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Touch, In touch, Out of Touch: surface materialities and haptic technologies in contemporary art textiles - paper

This paper seeks to address some of the shifts in contemporary art textiles by looking at the work of Magdalena Abakanowicz, Barbara Layne, Lia Cook and Lydia Predeminato. At first glance there may appear to be an antagonistic relationship between the sisal sculptures of the 1960s (Abakanowicz) and those working with haptic visuality and new technologies to connote touch.

However, I shall argue that the invitation to touch in the 1960s was based on one interpretation of haptic; namely taking hold, grasping, and binding the object, often large overwhelming forms repellent to sight, to the subject in an act of aggression. Contemporary work that stages the physical and the virtual through a series of surface materialities occupy rather a different position. By reading through the works of Layne, Cook and Predeminato via the writings of Laura Marks, Luce Irigaray, Merleau Ponty and Alois Riegl, I will explore the economy of flow that takes us back to all things tactile, invoked through multi sensory perception. Haptic perception and visuality imply an invitation to touch without touching: a notion of touch whereby I graze, caress and stroke a surface in an intimate embodied way. This suggests a more erotic and touching encounter between artist, work and audience.

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