

Sztuka dostępna: Accessible Art – encounters with modern art for blind and visually impaired people

Zachęta – National Gallery of Art

Since 2012 Zachęta – National Gallery of Art in Warsaw provides various services entitled “Accessible Art” dedicated to people with physical disability. Among them there are special ones for blind and visually impaired people. They consist in preparing for every exhibition an **audiodescription and typhlografic** materials (materials that can be touched), so that each of Gallery visitors can get to know each piece of art by themselves.

Members of the Gallery staff responsible for making exhibitions accessible to people with physical disability, cooperate with many organizations and institutions working in the field of blindness. The effect of this cooperation is growing popularity of “Accessible Art” meetings and, in long term, increasing accessibility of art to blind and visually impaired people in Poland.



Fot. Paulina E. Rutkowska

The target group of these activities are mainly adult blind and visually impaired people, although Zachęta is open also to other groups with different disabilities and tries to **integrate** them in the meetings. Very important in that matter is the integration of people with different disabilities and without disabilities.

The Gallery is continuously establishing **new contacts** and working closely with organizations, which are active in the field of blindness. These organizations disseminate information about events which are part of “Accessible Art” project. Moreover, Zachęta itself runs communication actions in order to reach as many people as possible: website, mailing, creating events on Facebook, sending out their newsletter to a continually growing number of interested people.

„Accessible Art” has been a permanent activity of Zachęta since July 2012. First event was preceded by **solid preparation**: establishing cooperation with one of the most active organizations in the field of making culture and education more accessible for people with disabilities. After that, Zachęta started with the removal of architectural barriers. Secondly, the Gallery improved its website, so that blind and visually impaired people could use it. The next step was to improve the skills of the team responsible for this project. Educators and coordinators took part in: antidiscrimination workshops, audio description workshop and learned basics of sign language.

The team which organizes these meetings is responsible for:

- coordination of the work of educators who show around the exhibitions and conduct workshops;
- planning the activities, preparing contents of each meeting;
- preparing documentation;
- cooperation with NGO's and other cultural institutions;

The aims and challenges of that team are:

- assuring audiodescription to all pieces of art which are in Zachęta collection (including video arts with subtitles for deaf people);
- creating the list of pieces of art (in collections within Poland), which can be touched by blind and visually impaired people (in cooperation with art curators and conservators);
- creating the encyclopedia of art for deaf people.



Fot. Zachęta „Sztuka Dostępna”

„Accessible Art” meetings take place once a month and deal with the current exhibition in Zachęta, which is no permanent exhibition. It means that there is no prepared audiodescription and typhlografic for these exhibitions.

Each meeting is conducted **by two people**. One of them is responsible for presenting the exhibition and each piece of art by using audiodescription. The second person prepares touchable materials (typhlografics).

This is usually a student of Fine Arts, who is able to find a way to present a piece of art for blind or visually impaired people and has enough skills to create it. Each typhlografic has to be sized and convex.



Fot. A. Zdzieborska

Zachęta also engages **volunteers**, who help blind and visually impaired people in arriving to the Gallery from their houses or from the stops near the Gallery.

There is also a website: otwartazacheta.art.pl, where people can find Gallery resources, documentation from the meetings and materials about exhibitions in form of audiodescription.

Until now, Zachęta has been organizing meetings which concentrated on interpreting exhibitions and permanent collection of the Gallery but soon, they will organize **meetings with artist** which will enable the blind and visually impaired people closer contact with art and its creators.



Members of the team responsible for the “Acessible Art” meetings claim that people who visit the Gallery for the first time are very **interested** in Zachęta’s actions and appear in the next meeting/workshops organized by Zachęta.

Special attention is paid to **the way the people who run the meetings are prepared** for the cooperation with visually disabled people. They get a lot of knowledge about this specific kind of disability, about audiodescription and openness to the needs of a group.



Fot. Dominika Kucner
„Sztuka Dostępna”

Tips for those who want to take on this kind of activity:

- **Listening to people's needs/demands and responding to them.** The most frequent questions regard insufficient information on the website, a person needs to be accompanied by someone in order to arrive to the gallery. Zachęta responds to this kind of demands. These tasks aren't expensive and their fulfilling makes art and this kind of meetings more accessible.
- Preparation of suitable **program** of the meeting, in which there is enough time to discuss each issue with the participants and to use typhlographics and audiodescriptions.
- **Cooperation with other institutions**, which are active in common field, so that you can count on mutuality in activities, e.g. using special equipment which you can borrow from others to prepare materials.
- **Being open for other groups** in organizing meeting for blind and deaf people. It can contribute to a better educational effect.

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