



CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Program Notes

- Program Title:** Accessibility in the Museum for Blind and Deaf Visitors
- Location:** Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
- Date:** February 14, 2001
- Presenters:** Elly K. Wong, Docent Coordinator, Asian Art Museum (former Access Coordinator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York)
Elana Hornstein, Visitor Services Manager, Education Department, San Jose Museum of Art
Pete Eckert, Artist and consultant on programs in museums for individuals who are blind (Pete is blind)
Orkid Sassouni, Fieldtrip Explainer, Exploratorium (Orkid is deaf)

Program Overview:

- 1) Elly presented practical suggestions on organizing programs for individuals who are blind, and Elana presented on organizing programs for individuals who are deaf, including sign language, assistive listening devices, etc.
- 2) The group divided into two groups and went into the galleries with Pete and Orkid, who presented gallery techniques for blind and deaf individuals
- 3) The entire program was sign interpreted

Handouts / Recommended Reading:

- Resource List.....page 2
- Programs for Blind and Visually Impaired Individuals By Elly K. Wongpage 8
- Checklist: Making Museums Accessible for Blind and Visually Impaired Visitors
By Elly K. Wong.....page 12

Resource List

Accessibility in Exhibitions for Visitors who are Blind and Deaf

PANELISTS

Elana Hornstein
Visitor Services Manager
San Jose Museum of Art
110 South Market Street (at San Fernando)
San Jose, CA 95113-2383
Tel (408) 271-6840
ehornstein@sjmusart.org

Pete Eckert
Tel (916) 442-4678
peteeckert@mindspring.com

Orkid Sassouni
Fieldtrip Explainer
Exploratorium
3601 Lyon Street
San Francisco, CA 94123
orki99@aol.com

Elly Wong
Docent Coordinator
Asian Art Museum
Golden Gate Park
San Francisco, CA 94118
Tel (415) 379-8839
ewong@asianart.org

ORGANIZATIONS - General

ADA hotline #: 1-800-949-4232 (voice/TTY)
Automatically connects you to your closest regional ADA technical Assistance Center

Center for Independent Living (Berkeley)
Sue Yasuko Abe (Youth Services Coordinator) and Lara Ramos (Youth Peer Counselor)
2539 Telegraph Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94704
Tel (510) 841-4776
TTY (510) 841-3101
Fax (510) 841-6168
www.cilberkeley.org

Center for Independent Living (Oakland)
426 14th Street, Suite 218
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel (510) 763-9999
TTY (510) 444-1837
Fax (510) 763-4910

Independent Living Resource Center (ILRC)
649 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
Tel (415) 543-6222
TTY (415) 543-6698
Fax (415) 543-6318
internet keyword: independent living centers

Disability Access Symbols Project
Graphic Artists Guild Foundation
90 John Street, Room 403
New York, NY 10038
Tel (212) 791-3400
<http://www.gag.org/resources/das.html>

National Arts & Disability Center
UCLA University Affiliated Program
300 UCLA Medical Plaza, Room 3310
Los Angeles, CA 90095-6967
<http://nadc.ucla.edu>

National Council on Disability
1331 F Street NW, Suite 1050
Washington, DC 20004
Tel (202) 272-2004
TTY (202) 272-2074
Fax (202) 272-2022

National Institute of Art and Disabilities
551 23rd Street
Richmond, CA 94804
Tel (510) 620-0290
<http://www.niadart.org>

National Endowment for the Arts
Paula Terry, Coordinator
Office of Special Constituencies
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 724
Washington, DC 20506
Tel (202) 682-5530
www.arts.endow.gov/partner/Accessibility/Brochure.html

ORGANIZATIONS / SERVICES - Blind and Visually Impaired

American Council of the Blind
1155 15th Street, NW, Suite 1004
Washington, DC 20005
Tel (202) 467-5081
Fax (202) 467-5085
(800) 424-8666

American Foundation for the Blind - Headquarters
11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300
New York, NY 10001
Tel (212) 502-7600
Fax (212) 502-7777
(800) 232-5463
www.afb.org

American Foundation for the Blind - West
111 Pine Street, Suite 725
San Francisco, CA 94111
Tel (415) 392-4845
Fax (415) 392-0383

Art Education for the Blind
160 Mercer Street
New York, NY 10012
Tel (212) 334-3700

California School for the Blind
500 Walnut Avenue
Fremont, CA 94536
Tel (510) 794-3800

Lions Silicon Valley Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired
101 N. Bascom Ave.
San Jose, CA 95128
Tel (408) 295-4016

Peninsula Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired
2470 El Camino Real, Suite 107
Palo Alto, CA 94306
Tel (650) 858-0202
www.pcbvi.org

Rose Resnick Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired
214 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102
Tel (415) 431-1481
www.lighthouse-sf.org

Art Resources

Sewell MP Corporation
Woodside, NY 11377
Sewell Raised Line Drawing Kit, Patent # 2,616,198

Audio Descriptions

Audiovision
1503 Alta Glen Drive
San Jose, CA 95125
Tel (408) 453-7100

Acoustiguide
330 Seventh Avenue, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Tel (212) 279-1300
www.acoustiguide.com

Antenna Audio
PO Box 176
Sausalito, CA 94966
Tel (415) 332-4862
Fax (415) 332-4870
www.antenna-audio.com

Braille

American Printing House for the Blind, Inc.
1839 Frankfort Avenue
Louisville, KY 40206
Tel (502) 895-2405
Fax (502) 899-2274
www.aph.org

Braille Works International, Inc.
2802 Pointer Place
Seffner, FL 33584
Tel (813) 654-4050
Fax (813) 689-8628
www.brailleworks.com

Gloves for Touch Tours

Fisher Scientific
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Tel (412) 963-3300
(Disposable Poly, Cat. #11394 100B, Medium)

ORGANIZATIONS / SERVICES - Deaf and Hard of Hearing

California School for the Deaf
39350 Gallaudet Drive
Fremont, CA 94538
www.csdf.k12.ca.us

Deaf Counseling, Advocacy and Referral Agency (DCARA) Headquarters
14895 E. 14th Street, suite 200
San Leandro, CA 94578-2926
Tel (510) 483-0753
TTY (510) 483-6914
www.dcara.org

D.E.A.F. Media, Inc.
Dr. Susan Rutherford
2600 10th Street, suite 101
Berkeley, CA 94710
Tel (510) 841-0163
TTY (510) 841-0165
drsr@deafmedia.org

National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
814 Thayer Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Fax (301) 587-1791

ASL Interpreting Services

Bay Area Communication Access (ASL referral service)
973 Market Street, Suite 280
San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel (415) 356-0405
TTY (415) 356-0378
Fax (415) 356-0495
Deaf Services of Palo Alto
PO Box 60651
Palo Alto, CA 94306
Tel (650) 856-9262
TTY (650) 856-2558
Fax (650) 856-1114

Hands On Interpreting Agency (interpreting services throughout US)
PO Box 418
Auburn, CA 95604
Tel (800) 900-9478
TTY (800) 900-9479
Fax (888) 900-9477

Hired Hands
PO Box 15024
Fremont, CA 94539
Tel (510) 739-6228
Fax (510) 739-1993
www.hiredhandsasl.com

Additional Bay Area Interpreters:
Patty Lessard (510) 792-4562
Anna Mindess (510) 653-4587
Charlotte Toothman (510) 428-0476
Phil LaBarbera (510) 536-2243

Assistive Listening Devices

Comtek
(800) 496-3463 or (800) 466-3463

Gentner Communications
www.gentner.com

Captioning

Bay Area Video Coalition
2727 Mariposa Street, Second Floor
San Francisco, CA 94110
Tel (415) 861-3282
Fax (415) 861-4316
www.bavc.org
(low-cost captioning services for independent producers and non-profit organizations)

Larry Driver
Driver & Nix Closed Captioning
Arizona
(602) 266-9077
ldriver@ccproductions.com

National Captioning Institute
California Office
303 North Glenoaks Boulevard, Suite 200
Burbank, CA 91502
Tel (818) 238-0068
Fax (818) 238-4266
www.ncicap.org

Real-time Captioning Services In the Bay Area
Laura Brewer (650) 949-1900
Teri Darrenougue (650) 595-2799

Communication Services

California Relay Services
Tel (800) 735-2922
TTY (800) 735-2929
Customer Service (800) 676-3777

TTY Equipment

DCARA Bookstore
568 Parrott Street
San Leandro, CA 94577
www.deaf.store.org

Deaf & Disabled Telecommunications Program (DDTP)
505 14th Street, suite 400
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel (510) 302-1100
TTY (510) 302-1101
(800) 867-4323 consumer affairs
www.ddtp.org
(long-term equipment loan for deaf & disabled consumers, non-profits sometimes qualify)

Programs for Blind and Visually Impaired Individuals By Elly K. Wong

Audience

According to a poll conducted by the United States Census Bureau in 1994, 20% of Americans have a disability. 8.8 million Americans have a visual impairment and 1.6 million individuals living in the United States are blind.

The National Organization on Disabilities polled 1000 Americans with disabilities 16 years of age and older and found that they continue to lag well behind Americans without disabilities in the most basic aspects of life. Large gaps exist between adults with disabilities and adults without disabilities in areas such as employment, education, income and socialization. There is no indication that this gap is narrowing; therefore the goal of the Asian should be to embrace the special needs community and make them feel as welcome at the Museum as visitors without disabilities.

Program Overview and Background

Last year the New York MoMA served over 5,000 individuals with special needs, not including the thousands of disabled visitors that visit the Museum and use their independent services, which include wheelchairs and walkers, tactile installations, and large print and Braille brochures.

Programs for Blind and Visually Impaired Individuals

There are many basic services museums can offer to visitors who are blind and visually impaired that will open the galleries enormously.

Large print brochures are extremely helpful for visitors with low vision, as well as some senior citizens with poorer vision.

Braille brochures provide blind individuals with a source of information that is automatically given to all visitors with sight.

Large Print Video Monitor allows text and images from brochures and catalogues to be enlarged up to sixty times.

Audio tours will be helpful for both the general public and visitors with disabilities. Individuals who are blind and visually impaired could listen to detailed accounts of the museum's collection through an audio tour designed specifically for them

A visually descriptive tour of works in the permanent collection, blind individuals could experience the museum without a sighted guide.

Another special audio guide could be created of a reading of current exhibition brochures.

Touch tours involve a special relationship between Education Department members and employees in both the Conservation Department and the Department of Sculpture. MoMA began its Touch Tour program in 1972 and is one of the few museums in the country to provide this type of program; the Asian can become a pioneer on the west coast with similar services.

Trained docents and other Education staff members guide blind and severely visually impaired visitors through the galleries, allowing them to touch designated sculptures. Wearing thin plastic gloves to protect the artwork, visitors can experience sculpture in a way unimaginable to many. While many works in collections are extremely fragile, certain bronze and stone works might be sturdy enough to be incorporated into a Touch Tour program.

Also, **clay replicas** of significant works can be constructed, so that blind individuals will have a sense of the shape and form of the more delicate objects.

Pottery shards, small fragments of marble or bronze, scraps of fabric and other tactile pieces are extremely helpful in the galleries to better understand works.

Along with touch tours of sculptures, visitors can experience **tactile diagrams** and **enlarged color reproductions**. The diagrams are raised-line interpretations of artwork in the Asian's collection. With these diagrams, visually descriptive tours are offered to allow blind individuals to view artworks through the mind's eye. Trained docents and other lecturers learn how to properly visually described works of art, and the Asian's galleries become open to an otherwise neglected audience. Art Education for the Blind (AEB), a nonprofit organization, created guidelines for these descriptive tours (on handout).

Multi-part courses for both children and adults who are blind and visually impaired are essential to the appreciation of museum collections. MoMA and AEB worked closely together to develop techniques and teaching tools that could translate visual information to individuals who are blind and severely visually impaired. These courses are three to four classes in length and allow students to explore collections more in-depth through touch tours, tactile diagrams, descriptive tours, discussion, and hands-on art activities, including **Sewell Drawing Boards**.

One participant of the course at MoMA stated:

"I am not a stranger to the museum world. I was a registrar at the American Crafts Museum for 26 years and first viewed The Museum of Modern Art when it was housed in a residential building on 53 Street. Nothing, however, prepared me for the sheer delight of the sessions in this program."

Tactile installation in the galleries with raised line drawings and audio leading individuals through the diagrams. These programs are about thirty minutes in length and are enjoyed by many fascinated visitors.

Student Programs are one to three parts in length. In a three-part course, after already speaking with the teacher and setting up a theme, the Coordinator visits the classroom to provide context and information prior to the student's trip. It is a time to engage as many students as possible in the conversation. While listening to one another, an

environment is established that leads to no right or wrong answers. Students are comfortable and want to bring in related ideas. They are interested in forming their own conclusions. Prior to leaving, the Coordinator introduces the students to what is to come, what to expect, and how to behave during the Museum visit.

Next, the students visit the Asian for a Touch tour of the works they discussed during the first session. The students begin to recognize themes, make relationships, and view in-depth four to six works. By not overloading their minds, students are eager to return.

Finally, the Coordinator returns to the school or organization to further discuss the art and to lead a hands-on art making workshop. This follow-up extends the students' desire to return to the museum. Students should always leave with more questions than answers, encouraging further research and visits.

Educational Technologies

There is no better place in the country to embark upon technological initiatives than in the bay area. Based in Silicon Valley, the Asian has the opportunity to utilize the many resources of the dot-com culture. **On-line projects** will benefit not only those with disabilities but the general public as well. The size of the audience that a website reaches far outnumbers the cost. A project could be as simple as posting information for visitors with disabilities, or as complex as creating an interactive and multi-accessible sub-site about art. This site could provide lesson plans and possible hands-on art activities for teachers who plan to bring their students to the Museum. The Internet has become an informational tool in all households, and its easy accessibility is ideal for the dissemination of information about art and the Asian to individuals with disabilities, and their parents, relatives and teachers.

Teacher Training and Resource Center

Special Education Teacher Training Programs, which are essential to continuing the art learning process in schools, could also be held two to four times a year. These workshops introduce elementary, middle and high school teachers to appropriate strategies and art projects for their classes. By learning new creative approaches, teachers become aware of how to include art into their everyday curriculum. Discussions will concentrate on the use of tactile diagrams and how to visually describe works of art. The Disability Coordinator will travel to each participating school during the semester to provide ongoing mentoring, and telephone consultations will also be available.

Lending libraries provide educational materials including videos, course packets and slides on a loan basis so that teachers may continue projects throughout the entire school year. Tactile diagrams and enlarged color reproductions could be available free of charge.

General Museum Accessibility and Staff Awareness

While museums can be structurally to code, there are numerous options for an architecturally accessible museum to become more user-friendly.

As well, an architecturally accessible museum is only as functional as the staff who know how to use it. A general understanding from museum staff of visitors with disabilities can be as important as the programs. It is extremely significant to ensure all staff are aware

of building requirements and special programs. The Department of Membership can better assist a deaf individual that would like to join the museum by knowing what programs are offered. It is advantageous for a curatorial staff member to know the appropriate height for a pedestal so that a wheelchair user or child can appreciate what sits atop. When a blind individual would like to know more about an exhibition, visitor assistants should realize that the Museum provides Braille brochures.

Staff seminars bring together employees from every department of the museum. Separate workshops are often held for volunteers and docents, as their contact with the public is greater. Through interactive workshops and keynote speakers, the seminars address the numerous stereotypes frequently associated with individuals with disabilities. It is often surprising how many questions staff members have about visitors with disabilities and the accessibility of their own museum. Workshops provide a comfortable and open environment for staff to learn about this unique audience and discuss their own misconceptions.

The seminar is broken into two sessions. The first session is an open forum often led by a trainer/consultant on disability issues. Employees write down questions they might otherwise be afraid to ask. After submitting the questions, each is discussed by both the moderator and the museum participants. During the second session, a panel of individuals with disabilities is brought in to talk about various experiences at museums, as well as answer additional questions. Feedback on these seminars at the MoMA was extremely positive. One Development Department staff member noted, "Thank you for providing such an open environment. I had no idea the numerous programs we offer! This information will be so helpful in future fund raising initiatives."

"When I come here, to MoMA, and put my hands on a sculpture, I am in effect having an experience of poetry, and the words and perspectives of the people with me become part of my experience of art." -Stephen Kuusisto, author, *Planet of the Blind, a Memoir*

Checklist: Making Museums Accessible for Blind and Visually Impaired Visitors

By Elly K. Wong

Facilities and Staff

- Are stairwells and hallways well lit?
- Are there extreme changes in lighting (dark hallway to bright gallery) causing sight difficulty?
- Are there obstacles in walkways (ie: rugs, signs, pedestals)?
- Are there any low hanging signs?
- Are staff, security guards and volunteers aware of programs, services, and ADA regulations?
- Are your docents / tour guides trained to give descriptive tours?
- Do you have an advisory committee to assist with questions, concerns and programs?

Printed and Recorded Material

- Do you have large print brochures and exhibition labels (at least 18 point)?
- Do you have Braille brochures and exhibition labels?
- Do you have a video magnifier?
- Do you have touchable objects in your collection or models and reproduction of sculptures?
- Do you have raised-line drawings of paintings and enlarged color reproductions?
- Do you offer audio guides of exhibitions, brochures and labels?

Describing Visual Art

For further information, please refer to Art Education for the Blind's publication
Making Visual Art Accessible to People who are Blind and Visually Impaired

- Read the label out loud. While this information is not always extremely descriptive, you are providing material that is available to sighted visitors. Also, if the size of the work is significant, provide an analogy so that the individual can create a mental image.
- Provide a visual description in a sequence, so the blind individual may piece together the work in his/her mind's eye. Start with the explicit subject, moving on to the composition.
- Orient the viewer with directions. A useful method is to refer to positions as numbers on a clock. When using "right" or "left," be sure to qualify whether you are referring to the viewer's orientation, or the artwork (which is a mirror image).
- Describe the technique or medium, especially if there is an important relationship between it and the subject matter.
- Discuss the style of the work of art - the features that identify it as being by a particular artist or of a particular school, region, movement or period.
- Once you have given an overview of the work, focus on details. Bring the work to life by discussing smaller aspects and parts of the piece.
- Let the visitor know where the artwork is located and its relationship to works surrounding it. Was it placed in a gallery for a particular reason?
- Use other senses, such as touch, to help the visitor further construct a detailed impression of the work. If touching the actual piece is not possible due to conservation concerns, consider creating reproductions, tactile diagrams and using small pieces of marble, bronze or canvas. Unique uses of sound can make visual art accessible as well.
- Re-enact a scene that is difficult to describe by having the visitor mimic a figure's pose.
- Provide historical context. For example, with artifacts and ritual objects, describe the setting where a particular piece might have been used or kept.

HINTS: Be aware of your language - try to avoid ambiguous and figurative rhetoric, and be objective, clear and precise so as not to sway a visitor's view. Remember that taking in this information can be exhausting... be creative, go to a cafe, sit and talk about the art. Use multiple approaches!