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Louise Bonnet and Elizabeth
King: *De Anima*
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Carpal Bones: “DE ANIMA”



Louise Bonnet and Elizabeth King: *De Anima*, 2025. Installation view. Image courtesy of Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York.

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The carpal bones are eight irregularly shaped wrist bones that connect the forearm to the hand. They are, of course, the artists' creative tool, but also, what we can call the "decision-making bones" that allow us to have a legal signature, be ten printed, shake and hold hands, partake in acts of freedom and rebellion, or engage in gestures of pure luck, such as throwing dices, fortune telling, or even palm reading.

In *The Physiology of the Joints*, Dr. I. A. Kapandji extensively illustrates the connection and movements of these joints while the body is actively performing actions.[1] Numerous peculiar mnemonics have been developed to facilitate memorization of the carpal bones' anatomical order and location, naming the carpal bones in a circle and, starting with the proximal row from the scaphoid to the pinky, then the distal row from the hamate to the thumb:

"Sam Likes To Push, The Toy Car Hard."

"Sally Left The Party, To Take Cathy Home."

"Some Lovers Try Positions, That They Cannot Handle."

"She Likes To Play, Try To Catch Her." [2]

Mnemonic techniques illustrate the close connection between anatomy, tactile experience, and visual perception. These cognitive strategies are designed to facilitate the retrieval and recall of information by employing verbal, visual, olfactory, auditory, kinesthetic, and spatial associations. From associating items to be remembered with specific locations in familiar settings, to medical professionals using gestures to recall muscle innervation patterns, to dancers linking moves with

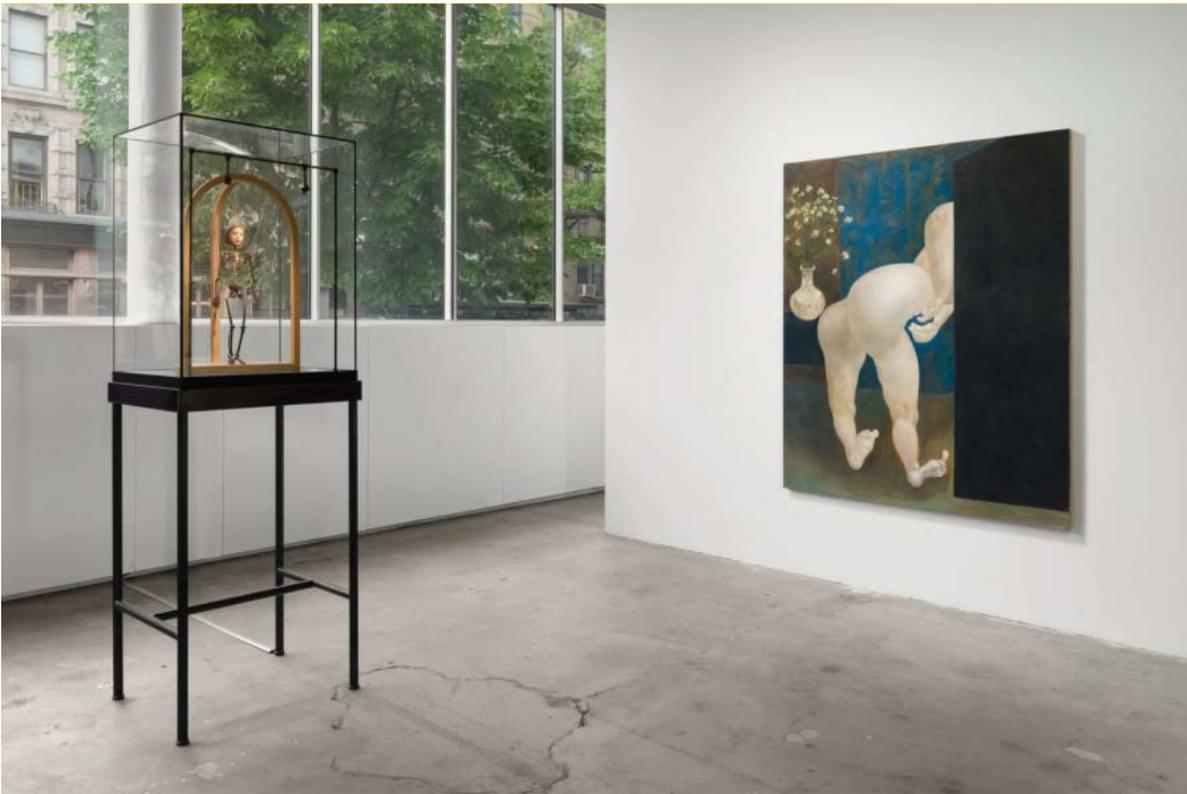
sound-based and visual cues to remember complex choreographies, mnemonics engage different parts of both the brain and the body simultaneously.



Elizabeth King, *Bartlett's Left Hand*, 2017. Carved and turned English boxwood. Image courtesy of the artist and Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York.

Following similar ideas of agency, motion, and animacy, Juhani Pallasmaa, Finnish architect and author of *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, expresses the significance of the tactile and holistic for our experience and understanding of the world, creating a short circuit between the dominant (and privileged) sense of vision and the suppressed sense modality of touch.[3]

Curated by Stefanie Hessler, *DE ANIMA* at Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York is an exhibition that confronts notions of physicality and embodiment represented in the works of [Louise Bonnet](#) and [Elizabeth King](#). Welcoming the visitors at the space entrance, we find King's *Bartlett's Left Hand* (2005) meticulously placed in a vitrine over a Chroma Key Blue background—the original chroma key color[4] chosen because of its general absence from human skin tones, making it easier to isolate the subject from the backdrop.



Louise Bonnet and Elizabeth King: *De Anima*, 2025. Installation view. Image courtesy of Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York.

In the main exhibition room, Bonnet's paintings *Pants* and *Bra* (both 2025) feature cropped human figures with exaggerated features, dramatic poses, and frozen gestures. These works are unveiled next to King's *Untitled Articulated Figure* (1974–78) and *Idea for a Mechanical Eye* (1988–90), both presented in glass vitrines. The vitrines display carved-wood sculptures of body parts and limbs from mannequins and puppets. At first glance, these could evoke an art drawing supply—articulated lay figures—but quickly capture our attention towards the carefully defined life lines ready for a psychic palm reading.

In both artists' visual language, gender is sometimes difficult to assign, figuration is never fully accomplished, and bodies remain incomplete or in the process of their own making. In Bonnet's

new body of work, figures appear anonymous: often lacking heads or limbs, some body parts rendered invisible or purposefully excluded by the composition, confined within the canvas edges. This lack of identification in Bonnet's paintings, which never tries to portray anyone or provide names that could reveal their personalities, somehow excludes a sense of intimacy and verisimilitude—one can never project onto her paintings. In contrast, King's works always possess an impersonating quality: the maker becomes the puppet and vice versa. The audience replicates the figure's gestures, which themselves echo human movement. This creates an ambiguity between being instruments or portraits, enriching the interplay between the audience and the subject, and reinforcing how both artists position the body and identity within their practices.



Elizabeth King, *Untitled Articulated Figure*, 1974–78 (detail). Porcelain, copper-plated steel, bronze, glass eyes, hair, Alaskan cedar frame. Image courtesy of the artist and Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York.

There's a sense of anonymity in both Bonnet and King's oeuvres, in part due to an uncanny evocation of reincarnation as if we are seeing a soul's journey through multiple lifetimes—almost as if their characters are just one sharing a parallel dimension of time and space, independent of the chronological threshold of past, present, and future: a concept explicitly shown in the silent stop-frame animation *What Happened* (1991/2008).

On a different level, the works exhibited on the second floor unfold another moment, one more embryonic of personality building or character development. At the same time that Elizabeth King stages several fragments of the process of making her articulated sculptures (*Studio Objects and Glass Eyes*) almost like a laboratory for forging identities or even a doll hospital,[5] Louise Bonnet's grotesque bodies such as the ones in *Shoe* (2025), render a feeling of being painted from the inside out, emphasising their endoscopical quality, and the extreme tension between psychological and physiological representation.



Louise Bonnet, *Shoe*, 2025. Oil on linen. Image courtesy of the artist and Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York.

Unconscious and subconscious movements, such as body spasms, phantom pain, or muscle memory, are portrayed in *DE ANIMA*. The collaboration between Bonnet and King's work is carefully considered by Hessler, which enhances the performative quality and transcorporeality of the artists' sculptures and paintings. At a time when bodily agency is highly mediated, surveilled, and overpowered by artificial intelligence, it is vital to acknowledge artistic practices that reinforce and examine human form, its conditions of motion, and emotion through a more intimate, holistic, and haptic perspective.

Louise Bonnet and Elizabeth King: *DE ANIMA* is on view at the Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York from May 7 through September 7, 2025.



Elizabeth King, *Studio Objects and Glass Eyes*, n.d. Image courtesy of the artist and Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art New York.

[1] I. A. Kapandji, *The Physiology of the Joints* (Elsevier, 2017) 1:130–160.

[2] Alex Tang and Matthew A. Varacallo, “[Anatomy, Shoulder and Upper Limb, Hand Carpal Bones](#),” *StatPearls* (2022).

[3] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 3rd ed. (John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

[4] Chroma key is a visual-effects and post-production technology that has been applied across various industries, including film, television, and photography, to separate the

subject from its background in images and video footage. The first known use of chroma key was in 1974.

[5] The world's oldest surviving doll hospital, Hospital de Bonecas, was established in 1830 in Lisbon's bustling Praça da Figueira. It is considered to be the oldest surviving doll hospital that continues to operate from its original location.
