Why Does A Visually Impaired Person Want to Visit an Art Museum

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Introduction

• The research project surveys and interviews people of all ages who have been diagnosed as being blind and who visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art – either in the galleries or via the web – in order to understand:
• their strategies for understanding paintings without vision
• the problems they encounter in museums
• how they imagine or picture paintings or other non-tactile exhibits
• their understanding of visual concepts and visual culture, in particular what they understand by:
  – Colour, tone and texture
  – The concept of a two-dimensional image
  – Perspective and different sizing within images
• if visitors who are born blind or become blind early in life are different from those who have become blind later in life
Aims of the Study

• The aim of this research is to:
  – produce a number of case studies that describe “non-visual” understandings of paintings
  – help teachers and educators understand the teaching of paintings to people who are blind and visually impaired
Objectives of the Study

• The objective of this research is to:
  – inform a greater understanding of how the mind, both visually and non-visually, understands paintings and two-dimensional images, two-dimensional interfaces / images used in the design of webpages and most importantly visual culture
  – inform better designed interfaces and more effective teaching methodologies in museums, classrooms and through educational technology
Methodology Used in the Study

• Open questioned, qualitative interviews with:
  – Visitors to the Metropolitan (four so far)
  – People who have previously visited the Metropolitan (three so far)
  – Students from Schools for the Blind who have and have not visited museums – various (four so far)
  – Teachers from the Metropolitan (two arranged)

• Participant and non-participant observations of visitors’:
  – Touch tours (two so far)
  – Verbal imaging sessions (five so far)
  – Special classes, such as drawing (thanks to Hurricane Irene, none so far)
Classifications of Blindness

• Total Blindness (TB)
  – no light perception

• Minimal Light Perception (MLP)
  – some light perception, but little enough to be usable

• Distorted Vision (DV)
  – light perception, but highly distorted and registered blind, e.g. achromatism, photophobia, tunnel vision, no central vision
Classification of Memory Studied

• No Visual Memory (NVM):
  – Totally blind from birth / Very early totally blind, from infancy, 0-2 years

• Assimilated Blindness (AB):
  – Blind from early childhood but with some light perception, primarily low-visual

• Visual Memory (VM):
  – Blind or low vision after developing strong visual memories
Access Visitors

PILOT STUDY
Three Case Studies of Older Visitors to the Metropolitan Museum

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“Edi”
CASE STUDY 3
Introduction

• Edi is an eighty year old woman, living in New York – unspecified exactly – but originally from a small town in Ohio

• Her visual impairment is macular degeneration

• In addition, many years ago she had an accident after which she told me she had developed a visual impairment – she told me she had cataracts but this could not be verified – and that she had always been “near sighted.”

• In her adult life she had a car license
• She had been blind for the last ten years
• She can tell colours still – however, in cinema “movies look black and white” because of the dark environment; however on television she “sees ‘everything’.”
• In her general environment, she cannot tell the details of things around her
• She can see enough to get around the buildings such as the museum with help
  – She can go on subways and use the steps to walk up and down the levels
• She said that in her apartment building “the entrance is vague”
Early education and culture

• Edi attended mainstream school but not university or college
• She trained as a singer – self taught – and was employed in various clubs around New York
  – She told me she enjoyed her career very much
“ I used to sing jazz, pop... like Edi Gourmet.”
“ I had my own cabaret act.”
• She used to be a member of the Metropolitan visits only very little now. Does not “get around so much.”
“Less and less because I find it harder to get around.”
Her Experiences of Museums & the Arts

• Edi travelled to many galleries when younger, including when she had a weaker visual impairment

• Has been attending The Metropolitan for around fifty years.

• She also attended many other museums around the world as her husband, who died, was a banker; she travelled internationally a great deal – she particularly mentioned the Middle East and Europe
• Did not practice visual art herself as an adult although she remembers doing them at school. She told me was not that interested as she always enjoyed listening to music and singing more than the visual arts.

“I was never good at painting. I never took to it”

“It was never my thing!”

• She did not remember what it was in particular that brought her to the Metropolitan initially – but she did not think it was a particular exhibition or work of art

• She gave up her membership of the museum as she did not use it enough. However, she did enjoy other things about the Metropolitan, such as its movies and lectures – she said they had a “wonderful auditorium”
Preferences in the Visual Arts

- Of the visual art she likes, Edi said that she always preferred the “European paintings”, particularly portraits – she named Rembrandt and Gauguin. She said she liked the Barbizon school of art, but preferred portraits.

“I’ve always loved European paintings... but I love all paintings.”

“I like portraits more than anything else.”

- Of the other visual arts, when asked about sculptures she said that she liked them but immediately turned to discussing ballet and opera, which she said she loved – “anything visual [in music]... Anything theatrical.”
• When prompted she said that she liked to have an emotional connection with the art to enjoy it
  “I like to have an emotional connection, especially with music... I love good music... even going through there [the exhibition]”
• However, she told me that she does not attend ballet much anymore as she cannot see them as much – but she still enjoys going to Broadway shows
  “...because it is more lit, and you can see better... but I’m not all visual”
SH: “So you like this combination of vision and music?”
  “Exactly.”
• She said that she liked to have an emotional connection, but this is caused much more by the music
Electronic Communication

• Edi said that she did not use the internet at all either for art or general browsing – however, she used her impairment as a reason
  “I don’t see well. It's one of those things I don’t have at all. Sorry! I have a friend who looks everything up on the internet for me”
“Camilla”

CASE STUDY 2
Introduction

• Camilla is a seventy one year old woman, living in New Jersey – she is married to “Charles”, our next case study
• She is originally from Atlantic City, New Jersey
• Her original visual impairment was congenital cataracts. However, she lost her sight completely in her mid fifties as her eyes became more impaired
• Her doctors could not accurately describe the reason she lost all of her sight:
  “I had pretty good vision, partial vision, up until I was fifty five, and then I lost it all from low blood pressure in the eye. And I don’t know why”
• She also had a guide dog.
Early education and culture

• Camilla attended mainstream school initially but then went to a school for the blind as her eyesight deteriorated and she needed more particular support

• After school, Camilla was an undergraduate for three years

“I only went [to university] for three years and my major was educational psychology”
Experiences of Museums & Arts

• Camilla had never been to a museum as a child – either when she had some sight or not. “I first came here two years ago. I never visited any museums before.”
• She also had little recollection of any visits or being taken to see art works as a child.
• When I asked her if she had any experiences of learning about painting as a child she said, “No, not really”
• Camilla did not have any issues about attending the museum or learning about the visual arts latterly

“I’m coming here on the 27th to [learn to] paint.”

• Camilla also told me that she had learnt some forms of art when she was a child, and still continued practice arts and crafts for pleasure as an adult.

“I did clay and [origami]. I just did a little box [using origami] today before I left the house”
Preferences in the arts

• Camilla preferred to learn about the non-technical aspects of paintings’ creation in the collections she visited. Instead she preferred the context they were placed in

“I don’t have a visual image... You see that’s a problem [about the] culture [of description]. It depends on who it is describing it to you. [You can miss various details]”
Electronic Communication

• Camilla used the internet at home to look for information and for communication
• She did not use it at all for looking up images. She felt that her accessible technology was not good at facilitating this

“No, no I can’t do any of that, because I can’t see and they haven’t anything for a blind person to do that.”
Me: “Do you go through verbal descriptions at all?”
“Well, you know, we have a software [JAWS] and its limited. So we don’t have all the advantages.”
Me: “Are they accessible, or not?”
“No.”
Me: “So you’ve found none of this accessible?”
“No.”
“Charles”

CASE STUDY 3
Introduction

• Charles is a sixty four year old man, living in New Jersey – unspecified exactly

• He was originally from Jamaica, but grew up in Sugar Hill, Manhattan – the Upper East Side
  “Right across the river from the Yankees”

• His visual impairment is Congenital Glaucoma

• He had some sight, but very little – unspecified what he did and did not see

  “I am not completely blind. I can see things but not clearly”
Early education and culture

• Charles attended a mainstream school – he had never been to a school for the blind, even though his impairment was strong

“It was very difficult learning science in mainstream.”

• He attended university and has an MBA – he also recently studied history independently

• When prompted about learning art when younger, he said that he had learnt art at school and then taken sculpture as a minor at LIU (Long Island University)
Experiences of Museums & Arts

• Charles had attended the Metropolitan for many years, since childhood he recalled "I've been coming here since the late sixties... I've been coming to lots of them [museums] since the sixties"

• Charles also recalled attending a number of other museums before his visual impairment became more serious
• He particularly recalled a love of museums when he was an undergraduate. He did not have a preference for art or cultural artefacts or natural history. He simply seemed to enjoy the intellectual environment

"I would live in the museum sometimes [when I was younger], like the museum of natural history, all day long."

• Charles would still attend art museums, such as the Metropolitan, even though he did not fully comprehend all of the exhibits he saw

"[When young] I used to come here [The Metropolitan]. In those days I would come to a museum and look at a painting, but I could not really tell what [was there] because I didn't have an organised person. I don't believe they had a [system] like they have now."
Preferences in the arts

• Charles preferred knowing the academic background of paintings during his visit to the museum.

• He was particularly interested in the scholarly study of the history of painters and their eras; this was very marked in his initial requests for verbal imaging tours.
  – During our observation of the El Greco images, Charles expressed a particular interest in knowing about his personal background.

"It's strange, [when El Greco] was described and that was fine and all the different characters that [went into] the painting, but all the time I'm thinking more about the painter himself."

"Me: Right, the historical background."

"Yes, and how he was able to paint it all just using all of his experiences that he had. That's why I, when I mentioned his being steeped in history... [and the teacher mentioned] his intellectual prowess. So I was more fascinated with him."
• Charles told me that he had been involved in the technical study of arts before
• This had been particularly marked whilst he was a visually impaired undergraduate; however, he continued to practice arts for enjoyment at home, and got a great deal from any kind of intellectual activity

"I used to get paper Mache and make things [at home and at school]... I used to have a place I could go and buy the paper Mache. They don't have that any more. And you would just make things. You could just put things on hangers and around bottles; you know"
Electronic Communication

- Charles said that he does not use the internet at all, and so imagery of paintings on the web was of no relevance to him.
- He said that his preference was for developing his writing at the moment.

"I'm more into writing, actually... I'm doing a project now... I'm looking a allegory. I'm teaching myself [through literature]"
Pilot Analysis

FIRST STAGES OF RESEARCH
Initial Findings

• Already the findings suggested that the initial questions needed to be altered to reflect a more cultural interpretation of the need to visit the museum, and what the Metropolitan is to its visitors
People involved in the study like to discuss the history and social context of the images at length more than understand the “look” of the exhibits.

– It became clear that there is more to visiting museums than a technical comprehension of paintings or other art works.

– Visitors use their visits to connect with culture and history, providing a greater experience than simply reading a book or listening to a recorded description.
• People involved in the study regarded the museum as much of a draw as the paintings or other artefacts inside; they gave it the significance of a cultural palace or cathedral, invoking feelings such as nationalism or scholasticism

• All of the visitors, no matter what level of their impairment or background, did not want to access images on the internet. They all used their visual impairment as a reason for not doing so
School Students

FIRST STAGES OF RESEARCH
Three Case Studies of Students at California School for the Blind

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CASE STUDY 3

“Diego”
Introduction

- Diego is a twenty year old man currently at the California School for the Blind
- He was originally from Santa Rosa, northern California
- His visual impairment is Stargart's, "which is something that affects the central vision."
- He was born blind, "I am legally blind", although he has perception of shape, some form and colour
“It is hard for me to see details... I can see you, like your outline... I can see that you’re wearing glasses. But I can’t tell if you’re smiling or frowning.”
• He has had the same level of impairment since birth, and it has not deteriorated.
“Luckily its been about the same; its been just about the same.”
Early education and culture

• Diego attended state/public schools in California from the age of around seven until eighteen. After that he attended California School for the Blind (CSB)

• He did not have much access to access technology or Braille at his public school.

“No, they didn’t teach me Braille. They helped me with screen readers as far as CCTV goes, but that’s about it... I had enlarged books, so I had really big books...”
• He did not graduate from high school “I am actually currently working on that.” He is studying for this between a community college in Fremont
• After school he is to take the Hadley course for assisted living
• Eventually he hopes to become a forensic, or ear, nose and throat technician

“Back in public schools they didn’t provide me with the best services; and so they provided me with CCTV and large print at first, but that’s about it.”

Me: “So you didn’t have access to computing”
“No. I didn’t have the adapted technology. So I actually didn’t learn to type until I got her to CSB”
• At CSB he uses ZoomText, which makes the images on screen much larger. He does not need an audio screen reader as he has a comfortable level of vision
• He felt that his earlier lack of experience of using accessible technologies had held him back in his studies somewhat
Me: “So they didn’t provide that [technology] at [public] school?
“No, that’s why I didn’t do so well.”
Experiences of Museums & Arts

• Diego went to a museum in San Francisco once with school to view the King Tutt exhibition when younger – it was unknown whether he meant CSB or his previous school.

• He enjoyed this experience a great deal, but found some of the exhibits difficult to access

“I enjoyed it a lot, except for in the museums sometimes they have sculptures under glass and so.”

Me: “So did they allow you to touch the exhibits?”

“Some, they did allow us to. But the ones under the glass... And that was a little difficult, because it was dim and it was under the glass.”
• However, whilst at the museum the items he could not touch were described by a trained guide. He found this a satisfactory experience “They had, one of the staff was doing audio describing for us.”

Me: “Did you enjoy that?
“Yes, it was really good.”

• Of his visit, though, he expressed a greater preference for visiting the museum itself rather than just the works that they exhibited “I enjoyed more the museum, just actually being [there].”

Me: “So you enjoyed the experience of being in the museum?”
“Yes.”
Preferences in the Arts

• Although his formal art education was limited at public school, he felt he had positive experiences of the arts, both independently and during lessons

“I like to draw a lot... I always drew on papers... I think I took an arts and crafts’ class once. But here do I take an art class here... [At public school] It was working with clay a lot, and we also did like shades.”

Me: “So you used coloured pencils?”

“Yes.”

Me: “And did you enjoy it?”

“Yes, very much, especially the clay part, because its more hands on”
• However, he felt that he had a better experience of art education at CSB, as he had regular art classes and the teachers were more skilled in their teaching of art to blind and visually impaired students

“[At CSB] I draw more and I make a lot of stuff out of clay... I enjoy it more basically because of the teachers who are trained to work with visually impaired students, unlike the other teachers at public schools. They’re good teachers but they don’t have much experience of working with visually impaired people before... So it was a little more difficult sometimes to understand what they were explaining in front of the class... but here it works really good.”
Electronic Communication

- Diego uses technology “quite a bit”
- He thinks he has been on museum websites, however he did not specify which ones and what he used them for.
- He uses images on the web, but does not usually search for fine art images

“For images, sometimes I find, I often run into trouble seeing images on screen, because they’re not very light and not very clear.”

“Sometimes it describes what it is [but not often].”

Me: “Are these helpful?”

“Yes, very much.”
His difficulty with images and descriptions seems to be more related to his impairment, and the particular problem he has with perceiving light and dark colours; an issue not normally considered in accessible software standards which focuses on verbal descriptions:

“I like to read with a black background with white writing, but when it comes to pictures it makes them look funny.”
He feels fairly confident with technology because he has been trained recently at CSB. The main thing, however, was picking up the basics of computing. After this he gained the confidence to develop other aspects of his computer skills.

“I learnt how to type and then I started getting into the internet. I started researching stuff.”

Me: “And you use them for researching?”

“A lot more than I used to, that’s for sure. But I’m still working on my computer skills.”
“Phoebe”

CASE STUDY 5
Introduction

• Phoebe is twenty years old
• She is originally from Alameda, an island just off the coast of Oakland, in San Francisco Bay Area.
• Her visual impairment is a cortical visual impairment – although in addition she also had an unspecified learning impairment
• She has had her visual impairment from the age of three months, and it does not appear to have deteriorated since
• She can see things close to, and she also has tunnel vision. However, she sees colour. She also cannot see anything below and to the right of her, and she has no depth perception.

“I can see everything (sic.) except if that something matches something else its not going to be noticed”
Early education and culture

• Phoebe attended two public schools at around the age of five or six, however she left these after very short periods and has since attended CSB
  “I’ve been here pretty much thirteen years... I’m the oldest student who’s been here the longest... This is my last year”

• After graduating from school she is going to go to the Hadley Centre to study independent living
  “What you basically learn to do there is home living. You learn how to live on your own: pay bills, do your own dishes, do your own food... but its adapted so you they can help us if we need help. So they’re not going to leave us totally on our own.”
• She would like to go to a college or university later, but she will not get a high school diploma from the local community college.

“...because I would need a high school diploma. And I would like to, eventually, maybe.”

• Her ideal later studies would include some form of art and craft.
Experiences of Museums & Arts

• Phoebe has had a love of the arts since early childhood and was encouraged to participate in activities by her family
  “My sister, she taught me how to draw and stuff when I was a kid. And I just continued drawing”
• She had never been to a museum or gallery, but she has been on the websites of museums and done “a virtual tour, because its easier than going there and figuring them out”
• However, she cannot recall the museums she has virtually toured, and did not appear to be aware of the location or structure of the museums she was viewing

“They’re pretty cool... [but] I have no idea. They’re just on the internet and I just went through a bunch of them.”
• Given the opportunity, however, Phoebe would like to visit real museums as she would like to know more about the culture of her family and showed a strong preference for older art works and objects

“No one’s ever taken me to one… [but] like I said, I like old stuff, because I grew up with everything that was really like old and stuff… [My grandmother] grew up in the Philippines… which I found really interesting, which is really cool too, and so I like just like really old stories, old books. I don’t really like anything new, like I mean I do but I don’t… [but] I like older stuff”
Preferences in the arts

• She enjoyed ‘doing’ art more than studying the art of others. She also appeared to have a genuine passion for the expressive art classes at CSB

“I like really anything [in the class]... My favourite thing if I was, if I was going to go into art [class], which I am going to, I would probably do clay. I think I like it more than anything else... the feel, the texture, the way that if I messed up I can just squish it instead of throwing away a piece of paper and getting a new one”
• She also likes drawing but does not prefer it. However, this was not related to her visual impairment but in the quality of the media as one that did not allow too much recovery from mistakes.

“When I draw its like something that I’ve seen more than once; so I’ve got a clear picture of it and I don’t mess it up that much, easily....

Me: “... this is not to do with the fact that you can’t see drawings so well?

“No... its because of the fact that I’ve just got to pay attention to them”
Phoebe has been computing since the age of thirteen – approximately

Uses JAWs screen reader, but she finds this frustrating when it comes to describing images

“Sometimes it tells you there’s an image here but it won’t tell you what it is... It tells you the picture’s there, but if there’s nothing describing the picture, then it won’t read it to you...”

Me: Would you really appreciate a longer description?”

“Well not a long, not really like really super long that gets really boring. But... just like a thing about what is this picture... if I was to make my own website... I would put a short little detail under the picture and if you wanted to know more... about this one little thing I’d have a link just under that”
• She mostly uses computing for emailing and using the internet for personal research. In this and other answers she expressed a liking of “old things,” especially the artworks of antiquity.

“In the past, I’ve looked up stuff about Greek mythology... [CSB] doesn’t really study it but I do it on my own. Like I just look it up on my own if I have a spare moment in class... When I look up a certain person, there’s like a sculpture of what they think they would look like, and then they’d tell you it’s a picture of so and so.”
In the past she had found museum virtual tours on the web frustrating because of the lack of content about the art works themselves. She feels that contemporary tours have improved as they contain a description of the detail of the art works.

“What I couldn’t figure out was if a blind person were to go on the computer and do a virtual tour, they don’t tell you what the picture looks like. They won’t describe [it], because on the websites now they sort of tell you what is going on in the picture and the ones I’ve looked at before they would just skip the picture altogether and just go on and tell you who made it... and then like when it was made and stuff”
On the quality of the description of individual images on the web, she feels that it is of particular help to her as a visually impaired person. It has filled in details that she cannot quite make out in the web image.

Me: “What did you like about the description?”

“They told me more. Because I could see it but it sort of told me more that I was not noticing... they like described the background, what was in the picture and then I could get an idea of what it was supposed to look like”
“Ronaldinho”

CASE STUDY 6
Introduction

• Ronaldinho is nineteen years old
• He was originally from Santa Rosa in northern California
• His visual impairment is glaucoma
• He had full vision until the age of fourteen, but it has deteriorated rapidly since

“I have very little vision compared to where I could see fully... I can see the shape of you, but I can’t really tell your face, your characteristics and all that... but I can make out the shape and form of you”
Education and culture

• Ronaldinho went to public schools until he was fourteen, and then as soon as he was diagnosed with glaucoma he was sent to CSB

• He did not specify what he wanted to do when he finished at CSB

• He said that he liked art as a subject at school, but he had had to change many of his ideas about the subject since losing his sight

“I used to draw a lot as a youngster... I love drawing... It was one of my favourite [subjects] before I lost my sight. Of course now I don’t draw as before because I used to draw with pencils...”
Ronaldinho had only been to a museum in San Francisco with his school when he was around ten years old. He had never been independently or with his family. He also did not engage with public art since losing his sight.

“When I was younger and when I could see everything was interesting, but when you have a limited amount of sight you don’t seem to be interested in it because of course you can’t see it.”

Me: “So you don’t ask people to describe things to you?”

“I usually don’t. Sometimes... to carry a conversation, but its very different to seeing it yourself”
Given the choice of attending a museum or gallery or viewing pictures on the web, he felt that he was more likely to want to see pictures on the web.

“I am more likely to see it on the internet.
Me: “So you prefer viewing pictures on the internet?”

“Yes...”
Preferences in the arts

• Diego continued with his art work after he transferred to CSB. However he has now changed the media that he works with because of his continuing sight loss

Me: “Do you carry on with art now you’re here? “Yes I have, but more hands on, like ceramics, not so much painting. I used to when I could see better, which is colours and all that stuff, but now I have been working a lot with ceramics”
• However, he felt that his sight loss and the changes this had made to his making process had not diminished his enjoyment of the subject

Me: “And do you enjoy art as much?”
“It’s different, but I think I enjoy it [as much]…”

Me: “And do you still use things like colours…?”
“Well, yes, when I draw on paper with paint, when I glaze something, when I paint on ceramics I pick out colours... I just rely on the sight I have to know which colour is which”
Electronic Communication

- Ronaldinho has used computers since attending public school as a young child. He seemed highly computer literate.
- Since losing his sight he continues to use computing profusely and has been trained in the use of assistive technology; he uses JAWS and ZoomText depending on his need for particular forms of information.
- At CSB he uses computing for emailing, presentations and written assignments.

“Mostly for school work, research. I had to like download pictures of different things for different projects... like pictures of animals, or people, [for] science”
• He had only used computing to look at images once before to see an image of an art work that he had been given an award for displayed on the website of the American Printing House for the Blind, based in Kentucky

“I had a painting that I’d made and they posted it up on their websites. So I went in there and I looked at different works... they had not looked into the describing [of the images on the web], but I have come across pictures [on other websites] that they do describe the picture, but not all the time...”
• In circumstances where his image of the picture is blurred, then he relies more on verbal descriptions. This became more important when a class assignment dictated a greater knowledge of the details of the picture.

“Like if I’m doing a presentation, I have to know what I’m showing the class or what I’m trying to do.”
• His understanding of images on screen is dependent on the lighting and contrast of the images as they are presented. Certain images with colours similar to their background or have a very bright background in particular are difficult to comprehend.

“It all depends with what the picture looks like, because some pictures are more brighter, some pictures are less brighter than others. I have a very hard time seeing pictures that have like a bright background to them. Like, say there’s a bird on a tree and the background is green for the leaves, then I can’t really tell what I’m seeing. But, for example, looking at a guy on a desk and the background where he’s sitting is a dark colour then I could specifically see what he’s doing.”
• He thinks that there is a need for both changing and enlarging images on screen and for audio describing them, as this helps people with visual impairments

“When you have a visual impairment you still can see a little. You might not make out the whole picture, but if you have the audio description then you really look into it and you say, ‘Oh, OK, I see what they mean.’ You see it for yourself... They give you the help... So I would say a little bit of both”
Next Analysis

SECOND STAGE OF RESEARCH
Findings in the Student Case Studies

• All of the students tended to have a very scant experience of visiting museums “in the flesh”. It was unknown, however, whether this was because of the ages of the students, their social backgrounds or their visual impairments – or all three

• All of the students appeared to enjoy visual arts and were not intimidated by any media that they worked in

• Their preferences in art appeared to reflect their learning preferences and difficulties rather than their visual impairments
• The students all seemed to be comfortable with the use of technology, whether they used visualization or description, or whether they had an early exposure to accessible technology or not, and were not put off by images on the internet.

• The students were comfortable with verbal description of images, although they differed in the level of description – again this tended to reflect their academic preferences and abilities rather than their level or type of visual impairment.
Combined Findings

- The level of impairment did not appear to be an important factor as to whether a visitor wants to access what are considered to be visual images, whether in a museum or on the web.
- There was a definite generation gap between technology users and those who seemed to want to shy away from accessing images on the web.
- Accessing images on the web did not tend to be dependent on comfort with comprehending the images themselves, whether they practiced art or their visual impairment; but it did appear to reflect their comfort with technology.
• All of the people who had not attended schools for the blind had been to museums when younger
• The understanding of the museum as the attraction during the visit appeared to be common to both the adult visitors and students
• However, those case studies who had visited the museum a great deal when they were younger appeared to hold the institution of the museum in higher esteem
• It is interesting that, in common with observing images in the museum or on the internet, it was more important to be in the presence of the image, whether described or not, than to physically perceive the image
Next Steps

• Compare and contrast older and younger experiences of museums
• Compare teachers’ findings with the visitors’
• Contrast internet usage of images with visits to the museum
• Understand the cultural role of the museum in addition to the exhibits contained in it
• Is the term ‘art’ important, and does it persuade or dissuade people from visiting museums?
• It is unknown how many visitors with impairments visit the Metropolitan without using the access department, what their reasons for visiting the museum are and why they prefer to come around the museum by themselves – there is a case study, however, indicating that some visitors visit the museum only using the standard audio guide and a sighted friend