“Art is not what you see, but what you make others see.”

Edgar Degas

Engaging Through Touch

Touch Tours for the Visually Impaired
INTRODUCTIONS

Presenters:
Michelle Stempien Curator of Education, KIA
Frank Wolf Docent, KIA
Tracy Klinesteker Docent, KIA
OUR BACKSTORY

Touch Tours at the KIA
Finding An Audience

- Kalamazoo is host to the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons Training Center.
- Kalamazoo Regional Educational Services Agency (KRESA) services school children with visual impairments.
- A new and underserved audience is needed for such specialized tours.
- Open communication between these agencies and others allow for an exchange of information about our tours.
Getting Started

- Build an Advisory Committee.
- Members of our committee include:
  - A Professor with the Dept of Low Vision and Blindness Studies at Western Michigan University,
  - A local artist (Blind),
  - A VI/Mobility instructor at KRESA,
  - A retired counselor from the Training Center (Blind),
  - And a retired VI teacher.
Orientation and Mobility Training for Docents

How to:

- Greet our guests.
- Guide visitors through the galleries using proper O&M techniques.
- Explore the art.
- What to do with canes and guide dogs.
- Assist with putting on gloves.
- Experience visual impairment and how it affects the implementation of a tour.
Where We Are Now

- Grant writing and new art.
- The “Art Ark” and “Kluane” Braille Transcriptions
- Spreading the word.
- “What to do in Kalamazoo”
- New technologies to explore:
  - iPads – enlarge images & sound
  - Swell paper
  - Real objects
  - 2-D paintings
  - 3-D printing
CHOOSING OBJECTS: “THE ART”

How We Choose Objects for Our Touch Tours
We look for objects that have certain characteristics.

CHOOSING OBJECTS

We look for objects that have certain characteristics.

- Size
- Material
- Texture
- Complexity
- X Factor

“Man on Box,” Kirk Newman
Photograph by Frank Wolf
CHOOSING OBJECTS

Size
- Small enough for portability.
- Durability.

Materials
- Stone, bronze, wood, or found/recycled parts.
- Can talk about process of creation.
CHOOSING OBJECTS

Texture
- Look for contrasts.
- Rough/smooth, high/low, indentations.

Complexity
- Has interest.
- Shapes that can be easily visualized.

“Nathan Hale，“
Frederick William MacMonnies
CHOOSING OBJECTS

X Factor
- Interesting appeal.
- History of the piece.
- Something special about the artist.
- Exhibition serendipity.

"The Marriage of Hiawatha,"
Edmonia Lewis
Generally What to Avoid

- Overly complex objects.
- Ambiguous and abstract shapes.
- Fragile pieces.
- Artwork displayed in precarious positions.
- Sculptures accessible from only one side.
THE TOUCH TOUR

How We Conduct Our Touch Tours
TOUCH TOUR

- Tours are usually one hour divided into two 30-minute periods.
- One docent for every two visitors.
- Maximum of four visitors per tour.
- Visitors are school age children, young adults, and seasoned individuals.
TOUCH TOUR

First Half

- Upstairs in a conference room.
TOUCH TOUR

First Half

- Get acquainted.
- Learn life experiences with art.
- Present objects on a table.
TOUCH TOUR

First Half

- Gather clues as to what can be seen (i.e., partially blind, totally blind). This will help gauge interactions with your visitors.
- Most visually-impaired people are happy to inform you of their visual needs.
- Some will have other challenges in addition to their visual loss.
- Each tour is different. Be flexible!
TOUCH TOUR

Second Half

- Move downstairs to the galleries.
- Objects cleared with our curator are explored with gloves.
- Limited to what is currently on display.
Second Half - Sculptures

- Sculptures on pedestals should be accessible from all sides.
- Let the visitor discover the work by themselves.
- Don’t tell them too much, or too little.
- Start by finding extremities of the work.
- Encourage the use of both hands.
EXPANDING ACCESS

2-D Art, Real Objects, and 3-D Printing

"Regeneration" 2014, Chakila Hoskins
EXPANDING ACCESS: 2-D Art

Swell paper: A tactual exploration of the image.

“A Study in Pink (Mrs. Robert McDougal),”
William Merritt Chase
EXPANDING ACCESS: Real Objects

Physical modeling of objects in a painting.

“Still Life with Egg Cup, Eggs, and Bowl,” William H. Bailey
Is it the future?
Creating 3-D shapes of objects within 2-D art.
- Will allow more concrete exploration of an image.
- Copyright issues?
- Will be expensive at first.
Thank You for Listening!

Touch Tours for the Visually Impaired

“Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.”
Jonathan Swift

Image Credits: