Reanimating the Past: Embodied knowledge as art-historical method

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This session will explore how embodied knowledge can open up new avenues of art-historical inquiry by offering unique insights into the past. In recent years, this interest in the body as a research method and a pedagogical tool has led to a wide range of new practices, among them staging dance performances in museums; reenacting historical events or postures; and learning about artists' processes by remaking lost pigments or other materials. We aim to discuss what is to be gained from these efforts – how embodied knowledge might expand our understanding of art history as a discipline. Conversely, what does art history have to teach us about the experience and the history of embodiment?

We seek papers covering a variety of chronological periods, geographical areas, cultural traditions and media; we particularly encourage presentations that directly incorporate embodied practices. Presenters may focus on artworks with an embodied dimension, or those for which bodies and movement may reanimate still objects (through tactics such as tableaux vivants). We also welcome papers that relate embodied knowledge to congruent or contiguous methodologies, such as material culture studies, that seek to understand and awaken the haptic or affective dimensions of artworks. Ultimately, we are interested in ways that embodied practices in the present can add new layers of meaning to historical images, objects and texts or, by employing new movement vocabularies, can reveal aspects of artworks that have been hitherto hidden or latent.