

Tactile art to blow up your mind:

Touch This Art!

Arte Al Toque!

Short version:

Originally this was "merely" supposed to be the **first ever art-for-the-blind independent art exhibit in Texas**, ever.

That we came up with something that feels perhaps like a totally awesome, unique, innovative new art expression, beyond visual, auditory, performance art...

That was, and still is, a surprise.

The **Touch This Art!, Arte al Toque!** exhibit

Imagine Art

3830 Real St., Austin.

Monday to Friday, 10 am to 4 pm, Wednesday up to 8:30 pm, open until Monday the 15th of October.

I will be there often, especially every Wednesday evening.

Then, **The Book Release:**

Among several other calls to fame for this project, a companion *high-relief handmade-paper book* reproducing in page-size the art from the "Touch This Art!" exhibit is perhaps a first worldwide. Even more unique: this book has Braille texts in English and Spanish and also some Nahuatl.

7 pm, Friday September 28

Austin Book Arts Center (ABAC)

2832 E Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Ste 114 (right next to Flatbed Press).

Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/touchthisart>

or <http://bit.ly/touchthisart>

Long version:

Here in Austin, we are the "live music capital of the world".

We have "visual art."

We have "performance art."

Perhaps one of our chefs might be considered "a Leonardo" by the extraordinary culinary creations achieved. So much also a top parfumer, or a Hill Country winemaker.

Then, elsewhere, not in Austin yet, there had been some haptic or tactile art from time to time, thus completing the count of *the five human senses* becoming venues to experience art.

Yet, the very, very little of that tactile art that you hear about being advertised or celebrated in other towns happens to be generally "mixed", let's even say "contaminated".

Not "pure" tactile, not that I have heard of, except a few art books before 2014.

Just like generally a top chef's dishes are seldom judged by their taste alone, with the delicate and colorful presentation counting for much of the experience, many of those presenting "tactile art," even such art that is **specifically designed to be for the blind and visually impaired**, actually rely on people who have healthy sight, and thus experience the art primarily through their vision, as being the ones that promote, value, and encourage it.

Because, how can we, in a totally visual-based cellphone, TV and computer universe, share and experience SOMETHING THAT WE CANNOT SEE?

(just think of it, how could a TV show share about art that is not to be seen, but only touched?)

It turns out that it's worth trying, to squarely focus on a clear tactile experience in art.

When we are there, next to it, and we actually put our
hands on art that we can only touch, but not see...

Actually, I have no words, no words to describe *exactly* what happens.

What follows weakly tries, but the actual brain experience is something very hard to quite share, possibly quite personal an experience.

I made that art.

Gosh, by now I know more about every single intricate detail of the Aztec Calendar Stone than should be allowed. My reproduction, made here in Austin at [Papel Texano](#), is perhaps among the most precise and exact ever made, just short of the one at the University of Florida, because theirs is full size, mine only 66%.

And theirs is whole, mine is broken, in pieces...
How that came to pass is told elsewhere.

So then, what happened next was that, to have "something" for the public at my art show opening night, wife and I put several of those broken pieces inside large black plastic bags, on tables.

The intention had been all along that, as much as possible, people would not see the art but only get to experience it through touch. So far so good.

Originally I had planned to have almost no light in the art gallery. This turned out not to be possible beyond opening night; Imagine Art Studios is a shared space, an active set of art studios has users all around during normal open hours, other activities, etc.

Then, with all the delays and last-minute changes, another plan also failed, which was to have nice velvet cloth covering what had been planned to be a huge, 10-foot across Aztec Calendar Stone made of papercrete, concrete reinforced with a high percentage of paper pulp fibers, very strong even if thin. The idea was that people would be able to put their hands underneath the velvet, and experience the art by touch, but not be able to actually see it. The tactile-rich velvet would add to the experience, while also look quite nice, without "adding noise".

No large Stone no more, no time, (and, actually, by now also a bit short of money to afford velvet...), scratch that also. Besides, those broken pieces were still covered with vaseline that had been used to keep the cast papercrete from attaching to the mold. Yuck.

Having a roll of trash bags seemed like an adequate temporary solution, tide us over for Opening Night, "we'll get it right" later.

One of the visitors called it "gutsy".

To pack your art in trash bags, and then display it on tables that way, makes for an interesting artistic statement on its own.

I like that.

Having just frantically finished installation, at some moment I could finally take a little break, relax.

So I went to a table, put my hands on top of one of those plastic bags, let my fingers get engaged,

and

my brain sort of froze

(thinking things over, later, I remembered having read on how a brain must be "re-educated" after cochlear implants, "sound" just is not the same mental process experience!)

Not being able to see,
just touch,
well...

I'm just telling my experience.

I have no idea how things will work for others. I am VERY curious.

So far I have heard it has been somewhat a similar thing.

I am very, highly, visual-kinesthetic, too much sometimes, to the detriment of, say, my attention span.

I can put my hands inside a box of garage junk (I have many of those, alas), and immediately, as I grab anything, the brain connects right away, most often I know exactly what it is, what it was part of, I could describe it in detail: color, shape, appearance...

I've seen, looked with full attention at that junk SO many times... :-(

In this occasion, at my carport "Papel Texano studio", I had had very little time to see yet my Solar Stone sculpture.

Almost half of it broke as I was trying to load it, at the very last moment, for bringing it to set up the exhibit. Except for a few quick looks I got to take at some of those pieces, amazed at how well the cast had turned out (really, really well, those pieces look just exactly like some pre-Columbian artifact movie prop. The car looked like the haul of an archaeology dig robber in Central America, loaded with hammered-away fragments of a stolen frieze from that lost temple in the deep dark jungle of Guatemala. Very Indiana Jones).

Very late now, it all went into bags to load in the car, no time to pressure wash the vaseline, etc., rush and run.

Thus, the primary mental construct and experience and memory taking place in my brain here was not one of sight, it was a blank, an "image" was simply not "registered" in my brain. I also was quite tired....

So here I am now, at a table in Imagine Art, touching this art piece. Oh, I knew this one was part of the left head of the Fire Serpent, I had quickly seen, put these three fragments that belonged together in one place, maybe 3 by 2 feet total, onto a piece of cardboard, then the whole 10 pounds inside a bag, on this table, an hour before.

But now, trying to experience it *just with my hand*...

OK, sure,

after a few minutes I "got it".

My fingers could do the seeing and hearing.

But,

for a moment

my brain had been somewhere it had never been before.

Have you ever had a real "Tears In The Rain" experience?

If so, I would have used to so much envy you, so much.

Not anymore.

Here I was,
for an instant,
there

off the shoulder of Orion,
watching glitter in the dark,
near the Tannhauser Gate,

and then,
it was time to live.

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I say "we" very purposefully.

In all fairness, perhaps I should say "she"? The idea to actually display the broken tactile art pieces inside the black plastic bags, on tables, was totally my wife's, Deb.

I made it, I broke it, I bagged it.

But it was not I who figured out that plastic-bagged tactile art was beyond a very momentary thing. It was she who noticed that "there was something with potential" there. She also thought of the "art by the pound" concept, more about that eventually.

(Ouch, again I will have trouble filling out those nice little application lists, "what kind of art is yours?" Never seen a list that would include "tactile". Very seldom one that would have "paper art", either. I'll have to put "visual", as in some ways this kind of thing is like a sculpture).

The experience...

not the same, not the same...

Come feel it!

(I was about to say, "come see it", but, precisely, come NOT to see it, and, perhaps, also have your own brain messed up just for an instant.

Have a little satori, perhaps.

During that moment of disconnection with known reality, be one with the Cosmos.

Not guaranteed, your mileage might vary, but perhaps it's worth the try to come see, oops, touch this art!)