



ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA

GET THE FACTS: TOUCH TOURS

Touch, sound and smell connects us all with the art we enjoy. They are innovative and powerful ways to bring the arts to life in its many dimensions. Planning and providing experiences that enable this to happen, is an exciting adjunct to your programming and audience participation and development activity.


Imagine experiencing an exhibition through touch—feeling the shape of an object or the weight and texture of a piece of fabric that's part of an exhibition.

Imagine meeting performers and actors on stage in their costume immediately before a show, gaining an insight into their character through costume, voice and physicality.

Imagine walking around the set of the production you are about to attend, understanding movement, dimension, layout and scale of the production through a journey around the physical space, engaging all your senses (even smell!), rather than your sight.

“Touch is how I see and without it, museums can be very dull and boring places to visit.”

Many voices making choices:
Museum audiences with disabilities



People who are blind or have low vision enjoy arts and cultural events and tours in museums and galleries. For many people, touch is the main way they access a work of art, allowing the visitor to form a picture in their mind of a particular art work.

Many art museums and galleries offer visitors who are blind or have low vision the opportunity to touch original artworks. Alternatively some museums and galleries use copies, models and props. Usually a trained staff member takes people on a tour.

Tactile museums and art galleries


Many international museums have tactile exhibitions. This means that masterpieces can be enjoyed by visitors who are blind or have low vision—exact plaster replicas of original sculptures and replicas of antique furniture can be touched.

Being able to access and touch objects that are on display opens up a rich world for people who have low vision. It also makes art more accessible for the general public as well as for people with a cognitive impairment and for children.


Australia is embracing touch as a new way of presenting art to visitors and having objects available for people to handle. There are impressive examples in the UK and the USA, described in the websites listed.

In museums and art galleries, tactile exhibits may be objects such as sculptures, which are part of the collection. It could be a sample of fabric similar to that in a costume. They could also be replicas, models and props, or specially-created handling objects, such as fur or texture samples. It could be contemporary art that is made to be touched.

The MONA, V&A Museum and Art Beyond Sight websites listed below give great examples of tactile exhibits. An example would be a carved panel in the style of an 18th century cabinet, together with a detailed verbal description, or a Ming vase accompanied by a verbal description.



Our curator and I are talking about when we acquire new works [for the gallery], we look at material that can be touched and played with for tactile tours, to complement our audio description.

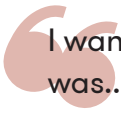


Bendigo Art Gallery

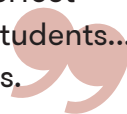


Practical tips for giving a guided Touch Tour

1. When welcoming and meeting a group, give a verbal description of the space you are in to give a full sense of where they are noting scale, lighting, activity and mood.
2. As you move between gallery spaces describe the spaces you pass through, even if they are not on the tour. A few words can give visitors a sense of the size and type of the exhibition or museum.
3. Limit guided touch tours to 3–5 objects.
4. Keep the tour group small, 3–6 people at most. While one or two people are exploring by touch, talk about the history or describe the piece.
5. When visitors touch a work ask them to describe what they feel. Ask how it makes them feel.
6. Choose objects that visitors can touch all parts of. If not, provide tactile pictures that can be touched.
7. In a guided touch tour, allow enough time for visitors to process their experience.



I wanted to let you know how absolutely terrific the Tactile Tour was...a lovely range of costumes and props which would have very much added to the students' experience of the opera; a perfect amount of time and information and background for the students... and a lovely and inclusive feel and opportunity for our kids.



Dew Lewis, Statewide Vision Resource Centre

Touch Tours in live performance

Notes about the show can be sent out by email or posted before the performance. Include descriptions of the set design, costumes and more.

In live theatre and operas touch tours are often given when an audio described performance is staged. Touch Tours can be offered at selected shows at a convenient time prior to the performance. One audio described show is generally offered per season.

Create a Touch Tour before a performance

- Set a time before or after the show, on the day of the audio described performance (Vision Australia Audio Described tours. www.visionaustralia.org/living-with-low-vision/learning-to-live-independently/sport-recreation-and-the-arts/audio-description)
- Choose what you would like to have as part of the tour. Generally a guided tour of the stage. People can touch the sets, props and costumes. Sometimes performers take part in this, dressed in their costumes.
- Make sure the person who is leading the tour is able to answer any questions about the performance.
- When you promote your show, include the date and time of the tactile tour
- Promote the show through your usual networks as well as disability arts networks, Vision Australia, Arts Access Victoria.
- A script of the show can be sent out to an audience member in advance.
- This means that audience members will have more understanding about what is happening on stage.

Some useful links

- Australian Museum and the National Museum: Many Voices Making Choices: Museum audiences with disabilities.
<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Uploads/Documents/2595/many-voices.pdf>
- National Gallery of Australia—brief extract on ‘hands-on’ experiences for people with vision impairment.
<http://nga.gov.au/Visiting/Access.html>
- Online Accessibility Training Learning Tool: Touch Tours and Other Tactile Experiences.
www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-touchtools.shtml
- Opera Australia.
<https://opera.org.au/accessibility/audio-described-performances>
- The Melbourne Theatre Company.
www.mtc.com.au/your-visit/access/

Image: *Hansel and Gretel* Tactile Tour, Victorian Opera 2014
Image supplied by Victorian Opera.

CONTACT AAV FOR MORE INFO