TEAM of ART

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE
TEAM OF ART

A PROJECT SUPPORTED BY ERASMUS+ PROGRAM

CONTENTS

PRESENTATION

Context

Art and culture are an essential part of the skillset of individuals within the society, when talking about social inclusion.

Within the cultural sector, challenges remain to be seen in the inclusion of disadvantaged audiences in terms of different forms of accessibility. Adults with little or no access to books and heritage, need to be supported with the acquisition of basic cultural knowledge and skills. While they may have no qualifications except language learning or writing skills, European culture and heritage can become "easy to read and understand" when presented to them in an accessible manner, through innovative forms of cultural mediation and training using digital tools.

The COVID 19 pandemic helped put a spotlight on initiatives aiming to accelerate the inclusion agenda in the cultural world within Europe. We questioned the accessibility of online images and text for different audiences including for visually impaired people and people with special needs (e.g.: disorientation, complexity, anxiety, rejection, etc.). The opportunities for digital cultural exploration in the art world for these target groups were limited. Therefore, this project offered a new and innovative way to discover artwork for audiences with special needs while it also provided educational resources for professionals in adult education for audiences with little or no qualifications.

A great availability of European heritage works in high resolution provided the partners with a great opportunity to develop a set of digital practices and tools for learners, educators, trainers and mediators. These resources are made available in a newly created accessible digital museum.

Platform "The European Accessible Museum"

The European Accessible Museum platform is the key tool of the project. This is because this platform brings together all the other objectives together and serves as a catalogue. This platform is the first of its kind, offering this type of virtual exhibitions of pictorial artworks in an inclusive manner, using "scrolling" visual narration and an easy to read and interpret text.

Within the platform, there are a number of sections. There is an "About" section, which presents in short, the project, its objectives and the timeline. In the "Partner" page there is a short description of the participating partners. The "Resources" page provides a direct link for the viewer to the intellectual outputs of the project. The "Contact" section enables the visitor to get in touch with the project team. There is also a language option, where the visitor can view all available content, tools and documents and also download them in English, French, Greek, Italian, Spanish and Bulgarian.

Team of Art Platform
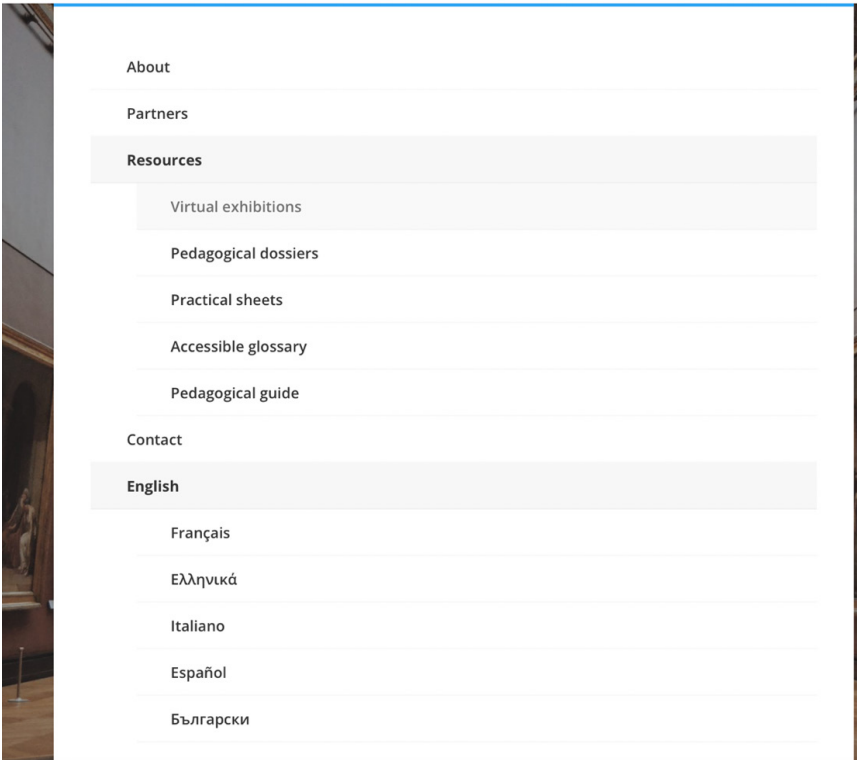
A visual representation of the content the Team of Art Platform has available for the viewers. Can be accessed through the following link: www.team-of-art.eu
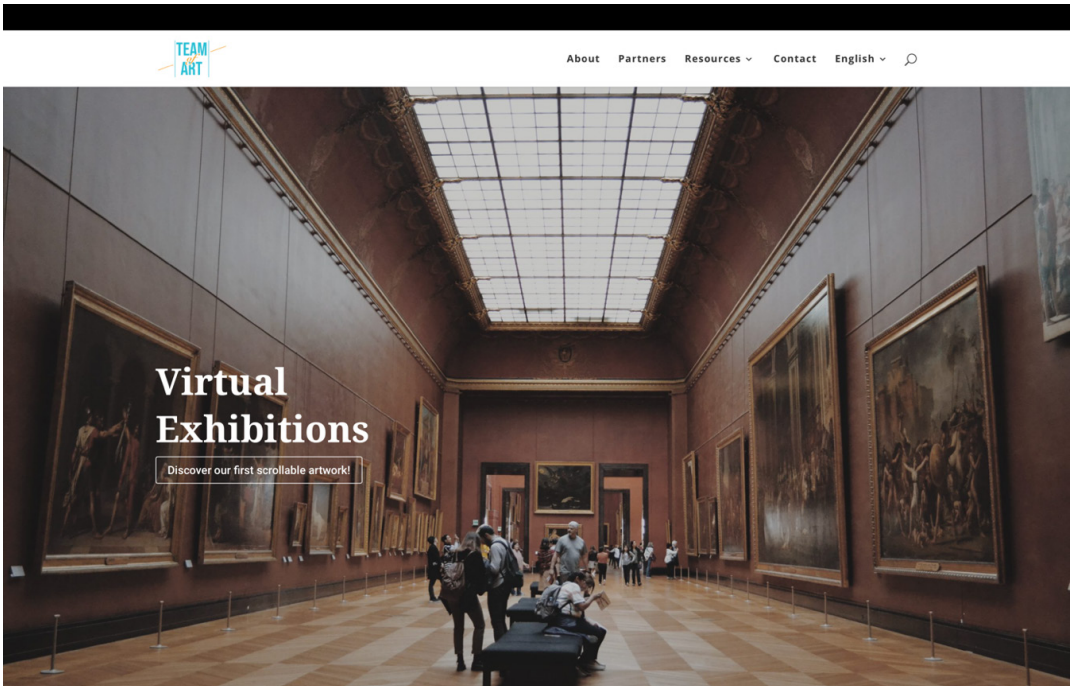
Virtual Exhibitions: 120 animated and scrolled artworks

This output focuses on proposing new ways of presenting artworks through an accessible methodology. The audience targeted are adult learners with little or no qualifications and/or specific needs.

Through editorial work, the writing of the content has been prepared in easy-to-read language. At first the partnership looked at the experiences of the target audience regarding the common methods of presentation of artwork. Long and difficult to understand paragraphs, set up in a way accompanied by a painting full of details is not easy to interpret for many individuals of the target audience. Rather, these settings negatively impact the viewer in terms of their emotional wellbeing. This negatively contributes to their experience of the cultural heritage and does not allow them to understand and experience the artwork. After a careful consideration of the aspects that stimulate these negative emotions, the partners developed a methodology, which avoids cognitive overload and disorientation and provides the viewer with easy-to-read and experience methodology that favors positive emotions. Through a progressive and guided discovery, the viewers can explore the work in its entirety through an animated and scrolling "visual walk".

Pedagogical Dossiers

In order for educators and trainers to blend the virtual exhibitions in their pedagogical paths, ten pedagogical dossiers were created. These dossiers provided support for the educators and trainers on different accessible and inclusive manners of including art and cultural heritage during their work with different learner audiences. In an oral and written comprehension of level B (accessibility scale), and through the creation of accessible text and image representation for learners with special needs, these ten pedagogical dossiers bring to the educators and trainers' awareness and training. These dossiers also present them with good practices on how to adapt cultural content for their target audience.

Practical sheets

The topics that the practical sheets focused on the topics of Inclusion, Digital tools, Techniques an educator can use and a selection of Activities suitable for this target audience. The creation of practical sheets advices educators and provide educators and trainers with tips, useful workshops and tutorials they can visit on the topic of accessibility and artwork in their daily professional activities in the classroom. It also provides them with great recommendations and examples on how to present content for learners with special needs. These recommendations also go beyond the content and presentations. The practical sheets also provide the educator and trainer with the opportunity to discover and the guidance on how to use a free software for workshops related to art and cultural heritage in an accessible manner. Furthermore, the practical sheets also provide explanations and definitions on the accessibility for the designated special needs.

Art keywords: Accessible glossary

It is important for viewers of the target audience – educators and learners, to be able to interpret the digital scrolling and narrated works presented in the European Accessible Museum and in the Virtual Exhibitions. Terms related to these objectives are described in an easy to read and understand language. Through this fully accessible glossary, at least 50 terms related to art and the sub-topics of this project were described. There is also more than one accompanying image and videos presented next to each of the terms, for visual representation and an easier interpretation. For educators, this glossary also provides an opportunity to define in an easier way complex concepts for the different audiences they serve.

At the time of preparation of this project, this glossary was the first of its kind, a multilingual glossary, which contains artistic vocabulary for audiences with few or no qualifications and/or with disabilities and learning difficulties, which is disability friendly and easy to read. Here once again images and videos were organized for easier interpretation.

Pedagogical implementation guide

Through this implementation guide is intended for trainers, educators and mediators, connected to this project's target audiences. This guide has been developed to discuss the topics of text and image accessibility. This is because a complex image, for instance, which has insufficient contract might be difficult to understand for some. Within this guide, a number of general and practical questions are answered. Please Visit the Parts beginning on page 6 for more information.

To conclude, through this project, European culture and heritage was promoted and trainers developed new key competences and skills necessary for future success in an inclusive society. All sections of this project have been prepared in English and translated in all official partner languages and all sections related to learners have been made in an easy to understand and read way.

ACCESSIBILITY IN SITU / OUTSIDE THE WALLS

Accessibility is a very complex concept, affecting multiple spheres of human life: from the social to the economic, from the private to the public, from politics to the environment. It has undergone a profound transformation over time mainly due to the evolution of the concept of disability, to which it is closely related.

We will now look at the challenges of museums with accessibility and the various barriers there may be. we will understand the importance of overcoming these barriers and how the covid-19 pandemic can also be seen as a possibility for moving toward an increasingly accessible world.

Museums and the challenge for accessibility

Recent decades have seen an increase in the construction and development of museums throughout the Western world. However, this boom has not necessarily translated into an increase in visitors or a diversification of the traditional visitor profile, which is typically characterized by high income and high education.

Museum accessibility means not only welcoming all types of visitors, regardless of their profile, but also making the content understandable to them. Whatever the work, whether it is a painting, a sculpture, or a video display, museums must make culture accessible to visitors. The idea that art and culture are among the areas most easily addressed by accessibility makes sense considering that culture focuses on creating dialogue and human connections and is synonymous with social inclusion. Not only museums, but culture in general allows us to be, and to feel, more included in our society and to meet other people outside our comfort zone. And this is what we can call the power of social inclusion. Accessible museums make things easier for all kinds of audiences.

PART 1

CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION IN THE MUSEUM SECTOR

The Bather,
1906, Henri Manguin

TEAM OF ART

Museums play a crucial role in society by educating the public and representing different aspects of culture through their exhibits. People with physical disabilities are part of the community that is educated or represented by museums. Consequently, it is imperative to make museums accessible to these communities by providing reasonable accommodations for their disabilities within the museum grounds. The accessibility for visitors with disabilities means that museums and institutions need to provide equal access and services to their venues for all types of audiences.

Another challenge to accessibility arose with the covid-19 pandemic. This is because access to many facilities was impossible for certain months. One possible response is digital. Museums have thus found themselves obliged to use digital as a means of getting closer to people and maintaining their role in society as a cultural and educational player.

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(Freepik)

Pandemic as a new possibility for inclusion

Covid-19 and the subsequent restrictions implemented to delimit the expansion of the virus have changed our lives in a number of areas. And this is also true for the ability to experience museums, culture, and inclusion. With the pandemic, many museums, as well as other venues, had to be closed for a long period. And with restrictions in order to prevent the perpetuation of the contamination, one was forced to limit access to the number of people in the closed spaces.

With museums closed more than open in the past year, the entire population has gotten a taste of what it feels like to be excluded from cultural experiences. Yet there are many thousands of people for whom this is a perpetual reality, with sites inaccessible for a plethora of reasons. In addition, the experience of the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the period of restrictions and social estrangement shows us how urgent it is more than ever to make museums accessible and to engage people. It is important to transcend physical boundaries and to meet existing individual diversity to make the experience of art and museums easier and more engaging.

The importance of digital to make museums more accessible

However, the pandemic and inaccessibility of many places, including museums, has given us the opportunity to find new ways to make culture accessible and a new way to enjoy museums and culture. Digitization of museum materials can be an interesting breakthrough in museum accessibility. Making use of digital can mean expanding the possibility of information and expanding one's offerings more generally. People thus have access to additional material. In addition, digital gives the possibility of reaching more people even outside the geographic area of the museum. Digital thus makes it possible to bridge a distance, both physical and cultural.

Different forms of barriers

The museum must be accessible in many ways. Barriers and impediments can be many and varied. They can be physical barriers, cultural barriers, or sensory barriers.
Barriers and restrictions must not only be removed, but must be independently accessible by all individuals: this means that individuals must have the independence to potentially enjoy the museum experience in complete autonomy.

Physical barriers

The first barriers we find are the physical ones. There can be different physical barriers that can be a problem for different groups of people: for example, people in wheelchairs, people with strollers, people with visual impairments such as blindness, elderly people who need special assistance. These physical barriers may be located not only inside museum spaces, but also outside, such as the entrance or the road leading to the museum. Inside the museum, all spaces should be accessible, starting from the restrooms, to the different floors of the museum, which can then be reached by elevators or connected by special elevators.

© Picture by storyset (Freepik)

Cultural barriers

One of the goals of museums is to educate people by bringing them closer to culture and art. This also means paying attention to the fact that not everyone starts with the same knowledge. We must therefore take into account both the aspects of this multi-cultural society and the existence of economic inequalities and those in access to culture. The cultural issue is also important. Each individual may have a different background and cultural baggage, but that doesn't mean it has to be a restriction in experiencing the museum and art. It is therefore necessary to make the works accessible from an understanding point of view. Additive information is important: this can be about the artist's path, the socio-cultural context, the artistic current, and, also about the painting techniques used in the material of the work.

Sensory barriers

Barriers can affect different senses. And this brings us to the consideration that art can be appreciated and understood not only by sight. In fact, there are several solutions to enable people with different impairments to approach art. For example, the presence of audio or video guides in sign language. For people with visual impairments, it can be important in addition to audio, to have the possibility to use touch. This is possible with the creation of braille catalogs, braille descriptions of the works, or the presence of 3D works that can be touched and have a different sensory experience of art. You can also create a sensory map, to help those people on the autism spectrum. So it can be helpful to have a sensory map before entering the museum to be aware of the spaces, lights, sounds, what they will find in general.

In order for museums to be more accessible, we need to rethink the way we showcase collections to best suit all types of audiences. It is important to provide inclusive experiences, not only of the specific exhibition, but of the museum environment itself.

© Pictograms from the North Carolina Museum of History website

ART EDUCATION FOR ALL

Art as a tool for learning and personal development

When we talk about learning, we talk about education. Learning is a natural process that develops in the human being. Experiences that arise from one's own desire and curiosity will be responsible.

All parties involved in this process have tried to generate shared learning. Facing the uncertainty that exists. The creation of collaborative partnerships between museums and people will be responsible.

A museum is a space for learning. An offering to share experiences that inspire, educate and entertain. They encourage reflection, promote critical thinking and understanding of the world. They also allow people to learn from a variety of professional profiles such as scientists, educators, researchers, curators, documentarians, etc.

In this way, the educational activity is transformed into a different event. It is able to motivate and activate learning. Thus, the creation of pedagogical foundations and methods leads to the discovery of the artistic experience. A valuable experience both in the field of knowledge and in the field of personal creation.

The conception of art and its role in education and society has given rise to a trust in the human being. As a subject with his or her own initiative to carry out integral development. With inherent potential and capabilities.

It is important to start valuing art and to develop artistic disciplines for learning. It has repercussions on the cerebral, cognitive, and personal development of people.

Art is the expression of human beauty. It teaches and learns. It is a key factor for personal happiness. Provokes emotions that make the difference between study and learning. Everything that moves us is always easier to learn.

On a personal level, art helps us to get better emotional and social skills. It produces changes in aspects such as confidence, skills and aptitudes. It also favors social integration. It promotes coexistence. It raises awareness about respect for the environment and the common good.

Here are the words of the writer Kurt Vonnegut. He attaches great importance to culture to reach our integral development:

"Practice any art, music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, fiction, essays, reportage, no matter how well or badly, not to get money and fame, but to experience becoming, to find out what's inside you, to make your soul grow. Seriously! I mean starting right now, do art and do it for the rest of your lives." - Kurt Vonnegut, 5th November 2006.

Kurt Vonnegut
(1922 - 2007)

Art demonstrates the social naturalness of learning. It helps learning among peers. And it fosters learning from others and learning about oneself in relation to others. Thus, it certifies that creativity is cognitive ability. It certifies that creativity is a cognitive ability. It activates all areas of the brain. Thus, we can affirm that art boosts working memory and attention. It also teaches us:

- To create a judgment and keep it under construction, to confront it with what we are or with what we have ceased to be.
- Be flexible with ourselves and with others.
- Have an open mind and flexible thinking to find solutions to problems.
- Make decisions in a broader way.
- Dealing with the unexpected, pursuing surprise.
- Know that the limits of our language are not the limits of our thinking.
- To think through a material, with its possibilities and limitations.
- To live experiences that cannot be lived from any other source.

Thus, one of the main objectives is to provoke a rapprochement towards culture. A quality culture. Empowering the capacities of each subject. Because everyone has the right to enjoy, live and learn from culture.
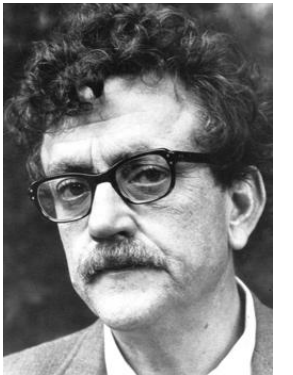
Inclusive methodologies and adaptations in museums

When we talk about inclusion, we are not talking about a principle or a value. Inclusion is a human right. To live, learn and develop with all people who are part of our community. Inclusion can relate to many issues. Issues such as gender differences, educational levels, religious beliefs, or disabilities.

Currently, schools are one of the main sources of learning. Fortunately, nowadays, society is also aware of the other spaces of access to knowledge. These are not linked to schools. Some are more recent, such as the internet. Others are more traditional, such as libraries and museums.

In museums, there has been a paradigm shift within the educational field. Some museums have initiated and designed educational programs for different age groups. And thus, transforming learning more in line with reality. Inclusive museums have the main goal of healing problems. Such as social exclusion, inequality and discrimination.

For this reason, cultural activities adapted to different groups are plenty. We can establish different ideas that can justify the museum as an ideal space for learning. Also, to being an inclusive institution. It respects equality and rejects discrimination. And it develops constructivist forms of learning. Where visitors take part during their stay in the museum.

It is important to refer to one of the principles of education: equity. It has the function of guaranteeing equal opportunities. In this way, to develop people's personalities. Through education, educational inclusion and equal rights and opportunities.

Equity is related to the principle of standardization. This means making conditions and a way of life accessible to everyone. So does inclusive education. It emphasizes the need for people with difficulties to have the same rights as all other people.

There is still a long way to go to transform museums into a cultural space accessible to everyone. Besides, being inclusive and necessary. With the aim of achieving the integral development of people.

So, we can affirm that museums are spaces that generate opportunities. Learning opportunities for a wide range of audiences. They are responsible for learning about. And offering innovative ways of feeling and enjoying art.

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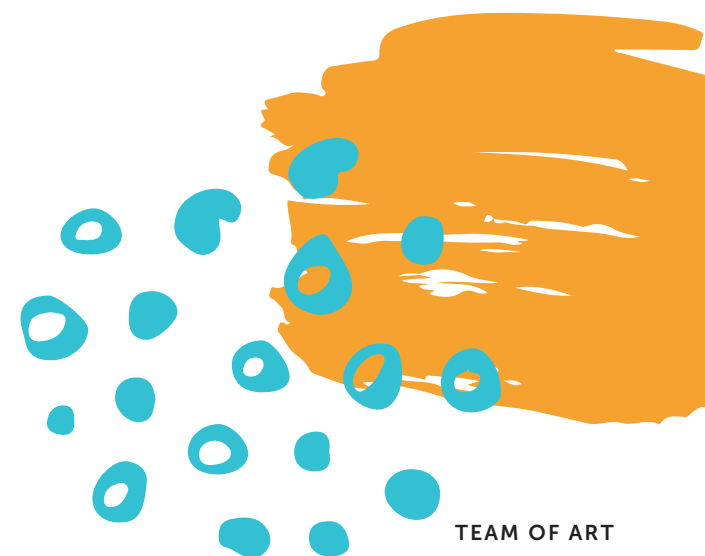
Access to museum content must be guaranteed to everyone. To achieve this, the following elements need to be considered:

- Elimination of architectural barriers that prevent or hinder mobility.
- Personalized treatment for the user.
- Physical accessibility to the collections. Whenever possible with the creation of models.
- Installation of magnetic loops to improve hearing signals.
- Installation of appropriate information panels. To help the transmission of information.
- Lifts providing audio and written information. With written indications in Braille format and in raised macro-characters.
- Schematic plans with high visual contrast and relief. Placed in different parts of the museum. Facilitating the recognition of the spaces and their distribution.
- Differentiated circulation areas in the exhibitions. By combining different textures and colors.
- Lighting focused on facilitating orientation.
- Information provided in Braille, macrocharacters and audio tapes CD-RO or DVD.
- Guides for basic knowledge of sign language.
- Accompaniment by a sign language interpreter.

Museums are scientific institutions. Their aim is to communicate and disseminate science to the public. For this reason, we need to focus on equality, diversity and inclusion.

The aim is for museums to become spaces for health. Welcoming spaces for all people. A place of memory for those who have lost it. A place of learning and opportunities. So, museums must invest towards adaptation and equality. As well as understanding diversity and addressing inclusion.

Making art accessible to everyone and less elitist

There isn't a single way to work with disabilities. But art is one of the best options. Art plays an important role in capacity development. It also helps to generate neurons in our brain. Stimulating imagination and creativity. And promoting autonomy and self-regulation.

It benefits communication and expression. And it provides a favorable sentiment because creative activities improve the brain functioning. And they are taking part in the creation of new neurons.

People with disabilities are able to develop short, half and long-term memory by art. Also, they can develop attention and concentration.

Art is an activity which helps to integrate a body, emotions and mind. This is very important to keep in mind. For this reason, we can consider that art fosters cooperative learning.

Accessibility in museums must become a priority. Because culture must be available to everyone on equal terms. Without being an exclusive culture.

Then, we motivate you to move the people to art and art to the people. And at the same time, to the museums. In this way, everyone will be able to grow personally and intellectually.

Delors (1996) quoted «Education is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be». And with this quote we invite you to reflect.
Without art there is no meaningful learning. And, thus, neither does the integral development of people.

We should keep in mind that there are many disabilities. But there are also many artistic resources.

The art world values difference. It empowers us. It trains us. It makes us equal. For this reason, we can affirm that the success of a museum is not measured by the number of visitors it has. It is measured by the number of visitors who have learned something.

The art world is in our hands. So is the struggle towards a culture available to all.

FACILITATE THE READING OF AN IMAGE

Make artworks more accessible

In recent years, there has been a growing and growing awareness of making art more accessible. This is partly due to the fact that we have seen major museums, such as the Louvre in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, join in. The accessibility of art spaces and works of art is now part of the debate in the world of art and architecture, and in the sociocultural sphere more generally.

Issues and challenges of images

We have all heard the cliché "a picture tells a thousand words", and certainly the use of pictures to promote content and knowledge can have real value. In fact, pictures help us learn, capture attention, explain difficult concepts with simpler signs, and can be used colors to diversify. We are very visual creatures, and even more so since new technologies have become widespread. A large percentage of the human brain is devoted to visual processing. Our love of images is related to our cognitive and attention span. Images are able to capture our attention easily; we are immediately attracted to them.

However, these images must be accessible for all people, and images must also be understood. We need to make sure that the images are completely understandable to everyone, without exclusion.

PART 2

MAKE ARTWORKS ACCESSIBLE

Rudolph II of Habsburg as Vertumnus, 1590, Giuseppe Arcimboldo

Images may in fact be an obstacle or difficult to understand due to a large number of factors: vision disorders, difficulty in reading contrasts, details, lack of cultural background, cultural shift.

Some people with reading difficulties or visual impairments need to customize the display of text to make it easier to read. When text is presented as an image of text, that limits their ability to change the appearance of that text. The most appropriate alternative text for an image depends very much on the context of the image in question. You must provide information for that image that takes into account its purpose and also the surrounding text on the page. The same image might need different alternative text depending on how it's used.

There are millions of visually impaired people around the world who do not have access to images. Even though images are thought to be the easiest medium to understand, many people do not find them easy to use and cannot enjoy them.

We must therefore find ways to make images, and artworks in general, accessible for all, and this can create bridges of opportunity and interaction for people with visual impairments, both professionally and socially.

Impediments in the accessibility of an image

Impediments may be mainly related to physical issues of the subject, or for socio-cultural issues. There are different kinds of physical impediments, mainly having to do with visual deficiencies. Below we look at what they are.

Blindness and vision impairment

The International Classification of Diseases 11 (2018) classifies vision impairment into two groups, distance and near presenting vision impairment.

Worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) data on visual impairment, at least 2.2 billion people have a near or far visual impairment. In at least 1 billion of these cases, or nearly half, visual impairment could be prevented or has not yet been addressed.

The main causes of visual impairment and blindness are uncorrected refractive errors and cataracts.

It is often thought to be a problem of the few, or mainly of the elderly, but this is not the case. Although most people with vision disorders and blindness are over the age of 50, however, vision loss can affect people of all ages. Visual impairments can have both personal impact and economic impact for creating long-term consequences in development and participation in the labor market.

Visual Contrast Sensitivity Problem

Contrast sensitivity allows you to tell the difference between the foreground and background. It's a crucial aspect of your visual function, particularly in low-light situations.

People with visual contrast sensitivity problems may have difficulty reading if the letters and background are not contrasting enough; difficulty distinguishing objects if they have shapes or colors that are too similar; soft light can be another problem, as it diminishes contrasts.

There are millions of people with visual impairments in the world, and many of them face the challenge of accessing visual information on a daily basis. This includes activities such as viewing and sharing photographs online, which have become a modern way of social interaction. What is important to remember, is that both offline and online, visually impaired users wish to view such images independently. So there are ways for these people to be autonomous in exploring the visual reality around them.

Diversity given by different socio-cultural conditions

Culture may be another element that influences how an individual approaches art. On the one hand, seeing art is something that is learned through teaching and habit. Like many other things, having already done something accustoms us to certain patterns of thought and behavior. So too with art. So if a person gets used to going to museums or is approached to art from an early age, he or she will be better able to read an image since it will be something that has been done before. A second element is cultural diversity. In fact, having the same culture may mean having the same patterns of representation and understanding.
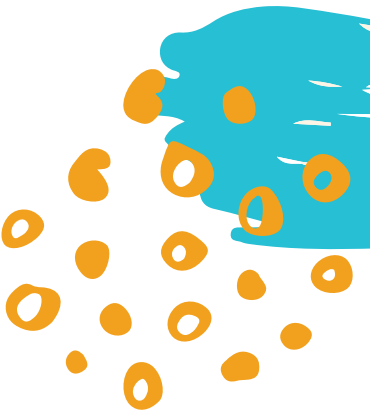
Cultural diversity is a valuable element of our society and enriches our lives, but it must always be taken into account as, if not considered, it can be a reason for estrangement and exclusion.

What are the possibilities to overcome these difficulties?

Here are different ways to make your artwork easier to find, easier to see, and for it to be more engaging:

Make three-dimensional images

Art can be explained and understood in many ways. One of these is through shapes. A first action can be done by rendering the images in 3D, this can be done by 3D printers, recreating the works and differentiating the elements of the work with different heights of surfaces. In this way, blind people or people with visual impairments, can have an experience of the work through touch.

Raised surfaces and 3-D shapes can be accompanied by descriptions and useful information about the work: what is where, how big the artwork is, and descriptions of colors and other visual cues.

Example of 3D printing, at The Prado Museum in Madrid during an exhibition called «Touch The Prado» that invites blind and visually impaired people to touch and feel some of the world's most famous paintings. Visitors cannot touch the original paintings, but a very high-resolution three-dimensional replica of each painting.

Exhibition *Touch The Prado*, 2015, The Prado Museum in Madrid

Play with lights

Another possible action is to play with the lights. For example, diminishing the outside lights, and using lights behind the canvas, to widen the contrast on the work and decrease the potentially problematic interaction with the outside environment.

© Picture by Suzy Hazelwood (Pexels)

The audio support

Images can be seen not only with the eyes. An important element may be the presence of audio support. Audio support can explain the work, explain to the visitor what it contains, clarify its main elements, contrasts, and nuances. The guide in the form of audio can be given to the visitor at the entrance, in the form of an audio guide, or be placed next to the painting through a QR code specific to each work.
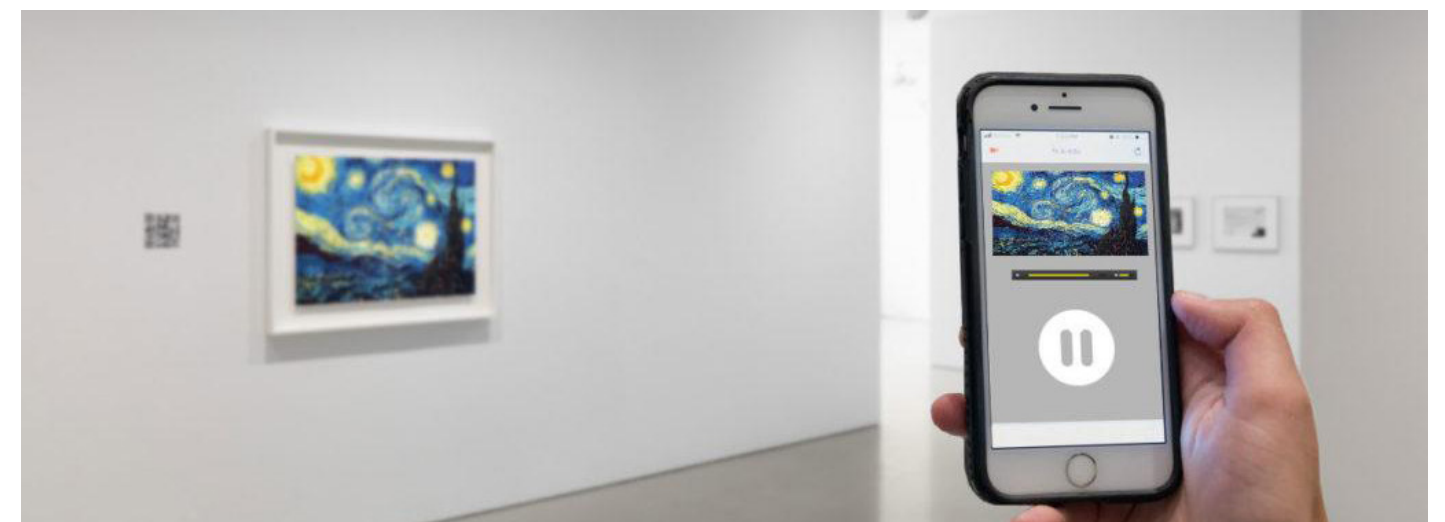
© Picture by QR-Code Italia

QR code

QR codes are making a comeback. When iPhone and Android smartphones included QR code scanners in their new products, they brought the efficient grid back into our lives. In addition, the increased use of QR codes in our daily lives due to covid restrictions (e.g., menus scanned by QR codes) has made the technology more familiar. QR codes can be used to educate the public. When someone scans the code, they immediately come into contact with new knowledge and can learn more about the artwork. They are also perfect for going to different cultures: in fact, much more information about the context of the work can be added to give all visitors useful information for accessing the work.

In this way, through information about the artist's context and artistic period, observers can be more fully introduced to the work. QR codes can also be used for internal purposes, such as inventory management.

Guides in braille

Another supplement in order to make artworks more accessible is the creation of braille information carriers, with additional information about the artist and the artwork's constituent elements. Braille is a tactile writing system used by people with visual impairments, including people who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired. Titles and additional brochures can be included for additional information. This enables, not only blind people, but in general those with visual impairments, to be autonomous and independent in approaching art.
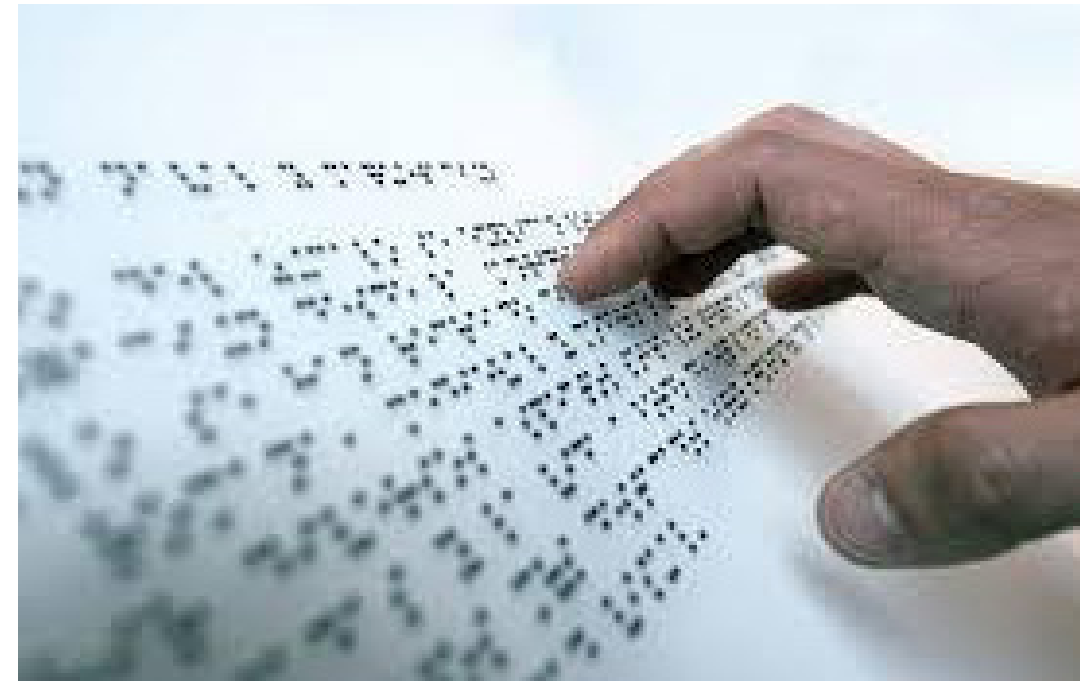
Good practices in the artworld

We have talked about different approaches one can have toward art and techniques that can be implemented to make artworks more accessible and make it easier to read an image.

All of these approaches, depending on the work and context, can be of great importance in conveying the message. Therefore, the opportunity to interact with art should be given to all who wish to perceive art as it is. And this is where we talk about accessibility. Making tactile artwork or including detailed audio descriptions are thus an efficient way to address this and to make artworks more accessible.
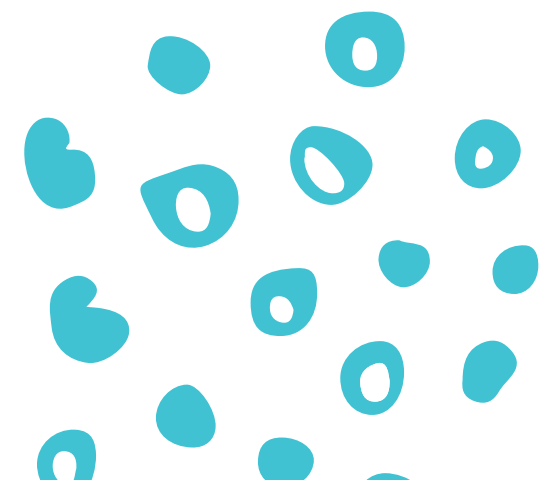
PART 3

THE NEW DIGITAL READING FORMATS

Self-portrait, 1885,
Berthe Morisot

A NEW VIRTUAL ART EXPERIENCE

Access to art content has evolved through time. Back when one needed to go to a library to find a specific title or to a museum to enjoy a particular artwork, today's digital era has changed, improved, and adapted the way we access art. Indeed, content digitalization is not a new process anymore. Instead, it has become a standard practice for many fields, not just the artistic one.

The technologies of digitization enable the conversion of traditional forms of information storage such as paper and photographs into the binary code (ones and zeros) of computer storage. In simpler terms, one does not have to rely on physical support to access paintings and photographs.

The current global health crisis has shifted the focus to digitized content and allowed museums worldwide to enter an era of digitalization. To follow this innovative trend, the Team of Art team has set out to offer solutions to those who could not benefit from these digitized contents as easily as planned. To do so, we planned on the new format of digital reading and ways to access information, as well as the role of digitalization in art.

Reading comprehension is the process of creating meaning from text. However, the reading process depends on **the reader, the text and the medium**. A series of factors can influence reading comprehension, such as the text presentation, the page layout, the content, the logic ties, phraseology, font type, and font size. All these criteria are well thought out by web designers, digital publishers, and any other specialist in the fields of online content.

With the advent of digitalisation, the reading process has changed and evolved. Thorough research has been conducted on the benefits or shortcomings of online reading. Many researchers have a more neutral opinion and argue that e-reading does not really affect the reading performance, cognitive or emotional experience of reading a narrative text. This notion is however to be taken with a grain of salt. Other research has also shown that the medium can indeed influence the reading process;

"Schugar (2011) found that participants reported using fewer study strategies (such as highlighting, note-taking, or bookmarking) when reading digitally. Kaufman and Flanagan (2016) noted that when reading in print, study participants did better answer abstract questions that required inferential reasoning, etc." Others argue that reading comprehension scores, after reading on screen, were significantly higher than after reading on printed materials.

All in all, while there is no real consensus as to which format benefits its learners best, reading online showed serious advantages in the purpose of this project.

Impact and advantages in terms of experience of digital content

In recent years, digital content, both narrative and pictorial, has shown promises in terms of learning and user experience. There are serious benefits to its usages, that are used both in learning environments and for training purposes.

Some of these advantages are as followed:

Accessibility everywhere

Digital content is accessible everywhere and at any time. Learners can access digital content on their smartphones, tablets or computers. In today's digital era, most adult learners have access to devices that can support digital content, which creates broader accessible content. Entry tickets to museums, distance between exhibitions and home, transportation costs, and more can deter learners that have no other access to art content.

Accessible to anyone

Content, whether they are narrative or pictural, can be accessible online which allows for a more inclusive experience. Indeed, adults with mental disorders, physical disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, and more, may have a more challenging time experiencing art in museums. However, on their own devices, set with adaptability features, they are able to enjoy pictural paintings without tiring themselves.

Storytelling

Museums tell stories through their hallways, whether they are chronological, historical or theme-based. While this can be difficult to follow in closed space, with little to no guiding information, virtual exhibitions have the power to follow the narrative in a continuous line with little information to confuse or lose the learner. The learner is then free to explore the gallery or follow the trail of information designed by the tour curator's layout and course.

Special focus

Online and virtual exhibitions are a perfect means for museums and curators to share more information about paintings and artworks that might not have been on the forefront of a regular tour visit. They are able to share details, context, history and techniques that can interest more visitors than if they had to walk the halls of the museums.

Time

Time remains an essential supporter of digital content. While museum visits are often planned on holidays or day visits, it is rare for a visitor to explore a museum multiple times due to time constraints. With virtual exhibition, the same learner is able to go back, time and time again to different sections of the gallery.

Read aloud features

E-texts and narrative experiences such as the Team of Art experience have been designed with text to speech or read aloud features. This allows people to listen to the content if they are too busy to read it, for example, while driving or while doing some chores. This feature is also helpful for children and adults with a learning disability or with visual impairment. It is also useful to help the user understand how a particular word is pronounced.

Strengths and perspective of the format used in Team of art

The Team of Art Narrative experience is not a linear, typical scrolling experience. Indeed, the exhibition offers a horizontal scrolling motion, with zooms and focus set by the creator of the exhibition to show the details, minute brushstrokes of the painter. This experience is especially relevant as researchers at the University of Reading (Dyson & Haselgrove, 2000) observed that reading comprehension declined when students were scrolling as they read, rather than focusing on stationary chunks of text.

Why did we choose a horizontal scrolling experience?

Since readers typically read lines horizontally from left to right, they frequently lose their line position and have difficulties finding them again as the eyes move from left to right and from top to bottom when reading on screens.
Furthermore, text movement during scrolling and the frequent shifts between pages and having all information visible at the same time when reading on screens all contribute to making the reading experience more complex, in terms of reading techniques and reading comprehension.

Reading on screens, one part at a time, increases the optical and mental load by causing the breakdown of the mental chain. Paging or scrolling interrupts the speed and continuity that are necessary to construct meaning in the mind.

© Picture by bongkarn
(Adobe Stock)

While there can be issues with horizontal scrolling, such as page lagging or poor overlay, we counteracted these by ensuring that users would not have to point to a specifically designated area of the screen and drag, but rather click anywhere on the right of the page. They are also able to use their keyboard and scrolling wheel. Furthermore, as users are more familiar with vertical scrolling, avoiding large chunks of text is paramount to ensure a positive user experience.

So, what is our proposal for a visual narrative experience / virtual tour in an educational context?

Team of Art proposes a visual narrative experience in the form of a short, virtual tour to introduce 120 of the greatest, well-known European paintings to adult learners. The reading experience, set in an educational context is crucial to ensure not only accessibility, as discussed above, but also an interactive and educative experience.
The learner can access all the relevant information about a painting through simple movements of the mouse or the keyboard, with a well-designed structure of images and text. The text itself is designed to be accessible to as many people as possible, respecting the Easy-to-Read format.

Indeed, flipping back and forth through pages of both the analysis of the painting and the image itself can lead to a split attention effect. Interactive structures such as the TOA Exhibition can make the linking easier to explore and clarify on the relationship of textual and graphical content.

The Split attention effect occurs when learners have to work with two different sources of information simultaneously when learning something (in our cases, the analysis of artwork and the analysis of the image). This creates an extra load on the brain, that in turn is unable to process all the information at once.

To emphasize more on the narrative and textual information, the texts and analysis offered in the Exhibition are in accordance with the Easy-to-Read format from Inclusion Europe, which defines writing and textual standards for learners with disabilities.
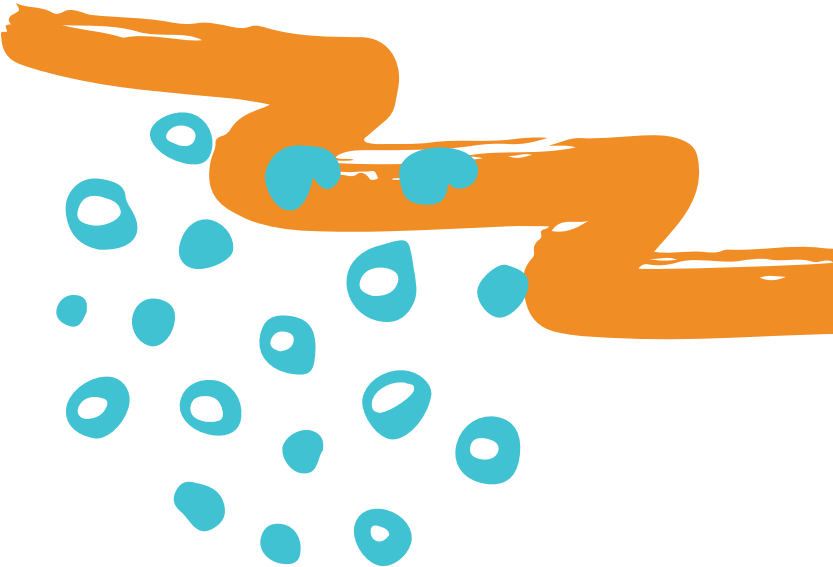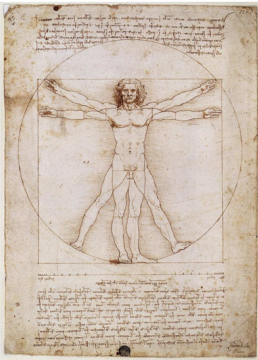
Virtual exhibitions

Take a look at 120 animated and scrolled artworks through our virtual exhibition platform. All the artworks description is written in a plain language in order to be comprehensible from all visitors despite their age, culture, background. Our virtual art exhibition platform will bring you almost impossibly close, to the details of every work available, so that you can appreciate items that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Topics

| All | Antiquity (7) |
| Color and Depth (10) |
| Fauvism (2) | Human body (7) |
| Impressionism (12) |
| Perspective (7) | Real life (1) |
| Resistance Art (6) |
| Subjects (10) | Women (3) |

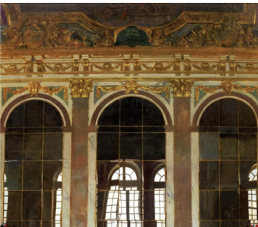**The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp**

The Vitruvian Man

Rudolph II of Habsburg as Vertumnus, Giuseppe Arcimboldo

**The Fighting Temeraire, J.M.W. Turner**

In conclusion, the Team of Art project and virtual exhibition are rooted in accessibility of format, through a new interactive narrative scrolling experience, as well as accessibility of content, using the Easy-to-Read Guidelines, and accessibility of all, as a free online resource.

Must See Virtual Tours

While the Team of Art Project offers a unique narrative experience of more than 120 analyzed artworks, other museums have developed their virtual content. When you are done with the TOA exhibition, consider these virtual tours and online collections!

• National Gallery of Art – Washington
• British Museum – London
• National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art – Seoul
• Louvre – Paris
• MASP – Sãn Paolo
• Guggenheim Museum – New York
• The J. Paul Getty Museum – Los Angeles
• Uffizi Gallery – Florence
• Van Gogh Museum – Amsterdam
• Pergamon Museum – Berlin
• Rijksmuseum- Amsterdam
• Musée d'Orsay – Paris
• The Broad – LA

PART 4
PROJECT RESULTS

Wanderer above the Sea of Fog,
1818, Caspar David Friedrich
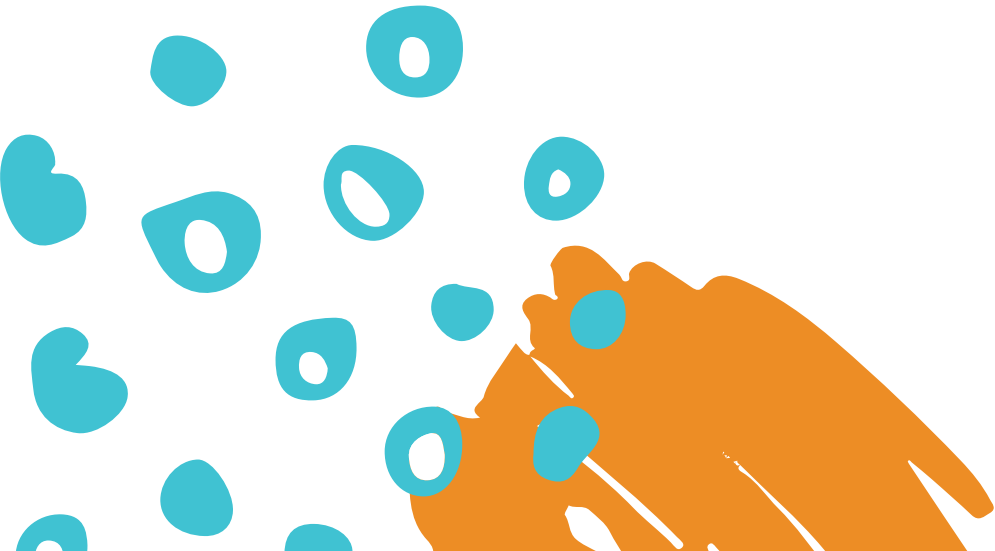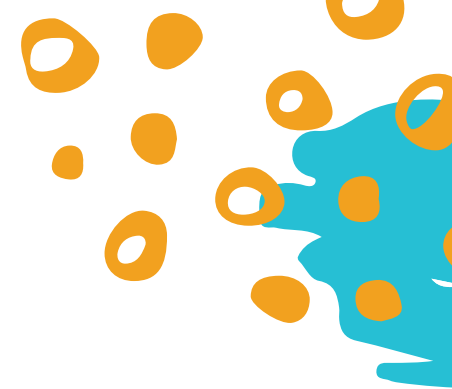
FREE PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCES

There has been great interest for this project and the results of it.
Team of Art has provided an outstanding portfolio of results, which is unique, modern, accessible and spot on with the needs of the populations not only across Europe and the European Union, but also across the world.
The 5 intellectual productions which are ready and available to make use of are:

• A virtual exhibition that brings together more than 120 animated and scrolling works of art by famous European artists covering a wide range of artistic eras, styles and techniques
• An accessible glossary of key artistic terms, illustrated and accompanied by videos in sign language
• 10 pedagogical files that will allow you to work around the works told. These files will be created around transversal artistic themes, bringing together an average of ten works from the " virtual exhibition " section.
• 30 practical sheets with advice for educators, workshop tips and tutorials to help them use the resources created in the context of their professional activity.
• A pedagogical implementation guide that answers general and practical questions;

In general, the testimonies of educators, trainers and students were related to the design of the project, the style of writing and the visually pleasant platform, graphics and documents that are available, the wide variety of topics and resources and lastly also about the variety of languages the resources are available in.

The partners received positive feedback for the project. In regards to the **virtual exhibition**, it was recognized by a part of the audience (trainers and educators) that this is innovative and very well designed and taught through. The virtual exhibition, in their opinion, allows people with disabilities, less resources and NEETs to be able to gain knowledge of culture and heritage. The exhibition aims to help with the understanding of difficult vocabulary and terminology that is sometimes found in artwork explanations.
Similar feedback was received by art and design students, who also, through the use of both the virtual exhibition and the accessible glossary, learned new terms faster and easier.

Here is a list of the topics that the virtual exhibition brings together animated and scrolling works of art by famous European artists covering a wide range of artistic eras, styles and techniques.

• Antiquity
• Subjects
• Colour and Depth
• Impressionism
• Perspectives
• Pop Art
• Feminism / Women in Art
• Fauvism
• Resistance Art

The partners also gathered feedback regarding the **accessible glossary** from NGO's; training centers and students. The accessible glossary was presented to the audiences after they viewed the virtual exhibition. The majority of the trainers and students are pleasantly surprised about the glossary.
They recognized that it greatly complements the concepts and terms used in the commentary of the artworks. The audience was also very impressed about how accessible and well presented the glossary is and how it is created to also meet the needs of audiences with few or no qualifications and/or with disabilities and learning difficulties. The feedback was that museum curators across more countries should also provide the descriptions of their artworks in a more accessible way so that a greater proportion of the population can understand what they are trying to explain.
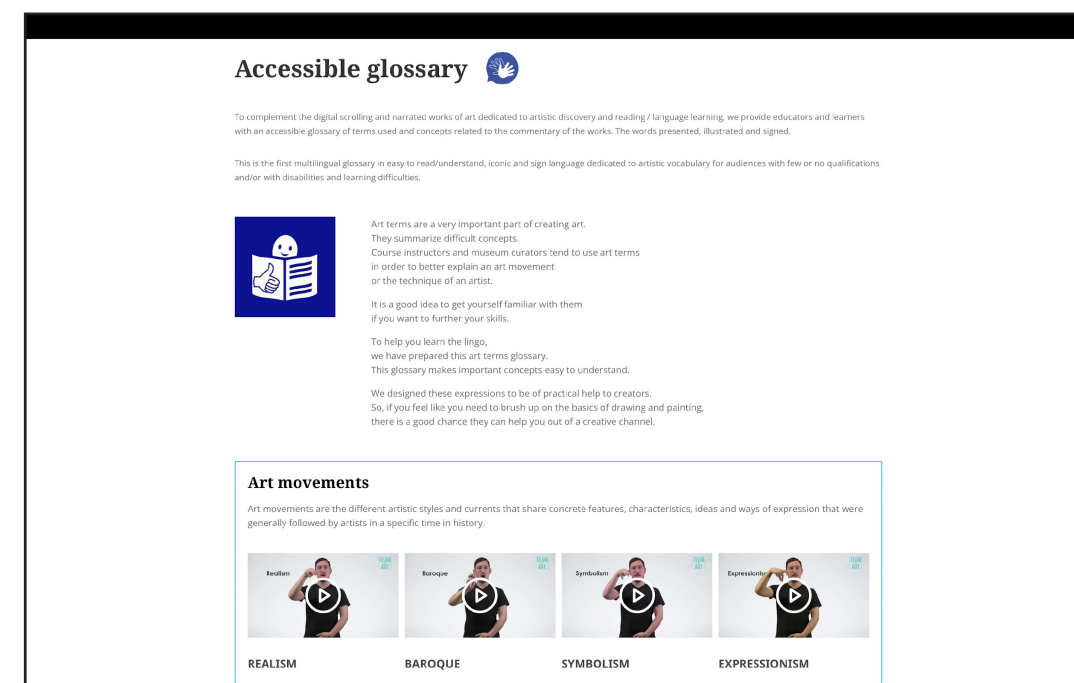
Here is a summary of the topics that are explained in the accessible glossary:

• Art movements
• Painting materials
• Perspective
• Painting technique
• Curator

In terms of the **pedagogical dossiers**, trainers and educators mentioned that they are very long and that they cover the main themes and topics. They shared that the depth and detailed explanations serve as a good tool to gather all the necessary information they may need in order to create a lesson. They gave compliments regarding the innovative activities and shared that they are very excited to make use of them with their classes. The students also shared that the dossiers are a great summary of the movements and topics that are key for an upcoming artist to know the details and background of. The pedagogical dossiers also addressed the topic of 'Disability in Art', which one that the teachers and trainers mentioned is not highly included, encouraged or discussed in many courses and curriculums. This was a very "eye opening" topic that seems to not be paid very much attention to currently in curricula. The feedback from the educators was that the pedagogical dossiers by themselves serve as a great theoretical background on the topics that are displayed through the virtual exhibitions.

"It is a great mixture of theory and practice that goes hand in hand with the virtual exhibitions. It was wonderful to see that some of the artworks that are in the pedagogical dossiers are also displayed in the virtual exhibition where you can find their detailed analysis and description." – educator from Bulgaria

Hereby a summary of the topics that you can find a pedagogical dossier about:

• Antiquity
• Color and Depth
• Disability in Art
• Impressionism
• Perspective
• Resistance Art
• Subjects

The **practical sheets** were very well received by educators as they provided a great workshop material for their students. They also found a lot of the topics innovative and the exercises and ideas for experiments very un-traditional. They mentioned that the practical sheets have great potential to be used as materials for in class and that in their opinion they will be found very interesting by the students. When we asked the students about their feedback and recommendations, the students expressed clearly that the workshops seem very interesting and new for them. They also shared

that the exercises in each workshop are very dynamic and include practical experience, theoretical knowledge and also room for creativity and critical discussions and critical thinking. They liked how the practical sheets are structured and also mentioned that the further recommended reading materials are interesting. One of the topic that continuously was impressing the students was the topic on using social media / Instagram for art popularization.

Hereby a list of the topics available in the form of practical sheets:

• An inclusive workshop for audience with mental disabilities
• Exercises on how to evoke creativity
• How to adapt photographs for people with cognitive disabilities
• How to use comic books in the classroom/workshop
• Theatrical performances which include people with disabilities
• Touch and smell approach – multisensory art exercises
• Appropriate works of art in a playful and digital way case study: create an audio guide
• Creating a digital art book catalogue
• Creating a virtual exhibition
• How to use Europeana?
• How to use social media in art popularization? Case: using Instagram to popularize art
• Creating and designing an art workshop for students with specific learning disorders
• Using the easy-to-read framework for digital exhibition
• Self-creation for art workshop
• How to look for art outside of museums and cultural centres?
• How to create audio description of artworks
• Appreciating, evaluating and understanding the value of art
• How to use storytelling for art workshops
• Creating mind maps as an exercise to art interpretation
• How art influenced and has been influenced by social movements
• Advice on art theory and presentation
• Art games
• Enrich a storyboard with art from European Heritage
• Recreate the life of a famous Artist
• Elements of art analysis
• Inclusion of audience with visual impairment
• Inclusion of audience with hearing impairment
• How to adapt colours for people with visual problems
• Perspectives and interpretations of the same artwork
• How to deal with copyrights and licences in adapting art online

CONCLUSION

Woman with a Parasol –
Madame Monet and Her Son,
1875, Claude Monet

This implementation guide provided the answers to a number of critical questions:

• What are the difficulties that can prevent to approach and understand of a work of art ?

• How to make the presentation of a work of art useful for the accessibility of its composition and cultural significance ?

• By which process, vocabulary, narration can I promote the entry in the work to maximize its feeling and lead to its comprehension for little or not qualified public ?

We believe to have inspired all the involved associated partners, educators, trainers, students and attendees of our events on the importance of inclusion in art. While the pandemic and digitalization of processes and experiences did shift the mindset for many of us and started to be more inclusive of the people with low or no education and people with any form of disability, there is still a lot of work to be done across Europe in terms of museums and cultural centers.

The pedagogical resources provided in this project are a great base for educators and institutions to use for educational purposes and further develop their workshops, and educational curricula. They are also a wonderful method to bring more people together to learn and discuss about European heritage and art.

There is a lot of potential for art education and education through art for all. It is essential for us as a European community to continue being more inclusive and strive for innovative solutions and ideas in order to preserve out cultural heritage.

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