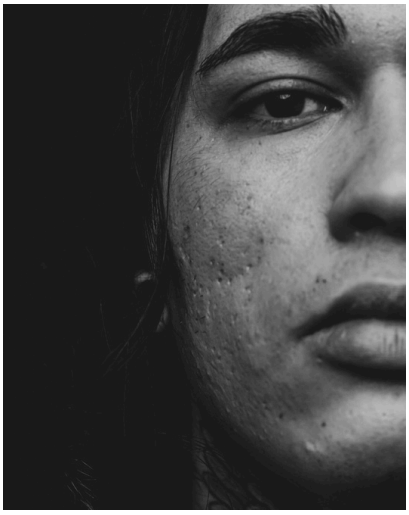
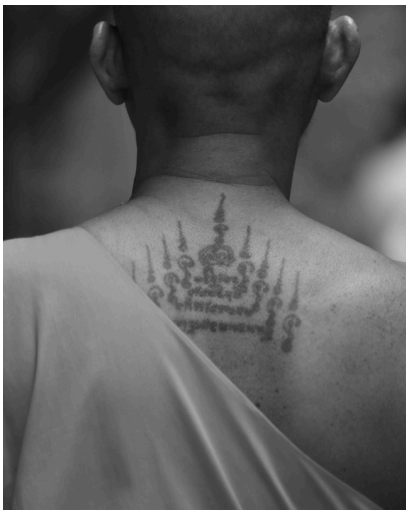
THE SKIN REMEMBERS:
Memory on and in the Body











28/29 January 2027

Cultural Identity and Memory Studies Institute, University of St Andrews

University of St Andrews | FOUNDED 1413

ILCS INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGES CULTURES AND SOCIETIES | SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CIMS Cultural Identity and Memory Studies Institute
University of St Andrews

Call for Papers

The Skin Remembers: Memory on and in the Body

"My story cannot be painted onto a canvas – it is a skin painting." (Hodgson 2009: 7)

Conference, 28-29 January 2027
Institute for Cultural Identity and Memory Studies, University of St Andrews
co-funded by the ILCS Conference Grant Scheme

This conference explores human skin as a distinctive site of memory where personal, cultural, and biological histories become materially legible on the body. As Jay Prosser argues, "Skin is the body's memory of our lives" (Prosser 2001: 52). Taking this insight as a point of departure, the conference invites interdisciplinary explorations of how skin functions not merely as a boundary of the body, but as a material register of lived experience and historical traces.

Across academic disciplines and artistic media practices, skin emerges as a locus where memory becomes visible and embodied: Scars, for instance, can register pain and survival, making lived experience materially legible on the skin. In post-genocide contexts, such marks also acquire specific historical force, bearing witness to collective violence and its aftermath (Mwambari and Sibomana 2023). Tattoos, meanwhile, reveal the ambivalence of skin as a mnemonic surface. On the one hand, they can preserve heritage and cultural continuity, transforming the body into a "visual map of autobiographical memory" (Ferreira 2016: 151; Odle 2022). On the other hand, they can function as instruments of ideological and biopolitical control, as the SS blood group tattoo demonstrates. In Holocaust memory, the concentration camp number emerges as one of the most violent forms of such inscription, marking the body through persecution and dehumanization. Yet, the re-inscription of camp numbers by descendants has become an act of intergenerational remembrance and reclamation (Bloch 2024).

At the same time, artistic practices draw attention to the social and historical meanings that cling to the body's surface: Bernier's discussion of African American and Black British art shows how racialized experiences and missing memories "stick to the skin" (Bernier 2019), while works such as "Mother Vérité" (d'Clark 2025) render stretch marks legible as embodied memories of pregnancy and maternal experience. Perspectives from the life sciences add another dimension to this discussion by showing that memory is also biologically embedded in and through skin as an organ, from immune memory in B cells (Inoue and Kurosaki 2024) to epigenetic "inflammatory memory" in epidermal stem cells (Bordon 2017).

Bringing these perspectives into dialogue, the conference asks how skin remembers, what kinds of memory it carries, and how bodily surfaces mediate between individual experience and collective history. In doing so, it seeks to open an exciting interdisciplinary conversation on skin not only as a metaphor for memory, but as one of its most powerful material forms.

We welcome contributions from across the humanities, social sciences, life sciences, and artistic disciplines that engage critically with questions of memory and remembrance. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Skin as archive and medium of memory
- Scars, wounds, healing, trauma, and survival
- Tattoos, bodily inscriptions, and practices of remembrance
- Skin, violence, persecution, and histories of oppression
- Intergenerational and transgenerational memories inscribed on the body
- Racialisation, colonialism, identity, and the politics of visibility
- Gender, sexuality, motherhood, ageing, and embodied memory
- Skin in literature, visual culture, performance, and artistic practice
- Medical and epigenetic approaches to skin and memory

Conference Programme

The two-day conference will open with a keynote lecture by Dr Cynthia Porter (Ohio State University) and feature thematic panels bringing together speakers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. The first day will conclude with a talk by Rayvenn Shaleigha D'Clark (London), offering an opportunity to engage with artistic approaches to embodied memory.
The second day will continue with thematic panels and a concluding roundtable discussion, bringing speakers into conversation to reflect on the conference's central questions and identify possibilities for future interdisciplinary research.

A dedicated **postgraduate symposium** will also take place on the afternoon of the second day, providing a space for emerging scholars to present and discuss their work. Therefore, we particularly encourage postgraduate researchers to submit proposals, and two travel bursaries will be available to support postgraduate participation.

Submission Guidelines

We invite proposals for 15-20-minute papers from researchers and practitioners across all relevant disciplines and at all career stages. Please submit an abstract of approximately 250 words and a short biography (max. 100 words) to cims@st-andrews.ac.uk.

Submission deadline: 10 November 2026
Notification of acceptance: by 30 November 2026