

History of Touch in Museums in Japan

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we survey the history of touch in museums in Japan. In order to achieve this objective, we focus on touch exhibitions, exhibitions of artworks to be appreciated through touch. As a method, we compare the history of these exhibitions in the United Kingdom and Japan. The first significant touch exhibition of sculpture in the UK was held at the Tate Gallery in London in 1976. Since then, many more exhibitions have been held in museums. The early ones were confined to visually handicapped visitors, because of fears about conservation. Recently, touch exhibitions are being opened to general audiences. With disability legislation, access for people with all kinds of disabilities has begun to improve in museums. On the other hand, the first annual touch exhibition in Japan was held at Hyogo Prefectural Art Museum in 1989 and it was open to every visitor including those who are visually handicapped. In respect to national museums, touch is considered a learning tool in their education programs, such as a school program for visually impaired students in Tokyo National Museum. It is plausible to say that instead of public museums, which played a key role in the UK, individual artists and private tactile galleries have assumed a key role in developing a better environment for people in Japan with visual impairment to access art. In conclusion, more museums in Japan are developing exhibitions and educational opportunities for their diverse audience in the 21st century. Cooperation between museums and artists will deepen the touch exhibition experience for visually impaired visitors by providing communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The golden rule kept in museums is "PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH". However, in recent years many museums have introduced displays which are not only to be seen but also to be touched, to be heard, and to be experienced by the audience. This method is called "hands-on", and the origin of it is in two streams that have developed in parallel. The first stream is children's museums, which became popular in the United States in the late 19th century, natural science museums in Western countries in the early 20th century.

The second stream is a type of exhibition called "touch exhibitions", exhibitions of artworks to be appreciated through touch in art museums and galleries. Touch exhibitions were started in Japan in the 1980s, and the number of exhibitions has increased in the last 30 years.

In this paper, we focus on "touch exhibitions", try to draw a rough sketch of their history, and consider some future prospects for more touch exhibitions in Japan. As a method, we compare the history of touch exhibitions in the United Kingdom and Japan. The first reason to compare with the UK is that the main players were different in the two countries. The second reason is that the policies concerning people with disabilities / cultural minorities, including the visually impaired, are also different in the UK and Japan. By comparing examples showing different developments like this, we may outline the features of touch exhibitions in Japanese art museums.

2. METHOD

We analyzed three types of publication, (1) posters for exhibitions in art museums in Japan from 1980 to 2014, (2) newsletters published by art organizations in Japan, and (3) research articles and practical reports published in the UK and Japan.

(1) Art Museum Posters

In order to investigate the number of "Touch Exhibitions" publicized by museums, we searched the University of Tsukuba Art and Design department's library database, which holds 9683 posters of exhibitions nationwide from 1980 to 2014. Key words were "touch", "tactile", "sense", "experience".

(2) Newsletters of Art Organizations

We searched reports in newsletters published by art organizations, such as the Japanese Association of Sculptors, the Japan Fine Arts Exhibition, and so forth, for activities concerning touch tours, workshops, and support for visually handicapped people provided in their exhibitions.

(3) Academic Papers and Practical Reports

We used academic papers and practical reports published in Japan and the UK as supplementary materials.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Anne Pearson, who worked for the British Museum from the 1970s, touch exhibitions in the UK really began in the 1970s. The early ones were confined to visually handicapped visitors, because of fears about conservation. More recently, however, they have almost always been integrated, i.e. open to everyone. The first significant touch exhibition to be held in the UK was at the Tate Gallery in London in 1976. It was concerned with introducing modern western European sculpture to visually handicapped visitors, and as such was seminal. It set the pattern for a kind of touch exhibition which is still continuing and developing in the UK. The sculptures, which included work by Henry Moore, Jacob Epstein, Barbara Hepworth and Edgar Degas, were arranged in a sequence from the more naturalistic to the more abstract. Following this, many touch exhibitions were held at large and small museums. At the British Museum, touch exhibitions were organized with their objects arranged by many themes. With disability legislation (Disability Discrimination Act 1995), access for people with all kinds of disabilities has begun to improve in museums. Large museums have appointed specialist staff to promote access, and many museums now provide for blind and visually impaired visitors through audio tours, touch exhibitions or touch tours, and tactile images or Braille descriptions to accompany visual displays.

On the other hand, in Japan, the first significant annual touch exhibition was organized by Hyogo Prefectural Art Museum in 1989 and has been continuing until now. In respect to national museums, the first school program for visually impaired students was launched in Tokyo National Museum in 2010. Touch is considered as a learning tool in the program. An old Japanese art puzzle game called "Kaiawase" was made for blind school students to handle and play, and a tactile map of the museum was offered for everyone to touch. Also, in Japan, individual artists and private tactile galleries have assumed a key role in developing a better environment for people with visual impairment to access art. For instance, the earliest record of a touch tour for blind and visually impaired students by the

Japanese Association of Sculptors dates back to 1967. They invited students of blind schools to their annual exhibition and provided them opportunities to appreciate sculpture through touch. Meanwhile, TOM Gallery was opened in 1984 by Ado and Harue Murayama in Tokyo, intending to offer access for blind visitors to appreciate the best sculpture, ceramics and other forms of art through touch. Various projects are held in cooperation with artists, such as Churyo Sato, Masakazu Horiuchi, Kyubei Kiyumizu, and many more under the concept "TOUCH ME ART".

In the poster database, the earliest exhibition was "Material and Form: Dialogue with Touch" held at Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, in 1996. In the 2000s, the "Tactile Exhibition" was held annually at Toyama Citizen Plaza. In the 2010s, touch exhibitions were held in various museums such as "Touch Art!" At Kawagoe City Art Museum in Saitama and "N + N Exhibition 2012: Touching - Sense of Lesson" at Nerima Ward Museum in Tokyo (Table 1).

	1984	TOM Gallery opening exhibition "From Rodin to the Present"
	1986	Mie Prefectural Art Museum "Arp Exhibition" 30 works were selected to be touched
	1986	Yamagata Art Museum " Yamagata Sculpture Exhibition Through Touch - Touching the Gentleness -"
	1988	Seibu Art Museum "Exhibition Through Touch"
	1989	Nagoya City Museum of Art "Pleasure to Touch - Holding Exhibited Sculptures by Hand"
		Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art "Form in Art: Expression Through Touch"
	1992	Nagoya City Art Museum "Art Exhibition Through Touch, Seven Artists: Presenting Today's Japanese Art, Returnee Exhibition"
P	1996	Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, "Materials and Forms - Dialogue with Tactile Senses"
P	1997	Miyazaki Prefectural Museum of Art "Sculpture Exhibition - An Exhibition Through the Hand and Fingertips"
P	2000	Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art "Touching Art Exhibition"
P	2001	Takasaki Municipal Art Museum "Touching with the Eyes, Touching with the Hands - Form of Life" Yoshitatsu Yanagihara Exhibition "
P	2004	Toyama Prefectural Museum of Modern Art "Art with Five Senses"
P		Hachioji City Dream Art Museum "Participating and Enjoying Exhibitions: Let's Talk about Magical Art - Ando Foundation Collection in Gifu Prefectural Art Museum"
P	2007	Kyushu Sangyo University Art Museum "Texture of Sculpture-11th exhibition of Kyushu Sangyo University Museum of Art"
	2010	Tokyo National Museum's School Program for the visually impaired was started
P		Nagano Prefectural Shinano Art Museum " Art with 5 Senses, Part 2" Exhibition
	2011	Aomori Prefectural Museum of Art "Touch the Art! - Feel of Art"
P	2012	Kawagoe City Art Museum "Touch the Art! 2: First Step Touching Art"
P		Nerima Ward Art Museum "N + N Exhibition 2012:" Touching - Sense Lessons - Holding
	2017	Hongo Shin Memorial Sapporo Sculpture Art Museum "Collection Exhibition: Through Touch"
		National Kyoto Museum of Modern Art "Discovering the Sense - Starting a New Art Viewing Program Creation Promotion Project"

Table 1. The Touch Exhibitions in museums in Japan

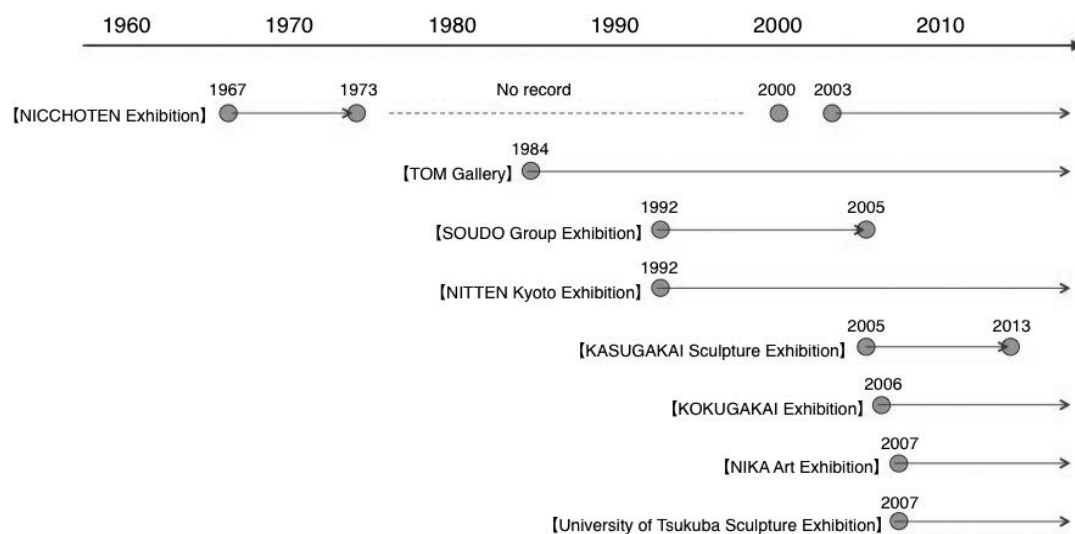


Figure 1: Support for the visually impaired by artist groups

In terms of reports from newsletters of Art Organizations, pioneering support for visually handicapped students was carried out in the form of a touch exhibition section at the 15th Japanese sculpture exhibition by the Japanese Association of Sculptors in 1967, and it continued to 1973. Although the record between 1974 and 1999 has not been confirmed, the topic has been discussed in the steering committee of the Association. On October 13, 2000, they decided to invite students of Kugayama municipal school for the blind to their exhibition in 2003. A project team was organized in 2006, and touch tours have been held every year since then. Other art organizations also began touch exhibitions, touch tours, and workshops for visually impaired people (Figure 1).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Touch exhibitions in the UK and Japan reflected the social position of museums and cultural policies. In the UK, museums are regarded as key players in social inclusion, and accessibility to people with disabilities was discussed in that framework. On the other hand, in Japan many museums were constructed during the last fifty years, but many of the small ones suffered from a decrease in visitors. The number of visitors was the main criterion for evaluation, and their focus was not directed to the needs of visitors. However, Japanese museums have been recognizing the needs of their diverse audience since the 2000s. More museums in Japan are developing exhibitions and educational opportunities for their diverse audience in the 21st century. In terms of touch exhibitions, it may be fruitful to cooperate with artists who have provided support to visually impaired people to appreciate art through touch and dialogue. Experiencing art through touch is greatly benefited by communication with someone who has knowledge and experience.

With recent Disability Legislation (Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, 2016), and the revision of Basic Act for the Culture and the Arts, 2017, the momentum for increasing access to culture and the arts for all people is being developed in Japan. In order to make this momentum a sustainable development, it is important for us to recognize the diversity and equality of the audience and their culture.

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