

Sensory Synapses of Drawing. Touch, Imprint and Embodied Knowledge in Giuseppe Penone's Drawings

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Abstract

This essay investigates the role of drawing in Giuseppe Penone's work, considering it not as a preparatory or ancillary practice in relation to sculpture, but as an autonomous device of knowledge. Through the analysis of significant nuclei within his graphic corpus –from the references to Chauvet and Leonardo to Sulla punta delle dita, Rovesciare i propri occhi, Palpebre, Pressione, Propagazioni, and Paesaggio del cervello– the article shows how drawing operates as a site of relation between body, matter, and perception. The notion of analogy makes it possible to read the morphological continuity between natural and bodily forms, while touch and imprint shift the cognitive process beyond the primacy of vision. In Penone's works, the surface is not a passive limit, but an active threshold: skin, paper, wall, and skull become sites of registration, emergence, and transformation of the mark. Drawing thus appears as an embodied practice, capable of making visible correspondences that are normally imperceptible and of restoring to representation an epistemic function. From this perspective, Penone's graphic work is configured as a sensory and relational field in which contact produces form and the mark becomes the trace of thought in action.

Keywords: Giuseppe Penone, drawing, imprint, touch, analogy, embodied knowledge.

"A drawing that is not exhausted by the effect of its technique, but that prompts a reflection on the world and offers an unexpected vision of reality, precisely so" [Penone 2009, p. 275].

"The first image produced by humankind is the imprint of hands" [Penone 2022, p. 27].

Introduction

In Giuseppe Penone's work, drawing emerges as a primary field of experience and formal elaboration: not a site subordinated to sculpture, nor merely a preparatory phase of the work, but an autonomous space in which thought takes form.

The title of this study, *Sensory Synapses of Drawing*, understands the synapse not only as a metaphorical image, but as a critical model for a form of knowledge that is not produced through the isolation of elements, but rather through the relation that connects them. Biologically, indeed, the cognitive process cannot be reduced to the single neuron but is activated within the minimal and generative space of the synaptic relation: an infinitesimal threshold in which passage, transmission, and transformation make the emergence of meaning possible. In an analogous way, Aby Warburg identifies in the *Zwischenraum* –the 'in-between space', the 'intermediate distance'– the foundational condition of culture and the substratum of artistic creation [Warburg 2002]. It designates the interval

that human beings place between impulse and immediate response: a space in which experience can be retained, elaborated, and converted into image, ritual, and thought. In Penone's graphic corpus, this intermediate space assumes a specific inflection. If in Warburg the *Zwischenraum* is above all a psychic, cultural, and symbolic space, in Penone the 'in-between' becomes physical and tactile. It coincides with the threshold of contact between skin and world. It is within this minimal yet generative zone that contact is transformed into trace, and trace becomes form. Meaning, therefore, does not reside in an isolated element –the body, matter, the surface, the mark– but in the relation activated among them. In Penone's drawings, the image does not present itself as a closed and autonomous configuration, but as the visible outcome of a process: the encounter between a bodily presence and a surface capable of registering its passage.

From this perspective, Penone's drawing does not represent, through resemblance, an already given form, nor does it retrospectively illustrate the sculptural work. To draw means, rather, to activate an operation of contact, emergence, and registration: to make a relation visible. The mark does not translate a pre-existing idea, but documents the formation of an embodied knowledge in which perception, gesture, and matter are co-produced. Drawing thus becomes an instrument of the *Zwischenraum*: it does not simply depict the body or nature, but records the threshold at which body and nature enter reciprocal transformation. The hypothesis guiding this study is therefore that, in Penone's graphic corpus, drawing operates as a relational and sensory device: not a completed image, but a field of passage; not the representation of an object, but a site in which perception becomes process and process becomes legible. Knowledge emerges at the point of contact, in that fragile and intensive zone in which the 'in-between' –biological, bodily, material, and symbolic– becomes the condition for the emergence of form.

Drawing as access to thought

Over time, Penone has accumulated more than four thousand sheets, experimenting with different techniques and materials: preliminary projects, sketches, but also autonomous works that cannot be translated into any other form. Although few exhibitions have been devoted exclusively to his drawings, the donations to the Philadelphia Museum of

Art [Basualdo 2022], the Centre Pompidou [Storsve, Pesenti 2022], and the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea testify to the artist's desire to preserve their unity as a coherent corpus and object of study, rescuing them from dispersal.

In Giuseppe Penone's practice, drawing constitutes direct access to thought, a space in which the image is not simply recorded but brought into emergence. When conceiving a work, the artist initiates a free and reiterated process: the images that surface are noted, accepted, or more often abandoned, until an essential form is reached. Drawing thus operates as a critical and reflective device, an instrument for analyzing reality and bringing into focus the natural processes that the work seeks to activate. It does not describe the future sculpture: it triggers it and accompanies its emergence. In this sense, it is both anticipation and residue, a site of sedimentation and renewed projection.

To question the role of drawing in Penone's work also means asking why a sculptor, an exponent of Arte Povera since 1968, who has moved beyond the traditional boundaries of sculpture by working in forests, on his own body, and within natural processes, should recognize drawing precisely as a privileged instrument of knowledge. The sources he himself has acknowledged help to clarify this centrality. When asked about his most significant points of reference [Penone, Guzzetti 2020, p. 537], Penone first cites the marks traced some 35,000 years ago on the surface of the Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc cave (fig. 1). We do not know who made them, nor the reasons for which they were produced; and yet, Penone observes, it is still possible to understand the emotion of those who traced them.

For Penone, the distinction between the imprint of his own body (fig. 2) and "the imprint of prehistoric man" is irrelevant, since their "animalities are equivalent" [Zevi 2011, p. 77]. It is a matter of "a resemblance by contact" [Didi-Huberman 2009, p. 13]. Prehistory exerts "an emancipatory effect on the modern artist, who perceives it as primordial" [Karatas 2019, p. 12].

Alongside Chauvet, Penone acknowledges the influence of masters such as Leonardo da Vinci and Pierre Bonnard. It is not style that interests him, but the internal motivation of the mark: the reasons behind the choices, the intensity of the process. In Leonardo's sheets, he recognizes a vision of nature and of humankind extended to the idea of the cosmos [Penone, Guzzetti 2020, p. 528], in which the movement of stone among the elements assumes the same form as the river:

Fig. 1. Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc Cave, Ardèche, Panneau des Chevaux (Panel of the Horses), Salle Hillaire, detail of the horses and rhinoceroses one another (© J. Clottes / MC).



The drawing of analogy

Penone's interest in Leonardo da Vinci's drawings is rooted precisely in their analogical mode of thought. In Leonardo's sheets, rivers have veins, the whirlpools of water echo the curls of hair, and the movement of crowds mirrors that of fluids: different manifestations of a single morphogenetic law. What Penone shares with Leonardo is not a style, but a mode of thought. The artist himself states that he cannot work through mere formal variation [Penone, Guzzetti 2020, p. 519]; the work arises from an analysis triggered by a suggestion from reality, by an association of ideas. Drawing thus becomes a moment of synthesis, a place in which latent connections become visible.

It is in this passage that the principle of analogy assumes methodological value for Penone. To draw means to slow down the gaze, to suspend perceptual immediacy, and to read the structure of phenomena. From this perspective, drawing is not primarily representation, but an instrument of knowledge: it makes it possible to recognize the same formal logic in different realities, to identify, in the bifurcation of a branch, the ramification of a vein, or the division of a watercourse, the expression of one and the same dynamic principle [Penone, Daniel 2022, p. 20].

An emblematic example is *Essere fiume (To Be a River)* (figs. 3-4), where the action of the river on stone is recognized as analogous to the sculptural gesture. The idea that the most "perfect" work in stone might consist in repeating the action of the river translates analogy into an operative process. On one side, though we shall not know which, a stone taken from a point on the mountain is carved in the most traditional and humbly mimetic way. On the other lies the model for this object: a large stone gathered from the river, at a lower level of the same mountain [Didi-Huberman 2008, p. 17]. As Penone would say: "it is being river that is the true sculpture" [Penone 2009, p. 151].

It is significant that the sculpture in question bears as its title an infinitive verb, almost an endless desire and, at the same time, a categorical imperative [Didi-Huberman 2008, p. 17]. In Penone's practice, one must be tree, be river, be stone: one must assume analogy as a cognitive posture.

According to Walter Benjamin, the mimetic faculty [1] constitutes one of the original principles of human experience: a disposition to recognize and produce resemblances, correspondences, and analogies among the forms of the world, which in archaic cultures would have played

a structuring role in the anthropological-perceptual relationship with reality. From this perspective, ancient human beings would have inhabited a universe densely traversed by "magical correspondences" [Benjamin 1979, p. 66], while modernity, relying increasingly on rationality, would have progressively obscured those "subtle dimensions of reality" [Hanegraaff 2015, p. 59] that elude a purely functional and optical-retinal reading.

Within this framework, Giuseppe Penone's work may be read as an attempt to reactivate an analogical and embodied mode of perception, in which contact with matter becomes an instrument of knowledge. In Penone, drawing is not merely the representation of a form, but rather a process through which relations emerge. Analogical practice thus serves to decipher the 'cryptogram' of the world [2], making visible correspondences that are normally imperceptible and restoring to representation an epistemic function. In this sense, Penone's work shows how knowledge does not derive exclusively from the distance of the gaze, but also from the embodied experience of contact and from the capacity of the mark to reveal, rather than reproduce, the deep relations that traverse the living. The work thus becomes a vehicle of access to this network of relations: what is experienced is "one's own nature, perceived everywhere" [Basualdo 2022, p. 14].

Seeing with the fingertips

The passage from analogy as a cognitive posture to the progressive questioning of the primacy of vision finds a figure of synthesis in the series *Sulla punta delle dita (On the Fingertips)*. In one of the most intense drawings of the cycle (fig. 5), the hand extends into an arboreal ramification. The thumb becomes birch, the index finger rowan, the middle finger ash, the ring finger alder, the little finger willow. The same formative logic runs through human beings and nature. It is at a tiny sensory threshold, that of the fingertips, that this relation emerges.

In Penone's artistic practice, matter is never placed at a distance as a mere object of observation, but is approached, touched, incised, pressed, traversed by gesture. The artist writes that one must "see with the fingertips" [Penone 2009, p. 70] or "see with closed eyes" [Penone 2009, p. 324]. To see through a blind gesture means to expand the imagination and to gain access to a "sensible knowledge" [Semin 2013, p. 182], grounded in the direct relation

Fig. 2. Giuseppe Penone, *Impronte - Sottosopra* (Imprints - Upside Down), 1987. India ink, printing ink, 33 × 48 cm (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).



Fig. 3. Giuseppe Penone, *Essere fiume* (To Be a River), 1979. Watercolour and pencil on paper, 16 × 23.1 cm (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).

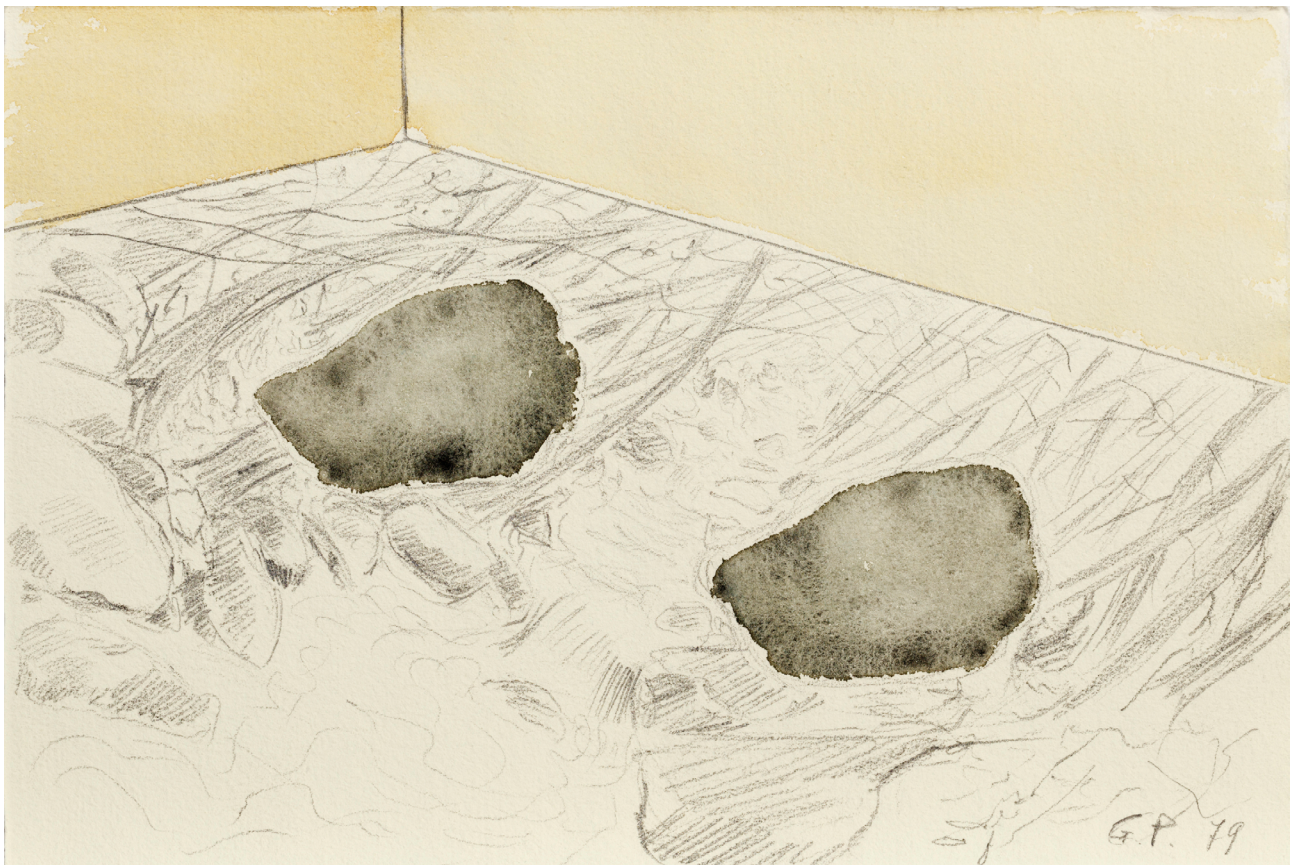


Fig. 4. Giuseppe Penone, *Essere fiume* (To Be a River), 1999. River stone, quarry stone (white Carrara marble), 36 × 50 × 63 cm each (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).

Fig. 5. Giuseppe Penone, *Sulla punta delle dita* (On the Fingertips), 1992. Watercolour and India ink on paper, 38 × 28.2 cm (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).

between subject and matter. Touching the bark of a tree, for instance, makes it possible to feel it as skin, to perceive its surface and, at the same time, to intuit its inner life. The imagination that derives from this is not an escape from reality, but its intensification: contact activates bodily memories, associations, and analogies.

Penone's artistic practice may be fully read within an embodied conception of knowledge [3]: the body is not merely a medium of perception, but the site through which the world manifests itself. Ultimately, 'seeing with the fingertips' means knowing the world not as something standing before the subject, but as a reality in which the body participates.

Reversing the gaze

The question is radicalized in *Rovesciare i propri occhi* (Reversing One's Eyes) (fig. 6), a series created in 1970, in which Penone explores perception through the voluntary annulment of sight. The mirrored lenses render the artist blind, yet they reflect what stands before him, transforming the gaze into a surface of contact. The elaboration of *Rovesciare i propri occhi* stems from a phase of free research: in order to arrive at the solution of mirrored contact lenses, Penone passes through a period of reflection in which drawing (fig. 7) summons forms and visual hypotheses, subsequently abandoned until the emergence of the resolving image [Penone, Daniel 2022, p. 20].

The title is decisive: it is not a matter of closing the eyes, but of reversing their function. The subject who looks becomes the object of another's gaze; the viewer sees themselves reflected, drawn into a perceptual circuit that dissolves the traditional hierarchy between the one who observes and that which is observed. The work thus calls into question vision understood as mastery, and the primacy of the visual as a privileged form of knowledge.

The inversion of the visual process suspends the optical circuit founded on the centrality of the subject and transforms it into a relational circuit. The subject is no longer



Fig. 6. Giuseppe Penone, *Rovesciare i propri occhi* (Reversing One's Eyes), 1970. Photographic documentation of the artist's action (Photo: Paolo Mussat Sartor. Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).

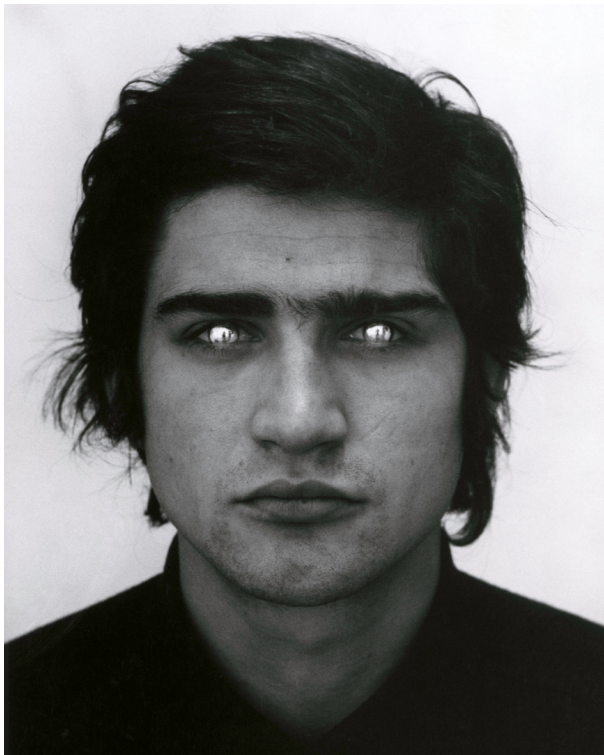


Fig. 7. Giuseppe Penone, *Progetto per lenti a contatto specchianti - Guardare la strada* (Project for Mirroring Contact Lenses - Looking at the Road), 1970. Ballpoint pen on paper, 32.9 x 18.1 cm (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).



configured as the organizing center of space, but as matter among matters, an integral part and reflection of what surrounds it. In this operation, one may recognize an enactment of the principle of reversibility elaborated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: the body is not only that which sees, but that which is seen, flesh of the world traversed by the visible [Merleau-Ponty 1969, pp. 150-165].

The connection with touch is not literal, but structural. The eye, rendered tactile, loses its function as the dominant organ of vision and is configured as skin, as an exposed surface. The concept of contact extends beyond the epidermal dimension to implicate vision itself: the proximity it establishes, analogous to that of touch, implies vulnerability, exchange, and mutual exposure.

If in *Rovesciare i propri occhi* the gaze is reversed as a reflecting surface, in *Palpebre* (Eyelids) (1977) it is brought to zero: the closed eyelid becomes the material threshold at which vision encounters its own limit. The drawing arises from the negative of the skin. Penone applies a layer of glue to the skin, obtaining a transparent film; he places it between glass plates and projects its image onto the wall: the cavities more heavily charged with matter appear darker, while the thinner parts appear lighter (fig. 8). The drawing is then reconstructed 'point by point', through a dense constellation of minimal graphic marks (fig. 9). As the artist says: "With the eyelid closed, it was like bringing the gaze to zero" [Penone, Guzzetti 2020, p. 540]. The formulation should be understood phenomenologically. It is not a matter of showing the anatomical interior of the eye, but of making visible the threshold of vision, withdrawing the gaze from the representation of the world and concentrating it on its own material condition.

Recalling the making of *Palpebre*, Penone describes the experience as a kind of tactile immersion in place [Didi-Huberman 2008, p. 24]: "As I proceeded, I came to know something more about my body, as much as about the surface of the wall. It was like walking in my own skin and, in addition, walking in the skin of space" [Celant 1989, p. 22]. From the second half of the 1970s onwards –with the large site-specific versions in Lucerne in 1977, and in Cologne and Essen in 1978– Giuseppe Penone developed a family of works deriving from *Palpebre*. In *Pressione* (Pressure), the artist devises a procedure in which the skin becomes a matrix: "I dirtied my fingers with black, touched the skin and lifted an imprint with a piece of adhesive tape, which I then projected onto the wall and redrew" [Penone, Guzzetti 2020, p. 525]. Penone carries out the

Fig. 8. Giuseppe Penone, *Palpebre* (Eyelids), 1977. Charcoal on canvas-backed paper. Documentation of the making of the work in the artist's studio (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).



retracing on the wall with charcoal, a material the artist describes as “the dust of existence” [Penone, Daniel 2022, p. 20]. The logic is minimal and radical: to employ an organic remnant, a memory of the living world, to produce a mark that insists in the present and reactivates a cognitive process.

Enlargement and isolation produce a revelatory and unsettling effect: something “that ‘was there’ from the beginning but concealed by the modesty of ‘normal’ proportions” [Barilli 1976, p. 14] –the epidermal weave– suddenly becomes an unknown landscape. It is here that Penone’s research may be brought into relation with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty: the invisible is not elsewhere, but constitutes a dimension immanent to the visible itself, one that emerges through experience [Merleau-Ponty 1969, pp. 150-165].

Propagations: the imprint as drawing

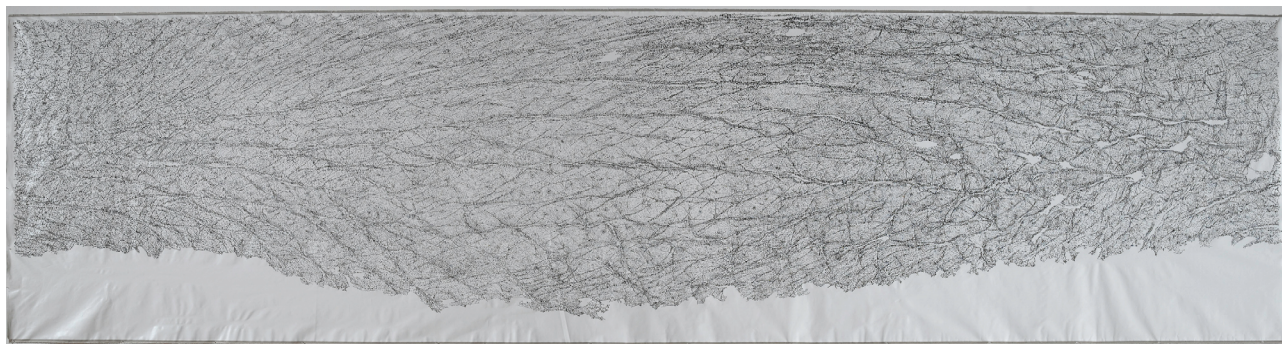
From the mid-1990s onwards, and with mural developments from 1997, the mark made by contact assumes a new centrality in *Propagazioni* (Propagations). The starting point of this series is the imprint of a fingertip dipped in printing ink and pressed at the center of a sheet of paper. The act of drawing sets the propagation of the imprint in motion. With India ink, Penone connects and extends the lines of the imprint until he obtains a closed form which, through repetition, gradually expands.

In *L'impronta del disegno* (The Imprint of Drawing) (figs. 10, 11), a group of ten large works on canvas-backed paper, made over the course of a year between 2002 and 2003, the distance between one pencil line and the next, traced around the fingerprint, is constant: always one millimeter. Each *Propagazione* required a long period of execution, pushed to the point of self-inflicted ‘pain’ through the choice of a coarse-grained paper, adopted as a deliberate obstacle [Penone, Guzzetti 2020, p. 531]. The artist seems intent to ‘condense’ within the space of the drawing sheet the time required for a tree to form each of its growth rings [4]. Propagation transforms a minimal portion of skin –the most sensitive part, devoted to tactile experience– into vegetal growth rings. The artist’s presence, by propagating itself, thus assumes the form of the interior of a tree.

As Briony Fer observes, Penone’s “tactile diagrams radically expand the idea of sculpture to the point of mapping even the slightest sensory experience” [Fer 2004, p. 94]. Such diagrams may function as instructions which, if executed, would produce a three-dimensional object [Demori 2022, p. 45]. It is no coincidence that Penone defines the imprint as a ‘minimal’ image [Penone 1973, p. 85]: formally, it is a phoneme; semantically, it acts as a morpheme, the smallest unit endowed with recognizable meaning [Demori 2022, p. 45].

Penone states: “the use of the skin is therefore the minimal image one can offer; and it is what adheres most closely to my reality” [Penone 1973, p. 85]. In this sense, the imprint is configured as a “minimal space of interpretation, which

Fig. 9. Giuseppe Penone, *Palpebra* (Eyelid), 1989. Charcoal on canvas, 218 × 714 cm. Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP (Credit: Adagp, Paris).



no arbitrary construction could extend" [Ammann 1977, p. 139]. For an artist such as Penone, oriented towards a deculturation of the image and a more intimate contact with nature, the crisis of iconicism [5] –contemporary with his emergence on the artistic scene– opens up a radical possibility: recourse to the index [6], to the mark of contact in the form of the imprint [Demori 2022, p. 51]. The series *Propagazioni*, *Pressione*, and *Palpebre* originate in an automatic and unconscious image [7], the finger-print, and render it conscious and voluntary through the irreplaceable action of drawing, which enlarges it and re-traces it in all its parts. The artist defines the result as "a drawing without concern for style [...], where the action of drawing is the subject of the work [...]. A drawing that [...] prompts a reflection on the world and offers an unexpected vision of reality" [Penone 2009, p. 275]. As Penone observes, the "infinite compositions of lines" of fingerprints "are also found in the geological strata of mountains, in the drawings made by the wind on sand, and in the waves of the sea" [Penone 2022, p. 28]. The concentric forms of the imprint, as they propagate, recall the growth rings of trees, which in turn evoke the circles that form in water. Meaning rebounds from one form to another through analogical transmission, "producing a

chain effect that brings into contact distinct phenomena, materials, and domains, associating them within a shared legibility". Each of Penone's works seems to possess this capacity to condense meaning and to act as a vector of acceleration: "the sensible, touched by the work, awakens and becomes the intelligible" [Bailly 2008, p. 58].

This acceleration of meaning is produced through the adoption of a radical posture. Giuseppe Penone's orientation, present from the outset and already evident in his earliest interventions on trees, is not grounded in an abstract theoretical framework, nor in an illustrative dimension. His thought adheres to things and to materials [Bailly 2008, p. 60] –wood, stone, earth, water, bronze, leaves, time, skin– replacing a vertical and hierarchical conception of the world with a horizontal structure, open to connections and ramifications [Bailly 2008, p. 64]. Within this framework, touch assumes a decisive value: it is the sense through which thought propagates with the greatest intensity, since "the whole vital process is on the surface" [Penone 1999, p. 90].

Landscape of the Brain: thought as imprint

Paesaggio del cervello (Landscape of the Brain) belongs within this orientation. The work is constructed from a *frottage* [8] of the interior of the cranial cavity: Penone dusts the bony surface with charcoal powder or red pigment and applies strips of adhesive tape to it. When torn away, these capture gaps, concentrations, and networks produced over time by the contact between the soft matter of the brain and the rigidity of the skullcap. The resulting image –an "imprint of an imprint" [Lancioni 2008, p. 116]– does not merely restore the morphology of the cranial cavity, but translates into the work the action exerted by cerebral matter upon its own dwelling place, making legible the traces left, over decades, by countless biological and emotional events. The strips are then arranged in parallel on glass plates, re-composing on a plane the geometric development of the inner surface of the cranial cavity, articulated in its four main zones: occipital, right parietal, left parietal, and frontal. In *Foglie del cervello* (Brain Leaves) (fig. 12), Penone juxtaposes this imprint of the skull with that of a leaf, obtained through the same procedure [9]. "It is not through the play of metaphor, but through the pregnancy of a morphology that Penone convinces us [...] of the cerebral character of a leaf" [Didi-Huberman 2008, p. 26].

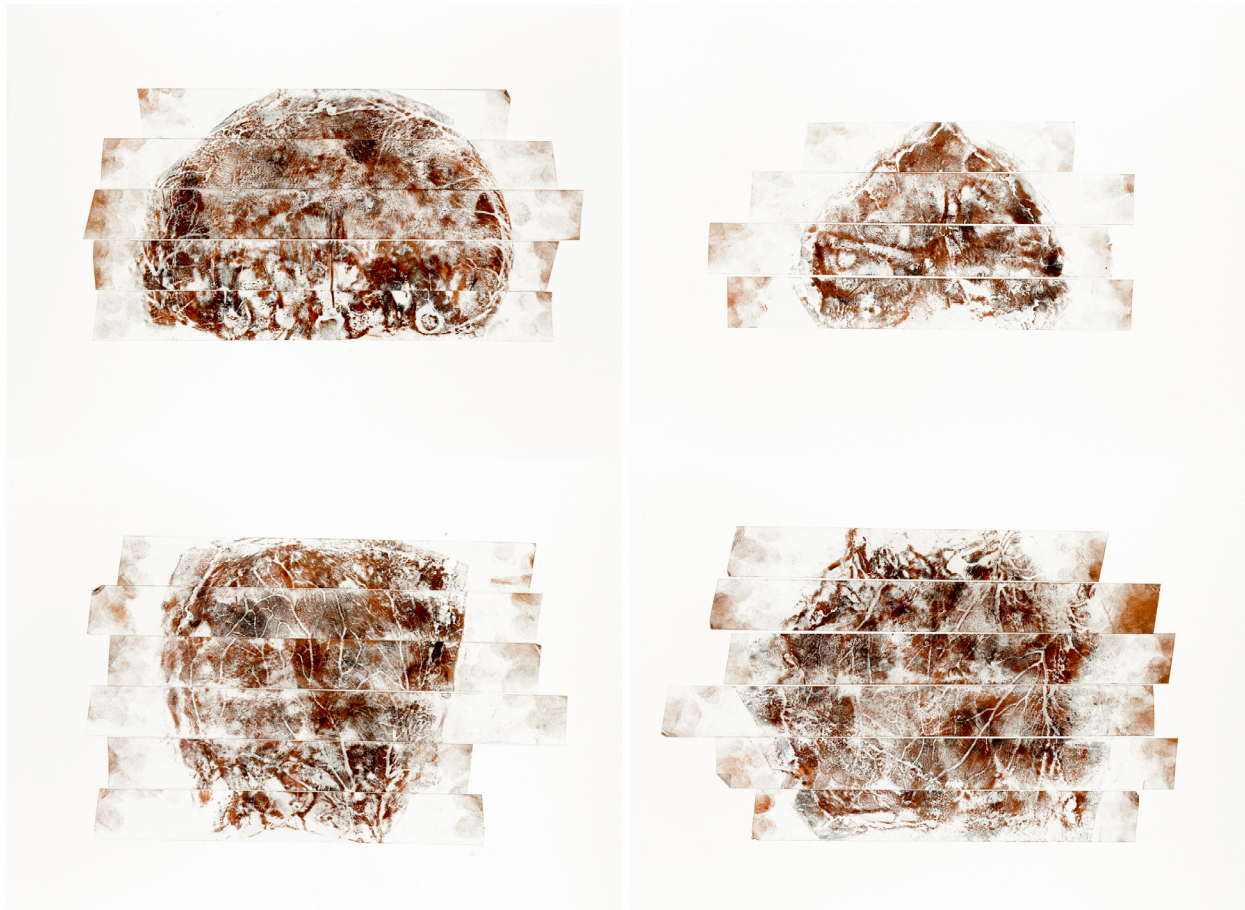
Fig. 10. Giuseppe Penone, *L'impronta del disegno* (The Imprint of Drawing), 2001. Pencil and print ink on canvas-backed paper. Documentation of the making of the work (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).



Fig. 11. Giuseppe Penone, *L'impronta del disegno* (*The Imprint of Drawing*, detail), 2001. Pencil and printing ink on canvas-backed paper, 200 × 120 cm (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).



Fig. 12. Giuseppe Penone, *Foglie del cervello* (Brain Leaves), 1990. Adhesive tape and charcoal on glass, 33 × 47 cm (Credit: Archivio Penone. © GIUSEPPE PENONE, by SIAE 2026).



Frottage is a relief technique also used by anthropologists and paleontologists on the inner surface of prehistoric skulls to reconstruct the encephalic development of early hominids. The archaeology of the technique employed by Penone for these drawings goes hand in hand with that of the object investigated: the brain. It is therefore unsurprising that Penone worked on these drawings while imagining a descent into the 'mines of the skull': "We lower ourselves into the brain through the vertical shaft that takes us to different depths. At each stop there are tunnels that lead us, through reasoning, to the excavation of ideas which, once quarried, are brought to the surface and... the richer the brain is in sediments of memory, the more tunnels there are, the more stops there are, the more excavation fronts there are" [Penone 2009, p. 305]. The excavation described by Penone offers an effective image of how the genesis of thought functions.

Penone takes a skull in his hands and observes its interior, recognizing a 'tactile blindness' to which we generally pay very little attention [Didi-Huberman 2008, p. 22]. Our brain is in contact with a wall of which it knows nothing, which it neither sees nor even feels. "The brain adheres to the skull, upon which it records its impulses, but it is unable to read the surface it touches. To understand and become aware of the form of the inner surface of the skull, one must touch it with the hands, see it with the eyes" [Penone 2009, p. 306]. Looking at Penone's *frottages* of meningeal networks, one has the sensation of standing before a place. "It is a true landscape, with depressions, riverbeds, mountains, plateaus, a relief similar to the earth's crust. [...] It is the landscape within which we think" [Penone 2009, p. 306].

Conclusions

Along this path, drawing has progressively revealed its nature as a synaptic device. Penone isolates and enlarges minimal fragments of the body, revealing structures invisible to

the naked eye. The close-up thus produces an oscillation between presence and absence: the object is extremely near, yet at the same time loses its habitual recognizability, entering a liminal zone akin to the threshold between waking and dream.

In works such as *Pressione* (Pressure) and *Palpebre* (Eyelids), the epidermis no longer appears as the closed boundary of identity, but as a porous and osmotic surface between inside and outside. In *Paesaggio del cervello* (Landscape of the Brain), the interior of the skull becomes a geological topography: the stratified memory of the organ is read as terrestrial sedimentation, dissolving the separation between body and matter.

Such procedures belong to a perspective that privileges tactility over vision. For Penone, 'seeing with the fingertips' means gaining access to a sensible and bodily knowledge, in which touch deprives the gaze of its perceptual primacy. The skin then becomes a site of passage and threshold: a space of uncertainty in which inside and outside interpenetrate. It is precisely this uncertainty, amplified by enlargement or by the closing of the eyes, that allows "a ridiculously small point» to expand until it opens 'to our gaze a reflection on the universe'" [Penone 2009, pp. 323, 324].

The conclusion can only return to the original gesture of drawing, questioning its ultimate meaning. Representation does not describe the world: it traverses it, and in traversing it returns the image of the one who moves through it. From this perspective, drawing is configured as a synaptic space in which sensory perception, the time of experience, and matter intertwine, to the point of rendering indistinguishable the boundary between what is seen and what is lived. Jorge Luis Borges, in one of his most striking images, expresses this memorably: "A man sets himself the task of drawing the world. Over the years, he populates a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fish, dwellings, instruments, stars, horses, and people. Shortly before dying, he discovers that this patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his own face" [Borges 1999, p. 173].

Notes

[1] On the compulsion to imitate the environment, see Karatas 2019, pp. 4-9.

[2] The term is taken from Breton, who uses it in relation to Surrealist analogy; see Breton 1972, p. 303.

[3] For an embodied conception of perception, see Merleau-Ponty 1965.

[4] On the lexicon of the 'concentration' of time in space in Penone's work, for further information see Lancioni 2018.

[5] By 'crisis of iconism' is meant here the refutation of the naturalness of the iconic sign; on the 'iconoclastic suspicion' in Eco, see Polidoro 2015.

[6] On Peirce's trichotomy of 'icon, index, and symbol', for further information see Peirce 1868.

[7] On skin imprints and breathing as automatic, prelinguistic, and 'animal' sculptures generated by the body, see Penone 2012, p. 16; Karatas 2019, pp. 12-22.

[8] On Penone's early experiments with *frottage*, particularly on bark surfaces, see Chi, Primeau 2022, pp. 81-84.

[9] On the reference to the Goethean conception of form as continuous metamorphosis (from leaf to skull as morphological variations), see Penone, Guzzetti 2020, p. 528.

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