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# Devisualizing the Museum: From Access to Inclusion

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**ABSTRACT**

The experience of visiting a museum exhibition is inherently visual. Although blind and partially blind people are increasingly offered some access to collections through audio and tactile content and inventive and accessible programming, these initiatives are infrequent and often assume that the goal is to replace or compensate for the visitor's lack of sight. We argue that this approach to access is underpinned by ableism. Drawing on four recent initiatives – an inclusive virtual visit, a digital audio-described tour, inclusive creation and engagement workshops, and the co-creation of inclusive content – we suggest that it is only when access initiatives are placed at the center of museums' offerings, taken seriously as artistic endeavors, and created with, offered to and enjoyed by both blind and non-blind visitors, that museums will move beyond their (often unwitting) ocularcentric assumptions towards a truly inclusive enriched experience for all.

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## Vision in museums

In this article about devisualizing the museum, we will privilege language that does not define blind individuals in relation to a deficit or lack. We will use "blind and partially blind" (hereafter abbreviated to BPB) rather than "partially sighted" or "visually impaired" to refer to people who have a non-normative way of (not) seeing, and "non-blind" rather than "sighted" for people who do not identify as blind or partially blind.

Since the development of the exhibition in the nineteenth century, museums and galleries have perpetuated a highly visual approach to the display of artifacts and art works, grounded in an ocularcentric and thus ableist "look and learn" paradigm.[1] Within museums' traditional reliance on exhibitions as the main way of communicating knowledge, BPB people are increasingly – and sometimes brilliantly – accommodated through engaging and inventive accessibility programming.

One of the key access tools is audio description (AD), which has traditionally been used to translate visual information into verbal description. It is a method widely deployed across film, television, and theater, but use in the heritage sector is still limited. In their *State of Museum Access* report (2018), audio description provider VocalEyes found that only 3% of U.K. museums and galleries mentioned AD guides on their

websites.[2] Where they are available, AD tours are provided as part of niche access provisions: they are mostly live, run infrequently and often require advance booking.[3] Partially blind art historian and scholar Georgina Kleege has convincingly argued that despite their best efforts, museums and galleries struggle to move beyond a way of thinking and working that unquestioningly places sight at the top of the hierarchy of the senses.[4]

"Accessibility" is the design of products, services, or environments to make them usable by disabled people. As such, its underlying assumption is that non-disabled people do not need accessibility support, because they can freely access or service their needs without additional help. For BPB individuals, the concept of access is aligned with the deficit model: it assumes that the experiences of non-blind people should be translated for them to compensate for their own "lack" of sight. Within the specific context of a museum, this leads to an assumption that the sensory-perceptual experiences of BPB people must be supplemented; this position access initiatives as second-best fixes valuable only as a way of replacing or compensating for a person's lack of sight. Therefore, even as museums and galleries aim to welcome blind people, they simultaneously send an (often subliminal) message that sight is the best means of experiencing and delivering knowledge or education.[5]

There is a pressing need to devisualize the museum. To achieve this, museums need to move away from the ableist assumption that vision is the primary sense through which heritage and museums should be experienced. In this article, we describe four case studies in which museums have questioned vision's privileged position in the museum visit. They each draw on the model of "Blindness Gain," which is underpinned by three axioms: first, BPB people benefit from access to a multisensory way of being that stimulates inventiveness, imagination, and creativity; second, non-visual living is an art; and third, accessible approaches developed by and for blind people can benefit non-blind people.[6] We believe that AD offers non-blind museum goers an experience of guided seeing, which enables viewers to look for longer, guides visual attention, and enriches the sensory experience with factual (semantic) narrative.[7] The value of creating inclusive AD is underpinned by evidence from cognitive psychology, which has shown that AD can enhance museum experiences in non-blind people.[8]

We will first discuss two case studies that explore the benefits of enriched inclusive AD that aims to increase enjoyment and engagement for everyone. We will also introduce and explore the notion of an "accessibility spectrum," with at one end, the possibility of full access – physical, sensory, emotional, cognitive – and at the other, a total lack of access. Instead of assuming that accessibility is a binary need, this concept places everyone somewhere on a multidimensional spectrum. The first case study takes an iterative approach to developing an inclusive audio-described video of a historic garden, and the second challenges the question of authority within the describing AD voice, by co-creating inclusive descriptions with novice and experienced museum visitors.

The third and fourth case studies go further by challenging the implicit assumption that vision is necessary and/or optimal for museum interpretation. They explore positionality and partiality within AD, and in so doing, they both forefront and empower blind and non-blind interpretation and voice. The third case study describes a set of workshops with different museums in which AD and hands-on activities were led by a partially blind artist. These activities enabled participants to examine and discover

objects and artworks without the prioritization of vision. The final case study examines the co-creation of inclusive AD with groups of blind, partially blind, and non-blind people, focused on the aesthetic experiences of art. In reading these case studies, it is important to recognize the respective positionalities of the authors, which will be discussed at the start of each case study.

## Case study 1: Chelsea Physic Garden (CPG)

Working with a historic garden provides an excellent and under-researched arena to explore the impact of multisensory museum experiences on memory and learning.[9] Previous research has underlined the wellbeing benefits of both museums and being present in nature.[10] The CPG project aimed to examine the impact of an online inclusive multisensory tour, with audio description as the main driver, on audience experience. This project was grounded in the principles of the access spectrum, which suggest that tools designed for access can enhance the experience for most visitors.[11] The project team included three non-blind interdisciplinary academics, who drew together psychology and museum studies (Eardley and Hutchinson) and translation studies (Bywood), together with a team of non-blind film makers and a professional audio-describer.

Crucially, the team did not want to simply create an audio-described film of the garden. Film or screen AD is typically created and added as a separate audio track post-production, and as such is generally not part of the concept, design, or creative process in filmmaking.[12] Instead, the concept was to start from the principles of AD and use the craft of AD to inform the design, structure, and content of a filmic tour of the garden. For example, the aim was to provide shots that started with the overall structure and situation of a plant, and then move in to focus on specific details. There was also an explicit focus on identifying plants that provided the richest opportunity for multisensory descriptions, focusing particularly on texture, and exploring the possibility of scent, taste, and sound. The project team also wanted the AD to enable audiences to situate themselves within the physical space of the garden, as they might during an in-person AD tour (see Figure 1). The garden's structure of four quadrants, each containing different plant collections, was therefore used to provide a framework for virtual visitors to form an impression of its layout and content.

The construction of the tour started with a conversation with one of the CPG's most experienced tour guides and was followed by a guided tour of the garden. The tour was audio recorded and included many of the standard elements from in-person tours, but explicitly incorporated two of the more multisensory areas of the garden (the edible and medicinal gardens). During the tour, the filmmakers captured shots as items and areas were being discussed. The outline of the film was determined by a combination of the requirements for effective and interesting AD, the narratives within the tour, and the suitability and interest of the shots obtained by the filmmakers (determined by a combination of visual appeal and multisensory descriptive potential). Using this outline, the first draft of the visual material was created, which informed the first draft of the AD. An iterative process then took place, in which the film was refined to better suit the flow of the AD and the "tour," and the AD was refined if the available video footage was not suitable or to improve the journey through the garden. As part of this iterative process, the team also sought feedback from a partially blind reviewer.

**Figure 1.** View down the path from the edible garden towards the medicinal garden, east side of the Chelsea Physic Garden, London.

The final version of the tour has optional subtitles, for D/deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences.

An initial comparison between the final voiceover script and other CPG tours suggests that the CPG inclusive AD tour has a higher proportion of descriptive and structural information, with reduced factual information. This is similar to other museum AD.[13] At the time of writing, the online tour has been taken by over 100 research participants, of whom around 30% are blind or partially blind. Evaluation is ongoing, with participants completing a brief pre-tour demographic questionnaire, a questionnaire immediately after the tour exploring enjoyment, interest, and "presence" within the experience, and a follow-up two weeks later to examine longer-term impact and memorability, with some questions exploring the experience of the AD techniques. Preliminary analysis of the results indicates that enjoyment and focus are high (8/10) for all visitors, with interest being higher still (9/10) for both blind and non-blind visitors. The tour also made people want to visit a historic garden and to be out in nature. Blind and partially blind individuals had higher agreement than non-blind people that the tour had given them an impression of "having been in nature." This is consistent with other findings that suggest that while AD is received positively by non-blind people, its benefits for BPB people are even more pronounced.[14]

Further analysis of the Chelsea Physic Garden data will extend our understanding of the potential of AD as inclusive interpretation in museums, galleries, heritage sites, gardens, and outdoor spaces. The similarity of the enjoyment and focus data across blind and non-blind participants in our preliminary analysis is consistent with existing research on AD in museums. In a previous study by Hutchinson and Eardley, the use of AD was compared with standard audio guides (AG), in 150 non-blind participants.[15]

In this study, participants' levels of enjoyment, attention or emotional response were similarly high with either AD or an AG. However, participants who viewed artworks with AD went on to have richer memories one month later, indicating a stronger impact over time. These earlier findings suggest that if AD were to be embedded at the design stage of exhibitions and programming, then many visitors would stand to benefit, and memorability would be enhanced. In practice, AD could provide both a tool for access and inclusion for BPB visitors, and "guided looking" for non-blind visitors, simultaneously reducing the need for separate access provisions and programming. Use of AD by non-blind people may also encourage people to spend longer with an artwork or exhibit and to engage more deeply with it. The increased memorability with AD suggests a deeper level of processing has taken place.[16]

## Case study 2: Royal Holloway Picture Gallery (RHPG)

Royal Holloway, University of London, has a Victorian picture gallery containing around 100 paintings. Like the CPG project, the work with the RHPG was grounded in the need for inclusive museum experiences. The project was led by Thompson, a partially blind critical disability studies expert.

Thompson's interest in "creative" rather than "traditional" AD was central to the project.[17] Creative AD privileges each viewer's subjective response to art and rejects the notion of a single interpretative voice, thus interrogating the traditional focus on objectivity in museum AD.[18] Thompson follows Kleege, who argues that AD should "abandon the pretext of objectivity. It is impossible and beside the point. The blind listener knows that there is some interpretation involved in even the most basic description."[19]

The notion of an aesthetic experience in response to art, or the sensory-emotional impact of a work of art, is key to Thompson's approach. Edward Vessel and his colleagues asked participants to rate how "moved" they felt in response to a series of artworks, then correlated this data with brain activity observed at the time.[20] They suggested that being moved by a piece of art activates a self-referential system, in other words, it provides moments in which the individual finds a personal connection to the artwork. For non-blind visitors to a gallery, sensory (primarily visual) input alone can give them a personal, and immediate response to an artwork before they seek additional information, such as the title or artist, to facilitate their interaction with the work.

BPB visitors are arguably not given the opportunity for a purely personal aesthetic engagement because their experience is always mediated by other peoples' choices: museum AD typically opens with information from the work's label, which risks diminishing the individual's sensory-emotional engagement. Thompson's initiative sought to redefine the traditional mode of AD, and the inclusion or positioning of factual or interpretative information about the work, by providing visitors with the opportunity to engage with the aesthetics of a work without prior interpretative explanation.

Non-blind volunteers from across the Royal Holloway college community (including staff and current and former students) produced their own inclusive audio descriptions of paintings in the picture gallery. This "inclusive" audio description did not claim to offer an objective description of an image. Instead, it recognized that each beholder saw things differently. It highlighted the describer's responses to the paintings' aesthetic

and emotional aspects as well as to their appearance and place in the gallery. This harnessed a diversity of interpretation, encouraging a subjective response using whichever words spoke to each person. This individuality made the project sustainable over time: new voices and new artworks can be easily added, and new describers are trained by simply listening to the existing descriptions.

The result of this project was a set of audio tracks that work together as a free online audio described tour of 15 of the gallery's paintings. Through Smartify, a leading online cultural heritage platform featuring over 2 million works of art, the tour makes the

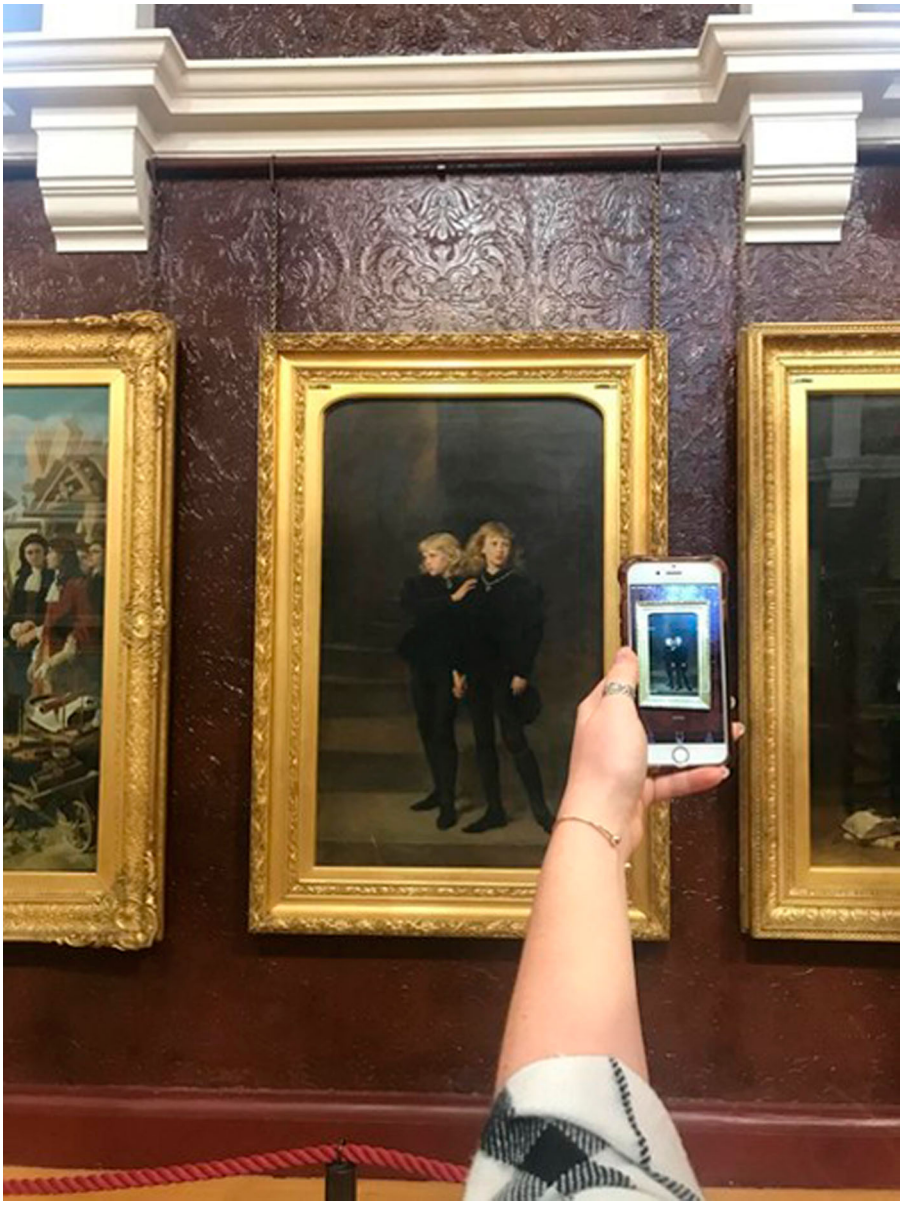

**Figure 2.** A view of the Smartify app in action in the Royal Holloway Picture Gallery.

picture gallery accessible to blind and non-blind visitors in the gallery itself via the smartphone app (see Figure 2), or around the world via the website. When the tour was launched in June 2020, it was one of only two audio described tours on Smartify alongside the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery's. Between January and June 2021, the tour was accessed 924 times, making it RHPG's third most popular tour. This number suggests either that large numbers of blind people are accessing the gallery for the first time, or that non-blind visitors are attracted by this inclusive way of experiencing art. The tour was shortlisted for the prestigious Times Higher Education Awards 2021 in the category of "Outstanding Contribution to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion."

## Case study 3: VocalEyes creative workshops

The third case study challenges not only the notion of objectivity, but also the omnipotence of the sighted interpretive voice within a museum or heritage setting. VocalEyes – an Arts Council England-funded organization working with the cultural sector to ensure that BPB people can experience and enjoy arts and heritage – have developed a museum workshop experience, created with and for BPB people.

The most effective way to meet the needs of an audience is to work with them. To date, five workshops have been designed by non-blind sector professionals Fineman and Cock at VocalEyes, in collaboration with Sally Booth, a partially blind artist (who led the workshops) and U.K. cultural organizations Leeds Art Gallery, the British Museum, Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery, Reading Museum and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), who hosted the workshops.[21] Drawing on the principles of "Blindness Gain," these workshops aimed to offer a creative experience that would recognize the importance and validity of blind voices in response to museum collections, encouraging both personal interpretations of displays, and artistic responses to them.

The workshops began with an exploration of works within a gallery or exhibition. Booth led the AD, with input from a member of the museum's team, highlighting the prominent narratives around the artworks and artifacts – for example subject matter, provenance, the artists' or makers' stories, what was exciting, unusual, or significant about the work – and encouraging response and discussion (see Figure 3). Booth challenges traditional access initiatives such as "lifeless and sometimes relentless descriptions of pictures" and "dusty Styrofoam representations" she has encountered in favor of a much more active and inclusive approach: "I want people to be able to discover the work, the artist, the materials, and the ideas. To get up close and to feel involved." An atmosphere of dialogue was established, with the views of all BPB attendees welcomed and equally valued. Booth encouraged participants to think about how to capture the atmosphere of the work. Examples of questions asked include: "What is it about the viewpoint of that work that makes it so dramatic? If there is a WOW factor as you encounter a piece, how do you tell me what makes it do that?" Booth also explains how new creative and technological developments have influenced her practice:

> An interesting development has been artists describing their own work. This is not the same thing as conventional description but offers the artist an opportunity to give a more personal insight into how and why they made their work, and the stories behind them. This has been

**Figure 3.** VocalEyes creative workshop at Leeds Art Gallery. Artist Sally Booth and workshop participants explore the sculpture "Red Fruit" (1987) by Peter Randall Page.

> propelled by the use of Instagram, where entries need to be shorter and pithier, and which is now being taken up by the mainstream.[22]

In some instances, for example at Reading Museum, tactile opportunities were included. In these situations, guided handling combined with AD was used to create an enriched multisensory experience. At Leeds Art Gallery, a discussion of the materials and methods used to create sculpture was complemented with handling samples of marble, bronze, and slate. This provided direct experience of the weights, textures, and temperatures of materials to enrich the overall sensory experience of the artwork.

Following the visit to the gallery, participants were invited to respond creatively in a practical workshop. Attendees could determine how they engaged, for example, choosing to explore a new material or artistic technique, or making a complete work of their own to take away. As the workshop was led by an artist who was partially blind, the BPB perspective was again centered on the experience of learning new skills and developing artistic creation; there was no implicit status differentiation between disabled and non-disabled people. The sessions developed from a variety of stimuli, including sculpture, paintings, and architecture, with the creative workshops involving clay use (see Figure 4), mark-making and sculpture formed by assemblage, painting and printmaking using rollers, and the use of 3D pens to create structures.

Thirty participants were interviewed by the workshop leaders as part of the formal evaluation of three of the events. Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive. 100%

**Figure 4.** VocalEyes creative workshop with clay, led by artist Sally Booth at Reading Museum.

of respondents at each event gave the experience a rating of "very enjoyable," with 100% stating they would like to re-visit their local gallery.

Attendees' responses also reinforced the importance of authentic creative experiences, where blindness is not deemed a deficit, but is celebrated as a valid and exciting way to experience museum and heritage collections and participate in artistic activity. For example, in their comments, participants valued "shared fellowship and friendship" and felt a sense of belonging: "You made us feel we could express what we think" and, simply, "You understood us." The wellbeing benefit of creative arts workshops in museums is well established,[23] but the additional advantage of these workshops is valorizing the interpretative voices of blind community members, who have been implicitly told for so long that they are unable to truly experience museum collections without the mediation of someone fully sighted.

## Case study 4: "Discovering Painting through Listening," Musée du quai Branly (MdqB)

This final case study, led by Thompson with Marion Chottin (a non-blind philosophy, art history and critical disability studies researcher) and French charity PERCEVOIR, who provide audio and tactile cultural experiences for BPB people, describes a collaboration with the Musée du quai Branly in Paris that applied the principles of "Blindness Gain" to the co-creation of inclusive audio description. This project took the non-hierarchical,

collective approach to creating audio description discussed in case study 2 (RHPG Project) one step further. It explored how AD can be enriched by novel ways of experiencing paintings that rethink traditionally "sighted" ways of appreciating art and by the renewal of the literary art of *ekphrasis*, specifically the description of visual arts in non-visual ways.[24]

Between March 2018 and June 2021, mixed groups of blind, partially blind, and non-blind co-creators worked together to create audio descriptions of some of the artworks in the museum's modern indigenous Oceania collection. (Some of these descriptions are available in French on the museum's website: only one exists in English so far. See https://m.quaibranly.fr/fr/informations-pratiques/aller-plus-loin/outils-de-visite/decouvrir-la-peinture-par-lecoute/ for the project page and recordings in French and https://www.quaibranly.fr/en/useful-information/go-further/visitors-tools/discovering-painting-through-listening/ for the project page with English recordings.) They began by asking a partially blind person to describe their perception of the painting. The groups then used a question-and-answer method to build up the description until every member of the group had a sense of the painting. They then rewrote the description as a creative response to the painting. During their work on "Barramundi Scales" by Lena Nyabdi, for example, the group created a very short "First Impression" which describes the painting without giving any contextual or historical information about it:

> Taller than it is wide, this painting is completely covered by a white pattern on a black background. This gives the impression of something soft, supple, and welcoming. We have the impression that the work is undulating, as if sheltering some living thing. Something living and flowing.

This description is the verbal equivalent of the kind of first impression a non-blind visitor might have as they enter a gallery. It allows the blind beholder to form their own aesthetic response to the painting without being guided by information from the painting's label. If they are attracted by this "First Impression" the listener can move on to a much longer and more detailed description.

Participants were encouraged to use multisensory language and imagery. They aimed to include vocabulary referring to a range of senses, while avoiding words referring only to sight. They described colors using objects and the sensations associated with them (for example, "sandy yellow," "lavender blue,"; "dusty grey," "terra cotta," "warm and earthy shades"). The notion of positionality in relation to the experience of an artwork was central to this process. For example, when describing a painting on bark by Tom Djawa from Milingimbi Island in Australia's Northern Territory, the groups took care to specify that their Western European way of "reading" the picture differed from the way it was experienced by members of the artist's Yolngu community. In a description of "Rêve de la liane-serpent" ("Dream of the Snake-Vine") by Maggie Watson, the group put themselves in the imagined place of the painter by describing a "thick brush" that they moved from top to bottom with a "confident and regular pressure."

One of the goals of this process was to enable visitors to create their own emotional and perceptual relationship with the artwork. As such, the project acknowledged that engagement with an artwork is a very personal experience. Some might glimpse it at a distance and catch a fleeting impression of it before moving on. Others might move closer and study it in more depth. Some might be interested in its colors, shapes, textures.

Others might care more about its historical and geographical context. To address this, the co-created AD of Tom Djawa's work https://www.quaibranly.fr/en/useful-information/go-further/visitors-tools/discovering-painting-through-listening/ incorporated several different descriptions of the same painting, as well as a response by the artist's son, to reflect the different ways in which the describers had experienced the painting, and likewise to offer listeners a range of ways in which it might be encountered. Unlike non-blind people, who explore museums at their own pace and in their own ways, blind people listening to traditional AD are not often given the chance to discover a painting on their own. The project experimented with ways of creating a gallery experience equivalent to that familiar to a non-blind visitor who glimpses a painting at a distance before deciding whether to move closer to investigate it further. The project website did not include images of the paintings described and some of the non-blind members of the project decided not to look at the paintings before describing them. In this way, non-blind people's experience of the descriptions (both the process of creation and the discovery of them on the website) was not dependent on, or "polluted" by, knowledge of the visual appearance of the work.

Ultimately, the aim of this co-created method of audio description was to position audio description as an egalitarian artistic genre, rather than as a service provided by non-blind people to blind people. By thinking of audio description as a subjective, even artistic response to a work of art, the aim was to make it accessible and appealing to everyone. As such, it is no longer only the preserve of people who know how to ask for it but becomes an integral part of mainstream museum interpretation. This non-segregated, co-created approach is anti-ableist because it refuses to define people by what they can or cannot do. Instead, it provides every museum visitor with a range of experiences without creating any kind of hierarchical relationship between them.

In August 2021, ten non-blind volunteers listened to the ADs of Djawa's work on Zoom. They were not given visual access to the work. They then completed an online questionnaire about their experiences. All respondents reported an emotional encounter with the painting and 80% experienced moments of complete emotional involvement with it. All respondents were moved by the descriptions and 60% were extremely moved. These preliminary results suggest that the audio tracks produce an aesthetic experience for listeners.

## From access to inclusion

Each of the four initiatives discussed above has sought to make museums more inclusive by using Hannah Thompson's notion of "Blindness Gain" and the work of Georgina Kleege to challenge the traditional approach to access for people who are blind and partially blind. As Kleege explains:

> The hope is that blind people can bring a perspective that has not been articulated before. If we can abandon the notion that blindness can only diminish, damage or destroy identity, and adopt instead the idea that the experience of blindness, in all its varieties, can in fact shape and inform other facets of personality and personal history, we will move toward a more genuinely inclusive society. The integration of blind perceptions and experiences will change the foundational assumptions of the culture; change how the human condition is defined.[25]

The first two projects (CPG and RHPG) reconsidered access as part of an accessibility spectrum. Instead of assuming that accessibility is a binary need, these case studies explore the ways in which AD might enhance experience (and access) for many museum visitors in person or online. They represent moves away from the ghettoization of BPB visitors within a separate "access" provision. In so doing, they reduce the time and financial constraints which limit "accessible" provision by comparison with "standard" visitor experience.

Both projects would have been enhanced by aiming to actively move away from the dominance of the ocularcentric voice. This could have been achieved by including BPB participants as co-creators through every stage of the process. Within the CPG project, the principles of AD structure were created primarily by non-blind describers (although often taking on board feedback from audiences). However, the premise underpinning VocalEyes' work – that the best way to meet an audience's needs is to work with them – should have been implemented more comprehensively. To a lesser degree, the same principle might have applied to the RHPG project. This project did have the benefit of a lead who was partially blind. However, although she was able to provide individual insight into blind ways of experiencing art, the AD co-creation process was still determined by non-blind groups.

The VocalEyes workshops described here challenge the dominant ocularcentric assumption that the optimum way to experience museum collections is through vision by designing creative museum sessions with and for BPB audiences. Given the omnipotence of vision as the sense for experiencing art, in focusing uniquely on BPB audiences, these workshops arguably provided BPB people the opportunity to explore their previously marginalized interpretative voices in a safe space.

However, these types of events remain few and far between as part of "access" programming. In addition, while the depth of impact for participants involved may be greater than for the pre-recorded online initiatives we have discussed, in-person programed activities reach far fewer people than online resources, because they are more limited by various factors including availability of practitioners, visitor numbers, gallery space and practical issues like travel. Arguably, enhanced provision will not be achieved as long as museums see these types of offerings as "access."

We advocate moving to an accessibility spectrum approach, which would see these types of provision extended. In other words, in addition to sessions reserved for BPB people who would prefer to engage within a community of people who share similar lived experience, museums would run similar sessions with an open invitation to everyone who wants to enrich their understanding and experience of art, through the lens of blindness. In so doing, the museum sector would begin to change the foundational nature of understanding culture, and the othering of (dis)ability within society more broadly.

The final project (MdqB) illustrates ways in which the principles of "Blindness Gain" and the accessibility spectrum can be applied using AD techniques, and through a truly inclusive co-creative approach, in which equal value and importance was given to blind, partially blind and non-blind interpretations. Similar to the RHPG case study, the emphasis was explicitly on the creation of an aesthetic experience, focusing on sensory and emotional engagement. This innovative approach to AD takes an important step away from the "authoritative" museum voice, and in so doing validates the interpretative perspectives of non-expert BPB and non-blind audiences. Providing BPB museum

visitors with the opportunity to develop an aesthetic experience is new within museum interpretation. The goal of providing people with different ways to engage was explicit within the MdqB project,[26] and this work clearly provides an excellent basis for exploring different types of AD production. The advantage of the rapid expansion of digital provision in museums is that in years to come, it should indeed be possible to experience collections in museums through a variety of interpretative narratives.

For as long as the ableist "look and learn" exhibition is intrinsic to the museum visit, the experience of visiting a museum will remain inherently visual, prioritizing sight as the optimum sense for experiencing and understanding museum collections. In this context, access initiatives will always be second-best fixes, propagating the binary able/disabled myth. Instead, we call on museums to reframe access programs as inclusion, in order to extend the benefit of "access" to enhance and facilitate the experiences of all visitors. As a starting point and drawing on these case-studies and the research, we propose creating integrated programs in which AD underpins all descriptions and dialogues (recorded or live) for all audiences, so that audiences can broaden their experiences and understandings of collections by experiencing them through different positionalities, including through the experiences of blind and partially blind audiences.

## Notes

1. Candlin, "The Dubious Inheritance of Touch."
2. VocalEyes, *State of Museum Access*, 22.
3. Krantz, "Leveling the Participatory Field" and Hoyt, "Emphasizing Observation in a Gallery Program" provide accounts of successful programs for BPB visitors at the Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: while admirable, these events are not inclusive because they require advance booking, have limited numbers, and are only offered to certain types of visitors.
4. Kleege, *More than Meets the Eye*.
5. The Canadian Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg is an example of a museum that overtly celebrates its inclusivity while simultaneously promoting a surprisingly ableist message about sight and sightedness. See Thompson, "Exploring Human Rights in Winnipeg."
6. Thompson, *Reviewing Blindness in French Fiction.*
7. Eardley et al., "Enriched Audio Description."
8. See, for example, Hutchinson and Eardley, "Inclusive Museum Audio Guides" and Hutchinson, "Museums for All."
9. Lehman and Murray, "The Role of Multisensory Memories."
10. See, for example, Chatterjee and Nobel, *Museums, Health and Well-Being*; Bratman, Hamilton, and Daily, "The Impacts of Nature Experience" and Bell, "Experiencing Nature with Sight Impairment."
11. See, for example, Hutchinson and Eardley, "Inclusive Museum Audio Guides."
12. Thompson, "Audio Description."
13. Jimenez Hurtado and Soler Gallago, "Museum Accessibility Through Translation."
14. Hutchinson and Eardley, "Inclusive Museum Audio Guides" and Hutchinson, "Museums for All."
15. Hutchinson and Eardley, "Inclusive Museum Audio Guides."
16. Ibid.
17. The Bank of England's audio description of "The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street: A Cartoon" is an example of "traditional" AD. It provides the listener with historical and contextual information before describing the work's visual appearance, and it presents its

information in a neutral, apparently objective way. See https://smartify.org/tours/audio-description-highlights-of-bank-of-england-museum.

18. See, for example, Hutchinson and Eardley, "Museum Audio Description."
19. Kleege, *More than Meets the Eye*, 121.
20. Vessel, Starr, and Rubin, "The Brain on Art."
21. Sally Booth's website is: https://sallybooth.co.uk/; to listen to her discussing her work with Anna Fineman, listen to this Art UK podcast: https://artuk.org/discover/stories/art-matters-podcast-how-blind-and-partially-sighted-people-engage-with-visual-art.
22. Email exchange between Sally Booth and Anna Fineman 15 November 2021.
23. Chatterjee and Noble, *Museums, Health and Well-Being*.
24. "Ekphrasis" is the word used to refer to a verbal description of a real or imagined work of art. It usually refers to works of art described in literature. In his novel *The Sea* (2005), John Banville provides an ekphrastic description of Bonnard's "Nude in the Bath with Dog" (1946 (pp. 152–3)); John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is an example of ekphrastic poetry.
25. Kleege, *More than Meets the Eye*, 13.
26. For a more detailed analysis of this project, see Chottin and Thompson, "Blindness Gain as World-Making."

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## About the author

***Alison F. Eardley***, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Westminster. Trained as a cognitive psychologist, her earlier work explored imagery, imagination, memory, and multisensory processing in individuals who were blind and sighted. Her current work applies a cognitive lens to visitor experience and audience engagement in museums and the cultural sector more broadly, with a focus on access and inclusion. Her interdisciplinary mixed methods approach has contributed to the development of museum practice and scholarship in the fields of museum studies, psychology, translation studies and disability studies. She is a Fulbright-Smithsonian Scholar (2021–2022).

***Hannah Thompson***, Ph.D., is a Professor of French and Critical Disability Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London and an AHRC Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Fellow 2021 for the project "Inclusive Description for Equality and Access." She has published widely on nineteenth-century French prose fiction, with reference to gender, sexuality, and the non-normative body. Her third monograph, *Reviewing Blindness in French Fiction* (Palgrave, 2017), marked the beginning of a new research focus on the intersections between Critical Disability Studies and French Studies. Hannah is currently working on creative audio description in museums, art galleries and theaters and the notion of "Blindness Gain." She is the author of the popular blog Blind Spot (https://hannah-thompson.blogspot.co.uk/) that maps her experiences as a partially blind academic in a resolutely sighted world.

***Anna Fineman*** is the Outreach Programme Manager for University College London Special Collections. Most of this article was written while she was the Museums, Galleries and Heritage Programme Manager for VocalEyes, working with museums and heritage sites across the U.K. to improve accessibility for blind and visually impaired visitors. She has broad experience across the museum sector within exhibitions and interpretation, having previously held roles at the V&A, White Lodge Museum at The Royal Ballet School, and the University of Bristol Theatre Collection. She has a wide educational background that includes a BA in Social Psychology, a PGCE, and an MA in Art Gallery & Museum Studies. Anna takes an audience-focused approach and is dedicated to exploring creative ways to support broader access to cultural and natural heritage.

***Rachel Hutchinson***, Ph.D., is a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Westminster. She is an interdisciplinary researcher whose work is underpinned by and situated in psychological theory and methods, impacting on access and inclusion in cultural experiences. Her particular interest is in Audio Description as an inclusive mode of access for both blind and non-blind people. In 2021 she was also the post-doctoral researcher and project manager on an AHRC project called "Inclusive Description for Equality and Access," about inclusive AD in theater, with Royal Holloway, University of London. Rachel also works as a freelance researcher focusing on understanding and evaluating the impact of cultural experience. Her Ph.D. (Psychology, University of Westminster) explored audio description in inclusive museum experiences.

***Lindsay Bywood***, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies at the University of Westminster. She teaches at postgraduate level. Her interdisciplinary research examines the use of traditional accessibility techniques, including audio description, in the context of inclusive design, with a current focus on heritage and museum contexts as well as football. Other research interests are in the subtitling of German films into English, and machine translation and post-editing. Before becoming an academic she worked for many years in the audiovisual translation industry in various roles. She is deputy editor of The Journal of Specialised Translation (JoSTrans), and Director of the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation (ESIST).

***Matthew Cock*** is a graduate in Fine Art, BA (Hons) Glasgow School of Art, and Art History, MA (Hons) Edinburgh. He is currently Chief Executive of VocalEyes, which brings theater, museums, galleries, and heritage sites to life for blind and visually impaired people. Prior to VocalEyes he worked at the British Museum, as an editor, digital content manager and then Head of Web, responsible for the museum's websites and digital projects, including gallery and mobile technology projects. He began his museum career at the Victoria and Albert Museum as a curatorial assistant, working on documentation, gallery, and other projects across curatorial departments. Since 2008, Matthew has been a Trustee of the Jodi Mattes Trust, that champions accessibility of digital culture in museums, libraries, and archive sectors through the biennial Jodi Awards.

## ORCID

*Lindsay Bywood* http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1860-6647

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