

The Arts

Multisensory Art



One of art's most important qualities is its ability to evolve, including the ways it is created and displayed. Museums are pairing works of art with sounds, smells, and other sensations in exciting new exhibitions. They can be enjoyed by sighted people and those with blindness or low vision.

Pre-Reading Questions

Discuss these questions in pairs.

1. What kind of art do you like? Do you have any favorite artists?
2. Have you been to any good museums lately? If so, what did you enjoy about the visit?
3. Art lovers who have vision problems may have trouble seeing exhibitions. Can you think of any ways to help them enjoy museums?

Vocabulary Warm-up



Track 2

A Read and listen to this list of the unit's target vocabulary. Write the letter of the target word or phrase next to the correct definition.

a. abstract	f. exhibition	k. on hand
b. acuity	g. incorporate	l. portrait
c. ambiance	h. industrial	m. push the envelope
d. contend	i. landscape	n. simulate
e. edible	j. notion	o. tactile

- ___ 1. able to be eaten
- ___ 2. atmosphere or feeling created by a place
- ___ 3. idea; concept
- ___ 4. visual representation (such as a painting) of a person
- ___ 5. state; insist
- ___ 6. related to the sense of touch
- ___ 7. display of artwork or other items
- ___ 8. sharpness (often related to the sense of sight or a mental ability)
- ___ 9. include; make part of
- ___ 10. go beyond current limits; do something new in a field

B Complete each sentence with the correct word or phrase from the list above. Remember to use the correct word form.

1. I don't have any paint brushes _____, but if you need some, we can stop by my studio.
2. To _____ the feeling of floating in space, astronauts practice performing repairs underwater while wearing spacesuits.
3. This _____ has incredibly detailed brushwork on the trees.
4. _____ paintings are often hard to figure out since the artwork may consist entirely of simple shapes and colors.
5. There is a recycling center in the _____ district of the city.

Reading Passage  Track 3

When a painting or sculpture is created, the process is dynamic, with the artist breathing in the workshop smells, listening to street sounds, and feeling the materials that go into the work. However, by the time a piece enters a museum, it becomes an object to be seen and not touched. The traditional **notion** that museum experiences should be entirely visual is being upended by multisensory art installations. They **incorporate** the senses of touch, smell, hearing, and sometimes even taste.

One way to make art multisensory is by adding new display elements to existing pieces. For its Soundscapes **exhibition**, the National Gallery in London invited composers and sound artists to write music to accompany artworks. While viewing Cezanne's *Bathers*, art lovers listened to a composition by Oscar-winner Gabriel Yared. Jamie xx, a DJ, created pulsating electronic music to reflect the painting technique and light patterns of *Coastal Scenes* by Théo van Rysselberghe. Sound has the power to trigger emotions and memories, and the exhibition encouraged art appreciation from a new perspective.

The Tate Sensorium display, featuring works from Tate Britain, took matters to another level. The senses of hearing, smell, touch, and taste were stimulated during viewings of four **abstract** paintings. Near John Latham's *Full Stop*, there was a waist-high device that you placed your hand in. Waves of ultrasound **simulated** puffs of air, creating the sensation of rainfall beneath one's fingers. Hand-made chocolates were offered to viewers of Francis Bacon's *Figure in a Landscape*, with ingredients meant to evoke the mood and **ambiance** of the painting. The critical response to the exhibition was mixed, with purists **contending** that masterpieces should stand on their own, and others welcoming the fresh approach.



A visitor enjoys John Latham's *Full Stop* at the Tate Sensorium.

Entirely new works of art that transcend individual senses are also being produced. The Center of Multisensory Art in Malmö, Sweden, features innovative works such as 3D objects based on photographs. Workshops are also held to discuss new frontiers in art. Another space **pushing the envelope** is the Mori Digital Art Museum in Tokyo, which has 470 projectors and 520 computers. The displays, featuring vibrant colors, touch-activated panels, and more, change as you walk through them, making the experience unique and personal. A turn on the Multi Jumping Universe trampoline creates planets

and black holes around you. Children contribute to the exhibition by having their drawings digitally scanned and added to the Sketch Aquarium. And, while enjoying tea at the museum's En Tea House, you can marvel at visual effects projected into your cup.

When it comes to a complete sensory experience, there's nothing quite like the Museum of Food and Drink. You don't just experience displays – you touch, smell, and eat them. The Brooklyn, New York, museum focuses on the importance of food in our lives and cultures. It contains a "smell synth" that lets you mix 19 scents – including popcorn, cinnamon, and nail polish remover – and then smell your creation. For the exhibition "Chow: Making the Chinese American Restaurant," a chef prepared **edible** samples. On top of that, the museum had an **industrial** fortune cookie machine **on hand**. Making the experience more immersive, visitors wrote fortunes which were inserted into the snacks.

Another positive aspect of multisensory art is its ability to make art inclusive for the estimated 285 million people with low vision or blindness. For the Multisensory Met project at the world-class New York institution, clay, nails, and other materials were used to make a touchable replica of an African sculpture. Scents similar to the original object's were added, and electronics inside the replica buzzed when it was touched. A Material Book was made for another sculpture. It let the handler feel the types of materials that went into the piece, with feathers, wood, and porcupine quills providing a scintillating **tactile** experience.

Going a step further, installations are being created specifically for those with low vision. Artist Andrew Myers inserts screws at different heights into boards, resulting in touchable **portraits**. And, 3D Photoworks makes 3D representations of famous paintings like the *Mona Lisa*, with touch-activated sensors triggering audio descriptions. As these efforts show, the art world thrives on overcoming limitations and stretching our experiences. Multisensory art has the power to add new dimensions to museum visits, regardless of your age or visual **acuity**.

⁵ upend – turn over; challenge ⁶ installation – art exhibition ¹² pulsating – regularly beating ²² puff – small burst ²⁶ evoke – bring out ²⁷ purist – someone who favors the original creation or traditional style ²⁹ transcend – go beyond ³¹ innovative – original and creative ³⁴ vibrant – bold and exciting ³⁶ trampoline – platform that you bounce up and down on ⁵¹ inclusive – welcoming to everyone ⁵³ Met – Metropolitan Museum of Art ⁵⁸ quill – pointy spine sticking out of an animal ⁵⁸ scintillating – very exciting and impressive ⁶⁶ dimension – level; angle

Main Idea

- () What is the main idea of the reading?
 - Art that appeals to senses besides sight can be dynamic and inclusive.
 - Changing the art world requires the support of famous artists and galleries.
 - Multisensory art exhibitions are mainly put on by British museums.
 - Supporters of multisensory art believe every artwork should be touchable.

Detail

- () Which painting's multisensory display made it feel like water was touching your hand?
 - Coastal Scenes*
 - Figure in a Landscape*
 - Full Stop*
 - Bathers*

Vocabulary

- () In line 54, what does "replica" mean?
 - sense
 - material
 - display
 - copy

Analysis

- () What is suggested about people with low vision?
 - Their physical limitations prevent them from understanding art.
 - Nearly 300 million pieces of art have been created for them.
 - Touchable objects help them enjoy new and famous artworks.
 - Every major museum has Material Books which they can feel.
- () What can we infer about the Mori Digital Art Museum?
 - Because of the changing displays, everyone has a different experience.
 - Visitors under 16 years old must be accompanied by an adult.
 - The exhibition incorporates pieces from Malmö and New York.
 - Jumping on the trampoline triggers a camera which takes your picture.

Short Answers

Write a full-sentence answer to each question.

- What four senses were stimulated by the Tate Sensorium exhibition?

- For what purpose are workshops held at the Center of Multisensory Art?

- How does Andrew Myers create portraits?

A Choose the answer that is a synonym for the word or phrase in italics.

- At the workshop, experts were *on hand* to provide advice.
 - referenced
 - available
 - exclusive
- Monet's *landscapes* are known for their beautiful colors and sense of perspective.
 - scenic paintings
 - artistic techniques
 - preparatory efforts
- "Pop-up shops" challenge the *notion* that retail spaces must be permanent.
 - opinion
 - profit
 - outlet
- We love the idea of holding the *exhibition* outdoors, but we'll need a backup plan in case the weather turns bad.
 - show
 - party
 - session
- The fresh flowers and soft light contribute nicely to the gallery's *ambiance*.
 - scent
 - mood
 - width

B Complete each sentence below with one of these words or phrases. Remember to use the correct word form.

edible acuity tactile portrait push the envelope

- Some children's books add cloth and other fabrics to the pages to provide a(n) _____ experience.
- The cake looks real, but unfortunately it is not _____.
- Race car drivers need incredible visual _____ to control their vehicles at high speeds.
- Filmmakers love to _____ by creating complex characters and plots with unexpected developments.
- Many countries' coins and bills feature _____ of famous citizens.

C Choose the correct form of the words in parentheses.

- Some artists (contention / contend) that children create the purist works of art.
- Flight (simulators / simulates) are invaluable tools in pilot training programs.
- (Abstraction / Abstract) ideas are more easily understood when specific examples or details are provided.
- By (incorporated / incorporating) actual objects from factories into her sculptures, the artist makes the pieces relevant and relatable.
- The (industrialized / industrially) reinforced platform can support several tons of weight.

Word Parts

Study the word parts in the chart below. Then read the pairs of sentences that follow. Decide if the second sentence is true or false.

Word Part	Meaning	Examples
ac-	to; towards	account, acquiesce
-pos-	place; put	position, purpose
-um	related to	aquarium, curriculum

- The workshop is scheduled to be held in the auditorium.
People will attend the event in a building designed to hear speeches. (True / False)
- The special effects designer superimposed a second image over the first one.
To create the effect, the designer removed an image from the frame. (True / False)
- The accretion of seaweed on the propeller affected its operation.
The propeller had problems since seaweed was attached to it. (True / False)

Grammar & Usage

Verb + Noun + Infinitive

The structure *verb + noun + infinitive* is useful when a person or group is part of a request, order, or other action. Verbs like “tell, ask, order, want,” and “need” are frequently used.

Ex: We need everyone to keep their voices down near the nursery.

Ex: Did you ask the electrician to check the kitchen’s wiring?

Put the words in the correct sentence order.

- (to bring / reminded / their sketchbooks / Ms. Lincoln / her students).

- (to sing / The singer / asked everyone / together / the last ballad).

- (put the / want us / headphones on / to / Does the tour guide)?

Listening Listen to the conversation. Then answer these questions.



Track 4

- () How did the room with the Picasso artwork make the man feel?
(A) Surprised (B) Sad
(C) Fearful (D) Angry
- () Which aspect of the display did the woman NOT enjoy?
(A) The perfume smell (B) The painting
(C) The flashing light (D) The music
- () What does the man invite the woman to do?
(A) Travel to Central America (B) Attend an exhibition
(C) Take a history course (D) Help display some art

Reading Read this passage. Then answer the questions below.

Museums are making great strides in turning their permanent exhibitions into inclusive spaces for art lovers with visual impairments. Headsets with audio commentary facilitate self-guided tours, as do tactile maps of museum layouts and braille explanations of specific pieces. In New York City, staff-led “description tours” are increasingly available at famous museums.

Even more enthralling are “touch tours” that allow visitors, wearing silk gloves, to feel original art or cast replicas. The Whitney Museum, Louvre, Met, and Guggenheim are among the institutions that have led touch tours. Working with museums are groups like Art Beyond Sight which specialize in making exhibitions more accessible to low-sighted visitors.

- () Which of these means of making museums more inclusive is NOT discussed?
(A) Special maps (B) Audio recordings
(C) Evening visits (D) Braille descriptions
- () Which of the following is true about “touch tours”?
(A) Visitors can wear any type of glove during tours.
(B) Some of the artwork may not be original.
(C) The Louvre has been reluctant to offer such tours.
(D) They are given by every New York museum.
- () What would Art Beyond Sight most likely provide?
(A) Lists of galleries with innovative video exhibits
(B) Guidelines for helping blind museum visitors enjoy art
(C) Recommendations for the best paint mixing techniques
(D) Summaries of medical research on eye diseases