questionable." (Greeves, 2003: 30) Yet one action forbidden to the viewer of Mueck's sculpture is touch, as his work is (relatively) fragile - unlike marble or bronze statuary, for example, which can be touched by viewers, and which is sometimes created with that interactive touch as part of its meaning and being. Tribolo's test for sculpture could not be applied to Mueck's work, even though one of its most striking features is the mimetic realism that Tribolo claims as the superior quality of sculpture.

Mueck uses contemporary materials - fibreglass and resins - to construct his hyperreal figures, and these materials are not amenable to public handling. When Greeves writes that Mueck's work arouses touch, then, she is not inciting readers literally to touch his work - as did much classical writing, not least the foundational story of Pygmalion. Instead she notes that the work makes the viewer *desire* that touch ("arouses"), which begs the questions - why and how does it do this?

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