

Met Museum: Let the Blind See

Let the blind see. As exaggerated as it sounds, this is, in essence, the challenge that the Metropolitan Museum of Manila has taken upon itself with its recently launched program Touch the Artist's Vision specifically designed for the visually impaired. A total of 3.7 million Filipinos were saddled with this condition as of 2002. Few are aware that the Philippines ranks the third highest in the world in terms of a visually impaired population.

A first in museums throughout the country, and implemented with the generous support of Rotary Club of San Juan del Monte District 3800 together with Resources for the Blind, Data Computer Forms Inc., and Wild Sound Recording Studio, this program now makes a trip to the Met, a visual art museum, a worthwhile experience for those suffering from vision loss. Before this, visiting an art exhibit was a ridiculous and futile activity for the unsighted.

Through special facilities that utilize the other senses, the Met now offers the visually impaired the opportunity to also "see" paintings and have comparable experiences with the sighted museumgoers. These facilities are initially available for two of the Met's exhibit: "Postura," which features the portraits painted by Romulo Galicano and Filipiniana wear designed by Patis Tesoro; and "Sensorium," tactile works by Allision David. In the future, these facilities will be made available in all the exhibits located within the three floors of the Met.

These new components for the unsighted are composed of bilingual Braille captions (Filipino and English), bilingual audio guides, and tactile diagrams. The audio guides work in tandem with tactile diagrams. A tactile diagram

translates the actual painting using lines and varying textures produced on specialty paper. The audio then "guides" the hand of the blind in touching the diagram and describes the part of the painting being felt.

Complementing these new facilities are various activities designed to test the program's effectiveness, promote its wide use, and advocate similar programs to other institutions.

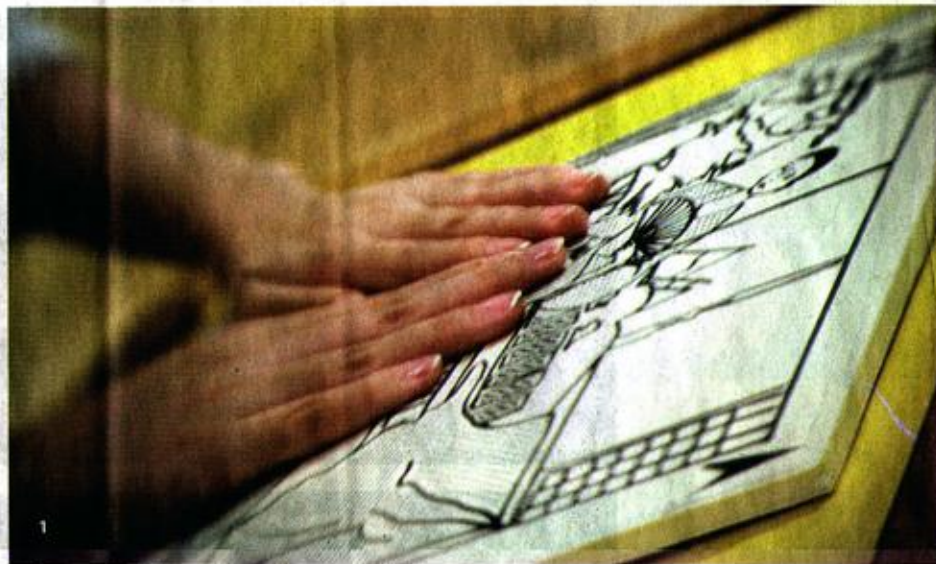
Last June 25, the Met hosted a group of blind young adults to test the facilities. It was an exciting experience for these first-time museum visitors. Their glowing responses affirmed the merit of developing a program for the marginalized sector of the society. Members of the Camera Club of the Philippines gamely volunteered to take priceless pictures that captured the sighted and the unsighted enjoying the Met's exhibits side by side

Last July 30, the Met hosted a seminar for professionals in the museum and similar quasi-educational institutions to reiterate the need to develop effective programs for people with disabilities. Several other programs are being lined up for the future.

In pursuit of its thrust to make art truly for all, the Met continues to work with institutions of diverse specializations and resources to further enhance the impact of the Touch the Artist's Vision program.

For more inquiries, please email info@metmuseum.ph.

The Metropolitan Museum of Manila is located at the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Complex, Roxas Boulevard, Manila. Museum hours are from 9 a.m. – 6 p.m., Monday to Saturday. Visit the Met's website at www.metmuseum.ph.



1) Feeling the art with her hands, a sensory delight for an art student. 2) Hands that feel the Messiah. 3) Annette Lee Esperaz of Rotary club of San Juan del Monte (in black) guiding visually impaired guests. 4) With Garri Apolonio, education officer of MET Museum and Galliver Enverga, who is visually handicapped.