

the common S E N S E

The Museum is an institution of sight, a house of looking and seeing, a place where we behold with our eyes. We may be stirred, moved or touched by what we see but we rarely touch the thing seen.

I lament this distance.

We stroke a pet, reach to draw a curtain and feel the fineness of the cotton, touch the hand of another person. We sleep between sheets, stay warm inside silk underwear and wool coats; cloth is the constant tactile companion to our body, is the hand that is always touching.

Cloth covers nakedness—makes us social. Its surround is an early architecture and its origins are animal: the fleece of sheep, the skin of bear, the spun thread of a silkworm.

Each extension of a hand or paw is toward contact. Contact with the ground, the air, to someone or something outside the self and from this extension one is always touched in return—that is touch's reciprocal condition and exchange. When we touch we go from being observers to being included; things seen become things felt.

In silence or in speech, reading and being read to are other forms of touch. The words of poets and writers stir us. When this happens we may be compelled to note, copy, or underline and often to share that touch—by passing the book from hand to hand, by reading out loud, or by sharing the page. The distance between author and reader, and reader and reader diminishes as the capacity of words to compel recognition travels from contact to contact, screen to screen, and perhaps from hand to hand.

This project is a series of invitations. It begins—or ends—with the image of a camera draped in cloth; with it, an invitation to be photographed. Your images will become material in the project. This is the project's first exchange.

Then, there is an invitation to take fragments of readings, poems, texts, and to submit your own.

In the South Gallery, there is an invitation to listen and feel the air generated by a field of twenty mechanized bullroarers inspired by ancient instruments used from Greece to Australia to call or signal over great distance.

In the North galleries, there is an invitation to pull down from the walls segments of birds, mammals, and amphibians. An exhibition is a form of exchange; like a conversation, it is organic, changed by each person who enters and whose acts of giving and taking will become the public life of the project.

—Ann Hamilton