

ANDY SLATER

Paintings & Sculptures

Educator Handout: Grades K - 6

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

This [exhibition](#) features Chicago-based artist Andy Slater's sound works and three-dimensional objects that mimic the ways traditional artistic formats look and are presented but engage senses other than vision. Meant to be touched or heard rather than seen, these "paintings and sculptures" interrupt the focus on vision that is at the core of the "visual" arts. For Slater, who is blind, this is more than just sharing an idea or making a political statement (though it is those things, too): it is an attempt to invite people to have artistic experiences that are similar 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.
- **Assemblage:** art that combines existing objects.
- **Composition:** the arrangement of elements in an artwork.
- **Medium:** refers to the type of art (such as drawing, sculpture, or photography), as well as the materials an artwork is made from (such as an audio file or bronze).¹
- **Scale:** the relationship in size between two things.
- **Subject matter:** that which is depicted in an artwork—such as people, places, or things.

¹Tate (n.d.). *Art Term: Medium*. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/medium>.



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

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

RESPOND: VA:Re7.2 - Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Share the following information with students.

Galleries and museums often use [Alt Text](#) (written descriptions) to convey information about artworks. These descriptions are meant to make visual art and digital images **accessible** to people who are blind or have low vision.

Andy Slater is a blind artist who relies on such descriptions to experience visual artworks. However, he has found that Alt Text often includes 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 and are focused almost entirely on **subject matter** and narrative (story-telling). In this series, Slater invites his audience to experience visual art as he does: through their imaginations.

Select a work from Slater's [Invisible Ink](#) series to focus on.

- Listen to the description of the "painting" as a class.
- Guide students in documenting their mental constructions of the "painting" through drawing, writing, acting, or another means.

Encourage students to then discuss how their responses to the artwork were similar to or different from their classmates'.

CREATE: VA:Cr1.1 - Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Share the following information with students.

Another way that galleries and museums try to make works **accessible** is by providing [3D printed models](#) of artworks and artifacts that can be touched. Although these models provide some access to details of the artwork, they are often made with different materials and at smaller **scale** than the original. To create works that are **accessible** to blind people, Slater made a series of sculptures that are meant to be experienced through touch instead of sight.

Inspired by Slater's sculptures, guide students in creating sculptures that are meant to be touched. Consider employing one or more of the **mediums** and methods listed below.

Traditional or air-dry clay:

- Press stamps or other textural materials into the surface of a clay slab. Keep the works as shallow relief tiles or construct forms using the texturized slabs.
- Construct free-standing sculptures with a focus on textural surface qualities using additive or subtractive methods.

Engraving:

- Provide students with a soft surface such as a foam plate that can be inscribed with a pencil or other blunt tool.

Mixed-media collage or weaving:

- Provide students with a variety of textural materials such as yarn, popsicle sticks, cardboard, beads, and EVA craft foam. Guide them in arranging and adhering materials to a firm surface such as cardboard or chipboard, or weaving them together using a [cardboard loom](#).

Assemblage sculpture:

- Prompt students to select a variety of materials and objects with different textural qualities. Guide them in arranging their chosen items into an **assemblage** sculpture. Encourage students to consider the areas of their sculptures where different surfaces meet. For example, do they want to create abrupt or gradual transitions between surfaces? Assist students in using hot glue to secure their items in place.

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

Guide students in sharing their artwork with a partner or a table group.

Encourage students to close their eyes and gently feel the surface of their classmates' artwork. Ask them to describe details such as textures, recognizable **subject matter**, and the **composition** of elements. What does the artwork make them think about or feel (emotionally)? Consider creating voice recordings of students' responses to share with the class or alongside an exhibition of students' work.

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.

