

PRESS
INFO

Basel, February 2016

PRIÈRE DE TOUCHER – The Touch of Art
Museum Tinguely, Basel: 12 February – 16 May 2016

Museum Tinguely is pursuing the project of an exhibition series with which it sheds light on the complex theme of the five human senses and their portrayal in art up to the present day. 2015 saw the opening of the first exhibition under the title, 'Belle Haleine – The Scent of Art', and this year will see a continuation with 'PRIÈRE DE TOUCHER – The Touch of Art'. This exhibition is devoted to the fascinating phenomenon of haptic perception and makes a break with customary museum practice of appealing primarily to the visitor's visual sense.



Marcel Duchamp, *Prière de toucher*, catalog cover for the Surrealism show 'Le Surréalisme en 1947', 1947, Collection Hummel, Vienna © Succession Marcel Duchamp / 2016, ProLitteris, Zurich; Photo: Galerie Hummel, Vienna

The exhibition is centered around the sense of touch and the haptic system as a possibility of aesthetic perception, and it throws up a series of questions at the same time: How do we perceive tactile art? What happens when our skin suddenly plays the main role in the experiencing of art? Even without direct physical contact with the beholder, can artworks appeal to their sense of touch? Can tactile experiences be described and translated into images? Works from entirely different eras testify to an understanding of art that includes the

tactile dimension. Tactility has increasingly become a deliberately employed design element since the mid-20th century.

The sense of touch is our first and oldest sense. It operates as a 'proximal sense' at minimal distances through direct physical contact. The skin is our largest organ. It is fundamental for recording the reality that surrounds us. Depending on the historical, geographical, and cultural context, the sense of touch is described sometimes as the most primitive, sometimes as the most existential and most complex sense. Primary organs of the sense of touch are the hands, especially the fingertips. Using them we are able, by means of stereognosis, to get a picture of a felt object without seeing it. However, the lips and tongue also have a multitude of sense cells, which is visually comprehensible in the portrayal of the somatosensory homunculus, where these three organs are represented in oversize. Aristotle assigned the sensations cold, warm, dry, and wet to the four elements. Further, in line with a material's properties, distinctions can be drawn between hard, soft, rough, and smooth. In addition to mechanoreceptors and thermoreceptors, our skin is also equipped with nociceptors, which signal pain to us. The skin harbors sense systems organized in highly diverse ways. Haptic stimuli can trigger pleasure or displeasure. Touching cannot be detached from one's own body, but it does enable the experiencing of intercorporeality (Maurice Merleau-Ponty) and is associated with intimacy and emotionality.

In Didier Anzieu, the notion of the body as house and shell of the 'Ego' is the point of departure for a nuanced psychopathological differentiation of the functions of the 'Skin-Ego'. Sensory deprivation leads to serious pathological damage. Touches, above all but not only through the skin, grooming for example, are a lubricant of social life – they make us happy. Our spatial orientation, along with our physical perception, also has its relational benchmark in the proportions of the human body: We have a body, we are a body (Wilhelm Reich).

The convention of oculocentrically orientated art perception emanates from our ability, primarily and almost exclusively, to comprehend images using our eyes, but at the same time to grasp them – in a widespread form of synesthetic perception – physically and tactilely too, with the 'haptic gaze'. With the transformation of our apperceptive apparatus brought about by technology, as a result of acceleration, distancing, and medialization (Walter Benjamin, Paul Virilio), the functions of our proximal senses have changed. Body extensions, artificial sensory organs, technological add-ons (prostheses) create new forms of communication, but simultaneously throw us back onto our senses' limited possibilities. Of these, the cutaneous sense is the most versatile and most elementary sense. Without it we are not viable. Without the hand as a tool there is no art, either. Creating art requires contact in the twofold sense.

PRIÈRE DE TOUCHER at Museum Tinguely is arranged in the form of a tour that enables diverse haptic, visual, and sensory thought experiences. To match our cutaneous senses' diverse possibilities, this trail is not primarily arranged chronologically or linearly but pursues various narrative strands, which are intended to enable several interpretations but also sensory and situative encounters. In partnership with Skulpturhalle Basel, plaster casts of antique sculptures from four centuries are on show, which are felt blindfold under instruction on a **hands-on tour** and can be experienced in their schematically reduced to naturalistic physicality.

Faith needs touch and touches are a type of proof of God. Touch practices are omnipresent in religions. The ritual extent of touching or its refusal is further enhanced through explicit permission (St. Thomas, reliquary cult, laying on of hands) or through spiritualizing dematerialization tendencies ('Mentopolis', Hartmut Böhme) and prohibitions ('noli me tangere'). The exhibition brings together objects from various religions and regions of the world which tell of spiritual and physical contacts on the search for salvation and of the skin as their intermediary organ. All objects make it clear that spiritual and physical touches are inseparable.

The **allegorical subject** of the five senses enjoyed growing popularity in 16th and 17th century art. In Flanders and the Netherlands in particular, typical manners of presenting sensory experience developed and gained currency Europe-wide in the form of print cycles. Inspired by *het gevoel* of Antwerp artist Frans Floris, numerous artists combined a woman's figure seated on the lakeside, a bird pecking on her outstretched hand, with illustrations of particularly sensitive or reputedly biting animals such as spiders or turtles, snakes or scorpions. Other works assign to the senses of feeling and touch pointed and sharp-edged attributes such as needles, spurs, or thistles. However, not every allegory links haptic experience with pain—Abraham Bosse's series *Die Fünf Sinne* emphasizes the erotic side of touching and, in its narrative of the seductive force of sensory joys, has the sense of touch form the crowning conclusion.

Ambivalence towards the haptic potential of art has characterized perceptual aesthetics between physiological touching and the tactile aesthetics of viewing for centuries. Without the creative hand, no art can arise – whereas its comprehension and reception occurs mostly only with the eyes and is institutionalized as 'haptic gaze'. Jérôme Zonder's series of drawings of touching hands and also the large-format, four-part nude *Autopsie de la jeune fille* speak of the manifold possibilities of portrayal that proceed from the interplay of hand, drawing instrument, and paper, from the continuously probing contact energy of the strokes in the drawing, the probing of the stroke (Hartmut Böhme).

Bethan Huws's pink neon text installation *Pierre de touche* is a product of her many years' preoccupation with the texts and principal works of Marcel Duchamp. *Pierre de touche* (touchstone) refers to Duchamp's work *Prière de toucher* and adds even more dimensions to Duchamp's wordplay that oscillates between request and supplication. In the exhibition the installation stands at a crossroads at which one is obliged to choose between baroque allegories and religious objects to one side and the leap into the avant-garde of the early 20th century.

One focus of the exhibition is formed by more than ten works by Duchamp, of which *Prière de toucher*, the catalog cover for the Surrealism show of 1947 featuring a realistically shaped female breast in foam, gave the exhibition its title. It is the first in a series of further erotic motifs that the artist realized in the subsequent years. To **Duchamp**, the sense of touch was the favored sense for pluridimensional spatial experiences. He saw in the act of love a sublimation of the tactile in the inclusion of the fourth dimension. However, Duchamp's artistic research was not only that of an erotomaniac or a bachelor in search of the bride. His work is characterized by many years of clear-sighted exploration of methods of (body) imprinting, reproduction, similarity, copy, and adaptation. The presentation takes account of these aspects as well, with a selection of further works by Duchamp. They are complemented in the same room with examples of special photographic reproduction methods, for instance electrographs, solarizations, or fluidal photographs. Alberto Giacometti is represented with two 'tactile' sculptures from his surrealist period, the *Objet désagréable* and the *Objet désagréable, à jeter*. From Man Ray a series of photographs are on show, including an illustration of the fur cup by Meret Oppenheim, textile body wrappings, and flowing garments (*L'énigme d'Isidore Ducasse* and *Anatomies*), along with a portrait of Lee Miller holding Giacometti's *Objet désagréable*. *Le Cadeau*, Man Ray's spike-clad iron which no longer cares for and smooths, but rips up and destroys, was created in surrealist alienation. It exercises a physical effect. **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto of Tactilism** postulated holistic tactile training as the basis of holistic education. Marinetti created the touch-relief *Sudan-Paris* in the context of this touch-doctrine. The anthropometry *Sans titre* by **Yves Klein** was created in the context of a performance during which naked, female models applied paint to their bodies in order leave behind a body imprint by pressing themselves onto the canvas. His idea for a *Sculpture tactile*, which he formulated in around 1957 in the form of a sketch and model, remained unknown for a long time; its reconstruction was only undertaken posthumously, in 2014. It opens up a special tactile experience to visitors.

The flowing and processual of the tactile experience is brought to bear particularly well in one medium: **film**. One film each marks the opening and close of the exhibition. Javier Téllez's video *Letter on the Blind, For the Use of Those Who See* shows the great opportunities for making tactile and textural experiences with the camera, while blind people are followed as they feel an elephant. Artur Żmijewski's video *Blindly* documents blind people's act of painting as a fascinating haptic process. Around 40 films and videos form a further backbone of the exhibition, with a focus on body-oriented and feminist positions and documentations of performances from the 1960s and 1970s.

One's own physical self and the possibilities of a sensory, chiefly **tactile, and action-based art** preoccupy numerous artists, including Marina Abramović & Ulay, Vito Acconci, Renate Bertlmann, Stan Brakhage, Chris Burden, Peter Campus, Valie Export, Bruce Nauman, Ewa Partum, and Carolee Schneemann; painterly exercises of the Vienna Actionists Günter Brus and Otto Muehl, and manifold politically and socio-critically motivated performances by Tania Bruguera, Regina José Galindo, and Rosemberg Sandoval.

In one exhibition room, the experiencing and orientation of the body in and through space is the theme in Guillaume Paris's video installation *Totem*, which generates a undertow with endlessly falling figures, with body-expanding adaptors and accompanying sketches and photographs by Franz West, with the video of a movement-restricted pro-prosthesis performance by Christian Eisenberger/Michael Niemetz as well as in Christoph Eisenring's specific body imprint. In Jan van Munster's work *Warmte* (Heat), minimalist installation sculpture is combined with heat radiation that can be experience through the senses. The body is used as a sculptural material by Hannah Villiger in her photographs enlarged from close-up Polaroid shots. However, Pipilotti Rist, too, with the video *Pickelporno*, creates a kaleidoscope of intoxicating body images, whose close-ups on body landscapes celebrate a feast of tactile experience.

Jean Tinguely is also represented in the exhibition, with an homage to the balloon-filled space that he realized for the exhibition 'Dylaby' (dynamic labyrinth) in 1962 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. If visitors have avoided it before, direct physical contact is unavoidable here, as it is also in Pedro Reyes's work *Cuerpomático II*, an arrangement in the shape of a toolbox, containing numerous instruments and objects that can be used to work on skin and body. Sculptural design methods used during manipulation by means of hands, imprint, skin and its concealment and their corporeal perception are the theme in Man Ray's *L'énigme d'Isidore Ducasse*, Duchamp's *Traveler's Folding Item*, Christo's *Package*, Ryan Gander's sculpture *I is... (XIII)*, Giuseppe Penone's six-part bronze sculpture *Riflesso del bronzo*, Miriam Cahn's diaporama *schreiender Säugling + Körperteile* and Pedro Wirz's portrait heads, which are modelled in the negative in the casting mold. The wonderful, 100-part Polaroid photographic work *Retouching Bruises* by Ulay fuses the theme of physical contact with the theme of the medial imprint and the traces that can arise in between. Further works in the exhibition, which enable **direct physical interaction** in varying ways, are Augustin Rebetz's labyrinthine trail, which takes visitors on a poetic and sensory journey through numerous chambers and spaces, Ernesto Neto's *Humanóides*, corporeal, corpulence-expanding Lycra sculptures, and Louis-Philippe Demer's *The Blind Robot*, which feels a person sitting in front of it. The theme of 'being touched' is also a subject in other video works. Yoko Ono's *Fly* shows the barely palpable, tickling touching of the body by flies. *Springtime* by Jeroen Eisinga documents his trance-like experience of being besieged by some 150,000 bees on face and upper body. *Temperance and Toil* by Źmijewski shows the skin's surface as a sculptural material in the sometimes almost violent contacts between a man and a woman, while in *Me and Aids* the risk of sexual infection with Aids is staged metaphorically as a succession of body collisions.

Works by artists such as Kader Attia, Agostino and Ludovico Caracci, unknown after Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Adriaen Collaert after Marten de Vos, Christian Comte, Cornelis Cort after Giulio Clovio as well as Frans Floris, Cornelis Jacobsz, Drebbel after Hendrick Goltzius, Renate Eisenegger, Loie Fuller, Jacob van der Heyden, Birgit Jürgenssen, Michael Landy, Étienne-Jules Marey, Vaslav Nijinsky, Meret Oppenheim, Peter Overadt, Crispijn de Passe the Elder, Georg Pencz, Marcantonio Raimondi after Albrecht Dürer, Thomas Rentmeister, Jan Saenredam after Hendrick Goltzius, Annegret Soltau, Timm Ulrichs, Alexandre Vallée, Mary Wigman, Martha Wilson, and Francesca Woodman complete the panorama of the exhibition tour, which extends across 22 rooms. The fascinating, very open and – for artistic creativity – essential theme of the cutaneous senses finds with this trail an open, non-conclusive presentation. The theme will be expanded to other knowledge areas by means of an interdisciplinary symposium.

Accompanying programme

The exhibition will be accompanied by numerous special guided tours, family Sundays, sculpture workshops with the artist Pedro Wirz and special tours for visually impaired people.

An interdisciplinary symposium with experts from the arts, architecture, religions, media studies, ethnology, anthropology, cultural studies, medicine and neurobiology takes place on 8 and 9 April 2016 at Museum Tinguely. The lectures of the conference will be published as a compiled volume afterwards. A publication of the last symposium 'Belle Haleine – The Scent of Art' (April 2015) is already available: ISBN: 978-3-9524392-3-4.

Curator of the exhibition: Roland Wetzel

Curatorial assistance: Lisa Anette Ahlers

Curator of 'The touch in religions practices and rituals': Eva Dietrich

Curator of 'Baroque allegories': Lisa Anette Ahlers

Hands-on tour ancient sculptures: in collaboration with Skulpturhalle Basel, cast collection of the Antikenmuseum

The Blind Robot and *Inferno* by Louis-Philippe Demers: in collaboration with HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel)

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Museum Tinguely: General Information

Opening hours: Tuesday – Sunday: 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Special opening hours:

Monday, 15 February 2016, Carnival, closed

Friday, 25 March 2016, Good Friday, closed

Monday, 28 March 2016, Easter Monday, 11 am - 6 pm

Sunday, 1 May 2016, Labor Day, 11 am - 6 pm

Monday, 16 May 2016, Whit Monday, 11 am - 6 pm

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