

# THE ILLUMINATED BODY

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

By

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## ABSTRACT

Using the metaphor of a body atlas, this paper charts an exploration of the sense of touch. Although photography is considered to be a visual art, *The Illuminated Body* demonstrates the ways in which the sense of touch underlies an embodied point of view. Monochromatic self-portraits layered and embossed with enigmatic healing talismans lend a physical and emotional tactility to the photographic project. The relationship of touch to visible and invisible pains and the materialization of memory on the skin reveal a reciprocity between self and other, inside and out. Buddhist philosophy considers mind to be a sixth sense and regards touch as fundamental to the process of perception. Phenomenology reflects the importance of intentionality in the first person point of view and the unavoidability of a reciprocal relationship with the world; as the world touches us through our sense perceptions, so do we touch the world. A synthesis of the two philosophies is possible only by acknowledging the uniqueness of an incarnate perspective, firmly rooted in the flesh. Skin can be understood as receptacle for memory, not only in the stories of scars, but also in the inevitable co-mingling of sensation and memories. A number of photographic artists including Geneviève Cadieux, Annette Messenger and Myra Greene work with fragmented body parts and skin, weaving fiction, history and metaphor into moving stories of the flesh. *The Illuminated Body* draws on a constellation of ideas in these and other artists' works to contextualize and search for resonance in photographic self-portraiture. Using illness and injury as a points of departure, *The Illuminated Body* uses of discourses of skin and touch to elucidate the commonalities of human experience that are hidden within personal narrative and associative memory.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Bernard Weitzman who reminded me that touch is fundamental to all kinds of perception.

*Nihil est in intellectu, quod non prius fuerit in sensu.*

There is nothing in the understanding that was not earlier in the senses.

*Horridas nostrae mentis purga tenebras, accende lume sensibus!*  
Purge the horrible darkneses of our mind, light a light for our senses!

— an alchemist, a cleric (Jung 36; par. 41)



# **The Illuminated Body**

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

## **1. GROUND**

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## 1.1. Feet



Figure 1: Karen Garrett de Luna, "2003 & 2005, New York City, NY & Lewiston, ME, Inversion Sprain of the Anterior Talofibular Ligament" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

### Facts and Figures

26 bones, 33 joints, 2 arches

### List of Injuries

Pes Planus (birth)

1974 Las Vegas, NV

Hallux Sprain (gymnastics)

1978 Las Vegas, NV

Shaving Injury, Lateral Lower Leg (adolescence)

1985 Las Vegas, NV

Hallux Valgus (dance)

1995 Seattle, WA

Inversion Sprain of the Anterior Talofibular Ligament (dance)

2003 New York City, NY

2005 Lewiston, ME

Corn (undetermined)

2009 Vancouver, BC

Torn Toenail (tissue/silks)

2011 Vancouver, BC

The feet are amazing. With just twenty-six bones each they support the weight of my entire body, sometimes for hours on end. My feet are relatively flat and wide and marbled with veins, great for modern dance but not so cute in heels. In my imagination my wide feet are a gift from my ancestors, generations of rice farmers before me. Both physically and metaphorically, my feet keep me grounded. As an adolescent I became aware of an increasing and potentially dangerous predilection for dark thinking. I started dancing at the age of sixteen as a way to balance my tendency for existential thought; by engaging my body, I managed to keep my feet on the ground.

## 1.2. Introduction

### 1.2.1. Debut

I am a body in motion. Even when I am sitting still as a mountain, my heart continues to beat and my belly expands and contracts with my breath. My body is both fragile and resilient; often injured, I suffer from aches and pains that are sometimes accidental and sometimes self-inflicted. The accumulation of lactic acid in muscles, as a result of overexertion, is a form of soreness I know well. The searing flash of pain from a torn ligament is a less common injury but not altogether unfamiliar (see figure 1). A sprained ankle will often result in visible swelling of the soft tissue in the affected joint, but muscular soreness, like a headache or heartache, is invisible on the outside. If there were an owner's manual for the human body it would probably stipulate that all bodies will feel pain, both physical and emotional, during the course of normal operation.

*The Illuminated Body: Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury* is a reflection on the body and how it informs different ways of generating knowledge. The thesis is comprised of two parts, a photographic series for exhibition and an essay containing reproductions of the images. The photographs, which include graphic elements and embossing, serve as mnemonic devices conjuring up illnesses and injuries I have suffered up to this point in my life. Each image is a densely layered excavation of corporeal memory. The indexical nature of the photograph cannot be separated from the fragmented body represented. Included in the image titles are the year, location and diagnosis for each injury—important situational information to include in an atlas meant to function as a navigational aid for memory. The essay maps out a textual background from which the visual work emerges, pointing out significant ideas, philosophies and artistic resonances along the way. It serves to contextualize the artwork by interweaving memory and lived experience with discourse to create embodied ways of knowing. These components are research for and excerpts from the ongoing production of a body atlas that will be completed at a later date.

As a photographer, I am dependent on my eyes to show me the working of the light. Working with the body, my sense perceptions guide and orient me. I am especially interested in the interplay of sight and touch in art: in the process of making art, in learning to appreciate art and in being able to reflect on the ways art can evoke an

emotional response. As a photographer and dancer, sight and touch are natural collaborators in the creative process.

I examine the means by which my art comes into being and contextualize my project with the work of other contemporary artists who work with skin and its stories including Geneviève Cadieux, Annette Messenger and Myra Greene. In considering specific artworks from each artist's oeuvre, I draw connections to my own project, creating complex webs that weave together philosophy, inspiration and resonance marking the contours of my practice.

### **1.2.2. Navigation**

Each chapter of this paper highlights a different part of my body that has been injured in some way. Some injuries reveal transgressions of the outside environment across the boundary of my skin while other injuries remain invisible on the surface, only materializing in the pain I feel. The skin and its scars can embody personal and cultural memory in ways that are often unexpressed. As part of my methodology, I explore philosophies including Buddhism and phenomenology, both rich in discourses on touch and the other sense perceptions. These philosophies are both grounded in a subject specific point of view, alluding to the fact that as individuals, we are at the centre of our own stories. Since the process of individuation is by and large invisible, evolving silently in dreams and in each step along my life's journey, one of the purposes of my thesis essay is to give voice to some of these ideas that inform my quest for self-knowledge.

As a component of my thesis project, this essay is a survey of the landscape from which the photographic excerpts from *The Illuminated Body* emerge—a kind of topographic map of ideas, theories and influences. Each chapter begins with an image from the series, accompanied by a list of injuries, facts and figures, as well as stories and trivia about the part of the body under investigation. These details are leaves from my evolving personal body atlas, the text included with the leading images is not technically part of the essay; rather it is a creative interpretation in the form of an illuminated manuscript, constructed to offer a subjective and embodied entry to the text that follows. The fragmented body part in each leading image corresponds in some way to the subject of the ensuing chapter. The thesis essay covers the theories and ideas grounding my photographs and contextualize the work alongside contemporary artists working with similar formal and/or philosophical intents.

### **1.2.3. Voice**

A first person point of view is heavily utilized in this essay. In using a first person point of view as my voice in this paper, I would like to emphasize the subjective nature of knowledge. I do not want to make any declarations of objectivity. What I know and what I have discovered are things that are personal; if my ideas resonate with the reader, it is only because he or she can see that concept in the mirror of his or her own experience and history. In writing this essay, I have tried to be conscientious of not claiming universal truths; my positions, thoughts and inspirations change and evolve over time and what is true for me today may not be in the future. My personal struggle to balance mind and body has led me to embrace a paradoxical logic that values both thinking and feeling.

### **1.2.4. Hybridity**

My undergraduate studies were in Dance and Mathematics. Along with photography, these disciplines are primarily non-verbal modes of communication. The influence of dance on this thesis essay is evident in my belief in the generation of embodied knowledge, a knowing based not only in the intellect but in the senses and in skin, bones and muscles as well. The influence of mathematics may be subtler; my photographic collages rely on a semiotics akin to the language of symbolic reasoning used in pure mathematics (e.g. a Fibonacci series of birthdays denoting the shrinking of a scar over time [see figure 6]). On one side of the equation is a presentation of my human flesh, balanced on the other side by an index, a graphic indication, designating where it hurts (or hurt) and hinting at what might heal that pain. *The Illuminated Body* is a hybrid, a synthesis of a wide variety of influences, ranging from spirituality and philosophy to science, literature and the arts.

### **1.2.5. Animating Ideas**

*The Illuminated Body* is an exploration of the ways in which pain and pleasure, narrative and memory are written on the body. The act of recording my aches and pains seems natural for me, but as a body in motion, it would be hard to ignore these signals. I use my body in a variety of activities including walking, biking, swimming, tumbling and trapeze. A stiff ankle or a sore shoulder is a reminder to warm up and to move gently through space. By striving for a balance between movement and stillness, between stimulus and

reflection, my research has enriched my photographic practice by providing a language for articulating discoveries relating to skin and the sense of touch.

Visible and invisible pains are communicated through my tactile sense. Physiologically speaking, touch is comprised of several somatosensory systems that can detect texture, temperature, body position and pain. Although skin is the largest organ of the body and considered to be the organ of touch, some receptors associated with touch are buried deep within the body in epithelial cells, bones, muscles, joints and internal organs. One only has to recall the pain of indigestion, gas or cramps to have an understanding of palpable injuries and aches that touch the body below the surface of the skin. In *The Body in Pain*, cultural theorist Elaine Scarry writes about the cultural reality of pain:

To have pain is to have certainty; to hear about pain is to have doubt. [...] If the felt-attributes of pain are [...] lifted into the visible world, and if the referent for these now objectified attributes is understood to be the human body, then the sentient fact of the person's suffering will become knowable to a second person. (14)

The experience of pain may be ubiquitous, but pain itself is highly personal.

Pain also can touch us in ways that involve no bodily contact whatsoever. The pain of a broken heart is no less real than that of a broken bone, they are merely different kinds of suffering, one rooted in the physical body and the other in the psyche. In Buddhist philosophy, the first of the Four Noble Truths is that life is suffering:

Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering... (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta 4)

The inclusion of bodily and emotional pain in this explanation of suffering addresses the many ways in which life can be unpleasant, miserable or distressing. By emphasizing the universal nature of pain and suffering, Buddhism suggests a way out of the isolation of personal pain. The omnipresence of human suffering is seen even in fantasy films like *The Princess Bride*; Princess Buttercup tells the story of how she lost her true love only to be rebuked by the Man in Black, "Life is pain, Highness! Anyone who says differently is selling something."

But this body also brings pleasure and great joy. Moving through space can be exhilarating. Even the simple action of placing one foot in front of the other is a rich experience, to which anyone who has tried walking with eyes closed can attest. The self-portraits from the series *The Illuminated Body* that are inserted at the beginning of each chapter of this paper are meant to celebrate the body's potential, as well as to commemorate its past trials and tribulations (see figures 1–3, 5–6, 10, 13, 17). A personal body atlas, the images map out where, when and how I have been touched by pain, providing a poetic and personalized medical record. The photographs are presented in the negative, alluding to the medical vernacular of x-rays and highlighting the aura or haunting glow sometimes evident in the creases and along the edges of the body. Embossed graphic elements and esoteric symbols add texture to the photographs and act as healing talismans rife with secret meanings, touching the injured body parts with fragments of stories and places.

The marks on the skin and the marks on the psyche left by accident and injury are proof that we have had adventures on this earth. Part mnemonic device, part catalogue, my personal body atlas allows me to remember, record and retell the stories of my experiences. Walter Benjamin laments that the art of storytelling is disappearing from modern life, "It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: The ability to exchange experiences" (83). But *The Illuminated Body* lets me tell the story of my body in my own "words" using images and symbols as narrative devices. In words alone I am mute to tell the stories of my body, but through images and symbols I can start to communicate the narrative of aphasic flesh. The graphic elements layered with fragmented body parts remain hermetically sealed, working their healing touch on the body in silence. The completion of the work lies within the stories the photographs tell on their own and as Benjamin observed, "[It] is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it" (89).

By creating an inventory of injuries that bear witness to some of the pains I have experienced in my life, I am engaging in an exploration of the sense of touch through the materialization of memory. The skin cannot stand in as a synecdoche for the self because there are unfathomable depths below its surface. Scars act as souvenirs, portals to the past that I carry with me into the present. As novelist Jeanette Winterson suggests, bodily memory is visible on the outside, "Written on the body is a secret code only visible in

certain lights: the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille" (89). *The Illuminated Body* is a journey navigated by touch; although the eyes can provide clues to location and to orientation, ultimately it is how one feels, a physical and emotional tactility, that enables us to navigate our day-to-day experience. The experiences of the body, on and below the skin, give life its texture. We are touched through all of our senses, including our mind. Our first person experiences of worldly phenomena provide clues to why the skin that separates self from other is really a porous boundary and how the sense of touch literally, physically and metaphorically informs and transforms how we see both the world and ourselves.



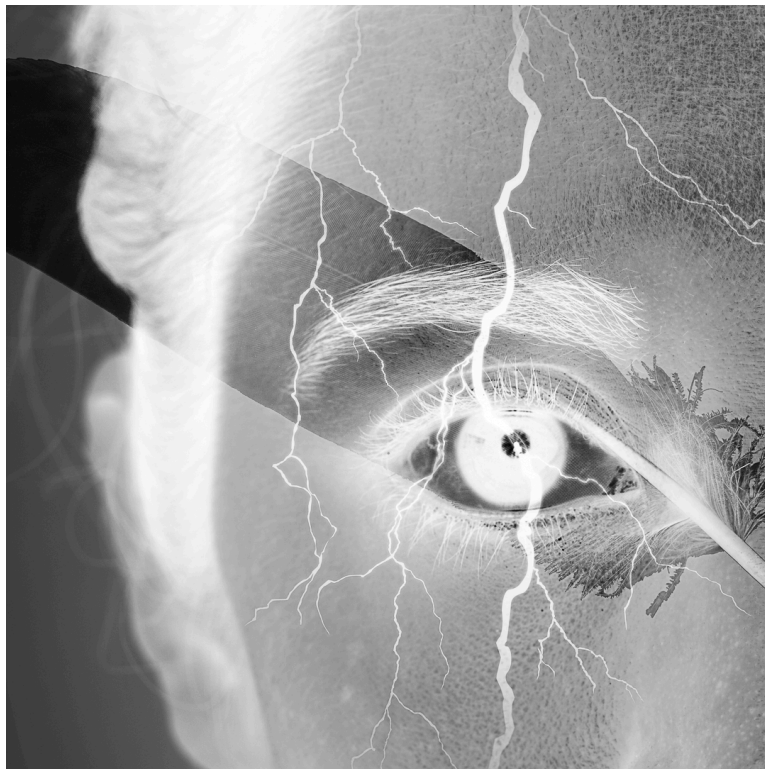
# The Illuminated Body

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

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## 2. FIELD

## 2.1. Head



### Facts and Figures

22 bones

### List of Injuries

Spock Ear (birth)

1972 *Albany, NY*

Asymmetric Piercing of the Ears (oversight)

1977 *Las Vegas, NV*

Allergic Conjunctivitis (hereditary)

1980 *Las Vegas, NV*

Migraines (undetermined)

1988– *various*

Concussion or Mild Traumatic Brain Injury, Grade II (hot tub accident)

1995 *Orcas Island, WA*

Achromotrichia (INS induced)

1996 *Seattle, WA*

Figure 2: Karen Garrett de Luna, "1988 – , Las Vegas, NV, Migraines" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

The sphenoid bone is one of the seven bones that articulate to form the orbit (e.g. bony socket of the eye). It is comprised of two greater wings and two lesser wings and houses the pituitary gland, which secretes hormones governing many bodily functions including growth and metabolism.

A few years after menarche, I started having migraines. This kind of headache can last anywhere from four hours to three days. Inevitably unilateral, I imagine an ice pick being driven through the base of my skull to the back of my eye socket. When the migraine breaks, it feels like an egg has been cracked on the top of my head, sending a tingling sensation over my scalp and down my spine.

## 2.2. Methodology

*The Illuminated Body* relies on a collection of theories, concepts and ideas relating embodied memory to the liminal boundary of self, the skin, and to its related sense, touch. Theories of perception and memory along with Buddhist philosophy and phenomenology form the field surrounding and fertilizing my creative ideas for both material and research portions of this thesis project. My research on touch perception and its relationship to sight has given me a verbal language to express my ideas. Unlike Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*<sup>1</sup>, I am thankful for my graduate studies in the visual arts, for having been taught to speak and for being able to use discourse as a tool in the process of critical creation.

The head is often associated with the intellect (see figure 2) and it is in the mind that the disparate sources of my methodology are synthesized into a coherent, flexible and expandable whole. Without the discursive abilities of the mind, I would be unable to put together ideas, make connections, filter and remix sensory information in a way that renders it intelligible. 1988 – , Las Vegas, NV, *Migraines* collapses seeing and feeling into one sense. The feather suggests many things—gently, with a light touch, my eyes gaze upon the world, not so gently the pain of a migraine gores my eye physically and figuratively. “Eagle eye” is a term for having extremely acute vision or for keeping a close watch. In my study of the different philosophies of touch, I strive to keep an eagle eye on the embodied relationship between my thoughts and my feelings.

### 2.2.1. Embodied Seeking

Like astronomers of old, I am combining science and alchemy in the search for personal truths. Theories of perception, phenomenology, Buddhism, touch, embodiment and memory provide a philosophical background for my material practice. By focusing on my own body, on my skin and its stories, the atlas I am creating is a living document, a mnemonic device and aesthetic record. The atlas is practical because my memory isn't perfect—I can't remember which ankle was sprained last and when it happened nor do I know if I alternate ankles or always sprain the same one. And it is poetic because it allows me to subjectively trace the different ideas that have touched my body over time. My

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<sup>1</sup> “You taught me language; and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse” (Shakespeare 1.2. 517).

methodology gives me a vocabulary with which to examine and discuss the ideas animating *The Illuminated Body* in relation to other artists and artworks, providing a history and context for my thesis project.

### **2.2.2. Mind**

The ability to perceive the world, to interact with it, is a blessing of the senses. Although the western tradition of dividing our experience of the world among five senses can be traced back to Aristotle, Buddhist philosophy includes mind for a total of six. As Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, founder of the Shambhala Buddhist tradition explains, “Phenomena as traditionally known are inspired purely by the five sense perceptions. We also try to piece phenomena together, to record and edit them in our mind, which in Buddhism is considered a sixth sense” (*True Perception* 37). The importance of the mind in the act of perception cannot be underestimated; mind provides the virtual space for the five bodily perceptions to accumulate and mingle, sorting the signals in an attempt to make sense of the world. It is the sharp aspect of mind as a sense perception that enables us think and feel without contradiction. Renowned Zen teacher and Nobel nominee Thich Nhat Hanh writes about this precision in his book *Understanding Our Mind*:

Our mind is like a sword. It cuts reality into pieces, separate from each other. But reality cannot be grasped by our discursive mind—the mind of imagination, discrimination, and discussion. We have to learn how to touch reality without using our usual patterns of thinking. (85)

Mind also informs our perception of place. David Abram, author of *The Spell of the Sensuous*, considers the resonance between phenomenology and Buddhist philosophy in relation to mind:

The human mind is not some otherworldly essence that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather it is instilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth. The invisible shapes of smells, rhythms of cricketsong, and the movement of shadows all, in a sense, provide the subtle body of our thoughts. Our own reflections, we might say, are a part of the play of light and its reflections. (262)

Within this sensorial field is Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idea of the Flesh, an animate element common to human and worldly sensibility and sensitivity (Abram 67). Abram understands Flesh to be "the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible and of the sensible in the sentient" (66). That which we think is not somehow separate from the world; it is part and parcel of a reciprocal sensibility and sentience. Likewise, that with which we think is not purely ethereal; ideas are built from physical impressions of the "outside world".

Merleau-Ponty's book, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), describes a philosophy grounded in a first person perception of the world. The introduction to the book reads, "[Man] is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (Merleau-Ponty xii). It is precisely the reciprocal nature of my being in the world that allows me to know myself. Without information from and about what is external to me, I can have no direct experience of the world. Without perceptions of these worldly phenomena—my mind would have nothing to think with, no raw materials, no data. The sense perceptions of the body are not only building blocks of thought, they are conduits that enable us to experience the world.

### **2.2.3. Touch**

In her discussion of the senses, poet and scholar Susan Stewart notes that in classical literature the five senses are placed within a hierarchy, "from the most valuable to the least valuable: vision-hearing-smell-taste-touch" (61). Aristotle justified this classification by stating that touch, because it is found in all animals, is the lowliest sense (Stewart 61). While it is true that single celled organisms like amoeba navigate by touch, it is anthropocentric to claim that just because a sense isn't unique or more developed in humans that it is less valuable. Trungpa Rinpoche outlines the traditional Buddhist understanding of the process of sensory perception and underlines the primary importance of touch, "According to the traditional pattern, beginning to see something visually is a process that has many levels. First we see with our eyes, and then we smell with our eyes, then we hear with our eyes, and then we begin to touch the object with our eyes" (*True Perception* 74). Buddhist philosophy considers touch essential among the senses; the sense of touch is fundamental to the process of perception with each sense relying on touch to finally come to a genuine understanding of the sense object.

Touch is fundamental not only in Buddhist philosophy; it is essential for the physical functioning of any of the other senses. Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray refutes Merleau-Ponty's claim that touch and sight are reciprocal senses. Recapitulating Irigaray's argument succinctly, academic Elizabeth Grosz summarizes, "[The] tangible is the unacknowledged base or foundation, the source of the visible that renders any comparison between them false" (106). Irigaray explains, "I see only through the touching of the light" (qtd. in Grosz 106), a position that is supported by the scientific understanding of the mechanics of sight and of how light strikes the retina. I can testify that a migraine can make the impact of light on the eye unbearable (see figure 2); I sometimes have to retire to a dark room until the headache breaks.

#### ***2.2.4. Origins***

The etymology of the word touch<sup>2</sup> shows a persistent duality between touch as felt sense and touch as personal experience. Physical touch is defined by contact or proximity. Two things that are very close together are said to be touching. The Oxford English Dictionary defines touch as "[that] sense by which a material object is perceived by means of the contact with it of some part of the body; the most general of the bodily senses, diffused through all parts of the skin, but (in man) specially developed in the tips of the fingers and the lips." ("touch, n."). As a verb, the 24<sup>th</sup> definition reads, "[to] affect with some feeling or emotion; to move or stir the feelings of; to produce an emotion in; spec. to affect with tender feeling, as pity or gratitude" ("touch, v."). A vocabulary of touch and contact was used to describe internal experiences in 18<sup>th</sup> century literature of sensibility; phrases like "to touch the heart," "to move the passions," "to be impressed," or "to agitate the mind" are all expressions based in tactile experience (Van Sant qtd. in Benthien 254).

#### ***2.2.5. Visible Wounds***

Skin, the organ of touch, is a boundary between self and other, but it also is a porous periphery. Literature professor Claudia Benthien wrote that the feeling of being alive was like being "opened like a wound" (209). This opening of a wound mirrors the opening of the senses to the world, an idea central to phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty believed that the senses are what separate the human being from the world of objects; the senses

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<sup>2</sup> Figuratively, "touched" means "[to] be deranged mentally in a slight degree; [...] slightly insane or crazy, 'cracked'" as in the phrase "touched in the head" ("touch, v."). In fencing, the expression "touché!" is "an exclamation used to acknowledge a hit" and in everyday language the word is used as "a pleasant admission of a valid point or justified accusation made by another person" ("touché, int.").

also facilitate the relationship between an individual and the world (Benthien 209). The image of a wound as an instrument for feeling<sup>3</sup> is also found in the Buddhist idea of *boddhichitta*, a Sanskrit word which can be translated as “tender heart”, “openness”, “ultimate truth” or “simply what *is*” (Chödrön 213). Buddhist nun and writer Pema Chödrön defines relative *boddhichitta* as “the courage to realize this tender openhearted quality by tapping into our capacity to love and care for others” (213). The vulnerability that enables compassion is thus linked to being touched through our senses.

Historically, *tactus* (as touch was known during the baroque) was understood as the sense of intimacy; in contrast to sight, hearing and smell, it essentially precludes a collective experience (Benthien 223). The impossibility of dissociating the sense of touch from one’s own body can act as a reminder that all sensory perception is tied to a living and breathing body. The sense most often invoked independently is sight and its claims to objectivity remain largely unchallenged. In an interview from 1978, Irigaray identified the mechanism by which the sense of sight asserted its supremacy:

More than the other senses the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. [...] The moment the look dominates, the body loses materiality. (50)

My challenge with *The Illuminated Body* has been to assert corporeality while using a primarily visual medium. My photographs are meant to simultaneously touch (emotionally and/or affectively) and reflect (in the Buddhist sense) the touching intrinsic to the viewing experience.

In searching for a way to imagine a non-objective sense of sight, I came across primatologist and feminist philosopher Donna Haraway’s argument for embodied knowledge, “I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere” (581). Haraway argues for *situated knowledges* (581), for closing the gap between subject and object by acknowledging the difference between vision and visualizing technologies, by admitting the limitations of human sight and by pinpointing the specifics of one’s own perspective. Haraway’s embodiment “is not about

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<sup>3</sup> The Sacred Heart of Jesus devotion in the Catholic tradition also emphasizes compassion and the unmitigated love and suffering of Jesus Christ.

fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material—semiotic fields of meaning” (587), it is about recognizing difference and affirming the subjectiveness of a unique point of view. By reaffirming the incarnation of sight in relation to the personal and figurative attributes of touch, the work of cataloguing aches and pains photographically becomes less a conflict between the aesthetic and the visceral and more a question of memory.

### **2.2.6. Memory**

Memory is an important aspect of perception, especially when we come to realize that memories are stored throughout our bodies. In his book *Matter and Memory*, philosopher Henri Bergson claims, “In truth, all sensation is already memory” (194). Pure perception is practically impossible, to perceive a thing-in-itself<sup>4</sup> without the intervention of the mind is an atypical occurrence. Marcel Proust lamented the impossibility of truly perceiving an object in *Swann’s Way*:

When I saw an external object, my awareness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, lining it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever directly touching its substance; it would volatilize in some way before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body brought near a wet object never touches its moisture because it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation. (85)

Perception and memory can be echoed in the body as well as the mind, as elegantly observed by Stewart, “We may apprehend the world by means of our senses, but the senses themselves are shaped and modified by experience and the body bears a somatic memory of its encounters with what is outside of it” (61). It is widely acknowledged that memory is intimately tied to the sense of smell (and taste in the case of Proust’s madeleine), but the somatic imprint of memory on the entirety of the body, including the skin and its scars, is often overlooked in its subtlety.

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<sup>4</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh provides an eloquent description of Immanuel Kant’s term thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), “Whether things really are the way they appear to us is something we can never know, because all our knowledge is prestructured through the filter of the mind. This is the basis for Kant’s famous distinction between the unknowable noumenon, or thing-in-itself, and the phenomenon, or thing-as-it-appears” (53).



### ***2.2.7. Embodied Ideas***

The concepts that form the field from which *The Illuminated Body* emerges are not just propositions, they are, perforce, embodied ideas. I cannot separate my perceptions from my thoughts. The constant stream of perceptions entering through the senses and being remixed in the mind is one component in a hybrid methodology that embraces tools for thinking about phenomena. Together Buddhism, phenomenology, touch and memory form a net with which I catch ideas and bounce them off of each other, remaining open and sensitive to the unpredictable outcomes of hybridization and cross-fertilization.

# The Illuminated Body

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

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## 3. TOUCHING

### 3.1. Hands



Figure 3: Karen Garrett de Luna, "1988, Las Vegas, NV, Saran Wrap Laceration, 7 Stitches, Digitus Tertius, Left Hand" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

#### Facts and Figures

27 bones

1 double loop, 1 accidental, 3 loops, 2 whorls, 3 arches

1 star

#### List of Injuries

Repetitive Strain Injury, L wrist (violin)

1983 Las Vegas, NV

Gouges and Lacerations (various)

1975– various

Saran Wrap Laceration (accident)

1988 Las Vegas, NV

Rips (flying trapeze)

2007 Rhinebeck, NY

Sprain, Digitus Medius (dance)

2010 Vancouver, BC

In high school I worked in at Naugles, a fast food establishment serving both Mexican food and hamburgers. One day I tried to catch a large roll of Saran Wrap as it fell from a shelf. The serrated edge cut my middle finger and when I first glanced down, I caught a glimpse of white flesh. Shortly thereafter I started bleeding profusely and ended up in the ER next to an elderly man who seemed to be dying. I felt sheepish being there for a handful of stitches.

## 3.2. Methods

It is difficult for me to describe exactly how I go about making work. Photography isn't necessarily the logical choice for an exploration of the tensions between seeing and touching or between the aesthetic and the visceral. Sculpture or installation may seem more appropriate, although my experience with the former is slight and my experiments with the latter have been evolving largely outside of my thesis<sup>5</sup>. My choreography often has had a strong visual aesthetic and perhaps because of my dance background, I recognize the impossibility of escaping the body. Photography is my medium of choice for this project; I was curious to find out if two-dimensional photographs could bring to mind a tactile vision of skin as a surface for recording histories, as a landscape for navigating interpersonal relationships. Could a photograph be read like Braille, not in the literal sense of feeling raised dots and translating them, but in a more figurative sense of sharing with the viewer a sensation or an emotion? Could photography fuse hot and cold, technology and sensuality into an experience that is at once both aesthetic and visceral?

### 3.2.1. Emergence

*The Illuminated Body* emerges from a nexus of memory, imagery and philosophy. The tradition of medical illustration contextualizes the images in a way that enables them to respond to the particular weight of that history, the objectification of anatomy and illness, with candour, slyly insinuating that the broken can also be sublime and that paradoxically what is imperfect isn't. Just as some injuries leave imprints on the skin in the form of scars, light leaves an imprint that makes the photograph. Philosopher Roland Barthes defined the "photographic referent" as "not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph" (76). But the images of *The Illuminated Body* challenge the indexical nature of photography; some of the illnesses and injuries are invisible to the lens, they exist under the boundary of the skin. And the graphic elements and embossing were added after the exposure had been made. As

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<sup>5</sup> See *Ning Ning* ([www.delunatic.net/fireflies](http://www.delunatic.net/fireflies)) for more information about an installation project combining movement, light and interactivity.

observed by my thesis advisor, Sandra Semchuk, “The punctum<sup>6</sup> is the injury” which is revealed in the title of each work (2); the injuries and illnesses, the histories of pain that have left traces on the body are what open the work, revealing the universal within the personal.

### **3.2.2. Substratum**

My quest for a more tactile photograph eventually led me to printmaking. In an iterative process, I experimented with laser embossing (actually burning the paper) and traditional embossing using matrices cut with a CNC router from MDF and plywood. I found that matrices cut with the laser cutter from acrylic plates provided the best results. I also conducted a number of experiments in the darkroom, painting emulsion onto different substrates including calf vellum and printmaking papers in search of a surface that evoked skin. The paper that proved perfect for *The Illuminated Body* is gampi torinoko, a handmade paper from Japan. Unbeknownst to me as I began exploring printmaking papers, gampi torinoko comes with a pedigree; according to *Art Hardware: The Definitive Guide to Artists' Materials*, “The Treaty of Versailles was written and signed on this paper because it was believed to be the most permanent paper in the world” (Saitzyk 110). I fell in love with the silky texture of the paper and it was strong enough to withstand the embossing process. In an instance of synchronicity, the paper is composed of 100% Philippine gampi (i.e. fibre from Filipino gampi trees).

Black and white images are hard to read for subtleties in skin tone, especially when the skin in question falls somewhere between black and white; makeup, exposure, contrast and a variety of filters can make dark skin look light and vice versa. I am a mestiza Filipina and have come to realize that “mestiza” is a term that can denote a very particular mix of races depending on geography. In the Philippines, mestiza or mestizo merely denotes someone of mixed Filipino heritage.<sup>7</sup> In my case my father is Filipino and my mother is a North American Caucasian mix: Irish, English, Scottish and German. In both *The Illuminated Body* and *Heavenly Bodies*, I have chosen to work in the negative, reversed black and white, not because I am trying to avoid a discussion of specific skin tone, but because the images are meant to communicate experiences and relationships universally

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<sup>6</sup> According to Barthes, “A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). The average affect of a photograph, its studium, is thereby punctuated by “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (Barthes 26).

<sup>7</sup> Mestiza/mestizo can also be applied to Filipinos who are part Chinese, for example.

shared by all people. In a previous series of colour portraits, *Articles of Faith*<sup>8</sup>, I accentuated each person's individuality in part by focusing on the colour of his or her bare skin. Ultimately I chose to use both the white and natural variants of gampi torinoko for *The Illuminated Body* prints<sup>9</sup>, the former is a natural white and the latter is tan reflecting the spectrum of skin tones in my family.

### **3.2.3. Genesis**

Starting with *Heavenly Bodies*, I have been considering the ways in which what is invisible can be made visible and how what is felt<sup>10</sup> can also be seen. First materialized in 2009 as I entered the MAA program at Emily Carr, *Heavenly Bodies* is a series of portraits of my intimate (and immediate) family, including my partner and my parents. I wanted to map my relationship to the people closest to me, to make evident some of the threads that bind us together as a family. In the case of *Beloved (Ling Yai)*, my husband's freckles are imagined as stars collapsing microcosm and macrocosm and encoding his monkey character in constellation form (see figure 4). In *Heavenly Bodies* I focused on imperfections on the skin of my loved ones, their freckles, scars and wrinkles—the details that mark them as human beings with some experience of life and endear them to me as singular, unique and irreplaceable.

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<sup>8</sup> See *Articles of Faith* ([www.delunatic.net/articles](http://www.delunatic.net/articles)).

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A for installation documentation and examples of gampi torinoko variants.

<sup>10</sup> The use of the verb 'to feel' here is deliberately vague as it can refer to what is felt by the body (as in pain) as well as what is felt by the heart or the mind (as in emotion).

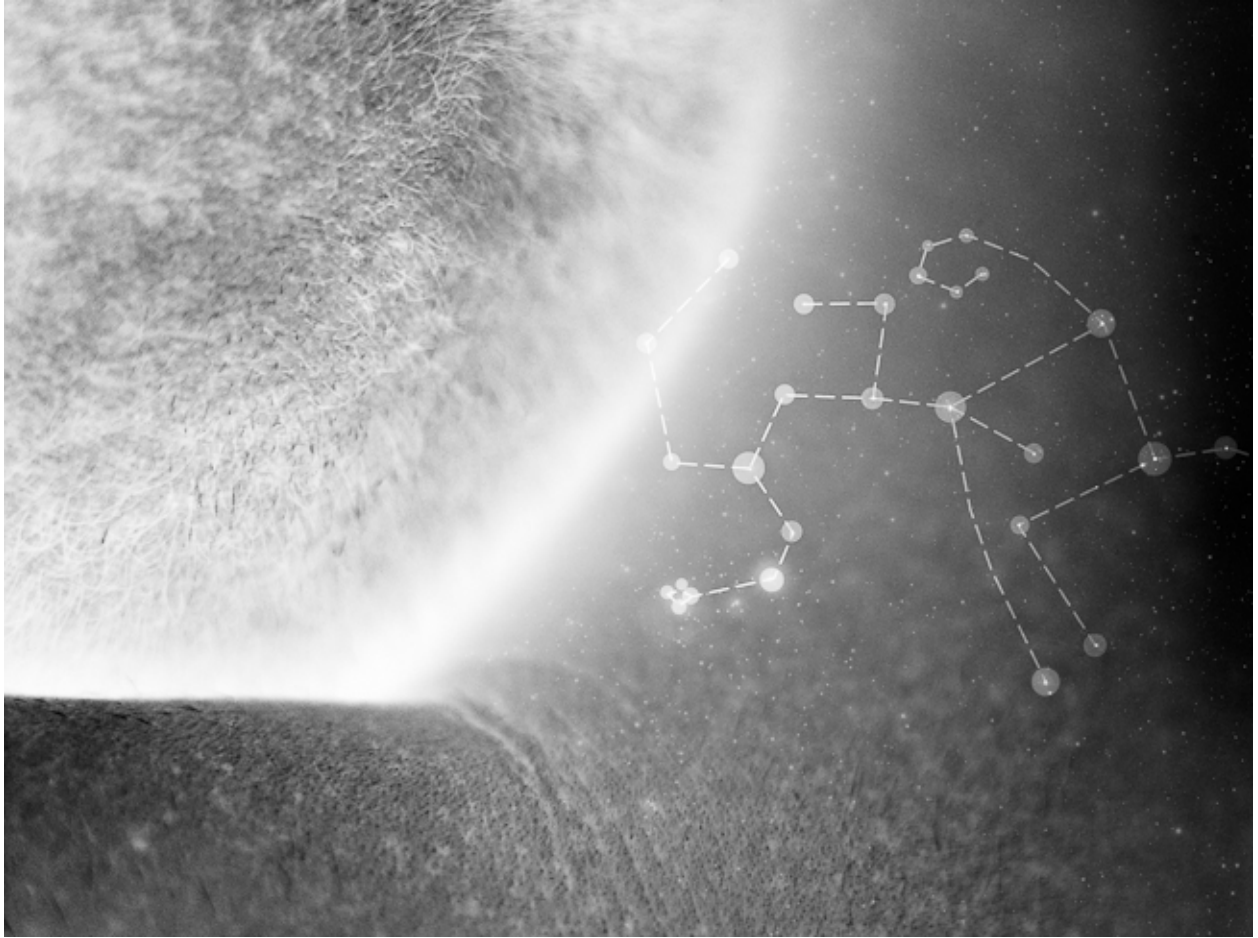


Figure 4: Karen Garrett de Luna, "Beloved (Ling Yai)" from *Heavenly Bodies*, 2010. Pigmented inkjet print, 24 x 18 in (61 x 46cm).

Astronomically speaking, heavenly bodies can be divided into two groups, luminous bodies and illuminated bodies. It seemed like a natural extension of the *Heavenly Bodies* series to continue my research by including myself as a subject. Although generally disinclined towards self-portraiture after years of dancing in front of full-length mirrors, I have always wanted a personal body atlas to catalogue my aches and pains. My memory is deficient in that I can't remember the years associated with certain traumas and digital photography has made it easier to document and date my "battle wounds"—ripped blisters from trapeze lessons, impact contusions from circus and dance rehearsals and impressive bruises from acupuncture. Although spiritually I am more inclined to imagine a luminous body, the title *The Illuminated Body* speaks to the written component of my research and to the semiotics of using a medical vocabulary with images of injury that appear to glow like x-rays and are layered with diagrams and symbolic graphic elements.

### **3.2.4. Self-Portraiture and Practice**

A series of monochromatic self-portraits, *The Illuminated Body* is revealed in fragments, each part focusing on a particular illness or injury. The images reflect upon the ways in which particular incidents have molded my identity. More broadly, the fragmented body is meant to resonate with commonalities of the human experience, as the very fragmentation precludes precise identification. Inseparable from elements of my material practice, including techniques of auto-portraiture and black and white photography, are my movement and meditation practices. One of the definitions for practice is the “repeated exercise in or performance of an activity so as to acquire, improve, or maintain proficiency in it” (“practice, n.”). The activities I repeat on a regular basis inform both my art and my life.

My self-portraiture is a continuation of the ways of looking pioneered by artists, both female and male, starting in the 1970s. In Canadian art, several female artists have worked in video with a similar focus on the female body. Lisa Steele's *Birthday Suit – with scars and defects* (1974) was a thirteen-minute video created on the occasion of her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday chronicling her passage through time as evidenced by marks on her skin. In Kate Craig's video *Delicate Issue* (1979) “a video camera slowly traverses a woman's body in extreme close-up” (*Visceral Bodies* 21). Both videos use technology to de-emphasize the representation of the body as a gendered subject by emphasizing the mediated nature of the viewing experience. Photographer John Coplans has also turned his camera on his own aging body, claiming that his “photographs recall the memories of the human race” (qtd. in Ewing 50). Cognisant of the history of the female nude, the politics of the male gaze and the “flesh-denying [practices] which [lead] people to fear and belittle their own unique physicality” (Ewing 142), I engage in a dialogue with these issues in my body atlas. These complications, along with the universality of pain as a human experience, ground my work.

My art emerges from a balancing act. On one hand, I am a very physical person with an active body. I move, dance, walk, swim and swing on the trapeze. On the other hand, my mind is also very active. As a teenager I instinctually knew that being too cerebral (in a darkly existential way) was dangerous. I had a very athletic childhood but stopped participating in team sports at the age of fourteen. When I was sixteen I started taking dance lessons, beginning of a lifelong commitment to movement. Moving is one activity



that helps me think less. Hyperactive in body and mind, a few years ago I started practicing meditation, also with the aim of thinking less. Through meditation I am interested in becoming more conscious of the ways in which I am affected by my senses, becoming more aware of the ways in which I shut down perceptions to maintain a desired emotional state. According to neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor, “As information processing machines, our ability to process data about the external world begins at the level of sensory perception” (18), so when my sense perceptions are compromised, I am not getting as much information as is available in the world. By practicing shamatha vipassana (mindfulness awareness) meditation, I am dedicated to becoming more and more sensitive to my own life experience; I am learning to smell acutely, touch fully and listen to my own thoughts without being caught up in them (Gunaratana). “[Shamatha] and vipashyana practices make the mind precise, tranquil and smooth in the positive sense—precisely being there, rather than dreaming or sleeping or hazily perceiving” (Trungpa, *Myth* 107). Mind, too, is a muscle and by balancing both movement and stillness, I practice engaging my senses and my mind, informing and enriching my ability to create.

### **3.2.5. Hands On**

Hands have the highest concentration of touch receptors. They are extremely sensitive and haptic technology is built into many contemporary personal electronic devices like Apple’s iPhone. I enjoy working with my hands and my creative process could be described as hands-on. In using my hands for various activities, from cooking to caressing to gripping a trapeze bar, the calluses on my hands evince manual labours. These various activities also often end up in injuries, both minor and serious. The middle finger on my right hand has been hurting for over a year due to a sprain incurred during the course of a dance performance and my left wrist complains whenever I play the violin (which is not often these days). Human touch breathes life into the objects made with the help of the hands, just as touch imparts life in Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

The process of making art is slippery and full of contradictions. I am thankful for the variety of mediums that inspire my work, from literature to sports, and for the diverse array of practices that characterize my process. In the process of making work, I am thinking with my hands (with important help from the eyes). Writer and Nobel laureate

José Saramago, eloquently expressed the notion of manual intelligence in his novel about a potter, *The Cave*:

It should be noted that the fingers are not born with brains, these develop gradually with the passage of time and with the help of what the eyes see. The help of the eyes is important, as important as what is seen through them. That is why the fingers have always excelled at uncovering what is concealed. Anything in the brain-in-our-head that appears to have an instinctive, magical, or supernatural quality—whatever that may mean—is taught to it by the small brains in our fingers. (67)<sup>11</sup>

These methods, practices and techniques, along with the philosophies and ideas forming the basis of my methodology, situate my work in relation to that of other contemporary artists in a way that is both exciting and humbling.

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix B for longer version of this quote.

# The Illuminated Body

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

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## 4. ARTICULATIONS

## 4.1. Knees



### Facts and Figures

*per leg*  
2 menisci

1 each femur, patella, tibia,  
fibula

2 cruciate ligaments (anterior  
and posterior)

### List of Injuries

Abrasions (various)  
1974– *various*

Genu Varum (hereditary)  
1974 *Las Vegas, NV*

Minor Tear of the Coronal  
Ligament and/or Iliotibial Band  
Syndrome (running)  
2009 *Syracuse, NY*

Figure 5: Karen Garrett de Luna, "2009, Syracuse, NY, Minor Tear of Coronal Ligament" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

In the spring of 2009 I visited Syracuse, NY for a one-month residency at Light Work. Although my mother grew up in that city, I was a stranger there. Sometimes I went jogging on steep hills in the cemetery behind Syracuse University, trying to get a feel for the geography of the place. My great grandfather's remains are in the mausoleum next to this graveyard. The nagging pain in my knee is a result of jogging on these hills.

My injury has temporarily put an end to jogging as a form of exercise for me. In some ways it feels like a ridiculous injury because it mostly hurts when I am not weight bearing; my iliotibial band seems to catch most often when I am tying my shoes or adjusting my legs to sit in a cross-legged position.

## 4.2. Context

Making *The Illuminated Body* has been a process of discovery; as I research other artists with similar interests I find resonances with my own explorations. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, resonance is “[the] reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or by the synchronous vibration of a surrounding space or a neighbouring object.” Resonance is fascinating in its ability to move or vibrate an object without actually touching it; the contact comes through the air, propagated by invisible waves. My usage of the word resonance emphasizes the magic of invisible touching. Artworks that resonate with my own draw out and amplify common features; by reflection, they clarify and focus my own intent.

One of the articulations of the leg is the knee (see figure 5). These articulations enable my legs to bend; they allow me to walk, run, jump and dance. By investigating where my work articulates with that of other artists, I start to identify distinct features of my own endeavor. I am able to locate my work by triangulating my position in relation to that of more established artists. The artists I have found whose practices are close to my own allow me to articulate and be articulate about a context for my explorations. In the next three chapters I will consider specific works that speak to *The Illuminated Body* by exploring the ways in which these works deal with methodologies of touch.

The terrain of skin, of injury and of the human body is well traversed. A number of photographic artists including Geneviève Cadieux, Annette Messenger and Myra Greene have worked with bodies and skin, weaving fiction, history and metaphor into moving stories of the body. The tangible aspects of touch in their artworks speak directly to my project, influencing and informing *The Illuminated Body*. As with *Heavenly Bodies*, I find myself discovering connections and creating maps as I draw on the shifting constellations of these contemporaries to elucidate and complicate my own self-portraits, thereby creating a context for dialogue, resonance and inspiration.

# The Illuminated Body

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

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## 5. SCARS

## 5.1. Hip

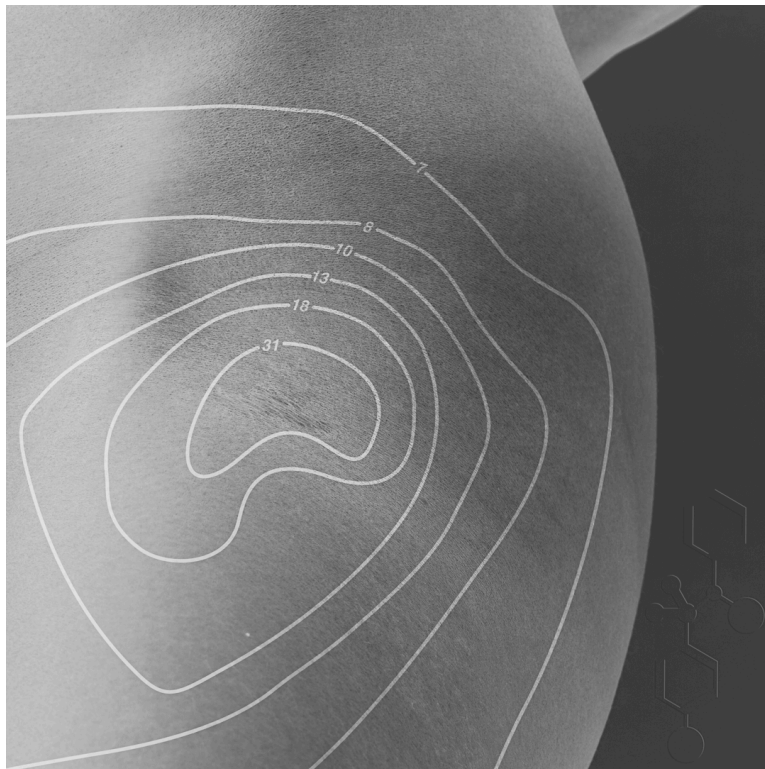


Figure 6: Karen Garrett de Luna, "1979 (Mother's Day), Las Vegas, NV, Second-Degree Burn" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

### Facts and Figures

3 pelvic bones

Acetabulum means "little vinegar cup" in Latin.

The iliopsoas is the filet mignon (or tenderloin) of the human body.

### List of Injuries

Second-Degree Burn  
(accident)

1979 (*Mother's Day*) Las Vegas, NV

Piriformis Syndrome (dance)  
1992 *Seattle, WA*

Hematomas (dance)  
1994– *various*

Contusion (car accident)  
1995 *Seattle, WA*

Iliopsoas Syndrome (dance)  
2003 *New York City, NY*

When I was young we had a spiral bound cookbook entitled *Kids in the Kitchen* containing a prized recipe for Finger Jello. On Mother's Day, I boiled the water before measuring it and I ended up spilling scalding water on myself. I couldn't reach the kitchen sink and had to run down the hall to the bathroom where there was a step stool.

My mother took me straight to the burn ward at the public hospital where she worked as an Emergency Room nurse. They put me in a whirlpool immediately and then later a nurse wiped off the layer of white blood cells that had congealed on my skin with a flick of the wrist. They sent me home with a bandage around my thigh and a container full of a fluffy, silver-based cooling salve called silvadene.

## 5.2. Geneviève Cadieux

French Canadian artist Geneviève Cadieux (born 1955) sees the body as a “sensitive surface capable of capturing and recording the fleeting passage of existence” (Eagan qtd. in Wall). The metaphor of skin as photographic emulsion runs through her work. Her corpus, although composed primarily of photographic works, also includes installation and sculptural work that often also centers on the body. Cadieux’s photographs, which focus on skin and injury, are the most relevant to my thesis. In her Artist Statement for the exhibition *Broken Memory* at the Tate Britain, Cadieux wrote about her guiding metaphor:

Through the medium of photography, I have been concentrating on the external image of beings, on fragments of bodies, on the skin, the human envelope. I have treated the skin as a sensitive surface which registers the marks made by time in the same way as photographic emulsion, which holds the image—or the image as a luminous wound on the emulsion. Skin as the frontier of the being, from the interior towards the exterior, the boundary between these two worlds, led me to look into the interior of the body. Scars, bruises, blood and tears are the reactions to suffering seen on the body.

The photography of Cadieux reflects a phenomenological understanding of self and other. In “Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh,” Grosz introduces the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty by drawing attention to the importance of an incarnated intelligence:

The body and the modes of sensual perception which take place through it are not mere physical/physiological phenomena; nor are they simply psychological results of physical causes. Rather, they affirm the necessary connectedness of consciousness as it is incarnated; mind, for [Merleau-Ponty], is always embodied, always based on corporeal and sensory relations. (86)

A corporeal and embodied intelligence allows us to experience Cadieux’s photographs on many levels, being overwhelmed by their size and spectacle as well as touched by the pathos of their subject matter. *Rubis* (1993) (see figure 7) is a large photographic diptych measuring over 2.5 x 3.5 meters. The bare back of the artist's mother is juxtaposed with a magnified view of cancer cells (Miller 866). The abstract beauty of the macroscopic



enlargement ensnares the viewer whose gaze is forced to vacillate between the human body and its disease.

Image under copyright. Please click to view.

Figure 7 - Geneviève Cadieux, *Rubis*, 1993. 2 plexiglass mounted Chromogenic prints, aluminum frame (2 épreuves couleur montées sur plexi, encadrement d'aluminium), 105  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 141  $\frac{1}{4}$  in (268.6 x 358.8 cm). Used by permission of Galerie René Blouin, Montréal.

Although I am not specifically picturing disease, the photographs in my series *Heavenly Bodies* focus on perceived flaws that make us human. Like Cadieux, I use family members as the subjects for many photographs. Cadieux's preferred model is her sister and as critic Laurence Louppe observed, "A sort of familial ethnography, a history of bodies, is at work here. And it encompasses the artist herself, who has embarked upon an intimate yet quasi-anthropometrical quest for her own personal genealogy" (39). In *Mother (Raquette River)*, a close-up of a caterpillar-like scar on my mother's knee shows a tributary system of varicose veins running into an overlay of the Raquette River (see figure 8). The viewer does not need to know that my mother had a meniscus<sup>12</sup> removed as a teenager or that she spent many summers camping along the Raquette River. Nor does he or she need to know that my mother went into early retirement after having total knee replacement surgery, only to have to repeat the procedure on the same knee less

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<sup>12</sup> A meniscus is "any of the crescent-shaped fibrocartilaginous structures situated between the articular surfaces of certain joints, such as the knee; also called semilunar cartilage" ("meniscus, n.").

than five years later. A disorienting mix of scales and variety of mapped elements complicate the reading of this photograph; the familial stories belong to my personal record, not to a prescriptive interpretation.

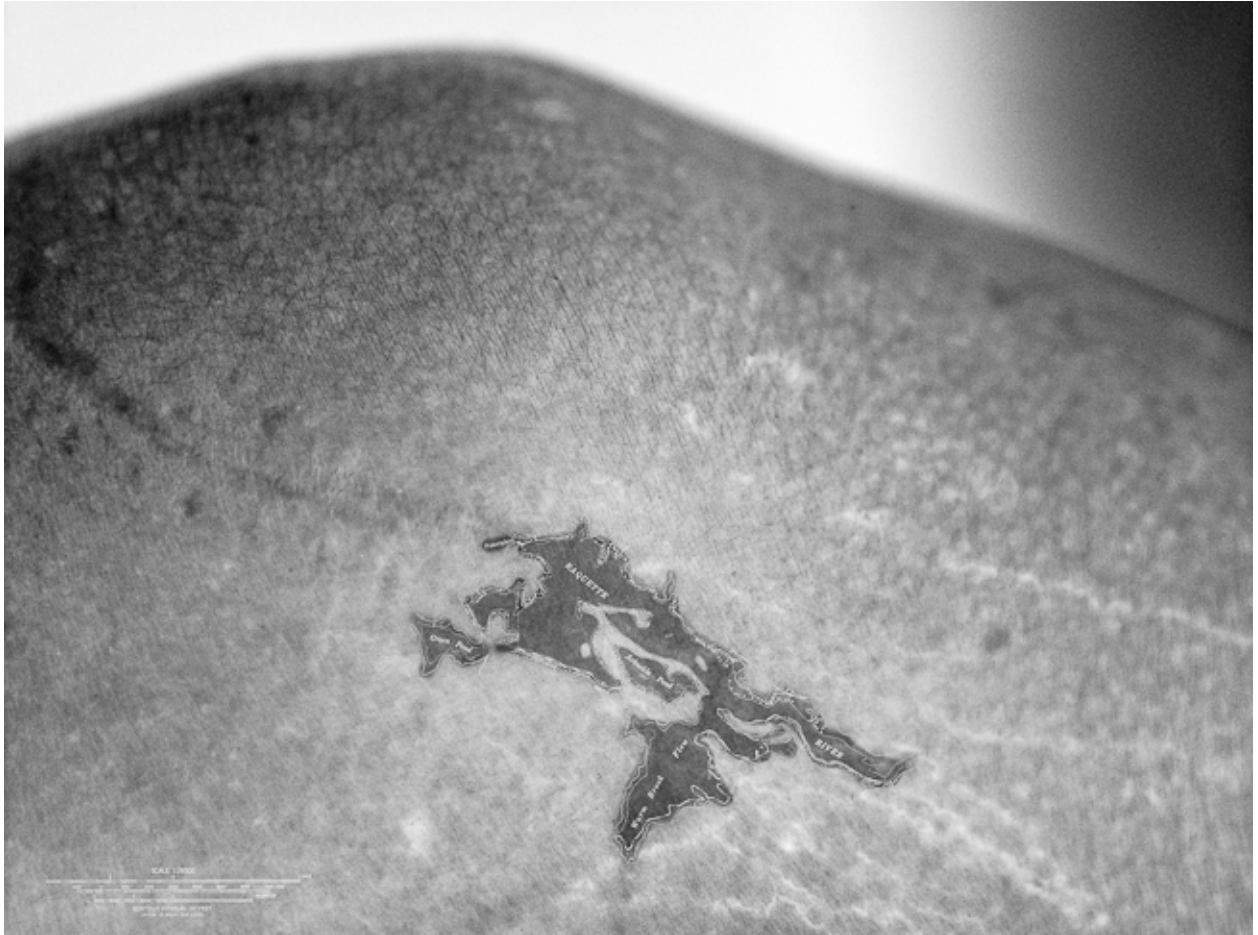


Figure 8: Karen Garrett de Luna, "Mother (Raquette River)" from *Heavenly Bodies*, 2010. Pigmented inkjet print, 43 x 32 in (109 x 81 cm).

Like the other artists whose work I examine in this essay, Cadieux is not afraid of forcing the viewer into an uncomfortably intimate relationship with her photographs. The coolness of the medium of photography with its technologic machinery and mediation is fused with the heat of body chemistry in the photograph, which thereby "becomes a store of skin-deep sensuality" (Pohlen 58). Her work for the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, *La fêlure, au cœur des corps* (*The Kiss*) (1990), is a triptych depicting a kiss flanked on both sides by an interrupted close-up of a scar (see figure 9). The fragmented body when seen extremely magnified becomes overwhelming resulting in "a reciprocal interpenetration of physical spaces. [...] It] is by virtue of the close-up that our gaze intrudes upon the

intimacy of the body" (Louppe 38). The "crack" or *fêlure* mentioned in the title might reference the scar and how it "[maps] out how the subject has been aggressed, literally penetrated by the environment" (Foncé 74). The term also might refer to the orifices that mark the separation between the inside and outside of the body. The blurriness of the boundary between inside and outside, between object and viewer can also be understood phenomenologically as Louppe noted in her catalogue essay for Cadieux's exhibition at the Belkin Art Gallery in 1999:

The body is not the envelope of an inside supposedly distinct from an outside that would contain the viewer [...] The body is a mediator whose primary function is to filter, to link topologies of the self – like the fields of interaction between the self and other. These are fragile boundaries indeed, vague and porous. (43)

Image under copyright. Please click to view.

Figure 9: Geneviève Cadieux, *La fêlure, au cœur des corps (The Kiss)*, 1990. Chromogenic prints (épreuve à développement chromogène), 60 x 228 in (152.5 x 579 cm). Used by permission of Galerie René Blouin, Montréal.

The scar on my hip in 1979 (*Mother's Day*), Las Vegas, NV, *Second-Degree Burn* (see figure 6) is but an echo of the burn I once suffered; it memorializes the location on my skin where I was aggressed by the environment. There is a large patch of discoloration

that is barely perceptible now over 30 years later and a smaller raised splotch where the burn was deepest, extending into the reticular dermis. The scar is somatic marker of the meeting of my skin and scalding water. My memories associated with that accident are fragmented—running to the bathroom sink because I was too short to reach the kitchen tap, sitting in a whirlpool at the hospital, gasping when the nurse wiped off the layer of white blood cells that had accumulated on the surface of the burn, being surprised that her swift action didn't hurt, sharing a bathroom stall with one of my grade 2 classmates to show her the bandage around my thigh. But instead of this stream of consciousness, the viewer is confronted with the image of a subtly scarred hip with an enigmatic title and left to make his or her own connection to somatic memory.

One of the most powerful things that art can do is affect a viewer emotionally. The tension in Cadieux's work is produced in part by its simmering emotionality. According to Henri Bergson, affect is "that part or aspect of the inside of our bodies which we mix with the image of external bodies" (60). Bergson also claims, "[There] is no perception without affection" (60), implying that perception cannot be pure. Some part of memory will always mingle with images of external objects with the result being our perception of that object. A disconcerting immixture of perception and memory allows Cadieux's photographs to work in the liminal space between self and other. In the affective power of her imagery "originates [...] the dizzying confusion between 'optic' and 'haptic', between different registers or channels of experience that intertwine yet do not yield up the ultimate key to our emotions" (Loupe 41). Cadieux's borderlands of skin, of self and other, of inside and out allow the artist to touch us with images that enter through our eyes but which speak directly to our skin.

# The Illuminated Body

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

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## 6. MAPS

## 6.1. Belly

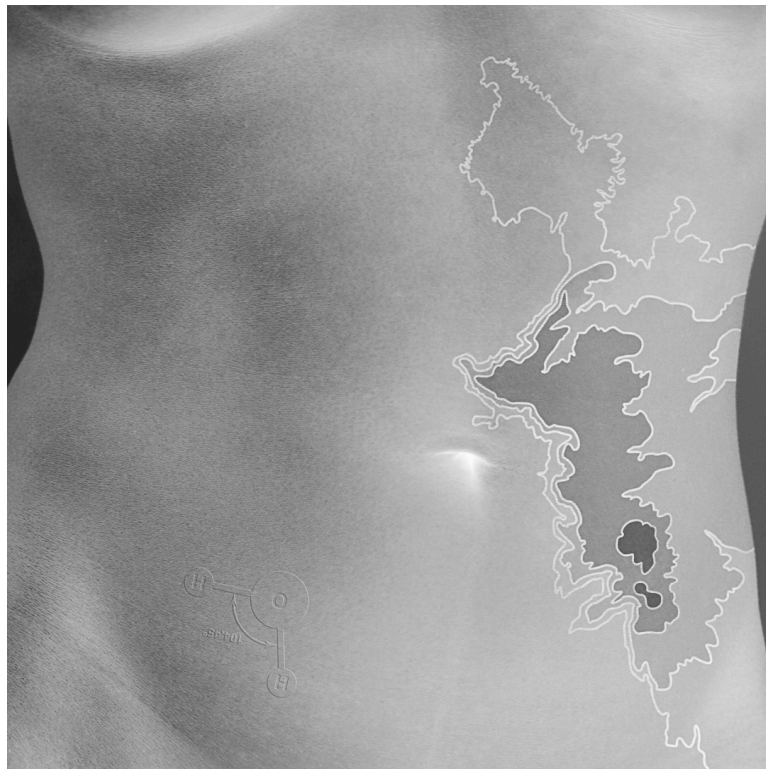


Figure 10: Karen Garrett de Luna, "2008, New York City, NY, Basal Body Temperatures" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

### Facts and Figures

Enteric Nervous System is another name for belly brain. It contains approximately one million neurons.

### List of Injuries

Nevus (birth)  
1972 Albany, NY

Alien Sutures (birth)  
1972 Albany, NY

Umbilical Chimera (birth)  
1972 Albany, NY

Mittelschmerz (menses)  
1986– various

Hyperphagia (undetermined)  
1991 Seattle, WA

Basal Body Temperatures (undetermined)  
2008 New York City, NY

The Svadhisthana or Sacral Chakra governs reproduction physically, creativity mentally, joy emotionally and enthusiasm spiritually. I suffer from what is called mittelschmerz (literally "middle pain") that happens at the middle of my cycle and is associated with ovulation. Curiously, I found that the monthly spike in my basal body temperature did not correspond with the periodic pain in my side.

## 6.2. Annette Messenger

Although the recent work of French artist Annette Messenger (born 1943) is mostly installation based, she produced several series in the 1980s that combined photography with drawing and writing. The layering of maps atop fragmented body parts emphasizes the relationship of that body part to a more than three dimensional Cartesian space in which stories and relationships reveal secret affinities. The second in a series of three projects employing photographs of isolated body parts in combination with other media<sup>13</sup>, *Mes Trophées (My Trophies)* is composed of photographs of body fragments overlaid with acrylic, charcoal and pastel (see figure 11). Delicately traced maps of love on the surface of silver gelatin prints create "an amorous geography" of the body (Messenger 30). Inspired by the *Carte du Tendre (Map of Tenderness)* invented by Mademoiselle de Scudery, a female writer in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, Messenger's "amorous cartographies chart the sweet destinations and the cruel contingencies of the romantic journey—past Boughs of Indiscretion, via Lakes of Indifference, to the Sea of Intimacy" (Bush). Beach scenes on the right foot and small photographic reproductions of human figures on the left foot can be seen in this trophy showing only the soles of feet (see figure 11); one can only imagine what story of romance inspired this imagery. Messenger's maps detail territories of the flesh with a tenderness, imagination and attention that layer the chronicles of bare skin with new meanings.

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<sup>13</sup> The first series was *Mes Ouvrages (My Works)* (1987) and the last *Mes Voeux (My Vows)* (1988-91).



Figure 11 Annette Messenger, *Mes Trophées (My Trophies)*, 1987. Acrylic, charcoal and pastel on 2 gelatin-silver prints, 81 x 67 in (206 x 170 cm). Photo: © 2009 Museum Associates / LACMA / Art Resource, NY.

Used by permission of © Art Resource, NY

Sheryl Conkelton, curator at MoMA, described the body parts of *Mes Trophées* as being drawn over with “whimsical, arcane symbols, and decorative marks” taken from “the less-regarded arts of tattooing, palmistry, chiromantic manuals, and children's book illustration, as well as to the illuminated initials of medieval manuscripts” (23). Unlike me, Messenger does not appear to be superstitious, confessing in an interview, “I make fun of sorcery and alchemy even if I make full use of their signs” (32). The issue of writing on my own skin in my self-portraits caused me much hand wringing. When I was working on *2008, New York City, NY, Basal Body Temperatures* (see figure 10) it became clear to me that in depicting my injuries and illnesses I didn't want to curse myself by focusing solely on the broken parts of my body. Previously, this image was much more complicated,



combining the molecular structure of water, the barren Mojave Desert and actual basal body temperature tracking charts from a period of months in 2008. The resulting graphics, while also inspired by vernacular diagrams and topographic imagery, are meant to heal.

The use of maps is one of the ways in which Messenger's work resonates with my own. Many of the graphic elements included in photographs from *The Illuminated Body* (and *Heavenly Bodies* before it) are cartographic in nature. However, I do not have a single inspirational source for these maps, each uniquely encodes information specific to the relationship I have with the subject of the photograph. In *Parents (Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow)* one version of my family history is represented (see figure 12). My parents, who are no longer married, each present their own hand. The diptych is overlaid with ghostly flight paths highlighting cities in the eastern and western hemispheres that have been important to my family's history; these dots and lines also connect Head and Heart lines reflecting the ways in which love, destiny and free-will crisscross. In this case, the journey I am recording is not romantic or whimsical like Messenger's in *Mes Trophées*; it is my own path in this world, which inescapably includes that of my ancestors as well.

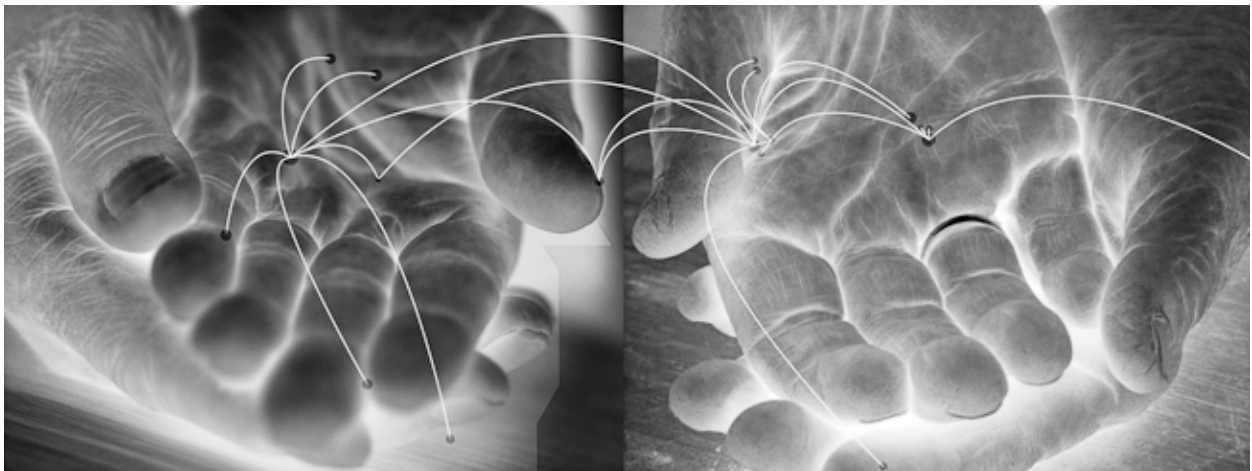


Figure 12 Karen Garrett de Luna, "Parents (Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow)" from *Heavenly Bodies*, 2010. Pigmented inkjet print, 86 x 32 in (218 x 81 cm).

In creating art that includes writing and drawing on body parts, a distinction between self-writing and making marks on another subject's body emerges. Along with *Messenger*, I have written on other's bodies, but in *The Illuminated Body*, I am tracing outlines on my own skin. John Berger commented on the double sensitivity of self-writing in his essay about Frida Kahlo. He focuses on her pain and her special method of painting with regards to surface and fine details. His description brings to mind *Las Dos Fridas* (*The Two Fridas*), a painting that was completed in 1939 shortly after her divorce from Diego Rivera and pictures twin Fridas connected by a bleeding artery. Berger comments on Kahlo's reflexive sensitivity, "[The] surface would also feel what the hand was tracing—the nerves of both leading to the same cerebral cortex" (158-159), a phenomenon echoed in my own process of self-portraiture as well. Although self-drawing acknowledges this double sensitivity, the skins of *Messenger's* romantic conquests in *Mes Trophées* are more closely related to hides (i.e. the skins of hunted animals,) inscribed with intricate stories.

In one sense a trophy is "anything taken in war, or in hunting, etc."; it is a spoil or a prize especially if kept or displayed as a memorial ("trophy, n."). *Messenger* hints at the memento mori<sup>14</sup> aspect of photography in *Mes Trophées*. In this series, as in previous work, *Messenger* fights against death by collecting fragmented body parts. She notes that "[t]he trophy is simultaneously on the side of victory and on the side of death, whether they are hunting trophies [or] the trophies of the Indians" (*Messenger* 29). Photography effortlessly transforms the animate into the inanimate, but the nature of this transformation is ambiguous. In a catalogue essay for a recent retrospective at the Hayward Gallery in 2009, exhibition curator Sophie Duplaix reflects on the correspondence between the living and the dead in *Messenger's* work:

The ambiguity between animate and inanimate, dead and alive, is often emphasized by Annette *Messenger* with regard to photography, and especially in the interesting parallel she draws between photography and taxidermy. Like the photograph, which freezes a split second of life, and artificially prolongs it, taxidermy attempts to recreate a pose that flirts with the living—capturing a movement. (19)

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<sup>14</sup> Loosely translated from Latin, 'memento mori' means 'remember (that you have) to die' or 'remember death'

By freezing the animate inside of a picture frame and then further objectifying it through intervention with mixed media, Messenger succeeds in memorializing map and model in one gesture. The fragmented body becomes inseparable from its map. Details of the skin's surface and stories, both invisible to the naked eye, are captured in a time machine. In her essay "Melancholy Objects", Susan Sontag wrote, "Life is not about significant details, illuminated [in] a flash, fixed forever. Photographs are" (81).

Messenger's whimsical mark making on photographs of fragmented body parts is deceptively superficial. In the virtual space where mark and surface intersect, meanings are made. By alluding to notions of the hunt in *Mes Trophées*, Messenger captures what is living and compounds it with what is considered to be inanimate (or dead), creating art that is at once sensual and complex. Materialized artworks are inanimate objects. Although behind the photograph, in the history of its creation, are real humans, including the owners of the isolated body part in the picture frame and the creator of the image, the warmth of these bodies has left the work. What remains are traces of the photographer's hands mixed with materials from the world, without one, the other could not exist. The human touch of the artist, of her models and of the viewer, completes the work; without it, the artwork would not exist. In the Buddhist way of thinking, all of these elements are interdependent<sup>15</sup>, without any one piece, none of the others could be.

Although works of art are largely inanimate, this lack of mobility does not imply a disjuncture; an *objet d'art* is still part of a web of interconnections that make up the world as we recognize it. In his book *Skinny Legs and All*, Tom Robbins reflects on the agency of objects:

It is because inanimate objects, in their stillness, turn back upon themselves that they are exactly identical with themselves. The frantic confusions of the organic realm wash over them. The universe moves around them. The Divine lines up with them. Their solidity may be spiritual as well as physical. In the immobile whirls the infinite. (63)

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<sup>15</sup> "Interdependence means that a thing can arise only in reliance on other things. A flower arises in dependence on the seed, clouds, rain, soil, and the warmth of the sun. All these things are other than the flower, but the flower depends on them for its existence. This is the interdependent self-nature of the flower. Everything in the universe has this interdependent self-nature" (Hanh 200).

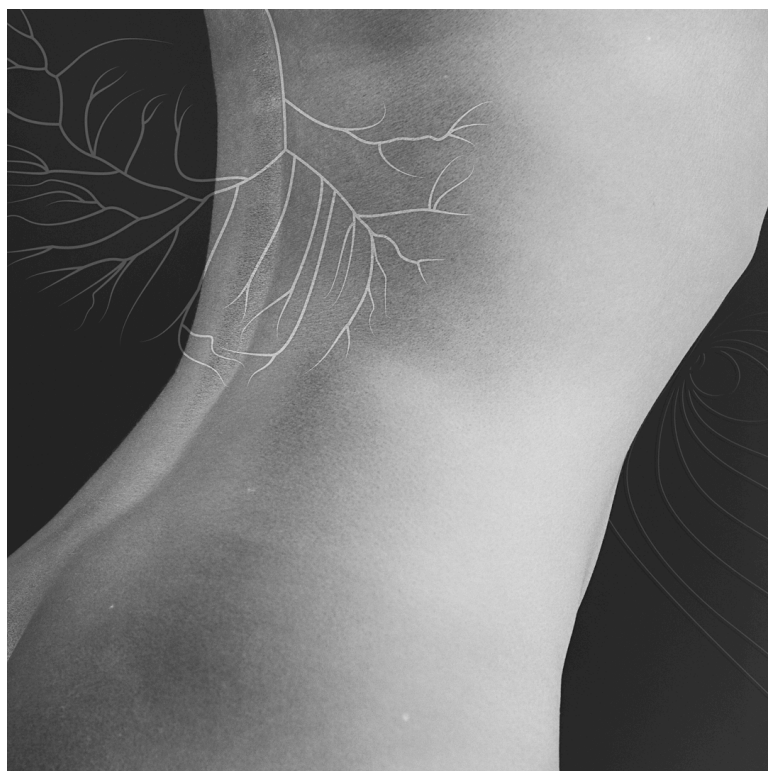
# The Illuminated Body

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

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## 7. MIRRORS

## 7.1. Centre



### Facts and Figures

24 vertebrae

1 sacrum

1 coccyx

12 pairs of ribs: 7 true, 5 false  
(including 2 floating)

4 curves

### List of Injuries

Trauma to the Phrenic Nerve  
1979 *Las Vegas, NV*

Lumbar Subluxation (dance +  
car accident)  
1994 *Seattle, WA*

Sacroiliac Dysfunction (dance  
+ car accident)  
1994 *Seattle, WA*

Pseudo Sciatica (dance)  
1994 *Seattle, WA*

Figure 13: Karen Garrett de Luna, "1979, Las Vegas, NV, Trauma to the Phrenic Nerve" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

When I was in grade 2, I attempted a cherry drop from the monkey bars during recess. I over-rotated and landed flat on my back, knocking the wind out of me. For a few eternal moments, I thought I was going to die right there on the playground. Technically the temporary paralysis of my diaphragm was caused by trauma to the phrenic nerve. The same injury can happen with a blow to the solar plexus. The area below the solar plexus is recognized by many as the center of emotion (imagine a laughing fit or being wracked with sobs). Legendary choreographer Martha Graham recognized the power of this emotional core and based her dance technique on contraction and release from the center.

## 7.2. Myra Greene

Myra Greene (born 1975) is an American photographer whose series *Character Recognition* (2004-2007) was partly a reaction to the “up swell [sic] of bigotry” and racial tension occurring after the devastation of New Orleans by hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Greene 3). In the statement at the beginning of the book *Character Recognition* Greene asks, “What do people see when they look at me? Am I nothing but black? Is that skin tone enough to describe my nature and expectation in life? Do my strong teeth make me a strong worker? Does my character resonate louder than my skin tone?” (3).



Figure 14 Myra Greene, untitled from *Character Recognition*, 2004-2007. Black glass plate Ambrotype, 3 x 4 in (7 ¾ x 10 cm). Used by permission of the artist.

Divided into seven sections: “face”, “mouth – horizontal plates”, “ears”, “profile”, “nose”, “mouth – vertical plates” and “eyes”, Greene focuses on body parts associated with the five senses and with racial identification (see figures 14 and 15). The images are very dark and small, only 3 x 4 in (7 ¾ x 10 cm), forcing the viewer into uncomfortably close viewing proximity. The intimacy of the work makes it appear “in your face”. The photographs were created using an antique process called wet collodion in which the traditional transparent glass was replaced by the artist with black glass resulting in images that are “virtually impossible to penetrate—deliberately dark, dense, and obscure” (Williams). The antique process evokes a bygone era when colonialism and slavery still

reigned (Jack 1) and size of the work belies the power of the convergence of a fragmented body, pain and cultural memory.



Figure 15 Myra Greene, untitled from *Character Recognition*, 2004-2007. Black glass plate Ambrotype, 3 x 4 in (7 ¾ x 10 cm). Used by permission of the artist.

Although photographs are usually flat and two-dimensional, Greene's images are deep, embodying memory and pain and engendering empathy through the recognition of shared experience. *Character Recognition* can be seen with the eyes, but it is felt under the skin. Her photographs remind us that we can feel touch not only with our own skins but also through the skins of others. Firing both when a person acts and when he or she observes the same action performed by another, mirror neurons have also been called "monkey see, monkey do" neurons ("Mirror Neurons"). According to neuroscience mirror neurons can "[dissolve] the barrier between you and other human beings" (Ramachandran). These so-called "empathy neurons" (Ramachandran) allow people to connect by enabling us to sense another person's feelings ("Mirror Neurons"). By holding a mirror up to American culture, Myra Greene allows us to become aware of our interconnectivity by making her consciousness collectively felt.

Empathy and interconnectivity play a role in the semiotics of the graphical elements in my work *1979, Las Vegas, NV, Trauma to the Phrenic Nerve* (see figure 13). The overlay is reminiscent of veins, nerves or the roots of trees and the title refers to what is commonly known as “getting the wind knocked out of you” (Kluger). Personally, I imagine that I am connected to the world through my centre, just below my sternum. Gut feelings are felt here, powerfully combining empathy and intuition.

It has been suggested that the pain of history and the memory of slavery don't belong to one race of people; they belong to all of us. The link to a specific time in history provided by Greene's use of antiquated imaging technology contextualizes her self-portraits in a way that reinforces the sentiments of the artist as she questions our contemporary society. I understood something about the pain of slavery differently after a conversation with a former professor who, like Greene, is a Black American. I was complaining that although I have learned to speak several foreign languages, I don't speak Tagalog, the language of my father and my grandparents. My professor declared that I was fortunate to know *which* language my ancestors spoke, as he himself had no way to name or learn the language of his forebears. Related to the issue of loss of language is the loss of names; in an interview Toni Morrison commented on the “huge psychological scar” inflicted on those who were dragged from their roots to become slaves on another continent (LeClair qtd. in Benthien 179). The violent rupture in ancestral history caused by slavery and the persistence of racism in today's society are sources of shared cultural pain laid bare by *Character Recognition* and in this way Greene has complicated the present for all of us (Williams).

A connection between unwritten histories, the skin and the senses is implicit in Greene's work. Artist and scholar Deborah Jack writes about *Character Recognition* and comments on the stories buried deep in cellular memory:

It is no coincidence that the five senses are represented here. This is meant to be a sensory experience. The most potent triggers of memories can be as subtle as smell, taste, sound, sight and touch. They take us inward on an excavation of shared histories/memories. These are sites without artifacts only the stories etched in the DNA of our grandmothers. (2)

Etched in my own DNA and cellular memory are stories from my parents and grandparents. More than stories, the totality of what I have inherited, both physically and



ephemerally, is one component of my karma. Among the gifts from my father (see figure 16) are my last name and a propensity for abstract thinking, for numbers and figures, for mathematics. A retired civil engineer, my father dreams of bringing smart, green technologies back to his hometown in the Philippines, air conditioning, refrigeration, clean water, self-sufficient electricity. Philosopher Cornel West reminds us that the word “human” is related to the Latin word “humare” which means to bury; we are “[tied] to the earth, to the soil” (“Craig Ferguson’s Late Late Show”); we are made of and come from the ground beneath our feet. *Father (ASZ18 Split System Heat Pump)* is a portrait of a human, my father, but as Oscar Wilde aptly observed, “Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself” (7).

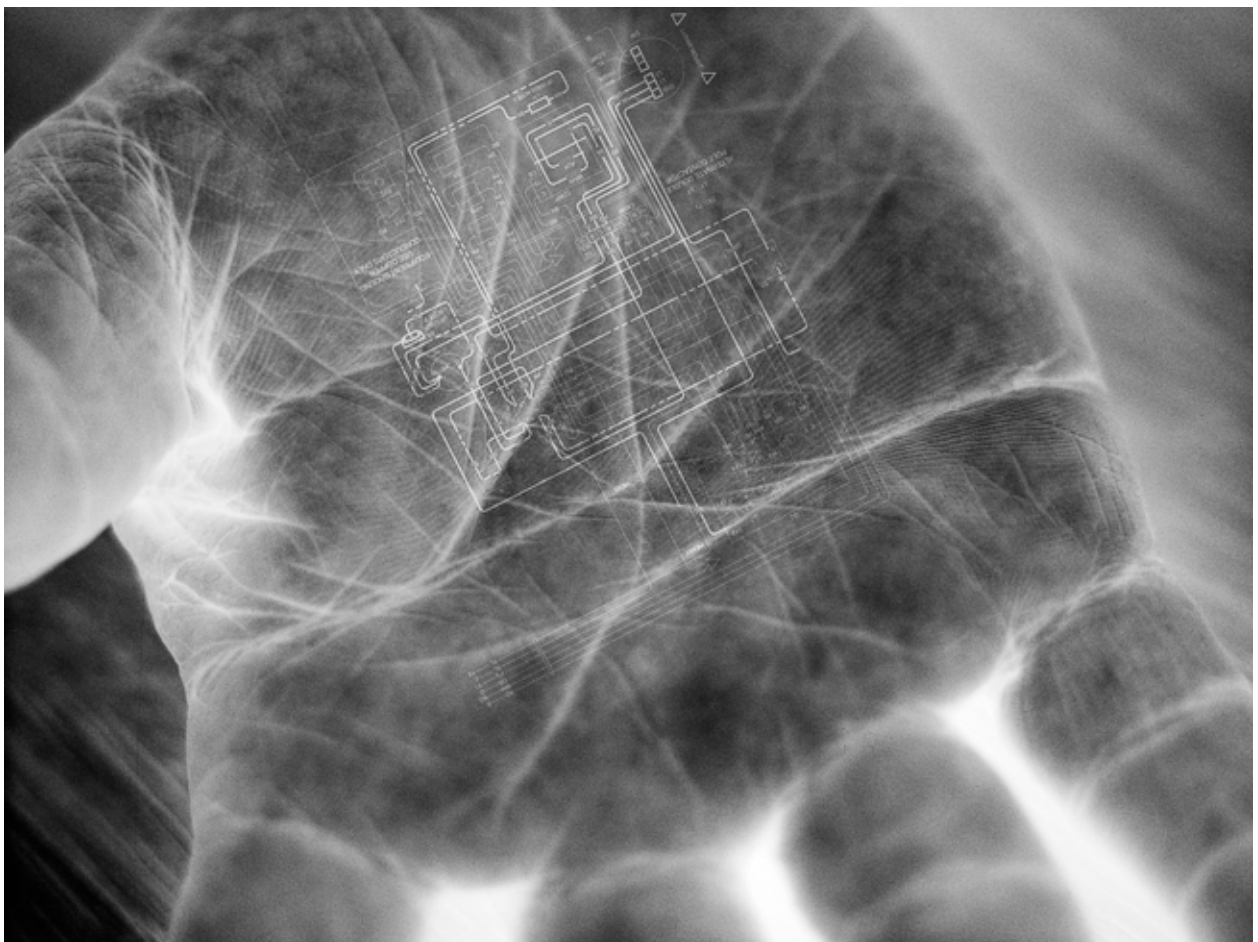


Figure 16: Karen Garrett de Luna, “Father (ASZ18 Split System Heat Pump)” from *Heavenly Bodies*, 2010. Pigmented inkjet print, 43 x 32 in (109 x 81 cm).

By recognizing that her point of view is both unique and universal, Myra Greene renders the invisible visible in her self-portraits. By materializing a consciousness of race and history in photographs, she passes down stories not just of injustice and hatred, but also of healing and hope. Without explicitly calling out her injuries, both personal and historical, Greene asks the viewer to weave a knowledge of historical context into his/her reading of the work. From such a point of view the injustice of assigning a human being value based on skin tone is all too clear. As independent artist, writer and scholar Carla Williams put it, Greene's self-portraits are "[unpretty] (but gorgeous)." The way into this work isn't through the eyes alone, the work manages to leave an impression with the viewer by playing on a synaesthesia that incorporates a feeling evoked by the mind and the eyes, tracing the invisible textures of history and the present with great sensitivity.

# The Illuminated Body

Excerpts from an Atlas of Illness and Injury

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## 8. FEELING

## 8.1. Heart



### Facts and Figures

4 chambers

### List of Injuries

Dislocatable Shoulders  
(hereditary)

1972 Albany, NY

Crepitus, Left Shoulder  
(gymnastics)

1978 Las Vegas, NV

Backne (adolescence)

1986– various

Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis

1988 Las Vegas, NV

Shoulder (flying trapeze)

2007 Brooklyn, NY

Itchy Spot (hereditary)

2008– various

Figure 17: Karen Garrett de Luna, "1988, Las Vegas, NV, T4-T5 Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis" from *The Illuminated Body*, 2011. Embossed, pigmented inkjet print, 20 x 20 in (50.8 x 50.8 cm).

My scoliosis is slight. My spine doesn't curve laterally making an S shape, rather it twists around itself at the fourth and fifth thoracic vertebrae. The aorta arches at the level of T4 and T5. A related development is that within the last ten years or so, I have developed the disconcerting ability to crack my sternum somewhere in front of my heart.

The heart provides a physical and metaphoric connection between head and hands. It is important in many mythologies; in Hinduism and Buddhism it is where Heaven and Earth meet, uniting man and god and providing a home for the emotions. The Anahata or Heart Chakra is associated with the colour green and issues involved with this center include complex emotions and compassion.

## Conclusion

The porous space between self and other on the skin of Geneviève Cadieux's photographs, the layering of symbols and meanings in the fusing of the animate and inanimate in Annette Messager's *Mes Trophées* and the tactile pathos of Myra Greene's self-portraits continue to shape and influence *The Illuminated Body* as a work in progress. The language of phenomenology and Buddhism gives me a way to articulate my ideas about the artworks of my chosen constellation of contemporaries as well as to elucidate my own thoughts about the art of living and the creative process as it unfolds.

There are lessons to be learned from every injury. Each time I hurt myself, I am forced to slow down. Having to slow down is a wonderful (if not sometimes bothersome) gift. I am prone to acting as if I were a "human doing" instead of embracing the spaciousness of my existence as a human being. Injuries bring us back to our bodies, to our flesh. Spanish poet Federico García Lorca emphasizes the elemental reality of the body in his poem *Ciudad sin Sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge) (Unsleeping City [Brooklyn Bridge Nocturne])*:

Life is no dream! Beware and beware and beware!

We tumble downstairs to eat of the damp of the earth

or we climb to the snowy divide with the choir of dead dahlias.

But neither dream nor forgetfulness, is:

brute flesh is.<sup>16</sup> ... (15-19)

As I am touched by the world, so do I touch. Learning to listen not only to my body, but also to the world as it responds is a process of opening my awareness to the touch and feel of life itself, not just in art and art-making. By honing sensitivity, listening intently to the messages of my injuries, and thinking with my whole body, I begin to see with the soles of my feet and feel with my eyes. Sight and touch are inextricably intertwined and with awareness, attention and clarity of mind, the crucial role touch plays in acting as a

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<sup>16</sup> No es sueño la vida. ¡Alerta! ¡Alerta! ¡Alerta!  
Nos caemos por las escaleras para comer la tierra húmeda  
o subimos al filo de la nieve con el coro de las dalias muertas.  
Pero no hay olvido, ni sueño:  
carne viva. ...

base for the other sense perceptions becomes apparent. Through the wisdom of the body, acknowledging illness and injury becomes the first step in healing. Within *The Illuminated Body* is an acknowledgement and celebration of the fact that eyes can touch and skin can see.

*On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.*  
It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eyes.

— Antoine de Saint Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

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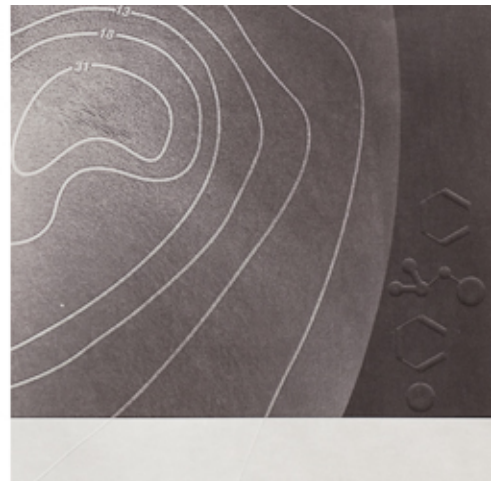
**APPENDIX A**



installation at Charles H. Scott Gallery and example of print on gampi torinoko white



example of print on gampi torinoko natural and installation at 1612 Gallery



Winner of the 2011 Governor General's Gold Medal for Academic Excellence (Graduate), Winner of the 2011 Winsor Gallery Graduate Student Award and embossing detail

## **APPENDIX B**

from *The Cave* by José Saramago, pages 66-67

Indeed, very few people are aware that in each of our fingers, located somewhere between the first phalange, the mesophalange, and the metaphalange, there is a tiny brain. The fact is that the other organ which we call the brain, the one with which we came into the world, the one which we transport around in our head and which transports us so that we can transport it, has only ever had very general, vague, diffuse and, above all, unimaginative ideas about what the hands and fingers should do. For example, if the brain-in-our-head suddenly gets an idea for a painting, a sculpture, a piece of music or literature, or a clay figurine, it simply sends a signal to that effect and then waits to see what will happen. Having sent an order to the hands and fingers, it believes, or pretends to believe, that the task will then be completed, once the extremities of the arms have done their work. The brain has never been curious enough to ask itself why the end result of this manipulative process, which is complex even in its simplest forms, bears so little resemblance to what the brain had imagined before it issued its instructions to the hands. It should be noted that the fingers are not born with brains, these develop gradually with the passage of time and with the help of what the eyes see. The help of the eyes is important, as important as what is seen through them. That is why the fingers have always excelled at uncovering what is concealed. Anything in the brain-in-our-head that appears to have an instinctive, magical, or supernatural quality—whatever that may mean—is taught to it by the small brains in our fingers. In order for the brain-in-the-head to know what a stone is, the fingers first have to touch it, to feel its rough surface, its weight and density, to cut themselves on it. Only long afterward does the brain realize that from a fragment of that rock one could make something which the brain will call a knife or something it will call an idol. The brain-in-the-head has always lagged behind the hands, and even now, when it seems to have overtaken them, the fingers still have to summarize for it the results of their tactile investigations, the shiver that runs across the epidermis when it touches clay, the lacerating sharpness of the graver, the acid biting into the plate, the faint vibration of a piece of paper laid flat, the orography of textures, the crosshatching of fibers, the alphabet of the world in relief.