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**Reflections on Access:
Disability in Curatorial Practice**

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Abstract

Access is a vital tool to deploy within a critical disability curatorial practice and can embody both conceptual and physical possibilities, whereby the very idea of access can be discovered in an artist's work, and, at the same time, be productively curated into both gallery spaces and the exhibition of the artwork. This essay reflects on the author's critical disability curatorial practice with the exhibitions *Marking Blind* (2015) and *Sweet Gongs Vibrating* (2016). Through the curation of works by Raphaëlle de Groot and Carmen Papalia, and through the artist curator relationship between the artists and the curator, the author of this paper, both exhibitions incorporated access in order to benefit the artists, the artworks, as well as diverse audiences. This paper argues that through the guidance of the curator, access can be incorporated into the exhibition in highly imaginative and artistic ways.

Keywords

disability art, disability aesthetics, access, disability curatorial practice, accessible curatorial practice

**Reflections on Access:
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Introduction: Curators' accessing access

My stake in the work of access is from the perspective of a curator who identifies as physically disabled. My interest in making my exhibitions accessible connects to the ways I take up disability and the disabled body as an issue of social justice. I have been deploying access in my curatorial practice since 2011 with the intention of transforming reductive interpretations of the disabled body, and to introduce audiences to "disability aesthetics," a concept coined by Tobin Siebers that describes (2010). Siebers 'called out' art history, because he indicated that disability is, in fact, everywhere present in contemporary art, because nondisabled contemporary artists 'see' the aesthetic merits of disability in art, ranging from the work of Pablo Picasso to Francis Bacon. Thus it was Siebers who began to centre disability within canonical art history. Siebers was one of the first to offer a studied, documented, and historical trajectory of where disability studies and contemporary art productively intersect. My projects have also explored activist positions and aesthetics within specific disabled community groups, including people with dwarfism, D/deaf people and hearing-impaired people, and blind and visually impaired people.

According to Elizabeth Ellcessor, access typically encompasses qualities of ease which might involve, for example, "user-friendliness of a system, or financial affordability" (2026, 6). "User-friendliness" can be productively incorporated into an active curatorial engagement with artists who use access as a conceptual framework in their practice. For example, an artist may explore the practice of audio description in their work, separate from the audio description developed by a museum staff member. As Georgina Kleege (2016) writes, "Audio description is

the umbrella term for techniques meant to make visual media accessible to blind people”—but they also introduce a new modality of digesting visual information, regardless if the user is blind, visually impaired, or sighted (p. 89). In this way, the curator’s and the artist’s interpretations of access are conflated and juxtaposed, providing a dynamic dialogic exchange between the physical artwork, exhibition space, and the conceptual translation of the work.

This essay reflects on my curatorial practice in two recent exhibitions: *Marking Blind* (2015), commissioned by Arts and Disability Ireland, and *Sweet Gongs Vibrating* (2016), exhibited at the San Diego Art Institute (2016). I explore the work of various artists but focus in particular on works by contemporary Canadian artists Raphaëlle de Groot and Carmen Papalia, whose works were included in both exhibitions. I trace their artistic processes from *Marking Blind* to *Sweet Gongs Vibrating* as they explore access in relation to my curatorial efforts to instill new modalities of accessibility into the exhibitions¹.

Marking Blind

Marking Blind is a virtual exhibition commissioned by Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) that focuses on the following critical questions: How is visual impairment marked by contemporary artists, both physically and conceptually? What can the markings created by blind and non-blind artists tell us about the way that the blind person experiences art, and in turn, how might these works mark the blind subject²? The exhibition showcases the work of Canadian artists de Groot and Papalia alongside the work of American artists Robert Morris and Alice Wingwall, all of

¹ This essay follows from a number of my recently published articles that also consider strategies and case studies on curatorial and access, including “Disabling’ the Museum: Curator as Infrastructural Activist,” published in the *Journal of Visual Arts Practice* in 2013 and “Crippling Cyberspace: A Contemporary Virtual Art Exhibition,” published in the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*.

² *Marking Blind* was launched on the ADI's website in March 2015 and is currently being hosted on the old version of the home page (<http://old.adiarts.ie/curated-space>) while the new website is developed.

whom have different relationships to blindness and visual impairment. The project is composed of existing and newly commissioned multi-sensorial works that explore what the visual, tactile, and aural qualities of blind-based art-making might look like, feel like, and sound like, when received through the filter of cyberspace as a mode of engagement. The work spans drawing, photography, video/performance, sculpture, translations, re-interpretations of canonical works from art history, and a collaborative audio-visual exchange involving transcription, which I describe further later in this essay.

Marking Blind calls into question ocularcentrism: the presumption that vision is both normal and primal. The conceptual framings for the artwork in this exhibition switch back and forth between the ostensible normative nature of vision and a more exploratory and experimental expression of sensing that conveys an intact, multi-sensorial experience and further, indicates that a hierarchy of senses that privileges vision explodes in profound directions when multi-sensorial expressions are embraced. The exhibition touches on how portrayals and representations of blindness mark the blind subject in both invigorating and complex ways. Papalia and Wingwall present works that express their own lived experiences of blindness through their work, of life as 'non-visual learners.' Morris and de Groot purposefully blind themselves in order to induce the state of not seeing as a means of achieving new experimental conceptual and physical outcomes. Both de Groot and Morris have a long-standing relationship to blinding, and while neither of them identify as blind, they have both worked intimately with individuals or groups who are blind or visually impaired. They believe that the act of art-making in and through blindness offers both a destabilization of painting, modernism and art history itself, which has much potential for transforming the typically reductive position of the blind subject.

All of the artists expand their sense of space. I explore Papalia's and de Groot's works as examples of artistic practices of access and also explore interpretation and translation as acts of accessibility that further expand and complicate how we think about access in relation to art and curatorial practice.

See For Yourself: A body schema of access

In 2015, Carmen Papalia developed a new series of works entitled *See For Yourself* for the *Marking Blind* exhibition that investigate the practice and experience of visual description. In a gallery setting, visual description is typically offered as a pre-recorded voice-over description of the exhibition that can be played and heard through a small device that visitors carry or wear as they move through the gallery. Papalia, however, prefers description by live voices, which he feels offer a more connected and embodied experience than that of listening to recorded audio descriptions. Further, he understands that live description decenters the visual experience of art by drawing our attention to both seeing and describing as modes of interpretation. Papalia thus positions live description as an open model for access that plays out through a relational exchange between people.

In *See For Yourself*, Papalia attempts to illustrate visual description as a creative process. He commissioned seven participants to write visual descriptions of significant art-historical, two-dimensional works, such as Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1484-1486), Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819), and Pablo Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror* (1932). Following this, he invited another seven participants to make two-dimensional visual translations of the visual descriptions created by the first set of participants. Each artist who produced a visual translation was given only the written description to work from; the title of the

artwork and the artist from which it was derived was not disclosed so as not to influence the artist's description. When displayed, the visual translation stands as the visual artwork and the visual description of the historical artwork serves as an alternate title for the artwork that it describes.



Figure 1: Carmen Papalia, *See For Yourself* (2015). John Muse created the visual description of Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819) and Rozzell Medina created the visual translation from Muse's description, pictured above.

Image description: A collage photograph of muscular nude men and men in speedos on a wood platform resting on the ocean. The sky is filled with clouds and lightning. One of the men waves a Canadian flag in his left hand. In the foreground, along the bottom of the frame, there is a composite of human hands woven together. Towards the back of the wooden platform is a pile of towels folded up neatly.

Papalia chose a diverse group of people to participate in *See For Yourself* from his own relationship circles, including close friends, mentors, family members, artists that he has mentored, and those with whom he shares community. Of the 14 participants, some acted as

visual describers (those who contributed the text-based portions of the project) and others as visual translators (those who contributed the image-based portions of the project). Papalia wanted *See For Yourself* to capture numerous visual and narrative styles to reflect the subjective and relational nature of the translation generated through visual description. He writes, "Of course, when you leave creative license in the hands of others you never know what you're going to get—but that reflects the process of visual description pretty well, I think. Also, since each piece is a reflection of the aesthetic practice of the participant who made it, the subjectivity in visual description comes through, too" (2015). The process of translation and visual description came full circle in *See For Yourself* when Papalia's partner, Kristin Rochelle Lantz, provided a final live visual description of each visually translated artwork for him. Upon hearing Lantz's descriptions, Papalia was surprised by the resulting artworks – some, he says, were predictable, while others made him laugh. The project became a poetic sequence, through-line and layering of complex description and translation. There is a type of meta-access at play, given that Papalia both begins and ends with visual description, first through text, then concluding with audio, with an image sandwiched in the middle. While the image is at the halfway point of the sequence, it is at the same time decentered amidst the various modalities of access – a complicated and yet energizing bundle of words and images. The image becomes one prong in the layering that is not necessarily more important or more informative than the other components; rather, the image is just a component of Papalia's journey through representation/vision, characterized by communication and collaboration. Through *See For Yourself*, one comes to observe an experimental study of the relational exchange of access that is both requested, and consequently provided, through translation. This project might also lead us to understand the potential for unexpected and mutual connection through the very practice of access itself as a new subfield of

phenomenology.

Study 5, A New Place: A sensorial study of place

Raphaëlle de Groot sets up various physical and situational constraints in her performance-based practice in which she obstructs her vision using a blindfold, donning restrictive wear, or by covering up her face. While this work has a potential for controversy given that it may be read as a simulation exercise, I offer de Groot's work to audiences so that they may be able to contemplate how her experience of loss through a loss of vision may be either similar or different than experiences of blindness.³ I want the audience to consider from ethical and conceptual positions whether these comparisons should even be made.

I take seriously how de Groot strives to work artistically outside the purview of vision, in 'un-mastery,' such as to instil a state of dispossession and of loss: loss of one's bearings, loss of control, loss of self-image. From her perspective, to be an artist is to experience one's limits, to shake up the idea of a static reality, to break the fixed patterns, and to work in a movement that looks for disorientation and accepts discomfort. During her performances, I have been particularly interested in how she invites audience members to film her as a way for us to participate in the experience. De Groot says this process originally served to document her experiments and serve as another means of interpretation but after several performances, the camera seemed to become an "extension of de Groot's eye, turning its gaze upon her to become at once its source and point of impact" (Déry, 2006).

My criticism of de Groot's performance work is that while audience members may watch

³ Simulation activities are widely critiqued within disability studies for how they collapse nuanced and varied experiences of disability into a singular experience of disorientation and struggle thereby reifying the ableist understanding of the life of disability as a diminished one. For more information on the complexities of simulation with disability studies discourse, refer to Sheryl Burgstahler, and Tanis Doe, "Disability-related Simulations: If, When, and How to Use Them in Professional Development," *Review of Disability Studies*, 1(2), 2014, 4-17

and listen to de Groot as she tapes various objects to her body, such as prosthetic legs and arms, or watch as she moves about a space or positions herself on a pulley, as they did for her 2006 work, *En Exercice*, at Galerie l'UQAM in Montreal, ultimately it is impossible for them to experience her embodiment. For example, how can the audience feel the weight of the performance detritus as it accumulated on the artist's body, or smell the stench of the tape against the artist's nostrils or feel the stickiness of the tape against her lips? The artist did not succeed at bringing the invisible - or whatever visibility she had - to the surface for the audience, nor did she succeed at demonstrating all of her other sensorial experiences in the same manoeuvres within her *En Exercice* project. Thus, the artist resorted to falling back on giving the audience a visual means of experiencing her work in multiple temporal formats, in real time and digital time, where an individual recording could be played over and over again and shared with a public. De Groot's eye was not only given over to the audience's eye, but the audience's eye(s) became the God's eye, the seminal Foucauldian panopticon overseeing all activity, while the artist was unable to return the gaze (1996).

What should we make of de Groot's experiences in this journey through a foreign space? How do we access that which is ineffable, incoherent, and that which does not yet have adequate vocabulary to express these perceptions that change by the minute, every day? I would argue that de Groot's performance of impairment gives rise to these new perceptible moments. Yet despite the success of de Groot's work in sharing new orientations within a gallery-based performance series, I am not sure that the artist is critically engaging in a phenomenology of lived experience that can be adequately shared with her public beyond merely visual documentation.

De Groot's *Study 5, A New Place* (2015), is a multi-sensorial eight-minute video. This video was an attempt by de Groot to engage with a critique I offered on some of her earlier

performance work in which I challenged her to critically engage in a phenomenology of lived experience and convey the experience of her embodiment to audiences. *Study 5, A New Place* video was shot in the backyard of a house in a small fishing village in Florianopolis, Brazil. Over a period of six to eight weeks, the artist collected miscellaneous detritus and rubbish found on the streets and on the beach during her daily walks. She also collected the paper bags that came from the grocery store with the bread and pastries she bought. The video is a visual and aural study of these collected materials, but also, through these materials, the video ultimately becomes a documentation of the place and the life that she discovered while she was temporarily living in Brazil. De Groot engages in the performative action of conglomerating these materials on her head. The debris and paper create a blinding mask that she wears over her head, gradually obstructing her sight. De Groot describes the experience as a kind of composite of visual impairment: "I can't see through the mask and the mask is made without me seeing what it looks like" (2015). This creation of her blinding mask is an action that she repeats with variations and different degrees of complexity. In this particular study, it is the first time that the artist explores unmaking the head, or mask, as much as making it. In other words, we get to witness de Groot unravelling her mask, as well as the creation of it.

Study 5, A New Place offers compelling video and sound capture that depict the embodied perspective of de Groot's performance. The action is recorded from three viewpoints: one is a capture from the artist's forehead, another is from her hand, and the last one is from a cameraperson. The first two are blind viewpoints: there is no eye behind the camera framing the action, as the devices, which also record audio, are strapped directly onto de Groot's body. The study then also becomes one of the beautiful sensorial experience of the actions she is

performing on herself, the image and sound recording devices probe this experience up close, almost from within, as if they were parts or extensions of her skin, hands, ears, and eyes.

The video editing is remarkable for the way it presents multiple perspectives. De Groot describes the editing of the piece like a study within the study. She says, "I wanted the viewer to gradually travel between the various viewpoints, be in the eyes that are not seeing but yet visualizing, be in the skin that is sensing and feeling, be in the ears. I also edited it from my own blinded perspective, wanting the viewer to experience blindness through sight" (2015).

Oftentimes, the images in *Study 5, A New Place* are abstract; the sounds are the crunching of paper beneath exploratory fingertips. Once recorded, this type of 'internal' viewpoint allows both the artist and the audience to see the experience, to look at it as material form. The record can never substitute the lived experience, but, in this case, de Groot provides a sensory simulation of it. *Study 5, A New Place* is an attempt to measure and qualify the difference between the recorded images and sounds from within and the artist's own physical and sensorial memory of the experience itself.



Figure 2: Screen shot of Raphaëlle de Groot's video, *Study 5, A New Place* (2015);

Image description: Raphaëlle de Groot wears a grey tank top and covers her entire head with scraps of paper. Her hands reach up towards her head to assemble the mask-like creation. She stands against a nature-background with rocks and plants.



Figure 3: Screen shot from Raphaëlle de Groot's video, *Study 5, A New Place* (2015)

Image description: A close-up of fingers grasping at a crumpled paper bag filled with black charcoal.

Sweet Gongs Vibrating

Sweet Gongs Vibrating opened in March 2016 at the San Diego Art Institute as the culmination of a four-month curatorial residency I did at the Institute. *Sweet Gongs Vibrating* was a multimedia, multisensory exhibition that broke with the ocularcentric by embracing a myriad of modes of perception with work by 20 artists. This project aspired to activate the sensorial qualities of objects to illustrate alternative narratives of access, place, and space for the benefit of a more diverse audience, especially for people with visual impairments and/or blindness. As curator, I was especially interested in challenging the ocularcentric modality of curating exhibitions, specifically the tendency to rely on the convention that objects must be experienced

through vision alone. For *Sweet Gongs Vibrating*, I wanted visitors to be able to touch all of the works in the exhibition, to be able learn new information about a body, a material, or a place through the sweet taste of ice cream, the gong of a sculpture, or the vibration in a wall, for example.

The artists in this exhibition explored the multi-modal possibilities of sculpture, site-specific installation, video, and works on paper, constituting an exciting and accessible template for how one might glean untold accounts of everyday surroundings. Each artist was invited to either contribute existent or create new site-specific work. Each piece encouraged audiences to engage sensorially through touch, sound, smell, sight and vibration, and intended to provoke experiences of creative and conceptual access.

The artwork in the show stimulated a number of sensory functions in the human body, including Cooper Baker's *Giant Spectrum* (2016), an interactive audio-visual wall piece that displayed a moving spectral representation of live sound in the gallery through the flashing of lights. Much like light, sound is comprised of many different frequencies, and different sounds contain frequencies with varying amplitudes. This relates to the sensory experience of access because as sounds occur in the space, the piece shows a moving, visual spectral display. The piece interacts with background sound present in the gallery and audiences interact with the piece by making sound. As a visitor talks, yells, sings, claps, whistles, stamps their feet on the ground, or plays music, the piece displays the audio spectrum of the sound they are making. The piece was effective insofar as audiences were able to witness how movement, sound, and vision could function together in an artwork, but it also operated as an inclusive device, as a means of access, in the way that its flashing lights could give Deaf or hearing impaired people visual cues

that articulate sounds in the immediate environment. By rendering sound into light, Baker's *Giant Spectrum* provided multiple sensory components to this piece.

Wendy Jacob's *Three threads and a thrum (for D.B.)*, (2016)⁴ is another example of the artist inviting sensorial engagement with her work. Jacob inserted the vibrational purr of a friend's cat into a drywalled section of the gallery, creating a sound object that you could sense with your body. Artist Aaron McPeake, who identifies as visually impaired, created *Gongs Vibrating* (2016), a series of bronze gongs suspended from the ceiling with black string. Each gong elicited rich timbres and tones upon contact with a hand-held swinging mallet, which again elicited a rich conversation between movement, sound, and vision. Visitors could engage with the chain reaction of sensorial stimuli that the work offered, by haptically directing the mallet into contact with the gongs, eliciting sound, vibration and movement as the gongs swayed under the pressure of the mallet.

All of these artworks proved very successful as modes of multi-sensorial engagement in the gallery according to my observations, which were captured during my time sitting in the gallery for two days a week over a period of eight weeks to witness audience reactions firsthand.

Three-Dimensions of *Study 5, A New Place*

In 2016, I returned to de Groot's video, *Study 5, A New Place*, for *Sweet Gongs Vibrating*. The work had only been exhibited and experienced virtually and I felt that the *Sweet Gongs Vibrating* exhibition would be a perfect opportunity to explore de Groot's video

⁴ In 1993 Jacob animated a wall in the (then) new Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego to expand and contract with the steady pace of breathing, an action inspired by the artist's experience of sitting with her father while he was in a coma. *Three threads an a thrum (for D.B.)* is an echo of her earlier wall, and addresses comfort in the face of a recent loss. This work did not rely on vision or hearing.

performance tactilely through installation. I asked de Groot if she would display the original found materials used to create her makeshift head-mask alongside the video as an interactive, touch-based component of the work and she agreed. I placed the found materials as a disorderly bundle on top of a pedestal in front of a projection of the video. The projected video literally broke through the flat two-dimensional visual representation on the wall so that the viewer could not only see the physical detritus of what the artist was experimenting with on her face and head, but could actually touch it. I wanted people to explore the varied surfaces of de Groot's papers, ropes, roughly-formed pieces of charcoal, plastic, and other materials. Sighted people could visually observe how de Groot's touching actions mirrored the touching of the same materials taking place by de Groot in the video as she covered her head. Hearing people could hear how the crinkle, crinkle, crunch, crunch noise emerged as a result of hands making contact with crumpled paper was echoed in the sounds emanated from de Groot's same haptics. Extending de Groot's work in this way was a bid to achieve a heightened level of tactile engagement. These are the types of 'creative access' interventions that need to be encouraged as we consider the expansion of the sensorial and haptic activism within our museums and galleries.



Figures 4-5: Raphaëlle de Groot, installation shots of *Study 5, A New Place* (2015) in *Sweet Gongs Vibrating*, San Diego Art Institute, 2016, curated by Amanda Cachia.

Image descriptions: (left) Installation of a pedestal displaying a pile of found materials adjacent to a wall projection showing an image of artist Raphaëlle de Groot covering her head with the same material found on the pedestal. (right) This is a detail of the image shown of the left where the materials consisting of brown paper and scraps appear in the foreground in focus, with the video projection against the wall in the background appearing blurred.

White Cane Amplified: Shifting the semiotics of the cane

Sweet Gongs Vibrating also included *White Cane, Amplified* (2015), a seventeen-minute video created by Papalia which was originally produced for *The Flesh of the World*, a group exhibition I curated for the University of Toronto in 2015. In *White Cane, Amplified*, Papalia carries out a sonic performance using a megaphone to navigate a busy urban street in Vancouver, British Columbia. The work takes on collaborative and performative purpose when he calls out to passersby, introduces himself as blind and asks them to please help him cross the street. Here, the artist takes symbolic control over the visual connotations of the cane, for rather than letting the cane speak for itself as a visual and symbolic device, he instead strives to acquire agency by aurally positioning himself within the urban landscape using a megaphone. In this process he becomes both vulnerable and resolute all at once. In contrast to the sound produced by the white cane's encounter with objects in the environment around him, Papalia uses the megaphone to guide the sound of his own voice into resonance across the atmosphere and, he hopes, into the ears of other bodies. Here, Papalia's reliance on other bodies to help him navigate through space is risky given the possibility of no one actually helping him. In other words, there is a risk that his body will remain immobile instead of mobile. Indeed, as we observe in the video, for the most part there is barely anyone around to take him from point A to B as he undertakes his journey. Occasionally we see a car zoom by but the only people we see leading Papalia across the busy intersection, eventually, are two young boys who are clearly curious about Papalia and his embodiment.

Papalia felt ambivalent about calling himself 'blind' through his megaphone to passers-by as he feels so strongly about identifying as a non-visual learner. However he felt that using the term 'blind,' a more recognizable term for the average pedestrian, might reduce the risk of the performance. Indeed, Papalia hoped to turn up the volume on the problematic semiotic associations his white cane carries, but the amplification risks reinforcing, rather than necessarily disrupting or transforming, the correlations with the white cane.

In 2013, Papalia developed *Mobility Device*, an earlier video project that also explores the semiotics of the white cane. In *Mobility Device* he innovatively deploys the accompaniment of a high school marching band. In *Mobility Device* Papalia abandons his white cane and replaces it with the Great Centurion Marching Band from Century High School in Santa Ana, California. Papalia collaborated with the band to develop a sonic repertoire of sounds that would carefully indicate different types of commutation and direction: a bellow on the trumpet or a blow on the horn would denote that he was about to cross a street, step over a sidewalk, bump into something, or turn a corner⁵. During the performance, the band follows Papalia playing a sequence of repetitive sounds that act as a guide for him as he traverses unfamiliar streets and spaces. Instead of using the tactility of the white cane, Papalia instead makes a sensorial transition into a sonic experience where human bodies, along with other types of objects, and public spaces are part of the project. The instruments and the people playing them become Papalia's mobility device, and Papalia relies on them – human bodies and their accompanying sounds – to guide him. Papalia is hands-free, so to speak, and relinquishes control by giving it over to the marching band to be his guide. With *Mobility Device*, members of the marching band

⁵ To learn more, visit the following article by Carolina A. Miranda, "Leading the Blind: A Marching Band Helps An Artist Navigate Santa Ana," *KCET ArtBound*, May 30, 2013, <http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/orange/carmen-papalia-grand-central-art-center.html> Accessed January 14, 2016

become collaborators and implicated in Papalia's safety and well-being. In the video documentation of the performance, produced by the Grand Central Art Center, one of the marching band students expressed a fear of the possibility of Papalia injuring himself, or even getting killed; the students in the band were very aware of their role as the prosthesis for Papalia and the responsibility that this entailed.



Figure 6: Carmen Papalia, still from the video, *White Cane, Amplified*, 2015, Vancouver, BC

Image description: Carmen Papalia, a bearded white man holding a megaphone up to his mouth with his left hand. He wears a blue long-sleeved collared shirt, a grey vest and a grey trilby hat. He looks as though he is standing on a sidewalk because there are parked cars on each side of the road in the image, and the background is filled with a green hedge and buildings.

Conclusion: Material and ideological access in the museum

Throughout this paper, I have examined a constellation of approaches to artistic access in order to illustrate its conceptual and physical possibilities for the artist, curator, and, ultimately, the audience who engages with the artwork. Access has both material and ideological components that are meant to stimulate physical, cognitive, and sensorial functions of the human body, proving that it is not one-dimensional. Through the evolving art practices of two contemporary artists, Raphaëlle de Groot and Carmen Papalia, we see how the work of artistic access might be taken up in conversation with my own approach as curator. Both de Groot and Papalia explore the temporary or permanent blind and/or visually impaired experience in their own lives and this

motivates my curatorial approach to think about how to make their work even more palpable for all audiences, but especially for blind and visually-impaired audiences to experience in the gallery by incorporating other sensorial experiences into the work that include tactile elements, sound, captions, and audio description. *Marking Blind* and *Sweet Gongs Vibrating* provided an opportunity to cultivate the artist/curator relationship and at the same time the accessibility of the artworks. I have found us in a responsive and receptive exchange. The spirit of access suggests that access is a fluid process that takes place between the curator and artist(s) in which each party reaches consensus on what access should mean in a particular time and place for a particular exhibition and audience. This also means advocating for a politics of access that takes into consideration how access will be seen, felt, and heard to both privilege and prioritize a complexly-embodied audience. As the examples in this paper demonstrate, when the artist/curator relationship centralizes access in the exhibition, the artwork evolves. Access is not monolithic, nor uniform; it is always variable and dependent on a number of conditions. When the artist and curator engage imaginatively with the work of access, we disrupt and transform both the standardized curatorial practice and the museum and gallery experience for the visitor. With access at the centre, vital new approaches to art-making and thinking will thrive.

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