

**HOW DO PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND RELATE TO VISUAL ARTS?  
- A CASE STUDY BASED ON ARTISTIC REFERENCES, ACCES-  
SIBILITY, AND AESTHETIC FRUITION**

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## 1 INTRODUÇÃO

This article presents results obtained in research focused on the reception of people with visual impairments into visual arts. It was carried out in the post-doctoral internship at the PPGE, at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, under Professor Dr. Monique Andries Nogueira's supervision. This is a case study that investigates the interfaces between blindness and visual arts. The research, which adopted a quali-quantitative method, was based on a survey done with people with visual impairments, who attend Benjamin Constant Institute - IBC, a century-old Institution located in Rio de Janeiro. Semi-structured interviews were responded by 40 people with visual impairments (30 of them are blind, while 10 present low vision). The questionnaire covered the following topics: 1) Their experiences with visual arts, 2) The probable repertoire of images they possess and how it was acquired, 3) If there was contact with any tactile material and/or audio description, 4) If they had access to art teaching as primary and secondary school students, 5) If they visit museums and cultural centers, 6) How do they realize the offer of accessible exhibitions in their city, and 7) Reports of aesthetic experiences.

The questionnaires were applied in 2021. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee, through consolidated opinion number 4.458.072.

## 2 DEVELOPMENT

Asked if they knew any work of art, 13 of 40 responded could not remember anyone. 4 interviewees commented they appreciate visual arts, however, they complained about the lack of opportunity to access this area, in which they had contact for the first time during the interview.

Among the 27 interviewees who cited a work, 16 mentioned only one, 4 participants cited two, and only 7 people cited three or more works. Foreign works were mentioned more times (45 citations) than Brazilian ones (22 times). Foreign artists were cited 74 times, while Brazilian artists totaled 42. "Monalisa" was the most cited work (20 times). Rodin's "The Thinker" and the Sistine Chapel ceiling were mentioned 3 times each. "The Last Supper", by Leonardo da Vinci, was cited 2 times. Another 7 works appeared only once.

The most cited Brazilian painting was "Abaporu" (7 times). "The prophets" and other Aleijadinho's sacred art were mentioned twice. Another seven works were cited only once.

Regarding European artists, Leonardo da Vinci was the most remembered (18 times), followed by Picasso (15), Van Gogh (9), Michelangelo (6), and Salvador Dali (5). Focusing on Brazilian artists, Tarsila do Amaral was nominated by 9 participants, Portinari

by 7, followed by Aleijadinho, with 6 mentions. Blind artists Virgínia Vendramini and Rose Queiroz were also remembered. The first was mentioned by three interviewees and the second, by one.

The results of this research point to the European arts' hegemony. Rebel (2002) observes how some European works have become known throughout history to the detriment of others, which fell into oblivion for reasons external to art, such as belonging to the collection of a museum in an Eastern European country. This selection of works colonized the imagery repertoire of part of the world, influencing even those who cannot see (GROSS; NOGUEIRA, 2021). In Brazil, this European collection is joined by some Brazilian works, such as "Abaporu", which can be considered an icon of national resistance.

Considering all the 40 interviewees' opinion, 28 complained about the lack of accessible exhibitions. It is important to remember that among them, there are 27 participants responsible for all data related to works and artists collected in this research. It means those who did not complain about the lack of accessibility do not have experience with such institutions. The prohibition on touching pieces of art was the most frequent complaint, it not being allowed even in events advertised as inclusive. There is no possibility of touching the works or tactile materials, and frequently the audio description is not available. This one, which is the only resource to mediate two-dimensional images, becomes an informative instrument only, with no possibility of leading the non-sighted observer to aesthetic fruition. Audio description is more suitable to mediate the fleeting images of cinema and theater, where a story is being told. The static painting images have a liveliness that cannot be translated into words. One of the interviewees commented: "Audio description only would not satisfy me. I have to put something in my hands, something tangible. The eyes of the blind are in the hands".

With the exception of ex-students from School Pedro II, who had been my pupils, no participant mentioned significant experiences with tactile materials to mediate paintings and two-dimensional works. This denotes the lack of access of the majority of respondents to these image three-dimensionalization strategies. Two statements emphasized the relevance of access to art education and how it helps to adapt a new life after blindness, highlighting the potential of art as an expression of what is unspeakable in a tragic moment of vision loss.

Two testimonials bring unforgettable experiences that happened thirty years ago, involving tactile exploration in sculptures. Unfortunately, touching original pieces is surrounded by stigma. Carijó, Magalhães, and Almeida (2010) draw attention to the taboo regarding people with visual impairments' touching in pieces of art, which is considered damaging. The deponents' reports highlight the need to review these issues.

### 3 CONCLUSION

In this work, it was reported the results of a study with 40 people with visual impairments and their relationship with visual arts. A third of those interviewed revealed that they had no contact with this area. The other two thirds indicated that accessibility opportunities are insufficient.

Regarding the works and artists cited, a Eurocentric tendency was observed, in which the participants do not know the characteristics of the works they cited. It exposes the need to mediate paintings through tactile materials and their respective audio description, in addition to the relevance of art teaching in educating the public and promoting artistic work by people with visual impairments.

Finally, it was mentioned two experiences with sculptures, justifying the defense of touching original pieces of art as a possibility.

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