

The Vancouver Art Gallery Becomes First BC Museum to Offer Regular Described Tours for Blind and Partially Sighted Visitors

*Gallery's Trained Educators Make Exhibitions
Even More Accessible to Wider Community in 2019*

January 30, Vancouver, BC – The Vancouver Art Gallery, in partnership with VocalEye, is proud to announce it is the first Gallery in British Columbia to offer regular Described Tours for its blind and partially sighted visitors. With the first tour given on January 5, 2019, the Gallery now offers live Described Tours the first Saturday of each month, whereby its trained Gallery Educators use innovative visual description methods to make its exhibitions more accessible to those living with varying levels of vision loss.

“The importance and appeal of the visual arts is universal and they are meant to be enjoyed by everyone,” says Kathleen S. Bartels, Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery. “Offering Described Tours on a regular basis supports the Gallery’s work towards becoming more accessible to the larger community including those who are blind or partially sighted.”

“By their nature, the visual arts traditionally appeal to a ‘visual’ audience, but they are an integral part of cultural literacy that people with sight loss might otherwise be excluded from,” says Steph Kirkland, Founder and Director of VocalEye. “We are thrilled to work with the Vancouver Art Gallery’s Educators, who can now provide visitors with vision loss a deeper understanding of the visual arts, and in turn, offer these members of our community an opportunity to contribute their own unique perspective on the arts.”

While the Gallery currently offers audio guides for select exhibitions, the Described Tours conducted in-person by specially-trained Gallery Educators bring new life to the art experience via well-researched techniques, guidelines and methods developed by VocalEye over the past five years.

VocalEye’s methods of description are categorized by “Levels of Experience.” In Level One, the Educator describes what is observable and apparent; at Level Two, the Educator shares non-apparent facts and context with the listener; Level Three incorporates the personal or subjective response; finally, Level Four explores the sensorial experience employing models, textures and tactile drawing techniques. To master VocalEye’s guidelines and methods, the Gallery’s Educators underwent a series of training workshops totaling more than thirty hours.

Visitors can look forward to the following Described Tours for 2019 at the Vancouver Art Gallery:

- February 2: *The Metamorphosis*
- March 2: *A Curator’s View: Ian Thom Selects*
- April 6: *French Moderns: Monet to Matisse, 1850–1950*

For more information on the Vancouver Art Gallery’s exhibitions and times of the described tours, visit vanartgallery.bc.ca

Registration is required as capacity is limited. Please contact Donna with VocalEye to register by e-mail: buddies@vocaleyeye.ca

VocalEye's Sighted Guides are available to meet adults with vision loss (18 years of age and over) at the Burrard Sky Train station and accompany them to and from the Gallery. To arrange a Sighted Guide meet-up, please contact Donna at least three days in advance: buddies@vocaleyeye.ca

The Vancouver Art Gallery is wheelchair accessible. Street-level access is available through our Hornby and Robson street entrances, open during all public hours. Wheelchairs are available to visitors on a first-come first-served basis or may be reserved in advance of your visit by calling 604-662-4700.

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MEDIA CONTACT

Hanah Van Borek, Communications Specialist

hvanborek@vanartgallery.bc.ca, ph: 604.662.4700 ext. 2403 or 778.322.8967

About the Vancouver Art Gallery (vanartgallery.bc.ca)

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most respected and innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's ground-breaking exhibitions, extensive public programs, and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is paid to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to the arts of the Asia Pacific region—through the Institute of Asian Art that the Gallery founded in 2014. The Gallery's programs also explore the impacts of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is situated on traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səłilwətaʔł (Tseil-waututh) peoples, and is respectful of the Indigenous stewards of the land it occupies, whose rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Vancouver and to the work of the Gallery.

Facebook:
[@VancouverArtGallery](https://www.facebook.com/VancouverArtGallery)

Twitter and Instagram:
[@VanArtGallery](https://www.instagram.com/VanArtGallery)

About VocalEye Descriptive Arts (vocaleyeye.ca)

Launched in 2009, VocalEye is a non-profit society and the first live descriptive arts service for the blind in Canada. Its mission is to provide greater access to theatre, arts and cultural events for people of all ages who are blind and partially sighted. We provide theatre companies and other arts organizations with the support necessary to make their productions and events more accessible to these audience members through live description, education, outreach and other services.

More information available via VocalEye's FAQ: <http://www.vocaleyeye.ca/faq/>