

Manchester Art Gallery

How to make your visual art exhibition spaces accessible  
by Sumaira Naseem

#AccessibleArtSpaces Project

ARTS  
COUNCIL  
ENGLAND

ARTS  
COUNCIL  
ENGLAND

OPEN  
DOORS  
AND  
SAFE  
SPACES

HAYWARD  
GALLERY  
TOURING

SOUTHBANK  
CENTRE



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**Open Doors  
And  
Safe Spaces**

# How to make your visual art exhibition spaces accessible

©Copyright 2023 Sumaira Naseem

This resource will help art organisations to:

- Look at including artists and public members with visual impairments in the exhibiting of visual art.
- Access lived experience to gain a visual difference perspective.
- Explore processes, tools and knowledge to show that visual art is not ocular centric.

## Sumaira's Story

I was once asked why I wanted to take photographs. What if they are blurry? They may be out of focus, overexposed or pixelated? Well, many photographs may be considered of poor quality but this is not because all such pictures were taken by people with visual impairments.

This moment of being reduced to my impairment actually empowered me to pursue my visual difference art practice. I want to share and mediate how I see the world. I believe I stop and capture everyday details like the colour of the sky. This is something that I cannot take for granted so I take a picture to remember.

How do I know what is in a picture that I took? Well, I use accessibility settings on my phone.

It can be extremely frustrating when I can't see colour or technology doesn't work. The latter should always be used as a tool rather than something one has to rely or depend upon. Support from others ought to be impartial and objective.

For me visual art is not purely focused on the sight of the photographer or viewer.

Most people don't pick up a camera if they see someone crying. Apart from their tears, you might hear the person sobbing. They could be consoled instead of you looking at them through a lens or screen.

As an artist I use my other senses along with my vision to capture moments and document experiences.

My multi sensory lens was a way to make art in an accessible way. My processes have evolved to tell stories so others can learn to see the world differently.

My practice invites people to stop, take notice and take action by acknowledging the things we take for granted like colour.

How often do we take the time to see how much one must look at in order to navigate visual art exhibition spaces?

How much information could we share like where each artwork is located, it's printed text and a description?

I imagine that a lot of information is already collated and shared between different teams working on an exhibition so why not make it public?

## **Part One**

A practical Demonstration of Accessibility Settings

- Taking a picture
- Explore image
- Live text

## **Part Two**

Engaging The Senses

Activities:

- Describe a picture as if you were speaking on the phone
- Change the filter on your phone so there's no colour
- Read a exhibition catalogue using Voice Over, Live Text and Apple's iPhone

## **Part Three**

Reflection and Pledge Action

Consider sharing your thoughts and feelings.

Feel free to do this in any way that is enjoyable to you. Be as creative as you like.

Now, think about an action you can take to improve accessibility. Make it as specific as possible. Maybe you are working with an artist who has disclosed a visual impairment.

Are you focused on the art or how it was made? Does the artist want their lived experience to be the centre of attention?

Remember disclosures are always a choice.

Structural and content inaccessibility are usually the reason for exclusion and discrimination (even if none of this is intentional).

You can share your reflections and pledged actions using the Twitter hashtag **#AccessibleArtSpaces**

If you would like to enquire about training or consultancy from Sumaira to make your art space even more accessible, you can contact Sumaira by sending an email to this address:

[opendoorssafespaces@gmail.com](mailto:opendoorssafespaces@gmail.com)

Watch out for new resource content available soon here: **#opendoorssafespaces**

**Blog:**  
[opendoorsandsafespaces.blogspot.co.uk/](http://opendoorsandsafespaces.blogspot.co.uk/)

**Twitter:**  
[@Doorssafe](https://twitter.com/Doorssafe)  
[twitter.com/doorssafe](https://twitter.com/doorssafe)

**Facebook:**  
[facebook.com/sumaira.naseem.31945](https://facebook.com/sumaira.naseem.31945)

**Instagram:**  
[instagram.com/opendoorssafespaces/](https://instagram.com/opendoorssafespaces/)

**UStream TV Channel:**  
[www.ustream.tv/channel/g78gCNAE7Fu](http://www.ustream.tv/channel/g78gCNAE7Fu)

The first page has a green background with white writing and includes the logos for the British Art Show 9, Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre, Manchester Art Gallery and Open Doors And Safe Spaces.