Discovering Art …Through Touch!

Have you ever noticed your colleagues and a few guests wearing gloves as they head up to the galleries? We hope this article encourages docents to consider being trained to help low and no vision guests experience art through touch. As Nancy Kelly has said many times after giving a touch tour, “I always learn so much from every touch tour I give.” So true and we hope others will consider becoming involved in these very rewarding and important tours.

Touch tours are offered for children and adults who have no or low vision. Mia curators have approved 42 objects that may be touched on these tours. A docent usually has at most three guests and plans a route just like a regular tour. Each docent will also develop a theme to enhance the 3 or 4 objects chosen for guests to experience.

There are four elements that may be utilized on touch tours:

* Help guests touch approved objects (see the complete approved list on the IPE site)
* Use elaborate Verbal Descriptions for objects we are unable to touch
* Help guests experience Tactile Boards-professional boards that replicate a painting
* Introduce Essence Boards-small boards with just the essence of a painting or object that cannot be touched. On one side guests may touch the essence of the object and on the other side a color print of the whole object is affixed allowing low vision guests to look closely at the work of art.

This fall we plan to host another Essence Board creation event. Begin thinking about an object you believe would make a good Essence Board. By the way these boards may be used on regular tours. The creation session will be a come as you can all day event in one of the museums studio rooms. Materials will be provided but participants may also bring supplies. Check the docent cupboards for the current box of Essence Boards and feel free to use them on tours.

Our team hopes more docents will consider doing Touch Tours. We are also hoping docents may be interested in a Study Group to consider best practices for touring guests for whom accessibility accommodations are needed for a better museum experience. If interested in participating in any area mentioned above please talk to or email Fran Megarry at: megar003@umn.edu

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