

Between Seeing and Feeling
Entre ver y sentir Selections from the Collection

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California Museum of Photography at UCR ARTS

Curated by Emily Citino

Since the emergence of photography as a medium in the mid-19th century, artists have sought to capture emotion on film, asking what it means to feel or be touched by a photograph, often in ways that go beyond sight. This is the realm of what is called "haptic visuality" in photography: a way of seeing images through multiple senses. More deeply, haptic visuality opens pathways to explore how a photograph can stir sensations within the body, evoking touch, feelings, and intimacy even when no physical contact between the photograph and the viewer occurs. Thus, it is valuable to understand photography through the lens of the haptic because it uncovers for us the often nebulous, emotionally charged terrain that is the relationship between the viewer and image.

Between Seeing and Feeling is guided by an investigation of the haptic, exploring how we, as sensate beings, engage with the world not only through sight, but also through feeling. Scholars have explored the haptic dimensions of photography, and two thinkers in particular illuminate how emotion and affect shape our encounter with the image. Theorizing on film and video, Laura U. Marks develops the idea of haptic visuality as an approach that combines visual images with our own, subjective experiences, so that the visual encourages a tactile, or intimate, reading of a photograph instead of remaining purely optical, with uncrossable distance between the viewer and image. This strategy requires a kind of labor on behalf of the viewer, asking us to render ourselves vulnerable to the image, and to recognize and address the disparities between our position and what is represented.

Building on this idea, Tina Campt argues that haptic images move us not only because of their visual depictions but also through how they emotionally register in our bodies. Here, the space between a photograph and the viewer is a fluid, breachable entity. As Campt writes, these images operate through "frequencies," a term she uses to describe the impact that images leave on viewers, through elements of time, sound, movement, and the visual. To inhabit such intimate views means to sit with an image and understand how its impression lingers, resonates, or unsettles, encouraging us to go beyond mere identification with what we see, but understanding how to live and relate to others differently.

This exhibition examines the haptic through three thematic sections. The first section, *Body Frequencies*, explores the tactile presence of moving bodies and how photography can evoke sound even without the use of video or audio. Graciela Iturbide's sonically evocative image *El Gallo* (1985), of a boy gripping a rooster by its feathered wings, pulses with energy, from the boy's mischievous gaze to the imagined clamor of the protesting bird. Two photographs from 1944 by Barbara Morgan capture the modern dancers Pearl Primus (1919–94) and Valerie Bettis (1919–82) gliding across their respective frames. The dancers appear to merge with their silhouettes, with Primus looking as if she is

dancing with hers, her hand outstretched toward the shadow of her head. Here, no clear distinctions between body and shadow are found. Meanwhile photographs by Mariana Yampolsky and Manuel Álvarez Bravo evoke stillness and calm: in the former, a child gently clasps flowers as she walks across a streak of petals, a young woman brushing her hair under an illuminating sliver of sun or moonlight.

Conceptual Approaches brings together artists who use photography to explore the idea of touch—not just as physical contact, but also as a vehicle for emotional and symbolic messages—to examine the interplay between the presence and absence of bodies. Six undated photographs by Vivian Maier capture the discordant hum of an unnamed city, establishing an archive of urban life from a woman reaching toward her window, a barrier between herself and the city, to the rotting trash left out on the sidewalk. Kenji Nakahashi's *Memory (Saye's Memory)* (1985) presents a scattered arrangement of photographs in varying sizes that portray a family member of the artist, perhaps their grandmother. Often, when we look at old pictures of loved ones, it is not merely their image that moves us but the echoes of their scent, skin, and voice. Nakahashi implicates the viewer as the family archivist shuffling through these photographs, inviting a mode of viewing that emphasizes both the emotional weight of a life lived and the lingering echo of her absence, hinted at by the subtitle suggesting that Saye has passed. In Catherine Opie's *Self-Portrait/Cutting* (1993), simple, childlike figures are carved into the artist's back, depicting a scene of two girls walking hand in hand. Here, tenderness and pain merge into a single visual entity where the body serves as both canvas and subject. Through this intimate and visceral image, Opie evokes discomfort—not to create a barrier, but rather to open a pathway that draws us deeper into an embodied experience of love and connection.

Finally, *Intimacies of Touch* traces the iconography of touch, mapping the depiction of physical touch as a means for emotional connection and human vulnerability. A man brushes his knuckles against another's chin in Joel Meyerowitz's *Germany* (1967). Although the reason is unclear—perhaps he is gently wiping away food or tenderly caressing his lover's mouth—the man's gaze suggests a quiet intimacy between them. In Flor Garduño's photograph *San Luis Potosi* (1984), a young girl gently places her hand on the shoulder of a man wearing an animal mask. While their relationship remains unknown, her gesture suggests affirmation or comfort; her turned body indicates she is listening attentively.

In their quiet hums, sonic vibrations, and relationships between strangers to whom we may feel intimately connected, these photographs speak not just to the eye but to the haptic, calling on the viewer to engage with the lingering traces that each image leaves behind, eliciting calls to build transformative relationships and solidarities across different worlds.

RECOMMENDED READING

Azoulay, Ariella. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*.
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Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

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