

ANDY SLATER

Paintings and Sculptures

Educator Handout: Grades 7-12

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

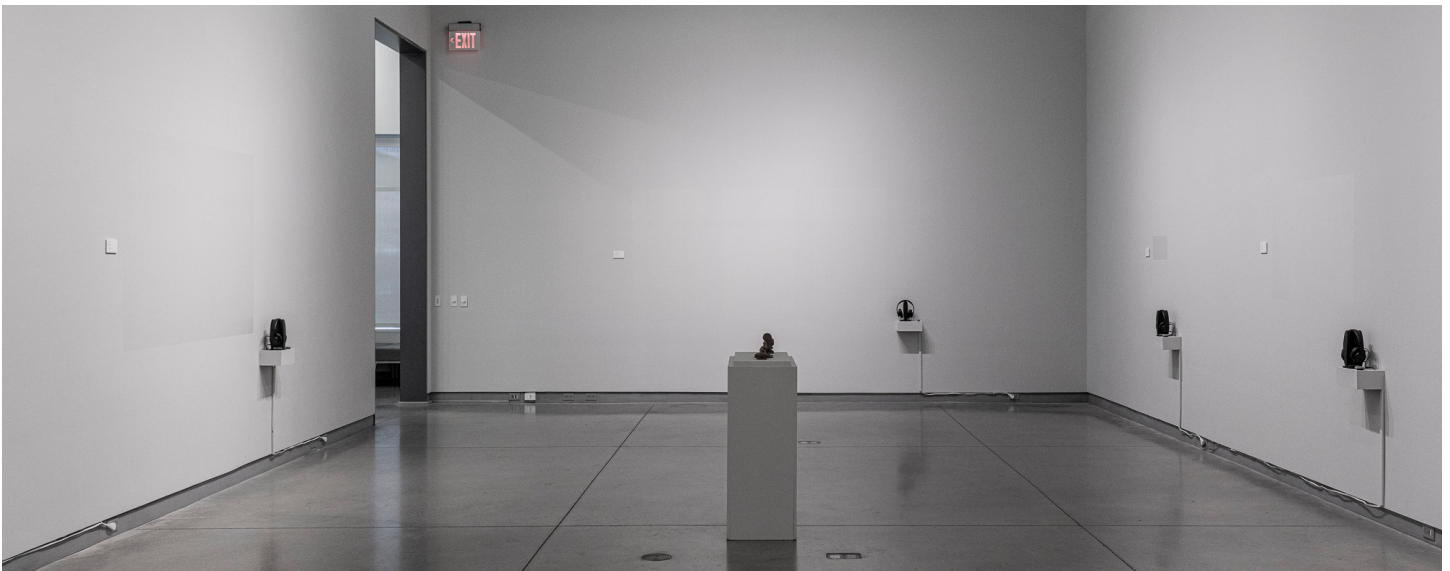
This [exhibition](#) features Chicago-based artist Andy Slater's sound works and three-dimensional objects that mimic the presentation and appearance of traditional artistic formats but engage senses other than vision. Meant to be touched or heard rather than seen, these "paintings and sculptures" trouble the ocularcentrism that is at the core of the "visual" arts. For Slater, who is blind, this is more than just a conceptual gesture or a political statement (though it is those things, too): it is an attempt to invite people to have artistic experiences that are analogous to his own.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

[Andy Slater](#) (b. 1975, Milford, Connecticut) is a blind Chicago-based media artist, writer, performer, and disability advocate/"loudmouth." Slater holds a Masters in Sound Arts and Industries from Northwestern University and a B.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is a 2024 3Arts Next Level Awardee, 2022-2023 Leonardo Crip Tech Incubator fellow, 2022 United States Artists fellow, and 2018 3Arts/Bodies of Work fellow. The founder of the Society of Visually Impaired Sound Artists and the director of the *Sound as Sight* accessible field-recording project, Slater has exhibited and performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, California; Transmediale Festival, Berlin, Germany; Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia; Critical Distance, Toronto, Canada; Experimental Sound Studios, Chicago, Illinois; the Art Institute of Chicago; Flux Factory, New York, New York; and the Momena Dance Company, Oak Park, Illinois.

VOCABULARY

- **Accessibility:** making information and experiences available for diverse audiences.
- **Alt Text:** a description that makes the content of an artwork, digital image, or audio recording accessible to people who are unable to experience the work due to loss of sight or hearing.
- **Context:** the situation in which something occurs.
- **Subject matter:** that which is portrayed or suggested in an artwork (such as a person, place, or thing).



Installation view of *Andy Slater: Paintings & Sculptures* on view at University Galleries from January 14 through March 26, 2025. Photo credit: Jade (Minh Hà) Nguyễn.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

RESPOND: VA:Re8.1 - Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work.

Share the following information with students:

Andy Slater's work focuses largely on advocacy for **accessible** art and technology. One of the ways in which art and technology can be made **accessible** is through **Alt Text** descriptions. As a blind artist, Slater relies on such descriptions to experience visual artworks and digital images. However, he has found that these descriptions often include information that is not **accessible** to a blind person, such as the surface qualities of a painting. In response, Slater created a series of "paintings" that exist only as descriptions. In this series, Slater invites his audience to experience visual art as he does: through their imaginations.

As a class, select and listen to works from Slater's *Invisible Ink* series.

1. While listening, prompt students to pay attention to the colors, shapes, textures, imagery, smells, sounds, and feelings evoked by the work.
2. Invite students to share their responses to the work with the class. In what ways are their responses similar to one another's? How are they different?
3. Ask students to describe how listening to an artwork compares to viewing an artwork.

Alt Text is also utilized for transcribing audio recordings to be **accessible** to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. In 2022, Slater was commissioned by Carnegie Hall to create a sound description of [Molly Joyce's](#) composition, [Side by Side](#).

1. Watch the recording of [Side by Side](#) as a class.
2. Ask students to share the ways in which their experience listening to the music aligned with or deviated from that of reading the description.
3. Invite students to share whether or not they think a description for a visual or audio work can be comparable to seeing or hearing the original work.

CONNECT: VA:Cn10 - Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

ELA WRITING: W4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

The way that language is used in **Alt Text** has a direct impact on how an audience experiences that which is described. Introduce students to [Alt Text as Poetry](#). Then, prompt students to select an artwork, image, object, or musical score for which to write **Alt Text** descriptions. Provide students with guidelines for writing **Alt Text** from sources such as [Cooper Hewitt](#) or [Harvard University](#).

1. Prompt students to write two or more **Alt Text** descriptions for their chosen work. Instruct them to focus on different qualities of the work, as well as different audiences and **contexts** for each description.
2. Encourage students to include descriptions that evoke sensory qualities beyond sight or sound.
3. Slater's descriptions for *Side by Side*, as well as his *Invisible Ink* series, focus predominantly on narrative and **subject matter**. Invite students to incorporate story-telling into their **Alt Text** descriptions.
4. Prompt students to consider their audience when selecting words and references to include in their descriptions. How do these choices impact the audience's ability to understand what is being described? For example, the use of slang terms or specific cultural references may only be **accessible** to certain audiences.
5. Direct students to share their work with a classmate and to provide one another with feedback for revisions.

Invite students to share their finished descriptions alongside the original works. Provide the following prompts for discussion:

- How do the different descriptions alter your experience of the work?
- Do you find that any of the descriptions align more closely with your personal interpretations or observations of the original work than others? If so, in what ways?

Educator resources are available on the exhibition [webpage](#).

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), and [Vimeo](#) and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact galleries@illinoisstate.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.

