

Accessible initiatives in Manila and Cape Town

Art Beyond Sight, a New York City based NGO, has been coordinating for the past decade an international museum of more than 250 museums that work to make their collections accessible to visitors with disabilities. Among its International members, two museums stand out. The Iziko South African National Gallery, which has been offering accessible programs since 1977, and the *Metropolitan Museum of Manila*, which pioneered access for 3.7 million visually impaired Filipinos.

About a year ago a group of educators from Manila visited Art beyond Sight's NYC office to discuss possible approaches to increasing accessibility to museums in the Filipino capital. Not long after that The *Metropolitan Museum of Manila* launched an extensive and innovative program entitled *Touch the Artist's Vision*, which includes touchable works of art, tactile images of artwork that cannot be touched, braille text, and audio descriptions. The Touch the Artist's Vision program provides professional development workshops for museum staff and educators, but more importantly, it takes cultural education for beyond the Metropolitan Museum's wall through a series of tactile books used by visually impaired students around the city.

The Meaningful Access Program (MAP) offered at the Iziko South African National Gallery aspires to convey the full meaning of art, artist' inspirations and process through a variety of multi-sensory methods discussions, and workshops in which participants explore art materials and techniques, and their own creativity. These programs are attracting visitors of diverse age groups, races, and economic backgrounds.

Although MAP works closely with the National Gallery, it is an independent group of retired educators and therapists that run more than 30 remarkable multi-sensory programs in a number of Cape Town's museums on a small budget. During some workshops, participants decorated drums as a group project in response to an exhibition of traditional African musical instruments: at others they created sculptures depicting 'freedom' in response to an exhibition about the lives of three South Africans. Nobel Prize winners: Albert Lulhuli, Frederik Willem de Klerk, and Nelson Mandela.

Raising awareness of these exemplary programs is essential and encourage emulation in other countries.

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