



Module 4

Unit 7: Tactile explorations

Core video transcript

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Transcript

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Hello. This is Elisa Perego from the University of Trieste, Italy. In this ADLAB PRO video, I will define touch, give you some tips on how to choose suitable objects for touch tours, and illustrate some aspects of the tactile exploration procedure. This is Unit 7 (Tactile explorations) in Module 4 ((Semi-) live or recorded AD for static arts and environments).

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In all human beings, touch is a crucial sense for learning and communicating, and a primary means of experiencing the world.

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When sight is absent, however, touch can contribute to fill visual gaps as it becomes an important additional source of information as well as a highly appreciated means for experiencing the aesthetic beauty of objects – especially if this sense is adequately trained and developed.

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Using only words to make art accessible could be a bit restrictive and not fully effective: haptic supports, however, could contribute to transmit the beauty of an object, to influence the aesthetic experience of an artwork, and

to make the art and the overall museum experience more direct, involving and memorable – which applies both to people with and without sight loss.

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Understanding artworks through touch is a process which takes more time than visual perception and it is not immediate – it is in fact, I quote, “successive, slow, analytical, and active”.

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Furthermore, art appreciation through touch can depend on several factors, including for instance the visitors’ familiarity and experience with art; their previous experiences whilst still having sight; their cultural, historical and individual differences, and many more.

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Not all museums or heritage sites provide touch tours for their visitors, or consider the possibility to include self-contained tactile experiences. The service is cost- (and time-) intensive, and it requires forward strategic planning, extensive networking and full participation of a solid team of experts from diverse and complementary fields.

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When planning tactile explorations, you should keep in mind that not all objects are suitable for audio and/or tactile description. You should learn how to select them, and identify the most meaningful within a museum, a gallery, an exhibition, a tour, a site, etc. You should select the most appealing to the touch (and to the eye – in a perspective of comprehensive inclusion for all),

and those which are adequately legible in their original form or in their reproduction.

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It is not possible to give you absolute rules on the way to select items for tactile exploration: this is a process that depends on the context the objects belong to, on their meaning and their physical nature. You should always negotiate your choice with the museum curators while relying on your creativity and documentary study, as well as on your acquired knowledge of the theory and practice of tactile exploration.

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In the National Tile Museum in Lisbon, for instance, the choice of which tile panels should have tactile reliefs was based, among other things, I quote: «on the presence of similar tiles or motifs in contemporary daily life of the Portuguese people». Furthermore, I quote: «elaborate patterns were broken down in sequences of several individual replicas of the most relevant motifs».

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Sometimes original objects can be made available for exploration through touch. This happens when the material of the given object is not fragile or perishable, or when the object is very common and easily replaceable, ...

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...as in the case of the ancient pottery oil lamps in archeological museums, shown in this picture.

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Paintings, artworks and objects, or relevant parts of them, can also be reproduced, so it's not a big deal if the originals are not touchable or meant to be experienced through touch. An excellent example in this respect is the case of tactile museums, such as the Anteros museum in Bologna, Italy, ...

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... where reliefs in white plaster of famous paintings, as the one shown in this picture, are produced and successfully used in guided settings.

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Although audio-guides can be a functional substitute in given circumstances, touch tours work far better if a human guide is present. Face to face favours an immersive experience, it is more interactive, it offers the chance for the visitor to ask questions, and it allows describers to tailor their description around an individual's particular interests.

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During a live touch tour, the guide can also direct the visitor's hands to the right spots of the replica, as shown in the picture. In fact, the tactile exploration procedure is no random process.

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If we consider the bas-relief of a painting, for instance, we should be aware that the process should begin by exploring the outer edges (to convey a rough idea of the dimensions of the object) to later slowly move to the

centre, for a deeper exploration into tactile aspects that might otherwise be overlooked.

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Furthermore, visitors should be encouraged to explore the object with two hands using their palms, fingers and fingertips to investigate the surface, recognise the layout of its components, enjoy the texture and temperature of its material. Especially when a human guide is not there, clear recorded instructions should direct visitors in this direction.

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I hope you have learned some interesting things about tactile exploration in this video. Find out more in our reading list. Bye!

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