



Suzanne Brulé, *Queer Objects Series*, 2020. Courtoisie de l'artiste.

Haptic Encounters: Touch, Art and Gestures of Care Symposium

PROGRAMME

16 octobre 2026
De 9h à 18h

Salle 6 – Centre Panthéon
Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

PRESENTATION

**Institut ACTE (UR 7539 Arts, créations, théories, esthétique),
École doctorale 279 APESA (Arts plastiques, Esthétique et Sciences de l'Art)
Università degli Studi di Genova PEA - The Philosophy of Experiential
Artifacts**

Research project: Horizon Europe ERCStg 2021 G.A. n. 101040535t:0535

Organizers :

Barbara Formis, Université Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne

Ying Wu, Université Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne

Luca Marchetti, University of Genoa

Camilla Palazzolo, University of Genoa

Compared to vision, touch has often occupied a marginal position in both philosophical reflection and Western artistic practice. Yet touch is a fundamental way of exploring the world, relating to others, and engaging with objects and environments. Touching and being touched can express care, intimacy, recognition, and consent, but also control, intrusion, and vulnerability, while our tactile interactions with objects gives access to distinctive aesthetic properties that play a central role in everyday life. In recent decades, artists, curators and museums have increasingly challenged the primacy of vision, exploring touch as an autonomous mode of aesthetic experience, artistic creation, accessibility, and care. Despite this growing practical interest, however, the theoretical resources for understanding haptic experience remain comparatively underdeveloped. This study day brings together perspectives from aesthetics, artistic practice, curatorial and accessibility studies, and the aesthetics of care to investigate touch as a perceptual modality, a gesture, a form of relation, and a medium of artistic production. The symposium will address a number of questions: how does contact generate different meanings depending on the bodies, objects, and contexts involved? What norms govern touching and being touched? How does the experience and evaluation of an artwork change when touch becomes a mode of access and engagement? And how can artistic and curatorial practices contribute to rethinking the relationship between haptic experience, accessibility, and care? The aim is to create a space for dialogue between theoretical and practical perspectives in order to underline how touch can transform the ways in which we encounter artworks, other people, and the spaces we inhabit.

Speakers: Suzanne Boulet; Fabrice Bourlez; Barbara Formis; Georgina Kleege; Luca Marchetti; Serena Massimo; Camilla Palazzolo; Ágnes Pethő; Pascale Weber; Ed Williams; Ken Wilder; Ying Wu.

PROGRAM

This workshop explores the aesthetic, artistic, and relational dimensions of touch, bringing together perspectives from philosophy, artistic practice, curatorial studies, and disability studies. It examines how touch can shape aesthetic experience and transform our relations with ordinary objects, artworks, others, and the spaces we inhabit.

9:15 – 9:30 Welcome and Introduction of the study day

Barbara Formis, Ying Wu, Luca Marchetti, and Camilla Palazzolo

9:30 – 10:20 Opening Keynote Lecture

Georgina Kleege University of California, Berkeley, USA

Choreographies of Touch: Temporalities of Haptic Art

Chair: Camilla Palazzolo

10:20 – 10:40 Coffee Break

10:40 – 12:30 Panel 1: Hapticity and Aesthetics

Chair: Pascale Weber

10:40-11:00 Camilla Palazzolo University of Genoa

Meaning through Touch: The Expressive Value of Touch in Art

11:00-11:20 Barbara Formis Université Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne

Touching, Moving, Feeling

11:20-11:40 Luca Marchetti University of Genoa

The Aesthetics of Everyday Touch

11:40-12:00 Agnès Pethő Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania

Affective Intermediality and Gestures of the Photofilmic Touch

12:00-12:30 Discussion

12:30 – 14:00 Lunch Break

14:00 – 15:30 Panel 2: Touch and Artistic Practice

Chair: Agnès Pethő

14:00-14:20 Suzanne Boulet Université de Bordeaux-Montaigne

« Aptic » art practices as practices of care?

14:20-14:40 Pascale Weber Université Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne

A Story of Fragility

14:40-15:00 Ed Williams Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
*The Haptic Uncertainty of Tonality**

15:00-15:30 Discussion

15:30 – 17:00 Panel 3: Gestures of Care

Chair: Barbara Formis

15:30-15:50 Serena Massimo Université Paris Nanterre, Centre de Recherches multidisciplinaires et Multilingues (CRPM)
Gestural Repetition as a Haptic Pedagogy of Making Common: The Dalcroze Method with Children with Disabilities

15:50-16:10 Ying Wu Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
Song Dong's Touching My Father and its ethical controversy

16:10-16:30 Fabrice Bourlez Esad, Reims
Queer Gestures and the Ethics of Touch

16:30-17:00 Discussion

17:00 – 17:20 Coffee Break

17:20 – 17:40 Closing Keynote Lecture

17:40-18:10 Ken Wilder University of the Arts London
Haptic Touch and the Ontology of Sculpture
Chair: Luca Marchetti

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Compared to other sensory experiences—and especially to vision—the experience of touch has often been regarded as secondary, both in philosophical reflection and in western artistic production and reception. This marginalization has resulted in limited attention to the role touch plays in everyday life, social relations, and aesthetic experience, as well as of its creative and receptive potential within the arts. Yet touch is one of the most fundamental ways through which we explore the world, relate to others, and make sense of the objects around us (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Fulkerson 2014; Classen 2012). Touching and being touched are gestures laden with emotional, social, and political significance. Physical contact can express care, proximity, recognition, and consent, but it can also become a form of control, intrusion, or abuse. Our tactile engagement with objects is likewise governed by permissions, prohibitions, and forms of authorization: the ways in which we are allowed to touch, manipulate, use, or explore things contribute to shaping their meaning and function (Candlin 2004, 2010; Chatterjee 2008; Roberts 2022). Touch thus registers bodily and material qualities while simultaneously participating in the production and transformation of relationships and practices. In line with Fabrice Bourlez's reworking of tact through feminist and queer theory, touch can thus be approached as a minor, dissensual practice that both exposes and displaces the normative economies of proximity, protection, and vulnerability that govern who may touch and be touched.

Over the past decades, this marginalization has increasingly been challenged by artistic, curatorial, and museum practices (Cachia 2022, 2024; Kleege 1999, 2018; Thompson and Warne 2018; Wilder and McPeake 2025).

Much contemporary art has questioned the primacy of vision by foregrounding materials, surfaces, gestures, bodily interactions, and haptic forms of exploration (Svankmajer 2014; Verbeek 2012; Bishop 2005; Bourriaud 2002, Fisher 2007, Phelan 2007). From the 1920s to the 1960s, Futurist, Dadaist, and Surrealist artists played a key role in revaluing touch as an artistic and perceptual experience. There influential manifestos marked this development: *Il Tattilismo* (1921) by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *the Menifeste du PRÉsentisme* (1921) by Raoul Hausmann, and *Palpable Art* (1969) by Paul Neagu. Across Europe, this renewed interest in tactile perception was expressed through projects such as Marinetti's Sudan-Paris (1921), Marcel Ducham's *Prière de toucher* (1947), as well as the tactile panels created by László Moholy-Nagy and experiments by the Czech avant-garde group Devětsil. This exploration of touch continued in the feminist performance art of the 1960s and 1970s, notably Valie Export's *Tapp und Tastkino* (1968), Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964) and Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (1974). In the 1980s, concern with tactile experience also emerged in China through The Tactile Group, founded by Wang Luyan and Gu Dexin. This concern can also be seen, for example, in Yoko Ono's *Touch Poem*, Ernesto Neto's immersive installations such as *SunForceOceanLife*, and performance works such as Marina Abramović and Ulay's

Imponderabilia (1977), as well as in Song Dong's series *Touching My Father* (1997-2011), where touch, bodily presence, and interaction become central to the structure of the artwork experience. Lygia Clark's work is especially relevant in this context: from the manipulable structures of the *Bichos* to her later *Objetos Relacionais* (relational objects), Clark explored touch as a mode of participation, transformation, and care, insisting on the therapeutic and relational dimensions of tactile experience within artistic practice.

A particularly important role in the process of rehabilitation of touch has been played by disability art and, more specifically, by artistic practices created by and for blind and visually impaired including: Fayen d'Evie, Jennifer Justice, Sugandha Gupta and Carmen Papalia. D'Evie's *With Cane in Hand, I Dance a Duet for One, for Two, for Three, for Four...* reimagines the choreographic object from the perspective of blindness and disability. Gupta's *Sight of Touch* invites tactile exploration through textile and material variation, while Papalia's *Blind Field Shuttle* is a non-visual walking tour in which the artist guides participants, with their eyes closed, through urban and rural spaces, inviting them to reflect on accessibility, and the ways in which orientation can be reorganised beyond vision. These practices have fostered greater attention to the haptic dimensions of understanding and world-making, showing that touch can function as an autonomous mode of access to artworks, bodies, spaces, and interpretation.

The same concern is visible in curatorial projects and exhibitions such as Georgina Kleege's *Haptic Encounters*, which explores how tactile and kinesthetic engagement can make artworks available through non-visual forms of appreciation, revealing material qualities that sight alone may not disclose. It is also central to Fayen d'Evie and Georgina Kleege's *The Gravity, The Levity: Let Us Speak of Tactile Encounters* with the KADIST Art Foundation, which investigates "the radical potential of haptic criticism and tactile dialogue" (2018). Another exemplary case is *Beyond the Visual*, curated by Ken Wilder, Aaron McPeake and Clare O'Dowd which aims to challenge the dominance of sight in the making and experience of sculpture by bringing together works that engage touch, sound, smell, and movement, showing that blindness and partial sight can generate ambitious forms of artistic creation and curatorial practice.

At the same time, museums have begun to rethink access to artworks through tactile pathways, touch tours and object-handling sessions, bringing to light haptic dimensions within works that have traditionally been approached primarily through vision (Levent et al. 2013). This can be seen in initiatives such as *Touching the Prado, Uffizi by Touch*, and Tate's touch tours for blind and visually impaired visitors.

These artistic, curatorial, and museological practices show that touch can disclose material, spatial, and relational features of works and exhibition spaces that visual approaches often leave in the background. In parallel, Nicola Perullo's notion of "haptic taste as a task" reframes touch as an active, situated undertaking in which

sensory discrimination, attention, and care are cultivated through concrete engagements with materials and environments (Perullo 2018). Rather than a passive reception of stimuli, haptic taste becomes a deliberate, self-transformative practice that reorganizes the relations between body and world, and complicates the traditional hierarchy of the senses by foregrounding touch as a site of aesthetic and ethical learning. This practical rehabilitation of touch reveals haptic experience as a rich mode of exploration, relation, and creation. Yet the growing artistic and museological interest in touch has not been matched by a corresponding theoretical development.

This study day emerges from this gap. Bringing together perspectives from aesthetics, artistic practice, curatorial studies, accessibility studies, and the aesthetics of care, the event seeks to explore the conceptual tools needed to describe touch in all its complexity: as a perceptual modality, a gesture, a form of relation, a practice of care, and a medium of artistic production. The workshop will address a number of shared questions: How does contact generate different meanings depending on the bodies, objects, and contexts involved? What norms govern touching and being touched? How does the experience and evaluation of an artwork change when touch becomes a mode of access and engagement? And how can artistic and curatorial practices contribute to rethinking the relationship between haptic experience, accessibility, and care?

The aim is to create a space for dialogue between theoretical and practical perspectives in order to underline how touch can transform the ways in which we encounter artworks, other people, and the spaces we inhabit.

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Art Exhibitions and projects

"Beyond the Visual", 28 November 2025 - 19 April 2026, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, England <https://henry-moore.org/whats-on/beyond-the-visual/>

"Prière de toucher! L'art et la matière", exposition itinérante: musée Fabre Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole (10 décembre 2016 - 28 mai 2017); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (13 avril - 22 septembre 2019); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen (26 mars - 18 septembre 2022); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lille (20 octobre 2022 - 27 février 2023); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux (2 juin 2023 - 7 janvier 2024); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes (23 février - 29 septembre 2024); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes (23 novembre 2024 - 20 avril 2025), France

Fayen d'Evie (with Alex Craig, Riana Head-Toussaint, Bryan Phillips, Zoe Scoglio, Kenny Smith, and Tommy Carroll), *With Cane in Hand, I Dance a Duet for One, for Two, for Three, for Four...*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2022

Georgina Kleege, *Haptic Encounters*, in conjunction with the exhibition *Jewish Folktales Retold: Artist as Maggid*, Sep 28, 2017–Jan 28, 2018, The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco

"PRIÈRE DE TOUCHER - Le tactile dans l'art", 12 février - 16 mai 2016, Musée Tinguely, Bâle, Suisse
<https://www.tinguely.ch/fr/expositions/expositions/2016/priere-de-toucher.html>

Fayen d'Evie and Georgina Kleege, *The Gravity, The Levity: Let Us Speak of Tactile Encounters*, 2016

"Zone tactile (触知区)", 22 August - 16 November 2015, Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art, Guangzhou, China

“Liverpool Biennial 2010 : Touched”, 18 septembre - 28 novembre 2010, Liverpool, England

Carmen Papalia, *The Blind Field Shuttle Walking Tour*, 2010-present



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