

Blindness and Expanded Sculpture (Leeds, 19 Mar 25)

Henry Moore Institute, Mar 19, 2025

Deadline: Dec 6, 2024

Kirstie Gregory, Henry Moore Institute

Call for participation: Blindness and Expanded Sculpture.

International Conference, to take place:

Leeds Art Gallery

Wednesday 19 March 2025

Deadline to apply:

Friday 6 December 2024, 17:00

About the conference:

This conference is concerned with the expanded creative, curatorial, and historiographical opportunities that arise when we refuse to separate out the senses and destabilise the normative, vision-based frame of art reception. By encouraging new inquiry into what kinds of experience artworks make possible, the conference asks: what can blindness bring to sculpture? What does this approach reveal about sculpture's ontological reality?

In 1987, Leeds City Art Gallery held 'Revelation for the Hands', an exhibition which invited visitors to touch the twenty works on show. Many of the artists featured, including Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, were prominent British sculptors but none of them were blind or partially blind. For blind audiences, touch is not merely a compensatory or recognitional engagement in lieu of the absence of visual information, it extends to a legitimate form of knowledge and aesthetic engagement in its own right. Such engagement offers benefits for both blind and non-blind audiences.

Since at least the 1960s, blind and partially blind engagement with sculpture, and its theoretical consequences, has radically transformed our appreciation of 'what blindness brings to art' (Kleege 2018). It has raised questions about how our organisations function, the kind of art they exhibit, and modes of exhibition they deploy.

Recent scholarship in the aesthetics of non-visual reception has moved away from the context independent autonomous sculptural object towards more situated practices. This shift of an audience's role from passive receiver to active participant has been termed 'the beholder's share' (Wilder 2022). Cumulatively these strategies encourage us 'to recast blindness as a multifaceted aesthetic position' replete with possibilities of reception usually excluded by the term 'visual art' (Thompson & Warne 2018).

How can thinking beyond sight, through a broad spectrum of sensory experience, change the ways we understand sculptural objects? What kind of entities do artworks reveal themselves to be once we reorient our approach to them away from just visuality? For this one-day conference we invite new contributions from the philosophy of art, art and curatorial practice, art history, critical disability studies, psychology and the sciences which engage with inclusive forms of making and beholding sculpture.

The conference marks the conclusion of the Henry Moore Institute's Beyond the Visual Research Season which precedes the exhibition of the same title opening in November 2025. This conference is part of a three-year research project, Beyond the Visual: Blindness and Expanded Sculpture. The project, a collaboration between the Henry Moore Institute, Shape Arts and University of the Arts London, was the recipient of the inaugural Arts and Humanities Research Council Exhibition Fund. The project will culminate with a landmark 2025 exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute, foregrounding work by blind and partially blind artists.

Topics and themes of discussion:

- Papers may engage with, but need not be limited to, the following issues and questions:
- How does blindness trouble our standard definitions and ontological accounts of sculpture?
- What role might audio-description and object handling have in an expanded future of sculpture beyond the visual?
- Historic and contemporary curatorial approaches beyond the visual
- Institutional critique
- Expanded approaches to archive material and accessibility
- How might blindness gain reframe historic debates in sculpture between the role of tactility versus opticality?
- As artists, curators, and historians, how can we seek to recast 'access' as creative praxis (Cachia 2022)?

Submit a proposal:

Applicants are kindly asked to submit:

- a brief abstract (no more than 250 words)
- a short biographical note (100 words)

The deadline to apply is Friday 6 September 2024.

Please email your proposals to: research@henry-moore.org

Submissions are also welcome in alternative formats.

Speakers will receive an honorarium of £100, and travel and accommodation costs within the UK will be reimbursed.

Reference:

CFP: Blindness and Expanded Sculpture (Leeds, 19 Mar 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 26, 2024 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42203>>.