

Living Blind: Season 2, Episode 1 “Accessing Visual Art, Here’s How” Audio Transcript

Naomi: Welcome to Living Blind. I'm your host, Naomi Hazlett. And this podcast is brought to you by BALANCE for Blind adults. Located in Toronto, Canada. This season of living blind is sponsored by AMI. Here at living blind, we explore the perspectives and lived experiences of people with sight loss and delve into barriers, challenges, and real life strategies for living life to the fullest.

For today's episode, we're talking about accessibility of museums and art galleries. We know that access to these spaces is important for a number of reasons. And that is certainly changed with the global pandemic. We sat down with John Ray and Melissa Smith, two people that are making the changes necessary for it to happen..

Our first guest is a well-known advocate in the GTA for blind and low vision folks. He previously worked for Ontario Public Service. Has been a board member of many human and disability rights organizations, and was honored with a medal from the Ontario historical society for his efforts to make museums, art galleries and other historic properties more accessible.

We are so happy to have Mr. John Ray with us. Welcome to the show John.

John: Thank you.

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Naomi: Maybe we can start from the beginning when you were talking about how important it is to have tactile experiences in museums. So, I've heard that you can use gloves or there's other strategies per for preserving the artifacts. Is that something you've come across in your experience?

John: Definitely. Um, gloves are a way,, and uh, they protect the item from the oils that are on your hands. It does work. It's not my first choice. I would prefer to be able to touch the item without gloves, but if that's what it's going to take, I will happily wear gloves. I remember when I was at what is really my, my favorite museum experience at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, Denmark, a private private Newseum that houses statutory from various ancient civilizations. So a very big place. And, uh, most of it when I was there many years ago was out in the open. There was lots there to touch and I was, uh, enjoying myself, touching anything. Everything to my heart's content. When, uh, a staff person came up to me and very quietly said to me, would you mind putting on a pair of gloves to protect the, the items?

And I said, okay. And I did and continued, uh, examining this wonderful statuary. So yes, gloves are a way of providing access. And protecting the items as well.

Naomi: I think you already answered the next question I was going to ask, which is, you know, in your opinion, what would be the best museums for tactile access to their exhibits?

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John: I have found that museums in England are often pretty good. The, the Glyptotek, as I've said is definitely my favorite. Um, although, um, the other places where I've done fairly well, often what we could call, uh, pioneer museums or, or old, uh, houses are, uh, quite accessible. Um, The, uh, black Creek pioneer village, just outside of Toronto, there's quite a bit there to touch.

Um, the museum in Edmonton, uh, has a lot to touch the, the, the, uh, the old Fort, uh, side of Winnipeg. These, these, these pioneer villages, they often have quite a lot to touch old implements or old vehicles or a chance to visit old buildings that may have been, uh, residences of, uh, important people or churches or, or, or school rooms.

Usually you can go into a selection of buildings. And, uh, just being able to go in them and walk around in them. And sometimes these, uh, facilities will have, uh, individuals in period costumes who, uh, act like people who lived at the time that the structure is depicting life and I always find them fun. Cause they're usually they use, they usually tell some funny stories and really bring to life the era that you're visiting.

Naomi: Makes sense to me. No, it's a more of a living scenery, you know, a place of living scenery, a place that's more active. I've definitely experienced that at a black Creek pioneer village that they let you kind of play with things or touch things a little bit more than say the Royal Ontario Museum.

John: Yeah, these pioneer village tend to be coy, quite interactive. Uh, and, uh, you, you get to experience life as it was back in, uh, the 19th century, I guess, 18th century here in Canada and in other countries

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Naomi: On the other side of things. What's your experience been like with, um, art galleries or art museums?

John: Well, they're tougher because you can't really touch a piece of art it's flat and so that's where raised line drawings or models, or, um, good audio tours come in handy. Uh, I personally prefer, uh, historic, uh, facilities with statuary. That that's what I prefer. I'm a history lover, but, uh, I, I have come to appreciate art galleries in, in the beginning I, sorta assumed that there wouldn't be anything of great interest to me as a blind person in an art gallery. After all, you know, what am I going to get out of a painting? Of course, some art galleries also have statuary and a skilled docent or guide, can do a good job of explaining what is contained in the painting.

And in my mind, there's no rules of how to do it. Some of them start at the top, uh, left-hand quadrant of the painting and go around the painting. That works. Others will start with what they consider the most important aspect of the painting and describe what they feel is really happening in the painting.

They, they jump right in that also works because remember the important thing is to convey to us who cannot see, uh, what the painting actually is trying to convey. And chances are. They've done some research and have some insights into what the artist is actually trying to convey. Of course, looking at a painting is a reasonably subjective exercise and different people may have different ideas of what's going on, or why the painter, uh, decided to paint that particular scene or what the painter is trying to convey. That's fine. That's why it's, it's sometimes very useful to have a couple of docents doing the description.

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You may, you may get a different perspective from more than one person. I think that's fine. If I get more than one perspective, I didn't piece it together and, you know, develop my, my own idea.

I have found art galleries can work. If you have a good guide, someone who is really good at describing. And one of the nice things I have found is that these tend to become a win-win situation. Guides who are preparing to describe a painting for us, tend to look at it in more detail than they might otherwise because the, they need to, you know, come up with a perspective of what's going on and they often say, They have gained a deeper understanding of what they are describing to us.

I'm always happy when that happens. I'm always happy to participate in what turns out to be a win-win situation. I'm always glad when, uh, these guides or docents, uh, also also gain from their efforts to describe a painting and make it come to life For me.

Naomi: That's a good point is that that can benefit them and it can create a richer learning experience for everyone who comes to a museum or art gallery.

John: I'm always happy when that happens. And, uh, a number of, uh, Times the person who was working with me or with a group has said that to me, I'm always happy when that happened. When that occurs.

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Naomi: I guess my last question would be, you know, do you have any advice for anyone listening in right now and taking in what you're saying about museums and wanting to go or wanting to know what to expect or what they should be asking for?

John: Um, my advice is plan your trip, try and get a sense of, uh, what's available. Uh, let the facility know that you'd like to have a tour because if you just show up unannounced you, you may be very disappointed, but if you call in advance and uh, explore, what they can do for you as a blind person, uh, chances are you're uh, visit will be much more useful and much richer.

And of course, some of us also organize groups and, and some places offer group tours on a periodic basis. So take a look at their website and see what they offer. Many places now have an accessibility section, and that will often provide information about any organized tours that are aimed, particularly at the disabled community.

And I also encourage people to, uh, offer their services to, uh, help advise, uh, you're a local facility. Sometimes they have advisory committees. Most of them will have a board. Uh, the more that we participate, the more of these places will become aware of our needs and desires to take part. So it's like most other aspects of life.

The more we are visible. The more we try to take part. And of course the more that these places, uh, incorporate diversity into their regular programs, the more that we see ourselves in a facility, the more that we will be interested in attending. And these days, all museums, art galleries and historic properties are looking to expand their clientele.

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We are an untapped part of communities who often do not go to these places. We are a potential source of new patrons. Well, this can be a win-win situation again, by becoming more involved. Uh, we can benefit hopefully through greater access and inclusion, and these facilities can benefit by having us as the real experts on what is needed to make access and inclusion a reality.

And I, I think that's a win-win situation for all facilities and all members of any community. But for me as a blind person, there is simply no substitute to tactical access. That's what I'm really looking forward to. Sometimes I get it and sometimes I'm very disappointed.

Naomi: Well, I think, like I said, you've given us a lot to think about.

John: Thanks a lot. My pleasure.

Naomi: And now a message from our sponsor. Discover AMI's collection of podcasts created by and for the blind and partially sighted community. Visit ami.ca to learn more. AMI entertains informs and empowers. And now back to the podcast.

Our next guest, Melissa Smith is currently the assistant curator of access and learning at the Art Gallery of Ontario. In her work, she advocates for underrepresented communities collaborates on strategies, builds partnerships and co-creates experiences that support lowering, perceived and physical barriers to the art gallery and its collections.

Welcome to the podcast, Melissa.

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Melissa: Thank you. I'm so happy to be here.

Naomi: Can you start by telling the listeners a little bit about yourself.

Melissa: So, um, my name's Melissa Smith and I'm the assistant curator of access and learning at the Art Gallery of Ontario. I've been there for almost nine years, which is something to note. Um, and my background is in, um, museum studies and art history. Uh, so kind of fits with working in galleries. Um, and I do a lot of work that's super focused on visitors and engagement, um, and just, yeah, kind of lowering any perceived or physical barriers to the AGO and the collection.

Naomi: How did you get started in this kind of work? How did you get interested in it?

Melissa: Actually, you know, I went to an arts high school in Ottawa called Canterbury, um, and fell in love with visual arts.

And then I sort of just pursued that through undergrad. Um, just kind of fell into art history from there. Um, I did my master's in art history at Western, and then quickly decided that I didn't want to pursue academia anymore. And then when I went back to Ottawa, I was lucky enough to get, uh, positions in library, archives, Canada.

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The Diefenbaker cold war museum and then the national gallery. Um, and it was really at the national gallery that I kind of, uh, found my passion, um, which is really about when you engage with someone around an art piece and someone has what we call like an aha moment where they're like, oh my God, like this is so not what I expected, or I'm seeing this in a new way. Um, and that's something that I find really deeply exciting. So.

Naomi: Yeah, no, I'm getting excited about it as well. I mean, I, we, we talked before the show too, and it already got me very interested. I mean, this is all new for me. So I'm going to ask a lot of questions.

Melissa: Sounds great.

Naomi: So can we start from the beginning? Can you walk me through how you might adapt a museum or an art exhibit for a person with vision loss or another disability?

Melissa: Absolutely. And I mean, I think, uh, what I want to start off by saying to you is that right now we can do much better, but what's in place is very much, um, something that was came out of art education for the blind, uh, from the states actually, uh, and most museums usually provide engagement for, uh, the spaces through programming, which looks like guided tours that often have audio, visual description, tactile elements, um, and usually activations around sound, um, an optional scent as well. Uh, so they're usually seen as multisensory tours and, uh, often given by an art educator or someone who's affiliated with the museum.

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Uh, so that's also what we do. And we've been running a program like that since 2010, and a lot of the training and work around those, um, forms of engagement came out of a report and work that Elizabeth Sweeney, um, did at the National Gallery and the report that they created then went out across Canada.

So I know the Vancouver art gallery, the National Gallery, and also the AGO, and I'm sure there's others, but, um, just based on my memory right now that that's how most programs are created.

Naomi: Hm. And so you're saying right now, there's these programs multi-sensory, uh, tours that people can access, although maybe not right, right now because of the pandemic, but generally speaking, that's something that people can, can do when they go to an art gallery or museum, hopefully, hopefully soon.

What about, do you ever get involved in. Ways to make the space accessible or the experience accessible for somebody who say was just dropping in?

Melissa: Sure. Sure, absolutely. I mean, a lot of this work is relational as well. Right? Cause there's not really one way or one answer. Um, and I feel really strongly about that because it has to be sort of a relational model, um, which is sometimes challenging within an institutional construct.

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But usually what I'm doing is I'm working directly with anyone that reaches out to me. Um, and I also liaise from time to time with, um, With that the exhibition teams, I would say that as a standard within museums, usually it's something called the Smithsonian guidelines that folks work off of for accessibility.

And then it becomes a sort of provincial thing. So in Ontario, we have the AODA requirements. So exhibition designers will set up the space in the most inclusive way possible. And then programming on top of that is something that becomes more relational and is about for instance, um, managing bright lights or anything like that.

Um, and I'm just also thinking about quiet hours, which extends past, uh, the communities we're talking about today, but that's really how we kind of work around what an exhibition is like to create access to those spaces. Another really good example, too is right now, um, A partnership that we've formed with blind square, which, uh, is based in the CNIB.

And we are piloting working with that particular app to create access to our upcoming Warhol exhibition at the ago. Um, and I also work in writing audio visual descriptions, with community members and lots of different stakeholders or curator reviews that are interpreted planner reviews that, and then I work with some folks also to ensure that that communication is clear.

So nothing for us without us. Uh, but, uh, yeah, so those are also ways that we try and create access that's self-determined on top of the pre booked pre-program tours and other engagements.

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Naomi: With the blind square can that be combined with the audio visual descriptions that you were talking about. Can you maybe tell me a little bit more about how the BlindSquare piece, uh, works?

Melissa: Sure. So, um, BlindSquare is kind of a GPS activated app that responds to beacons that we've installed in the museum. It has wayfinding orientation bits, and then you can also go a bit further and hear from our labels. And then from there, you can also hear the audio visual description. So those will be loaded onto the app.

Um, we also provide, uh, high contrast QR codes near the artworks that are a part of that tour that can also be used to access the particular audio visual description. Uh, and so we're that those are ways where I'm very keen to try, and ensure that there's agency and a person can decide to come to the gallery that day and have an experience rather than needing to book, because we're a union environment two to three weeks out for a tour. Right. So, um, that's important to me to create agency.

Naomi: You know, you've talked a lot about ways that you're trying to make art galleries exhibitions more accessible, um, both from the perspective of something more guided or planned as well as things that are available to everybody who are visiting. Why don't we talk about what you think museums and art galleries could do better?

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Melissa: Uh, a lot. I think there's a lot we can do better. Um, again, it's very much a human right, for me to have access to the spaces. And I mean, we have that kind of captured within, um, sort of our charter of human rights, uh, the Canadian human rights act, Canadian charter rights and freedoms, and then more recently the Accessible Canada act.

And it's really about prohibiting the discrimination, of, anything, um, to create access for anyone who identifies with a disability. And it's really important to me that we try and create space that's very accessible at any time because it's also museums we've identified as being able to improve wellbeing, really tackling any kind of complex challenges, uh, around medical stuff as well.

So there's also a whole movement in the UK for prescription to art. That's around arts and culture. It's really about connecting with groups and like really fostering, um, community engagement. And so it's, it's super important in that regard. And I think that we need to move past just kind of checking boxes to make it accessible and really start to work towards that relational model and moving past even universal design to get to a place where we're actually responding and ensuring that everyone feels welcome and able to access culture, because we know, I mean the world health organization, lots of different people have identified how being around creativity, either generated by yourself or someone else, um, actually improves your wellbeing through positive engagement, through lots of things. And so, um, that's why I'm pretty passionate about ensuring that we get past just yeah, again, meeting the bare minimum and envisioning ways to, uh, to get everyone through those doors.

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Naomi: I know we're talking a little more specifically around people with visual impairments, but what would be some things that you would like art galleries or museums to start doing that they're not now. And you can speak to either visual impairment or I guess any other disability that comes to mind? Cause our, our listeners come from many different walks of life.

Melissa: For sure. I mean, I have such a laundry list. Uh, maybe I'll start with some of the things that I, I feel so like quiet hours, for instance, visual narratives for accessing different elements of the building, um, and updating those regularly so that they represent exhibitions and, and how to manage expectations for the space that can also be audio right. not just um, visual, I think, uh, I'm, I'm excited about our pilot with BlindSquare, cause I think that it's manifesting that interest in creating like self guided options, but I'm also really keen to see raised, um, elements on the floor to help guide towards tactile, um, moments. So increasing that in any space is really important.

And I think we chatted too. I was lucky enough to be part of a delegation that went to France to see some really incredible installations at the museum. The museum of the Mediterranean in Marseille, say for instance, they have an entire trail that you can follow with raised lines on the floor, bringing you and guiding you directly to tables that have audio descriptions.

They have ASL interpretation. They have representations of key objects within that installation reproduced as 3D models in bronze, which is a naturally antiseptic material. So they become these kinds of lookout points where you have access to lots of ways of engaging in one place. Um, and that to me is really incredible again, because that provides agency to visit in your own pace in your own way to choose different ways to access those objects.

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Um, the one thing I would say about that though, is that there was no community consultation. So you have all these really rich, beautiful installations. Um, but I don't, I didn't see tons of folks using it because there wasn't engagement with community. And I think that that's also what museums need to be doing better as well around this work is from the beginning, working with community stakeholders.

Um, And I won't even get into an accessibility strategy, but even working with the community stakeholders to develop, uh, ways to engage with exhibitions and ensuring that that's something that meets folks expectation to be able to come to the space and feel comfortable.

Naomi: Hmm. So like you were saying before, nothing about us without us is really at the core of this sort of work.

Melissa: Yeah. And I mean, the thing too is like having worked in the field for as long as I have, and specifically working for community engagement and advocacy, there's things I can recommend based on having worked with community members and knowing, but that is also me as an able-bodied person in a role advocating when we need to have more employment and representation of folks who identify with disabilities in the workforce as well. So I want to share that because I think it's really important that museums do more of that work. It's also a labor crisis that we should just address as a nation. But, um, that's also key because I think that's the only way for us to remain relevant as, um, institutions, because we do come from a very strong colonial background and, uh, we need to engage better with lots of different communities to be able to yeah, remain relevant.

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And we have the ability through art and cultural objects to have conversations about the past the present and really help re-
envision a future. Right. And so I think it's also our
responsibility, not only for keeping objects in perpetuity, but
also for ensuring that we can have those conversations and
create kind of contact zones where we can make change.

Um, And that's really what I feel most passionately about as far
as access as well.

Naomi: Well, well said, I know you already spoke to this a little bit
already, but what could a partially sighted or blind person
expect when they visit a museum or out art gallery say where
you work or ones that you have worked in the past or are
familiar with?

Melissa: So really at the point of sale, Um, often, uh, when folks come,
there's usually, uh, different, uh, strategies for ticket payment.
Often, if you have someone that's accompanying you, for
instance, um, as a guide, that person, um, should be able to get
in free. Um, and then there's usually also different ticketing
strategies.

Cause I can't speak to all spaces, um, to provide access in that
way. Usually, uh, museums provide large print versions of
special exhibitions and labels. I know there's also museums
that provide app engagements that, um, texts readers can
engage with, or you have audio elements as well. Um, I know
the AGO we're in the midst of developing that.

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And so that's also why we're excited to pilot blind square, because it helps navigate that space. Um, So then you would probably move if you're coming to see the permanent collection, it depends on what kind of strategies have been put into that. And a permanent collection is the stuff that the gallery owns, that's often on view for a longer period of time. They usually rotated our site or every three years or so. And they're, um, key pieces in the collection. And then if you're visiting for a special exhibition, that's usually an exhibition. exhibition that's been co-created with other institutions. Um, and those usually have audio guides a bit more.

Um, those are usually the ones that are represented a bit more with large print binders as well. Um, there's also, I work with a large group of, uh, gallery guides who are volunteers and some sites also call them doscents. And so they're usually floating around with ask me buttons or will approach if, uh, if folks look like they are, they're a bit puzzled to help people move through the building and also to share extra insights about, uh, the gallery, the exhibition.

No idea what that's going to look like post pandemic, but we also used to run free hourly tours as well. In that regard. Um, you might also, uh, go to some sites where they have volunteers who also are offering up objects. So I know my colleagues at the ROM do a really great job of running a program where, um, some volunteers will be on the floor in certain exhibitions and have a specimen that you're able to engage with and touch.

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Um, which is really neat. And that's also interesting when we think about ethnographic museums versus art galleries, because usually ethnographic museums have trays of stuff and art galleries have that one Picasso, so, and it's flat. So it's also, it, it depends on what kind of site you're visiting as well. But I would say that for the most part, it's, it's usually through those programming, the multisensory tours that you get the best experience and through pilots, as I keep repeating it, but I guess I'm just really excited about it is BlindSquare too. Cause again, I'm really keen to create a self agency. Is that a good snapshot, a bit. And there's a gift shop, because you can go to the gift shop and touch all sorts of stuff.

Naomi: Yeah. I think the tactile piece I'm still curious about, and it sounds like that will really vary depending on the museum or the gallery that you're going to, I can imagine with a place like the Royal Ontario Museum, they might have some replicas of more three dimensional objects or artifacts. With paintings, it would probably depend on how much texture the artists would put into it, or kind of the nature of the art project. If that could translate in some way to a tactile experience, right?

Melissa: It's a challenge with that kind of flat 2D work. How do you translate that aside from raised line drawings that we've kind of learned over time, aren't super effective and you also have to kind of learn to read them, um, how do we translate an artwork in the most meant multi-sensory way.

If it's something that's already been produced. So I actually work with students from a range of backgrounds, so they can be industrial designers, they can be artists, um, and they're pursuing a graduate degree in that inclusive design field. So they're also like a design element to what they're working on.

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And we work with folks from the community and we run a co-design around particular artworks and then the students and, uh, those representatives co-create translations of those artworks. And usually what we would do is we would then be on the floor on a free Wednesday night and set up next to where the artworks are to be able to share a visual audio description.

And then the prototypes that the students have come up with and they seem to be more diorama 3D representations of the artworks. That usually seems to be where folks end up. Um, but we've also had, uh, filmmakers that have made like an audio narrative that really represented kind of the, the rise and denouement of a story.

Um, and we've also had folks engaged with scent. We've had people engage in haptic, uh, Representations of artworks. And so with the pandemic, actually, what we did is we shifted to, um, a series called multisensory museum moments where students recorded videos, where they included their visual audio description of the artwork.

And then they created a visual audio description of the prototypes that they actually still and made. Um, and. So in the before times, what would happen is those prototypes would actually come into AGO multi-sensory education and programming collection. So we can incorporate those into our tours. Um, and then in the after times we've done is that those videos live on our ago, access to art page, um, and you can actually search them on our webpage too.

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And there's a series of 12, uh, That's that's also a thing that's sort of been what we've kind of been talking around is I'm not entirely sure how things are going to look in post pandemic because certainly there's a real avoidance of touch. And the tactile element of our multi-sensory tours were really important because I work closely with curators and, um, conservationists to identify artworks in the collection that we can touch.

So that. Uh, a translation. There's not, you know, either through an audio description or through a 3D print or a diorama or a recreation of the work, so that again, you can have the same experience that you can touch the artwork. Um, and I'm just not sure how that's going to manifest, uh, in the future.

Naomi: Hmm, well, we'll just have to have another interview, I guess, in a year from now. And you'll let me know what, uh, what creative solutions have come up along the way. But I think that using tactile sensation is a really important part of the multi-sensory experience. And so I hope in the future, although we may not know what that looks like right now, we will find ways to incorporate that again, into the experience of going to a, an art gallery museum.

Melissa: Oh, I, I, trust me, I will be advocating for that. Quite intensely. And I think also like when we're doing those tactile moments, we encouraged people to wear nitrile gloves because, um, our hands do have oils on them that can over time on objects, uh, start like create a decomposition thing.

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Um, so we have to just be careful about keeping our. Uh, again, because that's museums, we want to keep them for as long as we can, which is something we can question or not. But all that to say. Um, so we have used nitrile, gloves. So I'm going to kind of advocate for that element being what will, uh, let us get back in the saddle and start again. And I think also we're talking as an institution already about hybrid models. So one thing that I don't want to underestimate or undermine is the impact of having shifted to a digital platform, because I've noticed on our multi-sensory moment videos, for instance, that we're connecting with on average, around 3000 people.

So we're on a multisensory tour. We could engage with maybe five to eight people, um, where I feel like there's an impact that I don't want to lose. Um, from that programming, um, while also acknowledging the digital divide too. Um, but that's why I think what museums can be doing better is creating multiple ways to access in a variety of platforms.

Naomi: All right. Well, last but not least. What do you think is the most important part of your work?

Melissa: I mean for me, the most important part is the representation of our humanity. I think through art and culture objects. And I think it's really important that we have time with things from the past and, you know, contemporary art as well, because it gives us pause.

I think there's a mindfulness in that when you're engaging with an object or a visual object or visual description that helps us think about, like, there's not a lot of other creatures on this planet that make art or take time to create the objects that are around us. There's something super telling about that.

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And I find artists are often folks who are really thoughtful and engaged in what's happening in their cultural moment. And. At a time where we find ourselves trying to re envision the way that we've structured the world. Um, I think it's incredibly important to be around that art and be around culture to see what we've done before.

Again, as I've said to think about it in the present and to help reinvision a better future and as kind of contact zones, contact objects, you can have conversations around art, that I... It just blows my mind. And I mean, there's moments too, just to share. I also work with, um, the Alzheimer's society and there's more than I can count on my hands moments where we've seen somebody who, um, has maybe perhaps been nonverbal for a very long period of time and opening up around an art piece.

Um, or, you know, even during a visual description, the conversations that happen on the tours afterwards to better comprehend what that art object looks like quickly move into interpretation conversations about things around us. So. To me, it's about making those connections, um, around people and being inspired by what we could actually really do as, as the human race.

Naomi: That is so exciting to hear. I've heard about music therapy for folks with dementia or Alzheimer's, but I hadn't thought about using visual art to elicit those emotions attached to memories and, and other feelings about the piece. So that is really neat.

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Melissa: The program really started from meet me at MoMA, which has this incredible website that you can see all this incredible research they did as well.

And I know, again, it was a program that started at the AGO and around 2010, where, uh, we worked closely with MoMA to develop it. And we've, it's been a longstanding partnership because you really can see tangible, um, It really art activate your brain and your Synopsys in a different way, like kind of fires up your brain and even talking about it, even being a around it, even engaging in some form of creativity.

Um, and that's why I keep calling out the notion of wellbeing, because if we think about health holistically, then having access to arts and culture, um, is incredibly important.

Naomi: Absolutely. So. Is there anything that you want to mention that we haven't talked about yet before we wrap up?

Melissa: I don't think so? Is there anything you want me to share?

Naomi: I know you said you wanted to talk about human rights. I just wanted to make sure you had said whatever piece that you wanted to say about that.

Melissa: I think I fumbled over it, but I think it's there. Really. I mean, the only other thing I would say is just, um, there is actually a review of empirical literature that concluded that engagement with artistic activities, either as an observer or of the creative efforts of others or as an initiator of their own creative efforts can enhance mood, emotions and other psychological states and the WHO found the world health organization found that art specifically has positive overall effects for mental and physical health at all stages of life, which is just, I mean, that's, that's why we need to create access.

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Naomi: Yeah. That's why we need the arts. We need to, you know, I feel like arts advocacy is a huge piece as well in terms of explaining why it's important. I think you provided really great reasons, whether it's the wellbeing, whether it's the fact that everyone should have the right to participate in culture and engage with art, whether it's doing it yourself or creating it.

So I guess all that is to say is. That it is important for us, right, to continue to advocate for that access, whether it's listeners, whether it's Melissa, whether it's me, you know, as allies to do that. So I hope we continue to do that going into the future.

Melissa: For sure. Cause it's all a structure we can undo. There is no reason we need to maintain status quo. There is no reason we have to maintain any of the things that we currently have in place.

Naomi: All right. Well, thank you very much for your time Melissa.

Melissa: Thank you, Naomi. I hope this is good.

Naomi: I definitely think so.

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Troy: That's it for this episode. Thanks for tuning in. We hope that you enjoyed it as much as we enjoy doing the show. Join us next time for another episode of Living Blind. Special thanks to today's guests, John Ray and Melissa Smith, our host Naomi, and the entire team at BALANCE for Blind Adults. If you liked what you heard today, feel free to subscribe or follow us on whatever platform you're listening on.

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