

Malaysia

'Arts Beyond Sight': Learn how to experience art without your eyes

BY OPALYN MOK
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In the first exhibit, titled 'Touch of Love', visitors get to feel and touch the textures of the sculptures as the guide explains the story behind each sculpture. — Pictures by K.E.Ooi

GEORGE TOWN, Aug 24 — How would you be able to appreciate works of art if you can't see and live in a world of darkness?

The visually impaired can never visit an art exhibition without a guide to explain the paintings and exhibits that are on display.

Well, imagine if the tables are turned and the sighted are led by a visually impaired guide to experience art like never before in a pitch dark room.

This is the *Arts Beyond Sight* experiential exhibition where the visually impaired and the sighted get to experience art using all the other senses except for sight.

Visitors are allowed into the exhibition hall in small groups where a trained blind guide will be waiting. The guide will introduce herself and then as the visitors fumble and hesitate in the sudden darkness, the guide will confidently lead them to the first exhibit with just her voice.

In the first exhibit called the "Touch of Love", the usual rule of "no touching" in any art exhibition gets thrown out the window as visitors are seated at a table and are encouraged to use their sense of touch to "see" the art.

Sculptures by Singaporean visually impaired artist Ch'ng Seok Tin are handed one by one to the visitors and the story of each sculpture is explained, most of which are stories of friendship,

love and human relationships.

The mixed media paper sculptures, with titles like "Moving the Heaven and Earth" and "Caged Embrace", are part of *Dreams of The Red Dust* that was inspired by Ch'ng's poem of the same title which she wrote in the 1990s. Red dust is a Chinese metaphor for the transient world.

"I wrote the Chinese poem close to the end of the 1990s. As I ponder and reflect on the poem, 'dreams of the red dust', the phrase inherent in the poem, became my chosen title for this exhibition," she said.

After the sculptures, visitors are led to the second exhibit — "The Sound of Joy" — where they get to touch and hear the work being exhibited. On a table lays an assortment of mixed media sculptures that emit sounds such as the tinkling of bells inside a sculpture or the clatter of rocks in another.



Singaporean visually impaired artist Ch'ng Seok Tin will be conducting workshops to create art for the 'Wish You Well' art installation.

Sdn Bhd and DID My Innovations Sdn Bhd and is held in conjunction with George Town Festival.

It is held from 10am to 6pm daily until August 28 at the Penang Science Cluster in Wisma Yeap Chor Ee. Ch'ng will also be holding daily art workshops at 11am to create the "Wish You Well" installation art.



The 'Wish You Well' art installation at the Arts Beyond Sight experience at Wisma Yeap Chor Ee.

Again, visitors are encouraged to pick up each sculpture-instrument and shake it to listen to the sound while feeling its shape and texture.

Finally, at the last exhibit — "The Taste and Smell of Peace" — visitors get to sit down at another table and are handed small cups of food which they can smell before tasting it.

At the end of the experience, the guides will talk about their own life journey as visually impaired persons and how they are able to integrate in the community through hard work and perseverance.

The *Arts Beyond Sight* 30-minute experience is a collaborative effort by Save Ones Sight Missions Berhad (SOSM), Dialogue in the Dark Malaysia

Participants will learn to create sculptures that double as sound-making instruments for the "Wish You Well" installation art display. Those interested to participate in the workshop may email to connect@did.my (<mailto:connect@did.my>).

The *Arts Beyond Sight* experience will head over to the Causeway Exchange Festival at Suntec City Exhibition Center in Singapore from September 2 to 8.

Find out more about GTF events at georgetownfestival.com (<http://georgetownfestival.com>).

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