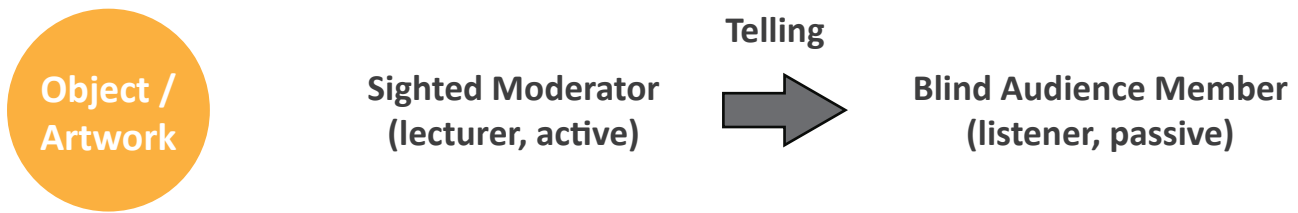


VISLAN explained

Geoff Munck, 2023

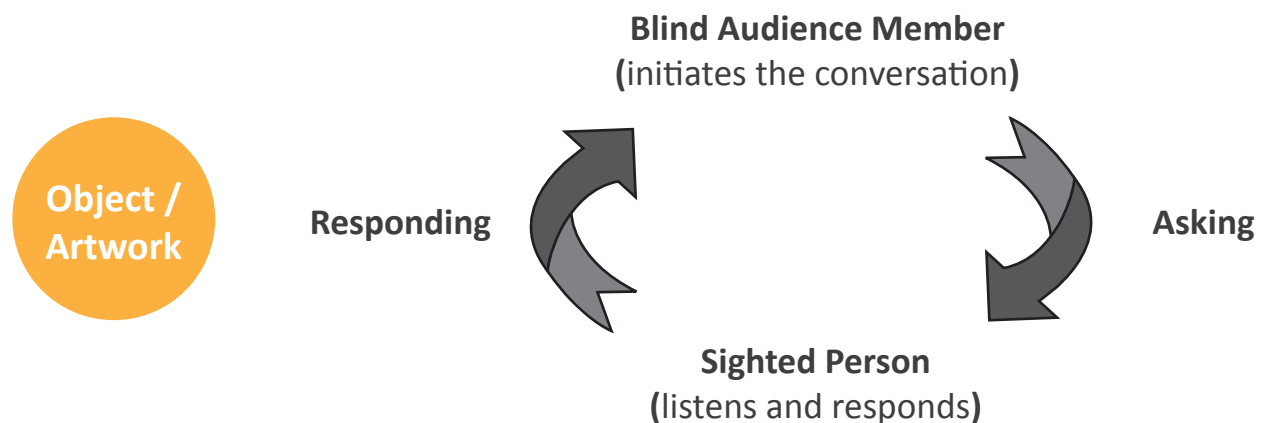


The traditional gallery or museum experience usually is lecture style and linear:



The presented artwork is usually selected and “filtered” by the moderator or gallery team based on what they think is suitable for the vision-impaired visitor and what they consider helpful to assist their experience (e.g. allowing to touch a sculpture when it is not meant to be touched or adding a tactile representation giving a topographic overview). The intent appears to be to satisfy the moderators’ or institution’s goal to pass on information they choose in the time available to them.

The VISLAN method is conversational and led by the person with the need to know. It is a circular process of enquiry in which the blind and sighted participants share equal active roles:



At its core, the Vislan method facilitates a bespoke purposeful process of enquiry led by the blind audience member. It affords choice and self-determination (starting by selecting the work to enquire about). Unlike current moderator-led offerings that emphasise economy of resources over the audience experience, the intent of the Vislan process is the full satisfaction of the blind audiences’ need to know. Of course this requires more time, but this is the lived experience of people with low or no vision seeking to engage meaningfully and comparably with visual experiences. Accepting that it takes more time, it need not require any additional technologies or art expertise. Naturally, a supportive and inclusive organisation could make human guides available without the time limitations that normally restrict such assistance. Additionally, blind audience members could be encouraged to adopt the practice of Vislan, empowering them to attend visual activities accompanied by sighted friends for a wholly satisfying dignified experience. On this point, galleries and museums could play an important role in overcoming sight as a barrier and achieve inclusivity and social responsibility by running Vislan education programs for interested blind audience members and their companions.

Experience has shown that the quality of the conversation that emerges is the best indication of the understanding and enjoyment of both participants. It is unnecessary to struggle with the question as to whether the blind person’s appreciation of a visual experience matches that of a sighted person. It is sufficient that the vision-impaired individual indicates that they are satisfied of their comprehension. As for most other experiences that cannot be seen directly, language and dialogue afford the richest palette for the imagination to paint an image in the mind’s eye and the individual’s heart.