

Lifeline

Luca Saba is a Professor of Radiology and head of the Department of Radiology at Cagliari University Hospital (Cagliari, Italy). His main research interests are neurovascular imaging, plaque imaging, and development of innovative diagnostic strategies for the risk stratification of stroke imaging for imaging biomarkers. Additionally, he coordinates and participates in projects regarding the application of artificial intelligence in vascular analysis and interpretation.

What has been the greatest achievement of your career?

To have become the youngest full professor in medicine in Italy. It was a great honour. Most importantly, it represents an additional source of motivation to continue working—with the help of my colleagues around the world—on improving research and knowledge about carotid artery imaging and its relationship with stroke.

If you had not entered your current profession, what would you have liked to do?

I would have liked to work in economics, I think that is quite a different area compared with medicine! When I was younger, I was very curious about the stock market, but I am very happy now to have chosen to be a medical doctor.

What is your favourite book and why?

My favorite book is "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes", I started reading the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle when I was a boy and occasionally I reread this book. The ability to understand the whole problem by understanding the smaller parts has always fascinated me.

What is your idea of a perfect day?

A perfect day is one in which I get up very early but perfectly rested and I can see the sunrise over the sea. Then I can play with my son and laugh with my wife. Some good ideas to carry on before lunch. A good lunch and then reading a science fiction book. A game of tennis and then a light dinner.

What was your first experiment as a child?

I don't remember exactly but my parents always told me that, when I was 2 years old, I would disassemble all the toys and puppets because I said I wanted to understand how they were made and what their soul was. I guess that this can be considered as my first experiment!

What is the best piece of advice you have received?

When I was a young doctor one day I talked to an elderly professor, and he gave me advice that I still consider extremely enlightening: "Important things, including an academic career, are not suitable for a sprint race of 100 meters but for marathon runners". Patience is an extremely important quality.



See [Review](#) page 559

Exhibition

The art of memory

"I think it is all a matter of love; the more you love a memory the stronger and stranger it becomes"

Vladimir Nabokov

In 1950, while writing his autobiographical memoir *Speak, Memory*, the Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov encountered a problem. A master of fictions, the great writer turned his pen to the events of his life and began to consider the validity of his, self-confessed, slippery memory. Nabokov's doubts, however, did not concern his capacity for recollection. Instead, he considered the plasticity of memory—the phenomenon of our own brains glazing our real-time impressions with their own unique watermark, altering our perception of the truth of our own experiences. Committed to paper, Nabokov's memories (unlike in his own lifetime) remain fixed in place—unaffected by the processes of memory consolidation and recollection—where they will stay for the rest of time.

In *Memory Palace*, a major group exhibition to mark the 25th anniversary of the White Cube gallery (London, UK),

curators Susan May and Susanna Greeves sought to achieve a similar effect by showcasing artworks on memory by key artists that have been featured in the gallery's past exhibitions. Spanning both London White Cube sites (Bermondsey and Mason's Yard), the exhibition explores this vast subject through the perspectives of over 40 artists, and has been divided into six themes: historical, autobiographical, traces, transcription, collective, and sensory.

The first of these themes, historical, explores the political and sociological events that influence collective memory. Co-curator Greeves describes how "the memories set down in the official record of history [are] in fact the narrative of the prevailing power". She states that "one of art's important abilities is in recovering the voices—the narratives that may have been erased or forgotten by history". Immediately as the visitor enters the first room, they are confronted by *Strata Poem in Red* from Theaster Gates' 2011 *In Event of a Race Riot* series. Renowned for using discarded everyday materials to highlight themes of historical injustice and social responsibility, the



Magnus Plelsen

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Virginia Overton

Untitled
Wood and rope, 2018

Chicago-born artist's *Strata Poem in Red* is made up entirely of decommissioned fire hoses—a material which, for many, is synonymous with memories of truncheons and police violence amid the turbulent struggle for civil rights in the USA.

Opposite Gates' installation, in quiet contrast, hang two silk gowns from Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's 2014 *Disremembered* series. This seemingly understated piece might come as a surprise to those more familiar with Salcedo's ambitiously large installation pieces, such as *Shibboleth* (2007), in which she ripped open the entire length of the Turbine Room floor of the Tate Modern gallery (London) with a deep fissure to convey the fragmented experiences of immigrants displaced in the first world. Inspired by interviews with parents who had lost children to gun violence, *Disremembered* serves as a tangible memorial to these lost lives while also commenting on societal expectations that might limit open discussion of traumatic memories. Looking closer, the visitor sees that each gown, hanging ghost-like, is in fact strewn with thousands of tiny needles that would make the garments agonising to wear.

For Berlin-based artist Magnus Plessen, also featured alongside Gates and Salcedo in the historical section, art is a means of exploring the forgotten personal stories of soldiers that have been physically disfigured from their

experiences of war. Inspired by Ernst Friedrich's shocking 1924 photograph series of grossly deformed soldiers returning home from duty, Plessen's 1914 paintings use starkly coloured layered cut-outs to dramatically distort body shapes and create a heightened sense of imbalance and confusion. "As many of these men were so disfigured from their original state, the memories of themselves from before the injuries must have felt like they belonged to another person." The distorted, unrecognisable faces featured in Plessen's paintings almost serve to flip Friedrich's camera on ourselves—making the visitor feel like their own perceptions and past experiences have become permanently disfigured following personal tragedy. In doing so, Plessen's paintings also force the visitor to reflect on the ongoing personal destruction caused by war and the silent battles that ex-military personnel continue to fight while attempting to readjust to civil society.

From the collective to the very personal, another theme in the exhibition, traces, examines the relationship between art and memory at its most fundamental level—the physical. Whether it be the image of Pollock's paint-mottled jeans smearing the floor as he bends down to the canvas, or the sharp hiss of Basquiat's spray can rattling through the middle of a disused wooden frame in his underground studio, we cannot separate an artwork from the conjured image of its creation. This link between the artwork and the memory of its creation is the primary focus of Lebanese artist Mona Hatoum's *Reflection*. Using a photograph of her mother sewing in her native home in Beirut, Lebanon, Hatoum prints the image directly onto three sheets of tulle (a transparent fabric), giving the optical impression of depth and movement. Here, the traditional relationship between the artistic creation and the afterimage become distorted, where the layers of tulle almost seem to contain the active memory itself.

The advances we have made in the empirical investigation of memory, largely permitted by non-invasive functional brain imaging, have meant that this monumental subject is now perceived by many to fall exclusively under the umbrella of the sciences, leaving art in the periphery. After experiencing *Memory Palace*, the visitor might ask themselves whether society is poorer for overlooking the remarkable tool of art to aid the conception of abstract ideas—a tool that can allow the communication of experiences beyond the barriers of language, cognitive ability, or expertise. When asked about his process of painting and how he perceives his finished work, Plessen says, "In my mind, the actual, finished picture emerges only in the process of viewing. The image, for me, does not exist as an independent entity that has its own place on the canvas." This visitor agrees. It is a mistake to think that art should be confined to the canvas.

Jack Williamson