

# AN ACT OF TRANSLATION: TACTILE ART EXPERIENCES AT THE CHEECH MARIN CENTER FOR CHICANO ARTS & CULTURE OF THE RIVERSIDE ART MUSEUM

## CLARA DAWSON

Advisory Committee: Christine Davidson, Janet Escarcega, Joshua Polanco

Art museum visitorship remains consistently lower for visitors who have low and no vision than general art museum visitorship. Why?

Art museums continue to provide insufficient interpretation of visual art for visitors who have low or no vision.

Several museums have innovative visual arts programming and interpretation but accessible art experiences need to be developed on a museum-by-museum basis to account for individual museum resources, mission, capacity and local community need. There is no one size fits all approach. Often times museums are faced with disaggregated information about how to create programming and unaffordable or unsustainable technologies.

This leaves visitors who have low or no vision with spotty art viewing opportunities, inconsistent interpretation and one-off programs.



## PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to develop a sustainable art viewing experience that increases access to visual arts for visitors who have low and no vision at the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Arts & Culture of the Riverside Art Museum (called "The Cheech") in Riverside, CA.

A subsequent purpose of this project is to create a practical implementation manual for staff to refer to when creating new opportunities for visitors who have low or no vision to experience art so that The Cheech Center can consistently provide this offering exhibition after exhibition.

## DELIVERABLES

1) Tactile interpretation aids for 2 artworks in the opening exhibition of The Cheech Center titled Cheech Collects.

2) Verbal descriptions of 2 artworks in the opening exhibition of The Cheech Center titled Cheech Collects.

3) A manual that provides step-by-step instructions for providing art interpretation using tactile interpretation aids and verbal descriptions to visitors that have low and no vision.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Positive Outcomes:

-Increased access to visual information in artworks for two pieces from Cheech Collects show.

-Tactile interpretation aids paired with verbal descriptions provide increases enjoyment of art viewing and museum experience

### Missed Opportunities:

-Increases access, but still creates dependencies on family and friends or staff for visitors. Not a fully autonomous experience

-Staff interaction with advisory committee was minimal. Fostering this relationship earlier would make for a smoother transition for Cheech Center staff to take over of this work.

## NEXT STEPS

Implement tactile interpretation aids and verbal descriptions for the opening exhibition of The Cheech Center in June 2022

Continue to engage with and develop a relationship with the low and no vision community of the Inland Empire

## References

Art Beyond Site. Museum Education Institute. [www.artbeyondsight.org](http://www.artbeyondsight.org)

Cavazos Quero, L., Bartolomé, J. I., & Cho, J. (2021). Accessible Visual Artworks for Blind and Visually Impaired People: Comparing a Multimodal Approach with Tactile Graphics. *Electronics*, 10(3), 297.

Graven, T., Emsley, I., Bird, N., & Griffiths, S. (2020). Improved access to museum collections without vision: How museum visitors with very low or no vision perceive and process tactile-auditory pictures. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 38(1), 79-103.

## PROCESS

DEC 2021

Assembled community advisory committee made up of members from the low and no vision community of the Inland Empire for first meeting

Meeting Outcomes: Committee familiarity with project, list of barriers committee faces when participating in arts & culture, recommendations for navigational markers and gallery furniture

JAN 2022

Review of all artwork to be included in the opening exhibition of The Cheech Center, titled *Cheech Collects*. Selection of pieces appropriate for creation of tactile interpretation aids.

FEB 2022

Digital images of artwork sent to texture printer to print interpretation aids. Verbal descriptions drafted.

FEB 2022

Secondary advisory meeting to review first iteration prints of aids and verbal description drafts.

Meeting outcomes: New information structure for verbal description and new format for interpretation aids, recommendations for audio and guided tour

MAR 2022

Review advisory committee feedback with printer and troubleshoot issues with texture, color and format

**Challenge:** Construction delays pushed back the opening of museum and the installation of the artwork in the *Cheech Collects* show. This meant that implementation of tactile pieces and verbal descriptions could not be a part of this project. Instead, a step-by-step manual for implementing and maintaining this work was created.

APRIL 2022

Third and final advisory meeting with review of final tactile pieces and their verbal descriptions, held at the Cheech Center.

Meeting outcomes: Approval of final interpretation aids and verbal description, discussion about museums as a social experience, introduced key museum staff to advisory committee and needs of visitors who have low or no vision

MAY 2022

Manual drafted, edited and finalized. Poster and presentation submitted.