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## **Sights Unseen**

**An accessible exhibition of photographs by blind & visually impaired people**

**19th - 23rd January 2010**

**The Association of Photographers Gallery**

**81 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4QS**

**Talk on Sensory Photography: Thursday 21st January, 6pm**

To book, or for further details, email [matt@photovoice.org](mailto:matt@photovoice.org)

# **Mini Exhibition**

**PhotoVoice**   
[www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

  
**SIGHT OF EMOTION**  
Integration through Art

In association with the  
**AOP**

# Sights Unseen

Sights Unseen is an exhibition that celebrates the possibilities of photography, a medium traditionally regarded as the domain of sighted people. It sets out to challenge our conventional understanding of visual communication and what it means to 'see'. This show is the culmination of photography workshops held with blind and visually impaired participants between November 2008 and December 2009 in China, Mexico and London. The photographers use senses in addition to and other than sight to create images; hearing to judge distance, touch and smell to discover subjects.

The images shown here have in many cases been created without the use of sight, and do not require sight to be enjoyed and understood. The focus is less on the image itself but on what it demonstrates; a momentary experience or thought process, and the emotions it inspired in the photographer at the time. Whether the photograph is experienced through sight, through hearing a description, or through touch using a tactile diagram, the photograph still fulfils its purpose by carrying that frozen moment across any distance and time period, to be described, explained and shared by others.

Through the use of audio and tactile diagrams this exhibition is accessible to all and furthers our awareness of the relationships between vision, blindness, sensory experience and imagery. By showing that photography can be created - and enjoyed - by those without sight, the exhibition aims to build a bridge between the sighted and non sighted worlds. For the blind and visually impaired this is a chance to discover the potential of photography as a form of expression and communication, and for the fully sighted it is an opportunity to explore an illuminating alternative way to engage with the world.

## How the exhibition works

A tactile trail runs around the exhibition, starting upstairs and completing downstairs. MP3 players are available at reception, providing audio captions and descriptions for each photograph in the order they are presented along the trail. Each photograph has a caption plaque in Braille and text, at the top of which is clearly stated the exhibit number. The exhibit number is also clearly stated at the start of each audio track, so that you can be sure you have the right track for the photograph you are studying.

Tactile diagrams are supplied for certain photographs. Each has a full audio guide to aid exploration of the diagrams and understanding of the photograph through touch. If you are able to see the photograph you may find it interesting to close your eyes and explore the tactile diagram with the help of the guide, and then look at the photograph to see how the image in your head compares it. Consider whether the differences are important to the effect of the photo on you.

**We hope you enjoy the exhibition! Before leaving, please do leave feedback using the forms supplied. If you leave your details you will be entered into a prize draw to win a print of your choice from the exhibition.**

**All prints are for sale, priced at just £50, with 50% of the revenue going directly to the photographer.**

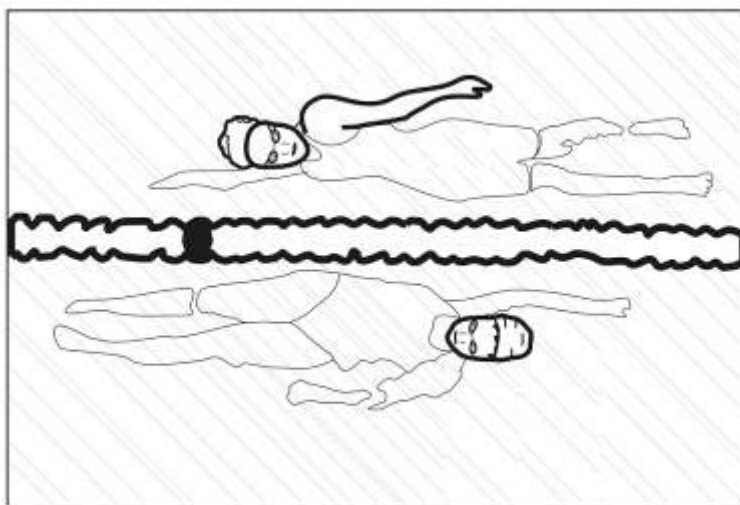
All prints are supplied as 16" x 12" Matt C-Type prints, unframed, and are accompanied by a caption and information about the project. To order, please take one of the forms provided, or ask at reception for details.

# Background and Context

- There are 45 million blind people in the world and an additional 120 million who live with visual impairments.
- It is estimated that 75 % of all blindness worldwide is avoidable. In the UK, 50% of sight loss is preventable, being caused by treatable conditions.
- In the UK there are around two million people with sight problems.
- Sight loss is one of the commonest causes of disability in the UK.
- Only around four per cent of blind and partially sighted people have no useful vision.
- In the developing world, poverty underlines not only the causes but the perpetuation of the ill health that leads to blindness.
- Dr. Buffa Hanse wrote in The Braille Monitor, "The social stigma of blindness is the most significant problem, not the loss of sight".

# What is a tactile diagram?

Tactile diagrams are maps formed by raised areas on a flat surface, used in conjunction with detailed verbal descriptions. Tactile diagrams are not exact reproductions of the visual image, but reinterpretations of the visual image into to a tactile language. The descriptions that accompany the diagrams guide the user across its surface in a clear and logical way. In addition, the narrative provides a detailed description of the original work.



To produce a tactile diagram a photograph must first be carefully analysed and interpreted to identify the key elements and their relative importance. A black and white diagram is created, with textures that can be felt with the fingers and which bring to mind the quality of the subject. Solid shapes can be represented in black or by a line outline, depending on which would be clearer or more appropriate to the subject.

The black and white diagram is printed onto a special kind of paper that swells when heated. The final stage of the process is to heat the paper, and as the black areas absorb the heat fastest, they raise leaving the rest of the paper flat and smooth.

# Stairs ahead – please take care

# Mexico Workshops



© Chloe Dewe Matthews / Sight of Emotion

Since the beginning of 2006 regular workshops have taken place in Mexico, teaching photography to blind and visually impaired adults and children, and sometimes also fully sighted people so that they become sensitized to the experience of using their other senses.

In addition to the workshops, Sight of Emotion has curated an exhibition of photos taken by the blind students in the Papalote Museum for Children in Mexico City, alongside the well known international “Dialogue in the Dark” exhibition.



# UK Workshops

Throughout 2009 workshops were held at the *Organisation of Blind Africans and Caribbean* (OBAC) in South London for people from the African and Caribbean community in South London. Following the first course of workshops a number of participants were given training so that they felt able to take on the role of workshop leaders in the next set of workshops for a new intake of OBAC members. They will therefore be able to run photographic classes at OBAC in the future, allowing more blind and visually impaired people in the community to discover sensory photography.



After the workshops were completed, several participants were supported by PhotoVoice to use their photographic skills to undertake personal advocacy projects tackling issues such as ignorance of the risks to eye health within their community, and barriers faced by the visually impaired. A selection of the images they produced are currently being used at the centre of a campaign to raise awareness of the increased risk of preventable blindness faced by people of African and Caribbean origin. Posters and postcards have been showcased across South London, and the messages have been disseminated online through e-postcards and through the support of black networks BlackNet.co.uk and Blackcnet.com.

# China Workshops

In May 2009, two PhotoVoice facilitators travelled to Beijing to run photographic training workshops for eight blind and visually impaired staff of the disability media organisation **One-Plus-One**. Two days of training in facilitation skills and the Sights Unseen process



were held for two visually impaired people and two sighted local photographers interested in becoming workshop leaders. This team then supported five full days of sensory photography workshops led by the PhotoVoice facilitators.



Following these workshops the work produced by the group was showcased at the Beijing Art Fair 2009, where it was accompanied by audio and tactile diagrams as it is here. The reaction from press and public was fantastic. When One-

Plus-One made the photography project the subject of an hour-long radio program, they received more than 200 calls – mainly from blind people fascinated by the topic and wanting to learn more.

The exhibition has toured to two other venues in Beijing since the Beijing Art Fair, and those who undertook the training in facilitation skills continue to introduce more blind and visually impaired people in Beijing to the techniques of sensory photography through workshops held at Beijing University.

# The Sights Unseen Process

Participants learn to use senses other than sight to create images; hearing to judge distance, touch and smell to discover subjects. Even participants with partial sight are encouraged not to try and use sight, but rather to select and frame their subject using their other senses and in the case of portraiture, through interaction and engagement with their subject. The resulting photographs are not only interesting because of the messages they convey about the experience of interacting with the world without sight, but are aesthetically beautiful and unusual images that challenge expectations.



The photographs are reviewed and shared in a way that suits the photographer. Some may prefer to view the image on a computer screen where it can be enlarged and brightened until the photographer is able to independently study it. Others



review through hearing the image described by someone who can see it, opening up a discussion of its visual impact and the details that were captured and in what way. The photographer may learn more about the moment of taking the photo than they were aware of at the time of capturing it – background details, facial expressions, or simply colours to go with the textures and smells they were aware of. In this way, the moment is recreated for both the photographer and the viewer.

# Sight of Emotion / Ojos que Sienten

## Mission

To work towards the inclusion of blind and visually impaired people into the social, educational and working environments through training, and to help sensitize society to the experience of blind and visually impaired people through artistic experiences.

## Objectives

- To offer blind and visually impaired people the tools to communicate through art, so as to improve their self-esteem, independence and safety while stimulating and developing their emotional, intellectual and creative potential
- To make society aware of the potential for communication inherent in the other senses; smell, touch, taste and sound
- To create a network of alliances to take advantage of the workshop results and to provide continuity to the work for social, educational or working integration

## The activities of Ojos que Sienten/Sight of Emotion include:

- Art workshops (photography, video, painting & sculpture) for blind and visually impaired people
- Sensitizing workshops for businesses and universities
- Interactive exhibitions for blind, visually impaired and sighted people
- Experiences in the dark to heighten the awareness of the other senses. (Dinners, concerts, sensorial activities, tastings etc)
- Psychological assistance for the disabled and their families
- Offering the necessary tools both to blind and visually impaired people, and the companies interested in integrating them into their working environment

For further information please contact OQS founder and director, Gina Badenoch: [ginabadenoch@ojosquesienten.com](mailto:ginabadenoch@ojosquesienten.com)



## PhotoVoice

PhotoVoice works internationally to empower marginalised and voiceless communities with photographic skills and the opportunity to speak out and address the issues that affect them. PhotoVoice delivers photographic training and equipment to the groups it works with, and coordinates the production of outputs such as exhibitions, publications, digital story DVDs, websites and advocacy campaigns to share the work and carry the messages of its participants to those who can make a difference.

PhotoVoice has run more than 50 projects across 23 countries, working with groups as diverse as refugees, street children, disabled groups, mental health service users, and those living with HIV. PhotoVoice always works in partnership with an organisation specialising in work with the group addressed by the project, ensuring sensitivity to the issues, and continued support for the participants beyond the project.

PhotoVoice believes in the sharing of learning and produces resources for practitioners and organisations seeking to use participatory photography in their work. This includes the PhotoVoice Manual, and guides for working with specific groups such as young refugees, vulnerable women, mental health service users, and blind and visually impaired people. All resources are available from [www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org).

### **For more information:**

[www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

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