

”In the future...I shall live a great deal in this room“

But, I think that it is the other parts of the brain... which most serve memory. I think that all the nerves and muscles can serve it, too, so that a lute player, for instance, has a part of his memory in his hands: for the ease of bending and disposing his fingers in various ways, which he has acquired by practice, helps him to remember the passages which need these dispositions when they are played.

--René Descartes, Letter to Mersenne (April 1640)

In one of the most iconic scenes of early Hollywood films, Garbo, as *Queen Christina* (1933), is seen walking purposefully through the room in the inn in which she experienced true love for the first time in her life. With pathos-filled sensuality, the queen caresses the bedside table, touches the candlestick, feels the walls, presses her head into the pillow, and powerfully embraces the pillar of the canopied bed she shared with her beloved. When he asks her what she is doing, she responds, “I have been memorizing this room. In the future, in my memory, I shall live a great deal in this room.”

Learning, or the acquisition of memory, as proposed by the current exhibition entails not only cognitive actions, but physical ones. We do not remember only what we read, saw, or heard: the body and its touch have a memory of its own that functions differently from the conscious mind, and often acts separately from it. It is familiar with the softness of the beloved armchair, and identifies the touch of a favorite keyboard. The body knows – as Descartes so well described it – the sequence the fingers take as they arrange themselves over the lute’s strings, moving as if they are independent physical entities. Memory has the power to restore the balance required to ride a bicycle, even after many years have passed without riding. Memory often bears the traces of traumatic events even when the emotions and conscious mind refuse to contain them.

At the foundation of memory is a neurological action in the brain; in fact, it is only in recent years that modern medicine has begun to explain phenomena pointing to the power of limbs or other additional systems “to remember.”¹

Indeed, the primeval belief in the power of memory to become assimilated in the pathways of the bodies has throughout centuries been at the center of numerous cultures, characterizing their perceptions and rituals. The works in the current exhibition engage in these expressions, as they understand the human body as a

kind of living archive bearing experiences, memories, and possibilities of knowing extending beyond their verbal formations.

In his essay *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty argued: “Science manipulates things and gives up living in them.”² In a certain sense, this is the goal of the exhibition: it strives to “live in things” beyond their overt formation, to deeply observe the performative gestures that are on display, and to slow down in their presence, based on the belief that contact with them and being in their physical presence along with and within some sort of capacity to bring one closer to the mind and soul.

Or Tshuva

Curator

Current research holds that certain physiological actions and processes leave their imprint on one’s DNA at the cell core of various organs and limbs, forming phenomena such as “muscle memory,” enabling muscles to recreate a level of skill in a shorter time than it takes to develop endurance from a zero baseline, or to the tendency of later childbirth becoming “easier” than the first time.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind* (1964).