



Interactive art exhibits > MMIT Annual Conference 2014: sound & vision explored > Mobile app marketing

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# welcome



This issue we have a special focus on sound and vision ahead of our Annual Conference in Sheffield on September 11th & 12th.

This year the theme is: *Sound & Vision Librarianship — Going Beyond Words & Pictures.*

Warm regards,

Catherine Dhanjal, Managing Editor

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**MMIT Annual Conference  
Sheffield, UK  
Thursday & Friday  
11 & 12 September 2014**

***Sound & Vision Librarianship  
— Going Beyond Words &  
Pictures***

**For more information see  
page 3**

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# Sound Canvas: engaging audiences through body movement



**Graham Peet, curator of The Public gallery in West Bromwich, explains how the work was developed, what it offers disabled visitors and how the underlying technology ensures it can meet the artist's goal of being accessible, fun and engaging**

Disabled artist Zoe Partington was commissioned by The Public and DASH (Disability Arts in Shropshire) to create a permanent piece of art for the The Public gallery in West Bromwich.

The commission was part of DASH's project IN 'Disability art in the mainstream'. This programme is specifically designed to facilitate galleries to commission work by disabled artists.

people with hearing loss can experience Sound Canvas through the lighting effects, blind people are attracted to the combination of sound and the tactile

In November 2013 Sound Canvas was commended at the Jodi Awards for Innovation in digital accessibility for all.

## Making art accessible and fun

Zoe lost her sight at the age of 24 and has worked in a creative way in disability arts for the last 20 years. Responding to DASH's call for submissions, Zoe wanted to play with familiar sounds to engage audiences in an accessible, fun and imaginative way.

Sound Canvas can be triggered by everyone, with or with a disability, as it is affected by body movement so you don't need to press a button or do any complicated interaction.

The idea is to draw people in to play with sounds that are familiar, like laughter. In doing so visitors are making

their own individual experience simply by using movement. People with hearing loss can experience it through the lighting effects, blind people are attracted to the combination of sound and the tactile.

Sound Canvas is intended to change over time. New familiar sounds will be added to provide new experiences for visitors over the next three years.

Here are some of the great comments from the visitor book:

- Love it at 90 years of age
- Super cool
- Amazing
- Fabulous
- Feels like I'm being laughed at, it's fun though
- It was funny. I want one!
- It scared me at first but LOL!
- My son loves it



Image: Sound Canvas by artist Zoe Partington | Photographer: Graham Peet

### ► The technology

Zoe gathered around her a group of technologists to realise her 'vision'.

Sound artist Andrej Bako designed the audio aspect of the project using Max MSP, a sophisticated visual programming language for music and multimedia. The programme controlled the way eight proximity sensors reacted to the presence of people. The programme played audio tracks and controlled lights in different ways depending on the position and movement of the viewer.

The lights were provided by Cloud One in Birmingham. They are i-Pix Satellite, programmed by custom DMX programme.

### Sound Vision: the artist's perspective

I have always been very intrigued by the viewer's perception of art since studying and engaging in the theoretical and interpretive side of how people see. I am also quite fascinated by how galleries and curators may wish us to view an art work and how we learn the rules to see visual information and the meanings behind what we see.



Image: © Photoeuphoria | Dreamstime Stock Photos. Picture posed by model.

This all made perfect sense until I lost my sight and at that point I began to think about how we see things in a very different way depending on your level of sight loss. I spent many years observing and engaging with art works with the limited sight that I have and this has influenced how I create my own ideas.

The commission from Dash and The Public provided a much needed opportunity to continue to develop my ideas.

Sound Canvas is in many ways a pilot — but has also come out of many experiments and trials and watching audiences engage with art. I was keen to produce something that audiences could play with, to allow them to create their own art or have an individual experience using the sound and the lights.

I wanted the piece to also be reflective of the space and express joy, delight and wonder but also have a range of sounds that may make the viewer feel they could partly control what happens if they took the time. During the works my understanding of the technology and how it could be developed much further began to expand but as always we had a time limited window to realise the piece and a tight budget.

The sounds for the piece in West Bromwich were recordings of local people's laughter which I was keen to embed in this piece. We then used about 40 files of laughter to create different sounds along the eight-sensor unit.

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Sound Canvas draws people in to play with sounds that are familiar, like laughter

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Each structure was made of light beech coloured wood to match the aesthetic of the gallery space and give not only a sound, which obviously can't be seen, but also a solid element to house the equipment and the lighting units. There were many challenges, how do I make the sounds trigger in the space successfully? How would audience members who may not hear sound engage with the piece? Was just sound too subtle for some viewers who were not use to sound installations?

Once I had a concept then I found myself having to

answer more questions, juggle my limited understanding of technology and investigate specialists who could technically provide the right advice and support. I sourced a sound specialist, Andrej Bako, who seemed to understand my intentions and was happy to assist. I had looked at many ways of projecting the sound and using various bits of technology but none of them seemed quite right.

The next challenge was the lights and the marriage between the lights and the sound. I was keen that the pattern of sound was reflected in the lights but needed more time

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Sound Canvas is now being toured to various galleries in the Midlands.

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Image: shows Zoe Partington, artist

- ▶ and budget to realise this in the way that I wished. I'd also not thought about the ventilation of the lights and the heat they generate or the robust nature of needing lights that could or would with stand heavy use. So in many ways it was back to the drawing board for the designs and size of the eight units required to house the sensors and the lights and speakers.

#### visitors' own actions create the interactivity in the exhibit

After many days of worrying and considering the mounting costs I finally made a decision and we went ahead with what could be achieved in the time frame to ensure we met the galleries deadlines. Graham Peet, the exhibitions manager, had been key to helping me make the right decisions and sharing his knowledge of the audiences in the venue.

Creating a piece like this has a multitude of complex parts and challenges. The most important element of this project was to listen to everyone supporting me and use their technical expertise and practical experience of art works in gallery spaces to achieve the best outcome within the set parameters.

#### The curator's perspective

We were very keen to commission an interactive artwork for a particular area in the gallery. We knew that it was important in our gallery that visitors were clear that it was their own actions that created the interactivity. It gave them a sense of control as well as pleasure in triggering the cascade of laughter. The balance between fun and clarity that Zoe and her collaborators achieved proved perfect for The Public.

The fascinating thing about working with Zoe was to see her transforming an idea that was in her head into a finished and very successful artwork — without actually having to programme or physically build anything herself.

It was also very important to us that the visitors would be able to continue to 'interact' with the work. We have achieved this by making the sounds something that will be updated over time. Visitors will be asked to send new sounds in to create the new sound canvas of the future.



Image: Sound Canvas by artist Zoe Partington | Photographer: Graham Peet

#### Postscript

Since Sound Canvas was honoured at the Jodi awards Sandwell Council has closed The Public and so Sound Canvas is now being toured to various galleries in the Midlands. It will be at Hive, 5 Belmont, Shrewsbury SY1 1TE from February 17th to April 9th 2014. ■

Graham can be contacted on: [gpeet@me.com](mailto:gpeet@me.com)

A video of Sound Canvas can be viewed at:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AgfORJsLvQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AgfORJsLvQ)

You can also see more about Sound Canvas on Pinterest at:  
[www.pinterest.com/dasharts/sound-canvas/](http://www.pinterest.com/dasharts/sound-canvas/)  
Website: [www.thepublic.com/exhibitions/sound-canvas](http://www.thepublic.com/exhibitions/sound-canvas)

DASH is a Disability Arts development organisation, which works locally, nationally and internationally with disabled people in partnership with arts and cultural organisations to develop Disability Arts practice

See our previous feature on the Jodi Awards in:  
*'The Jodi Awards: good practice in digital media'*, *MmIT Journal (iv)* 2013

# coming soon...

May 2014: mobile in libraries

Plus our regular items:

Features

News

Reviews

Technology roundup

## MMIT Group's Annual Conference

**Theme: "Sound & Vision Librarianship:  
Going Beyond Words & Pictures"**

11th-12th September 2014

Sheffield, UK

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