

Project title: In Other Senses: Disabled Knowledge and Visible Access



Blog Post #1

A Curatorial Rationale Grounded in Visible Accommodation and Cripistemology

Despite a decade of ‘inclusion’ rhetoric, disabled artists and visitors remain marginalised in Scotland’s arts sector.¹ This curatorial proposal posits that a major impediment to disability access in the arts is how we conceive of access and disability itself, which too often takes the form of unobtrusive accommodation, seeking to blend in as much as possible. Disability scholar Tanya Titchkosky articulates, ‘the paradox is this: the presence of disability almost always fades into an absence, and in many ways a dominant depiction of disability is that it should appear as if it is not present, not appearing’.² It is unfortunately an all-too-common

¹ Creative Scotland’s Mainstreaming Report 2022-2024 report finds that 11% of museum staff report a disability, vs 20.7% of the working age population in Scotland, Creative Scotland, *Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion – Mainstreaming Report 2022–2024*, accessed May 1, 2025, <https://www.creativescotland.com/resources-publications/publications/policies/equalities-in-creative-scotland/mainstreaming-reports>.

² Tanya Titchkosky, *The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011): 96.

approach that when disability blends in and disappears, the interests and contributions of disabled people disappear as well.

The exhibition *In Other Senses: Disabled Knowledge and Visible Access* at the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) will operate from the perspective that disability provides access to novel and transformative forms of knowledge and experience, akin to Johnson and McRuer's concept of *cripistemology*.³ This praxis essentially reverses Pierre Bourdieu's notion that cultural capital legitimises social power.⁴ Instead, true value lies in the lived experiences of disabled people, whilst non-disabled visitors become learners. Across seven rooms, works by disabled artists and/or featuring disabled subjects will be displayed thematically, exploring the different ways in which disabled experience and disabled bodies challenge, expand and exist in the able-bodied world. All curatorial work will be done in close consultation with Shape Arts and Neuk Collective, who have published guidance on how to work with disabled artists, and how to create an accessible exhibition. In keeping with Claire Bishop's critique of teleological gallery display, *In Other Senses* will reject periodisation and chronology in favour of themed rooms, interrogating narratives of historical progress and categorisation.⁵ This will allow for a visitor experience which is more self-directed, less ideologically didactic, and open to novel interpretations. The exhibition will draw upon recent and newly commissioned work from disabled artists active in the contemporary field, as well as widely exhibited artists revisited from the perspective of disability. Interweaving emerging, contemporary and widely exhibited artists and placing accessibility and disability aesthetics at the forefront of curatorial decision-making ensures that *In Other*

³ Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, "Cripistemologies," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 127–148,

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

⁵ Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology, or, What's "Contemporary" in Museums of Contemporary Art?* London: Koenig Books, 2013.

Senses has wide audience appeal and aligns with the National Galleries of Scotland's mission statement '*make art work for everyone*'.⁶

Amanda Cachia, an art historian who writes extensively on the topic of disability, sets the tone: 'I challenge the museum to think about how access can move beyond a mere practical conundrum, often added in as an afterthought once an exhibition has been installed, to how it might be used as a dynamic, critical and creative tool in artmaking and curating.'⁷ Whilst the relegation of access to the status of afterthought is a problem endemic to all sorts of gallery spaces, it can be particularly pronounced in heritage buildings, where structural modifications, even temporary, are discouraged or prohibited (for more on this, see Blog Post #2). The RSA is an ideal exhibition space for *In Other Senses* because of the opportunities it provides to interrogate accessibility in a heritage context. Additionally, the RSA's central location on Princes Street ensures that visitors will not be discouraged by a lack of accessible public transportation options.

In Other Senses will take place at a time when support for exhibitions that make disability visible has never been higher. *Crip Arte Spazio* by Shape Arts has documented the work and activism of the Disability Arts Movement, whilst *For Dear Life: Art, Medicine, and Disability* at Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego recognises the value of disability as a lens through which to understand the themes of illness and impairment in recent American art.⁸ Whilst recognising the vital advances of these exhibitions, *In Other Senses* provides a novel contribution to disability arts discourse by explicitly refusing chronology in favour of the 'complex embodiment' that foregrounds intra-disabled difference, and by actively engaging

⁶ National Galleries of Scotland, "Art Helps," *National Galleries of Scotland*, accessed May 1, 2025, <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/features/art-helps>

⁷ Amanda Cachia, "Disabling the Museum: Curator as Infrastructural Activist," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 12, no. 3 (2013): 259.

⁸ ShapeArts' *Crip Art Spazio* retrospective was first shown at the 60th Venice Biennale and is now on show at Attenborough Art Centre, Leicester. For 6 months, *For Dear Life: Art, Medicine, and Disability* occupied the main exhibition space at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. See <https://www.shapearts.org.uk/about-crip-arte-spazio> and <https://mcasd.org/exhibitions/for-dear-life-art-medicine-and-disability>.

with the ever-present historical and aesthetic context of Edinburgh and the RSA building.⁹ In its relation to the RSA, the city of Edinburgh, and the curatorial conventions of a large-scale gallery exhibition, *In Other Senses* will continually practice what Brophy and Hladki term ‘scraping’ against ableist narratives and assumptions about accessibility, foregrounding the aesthetic conflicts and ethical contradictions through the lens of visible access.¹⁰

⁹ Amanda Cachia, “The Flesh of the World: An Empirical Turn Toward Complex Embodiment.” *Art Journal* 76, nos. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2017): 68–75. Published online January 30, 2018.

¹⁰ Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki, “Crippling the Museum: Disability, Pedagogy, and Video Art,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): 315–333.

Blog Post #2

Navigating Accessibility and Heritage in Building Design

In Other Senses will occupy the main gallery of the RSA, a Category A listed neoclassical building and the venue for the National Gallery of Scotland's most high-profile exhibitions. Given its central role in Scotland's cultural landscape, RSA provides a rare opportunity to reframe accessibility as a tool for curatorial innovation as well as far-reaching and positive disability representation.

In Other Senses is committed to ensuring that the visitor experience is consistent from the point of entry. At present, high-profile exhibitions at the RSA tend to follow a chronological flow that begins at the front entrance, an access point that is not step-free.¹¹ Those who require step-free access are redirected to the back of the building, which is mainly used for deliveries and staff, with the unfortunate consequence that visitors with mobility requirements must enter the exhibition midway through. This results in an entirely different and perhaps diminished visitor experience. If the lift is out of service, there is no step-free access at all. These current accommodations risk creating the impression that the experience and interests of visitors with mobility requirements are of secondary importance. Disabled visitors may be left with the belief that they will be accommodated to a point, but only so far, and certainly not if it would risk damaging the aesthetic integrity of a heritage building, or the exhibitions it houses.

This conflict makes plain Titchkosky's observation (see Blog Post #1), that conventional gallery accommodations seek to erase disability, but ultimately erase disabled communities and their interests. Although the RSA is certainly not alone (even among galleries in Edinburgh, see Appendix B) in its failure to adequately think through mobility access, the building's heritage status serves as an added shield against accountability or reflection. This carries the implicit notion that access runs contrary to aesthetics: that implementing a step-free option at the RSA's front

¹¹ Royal Scottish Academy. "Stair-free Access." In *Accessibility*. Accessed May 1, 2025. <https://www.royalscottishacademy.org/about/accessibility/>.

entrance would inevitably damage its Category A listed neoclassical appearance. Such complaints are surprisingly common in Edinburgh, and even publicised and sensationalised.¹² Rather than merely comply with these structural and aesthetic demands, *In Other Senses* will actively engage with the context of RSA's heritage status.

In response to Titchkosky's critique of unobtrusive accommodation, the largest commission of this exhibition will be in collaboration with contemporary artist and wheelchair user Park McArthur and the urban design firm Publica. Together, they will co-design a temporary mobility ramp that reimagines access as both infrastructure and artistic intervention.

Additionally, the intentional pairing of well-known and frequently shown historical artists, such as Frida Kahlo and Francisco de Goya, with contemporary disabled artists, will serve to further question the assumed opposition between historical aesthetic standards and disabled visibility. By recontextualising Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with the Portrait of Doctor Farill* (1951), Goya's *Self-Portrait with Dr Arrieta* (1820), and Christian Schad's *Agosta, the Pigeon-Chested Man, and Rasha, the Black Dove* (1929) as artists and subjects who engaged with disability on their own terms, in their own historical circumstances, *In Other Senses* will make the argument that visible access is not incompatible with understanding and appreciating history.

Further ways in which *In Other Senses* will engage with its environment (both the RSA and Edinburgh) include an open call via the Neuk Collective for contemporary artists based in Scotland, and a commissioned piece by non-visual learner Carmen Papalia, documenting the experience of navigating Edinburgh's historical and commercial districts without sight.¹³ Papalia's process involves leading participants

¹² Mark McLaughlin, "Ramp 'to Nowhere' in Edinburgh Square Criticised by Heritage Body." *The Times*, March 2, 2025. <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/scotland/article/ramp-to-nowhere-in-edinburgh-square-criticised-by-heritage-body-xd9qlcn9s>

¹³ Carmen Papalia prefers to refer to himself as a non-visual learner, rather than visually impaired, see Amanda Cachia, *The Agency of Access: Contemporary Disability Art and Institutional Critique* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2024).

on city tours without the use of sight, and a video piece documenting this process will be presented as part of the exhibition.



Photograph of the Royal Scottish Academy interior, RSA Annual Exhibition 2019. Image credit Julie Howden



Photograph of the Royal Scottish Academy exterior, National Galleries of Scotland website, 2025.

Blog Post #3

Exploring Disabled Knowledge Through Sense and Circumstance

A central feature of *In Other Senses*, alluded to in Blog Posts #1 & #2, is the pairing of works from artists of disparate historical contexts, but united in their interrogation of disabled experiences. This Blog Post will highlight one such juxtaposition: two works which explore via different approaches the experience of chronic illness.

Due to its author's historical prominence, the piece most likely to first catch a visitor's eye as they enter Room 2 is Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with the Portrait of Doctor Farill* (1951). The last of Kahlo's self-portraits to be signed by the artist, it portrays the artist after she had spent nine months in a Mexico City hospital recovering from seven spinal surgeries performed by Doctor Juan Farill. Kahlo, seated in a wheelchair, clutches a red heart-shaped palette in one hand, a bundle of brushes in the other. To her left is a finished, dignified and conventional portrait of Doctor Farill. The explicit symbolism of Kahlo's heart-palette makes plain that Kahlo's own battle with chronic disease has served as a source of inspiration for her aesthetic output, and the fact that Doctor Farill's portrait is of a more conventional style, atypical of Kahlo's, seems to suggest that disability can inform art more broadly. Alongside Kahlo's work, tactile artist Heather Bowring will create a touch version of the painting, so that sighted and unsighted visitors can feel the portrait's grooves and the texture of the brush strokes.

Opposite *Self-Portrait with the Portrait of Doctor Farill* will hang a painting by Katherine Sherwood, from her series *Venuses of the Yelling Clinic* (2013 – present).¹⁴ Sherwood is a self-identified disabled artist who, after suffering a cerebral haemorrhage, has experienced impaired mobility and lost the use of her right arm, which had previously been her painting arm. Her work in this exhibition, *Olympia* (2013), reimagines another well-known painting, Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863), through the lens of disability aesthetics. Sherwood's *Olympia* foregrounds the artist's own chronic illness, as the figure Olympia's head takes the form of a brain

¹⁴ "Venuses of the Yelling Clinic." Katherine Sherwood (artist website). Accessed May 9, 2025. <https://www.katherinesherwood.com/venuses-of-the-yelling-clinic>.

shown in an MRI scan, of the sort that would be used to diagnose the impacts of a cerebral haemorrhage. Sherwood's reclining and seductive Olympia also wears a leg brace like the one used by the artist. Sherwood's work serves to explore the relationship between chronic illness, medical diagnosis, physical trauma, adaptive healing and beauty. Like Kahlo's, it interrogates and makes plain the role of a body's longstanding physical health in one's perception of (and creation of) works of art.

The pairing of Kahlo's and Sherwood's paintings in Room 2 is just one example of how *In Other Senses* embraces cripistemology, or the broader notion that disabled experience can provide unique insights into life and the arts.¹⁵ For Kahlo and Sherwood, this primarily takes place in a visual medium, but this is hardly the only way in which disabled experience conveys knowledge and insight in the exhibition. Across its seven rooms, works will be arranged in thematic groupings which explore different media and senses through which the disabled experience can differ. These themes will be highlighted below, although a more comprehensive catalogue of works planned for each room can be found in Appendix A.

Although visitors with mobility impairments will have access to *In Other Senses* through both the front and back entrances of the RSA, the two rooms adjacent to the back entrance have been designated as Rooms 1 and 7, in order to discourage the assumption that the exhibition's start and end points are centred on its 'main' front entrance, which has typically not been wheelchair accessible. To this end, Room 1 will serve primarily as an information point, containing a sensory map and other resources for the rest of the exhibition.

In addition to the works of Kahlo and Sherwood, Room 2 will hold works by well-known artists like Francisco de Goya, Yayoi Kusama and Christian Schad, recontextualised through the context of disability, as well as pairings across visual, audio and tactile media which respond to these and other works. At least one of the

¹⁵ Johnson & McRuer, "Cripistemologies," 2014.

pieces commissioned by the Neuk Collective's open call to Scotland-based disabled artists will have the opportunity to respond to Room 2's other holdings.

Room 3 will be a designated low-noise and medium-lighting reading room or 'Crip Library', containing texts by Titchkosky, Siebers, Cachia, Johnson & McRuer, Brophy & Hladki, Bourdieu, and others (see Bibliography). Contributing artists and staff (with varied embodiments and access needs) will also be invited and encouraged to suggest titles for the library. Care will be taken that all titles are available in multiple formats (Braille, large-print, audio, coloured overlay slides), and the reading room will also contain a zine rack featuring works from the Neuk Collective's open call.

Room 4 will feature a newly commissioned, participatory film project by Carmen Papalia (see Blog Post #2), as well as film installations by Carolyn Lazard (*A Recipe for Disaster*, 2017) and Jo Pearson (*All in Your Head*, 1991).

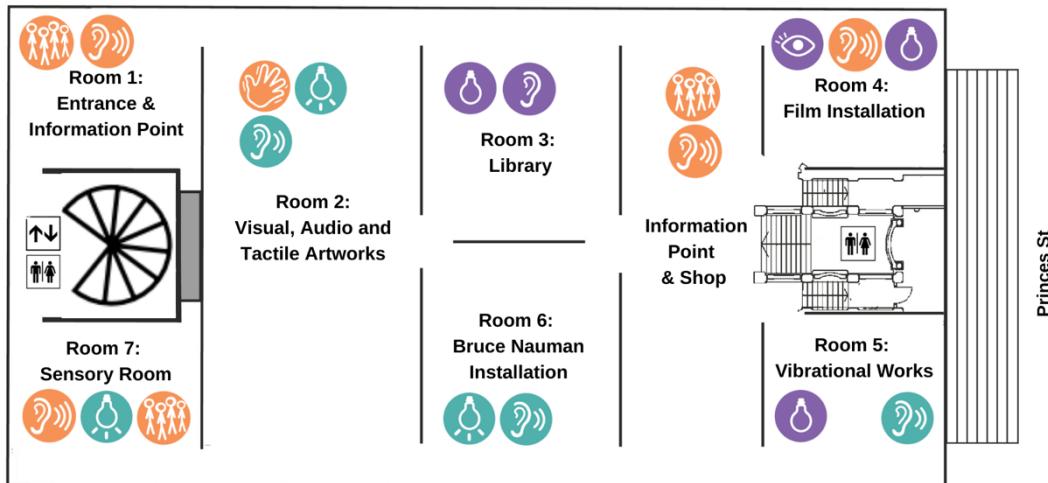
Room 5 will highlight works operating through the medium of vibration, including sound installations, low-frequency vibrations, visual representations of sound. The room will be anchored by a commission from sound artist Christine Sun Kim, as well as works from the Neuk Collective's open call which respond to the theme of vibration.

A newly commissioned installation by Bruce Nauman, based on his Corridor series, will be featured in Room 6. One purpose of Nauman's commission will be to thoughtfully convey a heightened awareness of space and mobility to all visitors, regardless of mobility or impairments.

A Sensory Room, designed by Anna Farley, will occupy Room 7. Farley will work in collaboration with disabled textile artist and sculptor, Judith Scott.

Sensory Map

Royal Scottish Academy



	Low	Medium	High
Visual or hands-on			
Lighting			
Noise			
Crowds			

There is a variety of seating options including floor seats, sofas and stools. Seating is available in every room except Room 6, which is designed to be a transient space.

Sensory Map made by author. Figure legend and sensory symbols are adopted from the Museum of Scotland's accessibility resource pack.

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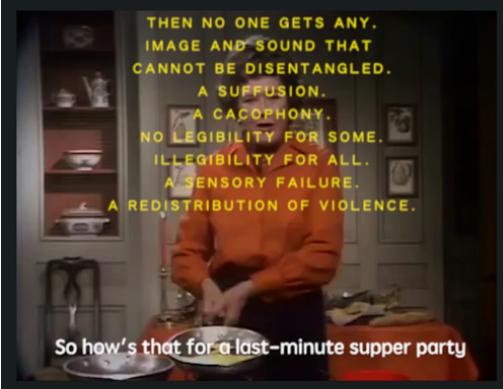
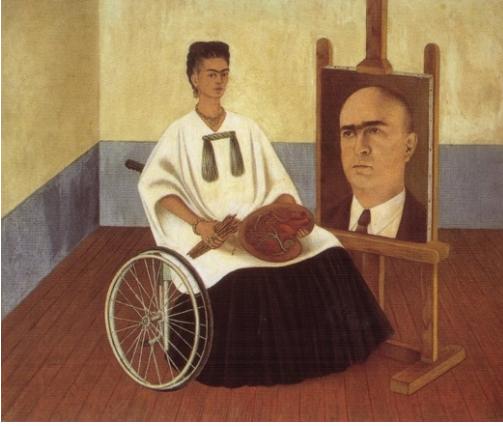
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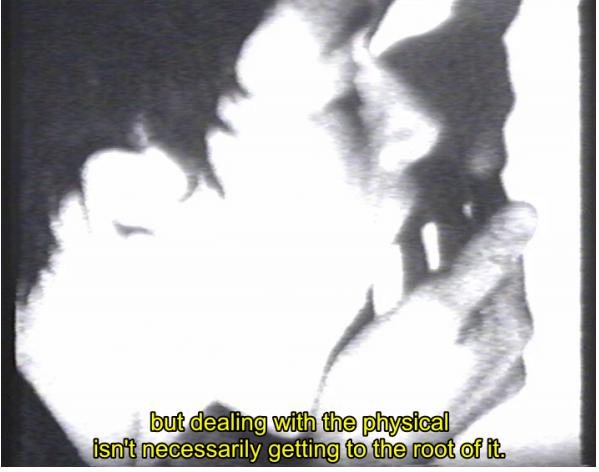
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Appendix A

1	Artist	Commissions & List of Artworks	Room
1	Park McArthur with Publica	<p>Installation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Other Senses hopes to commission a temporary mobility ramp for RSA (Princes Street entrance) co-designed by contemporary artist and wheelchair user Park McArthur and Publica, an urban design firm specialising in inclusive design. The ramp will allow disabled visitors to access the gallery 	Outside the RSA, Princes St Entrance
2	Carmen Papalia	<p>Artist Film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blind Artist Carmen Papalia will be commissioned to create a participatory public project that to accessibility in the heritage city of Edinburgh. It will be documented and presented as an artist film as part of the exhibition. 	Room 4
3	Anna Farley	<p>Sensory Room and Visual Map</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neurodivergent artist Anna Farley will be commissioned to create a sensory room with a range of seating options. Farley will also be commissioned to make a visual map.  <p>Photograph: Anna Farley, <i>Your Space</i> commission for Tate St Ives, 2025. URL: www.annafarley.co.uk/your-space</p>	Room 7
4	Billie Angel and Neuk Collective	<p>Interactive Art Cart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glasgow based artist Billie Angel will be commissioned to create two interactive carts in collaboration with Neuk Collective. Neuk Collective will curate a range of access equipment and resources including ear defenders (adult and children sizes), fidget toys and interaction lanyards/stickers. 	One cart will be placed in room 1 & another in the Information/Shop, secondary entrance.

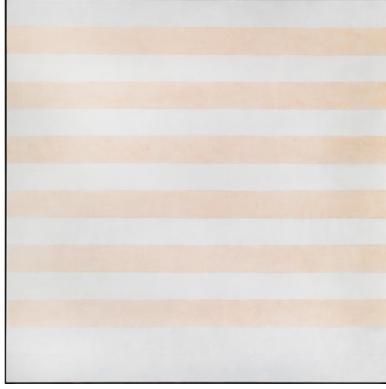
		 <p>Photograph by author 2025. Sensory Art Cart designed by Billie Angel and Neuk Collective for <i>See With Me</i> exhibition, Fruitmarket, Edinburgh, 2025.</p>	
5	Heather Bowring	<p>Tactile Artworks Copies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of the <i>In Other Senses</i> marketing strategy Heather Bowring will be commissioned to make tactile artwork copies of popular paintings from NGSSs collection, including Sir Edwin Landseer's <i>Monarch of the Glen</i>, 1851 which will sit alongside original artworks in the National Gallery of Scotland. Bowring will also respond to selected works within <i>In Other Senses</i> including Kahlo's <i>Self-Portrait with the Portrait of Doctor Farill</i>, 1951.  <p>Image: Tactile copy of Whaam! by Roy Lichtenstein used on use on touch tours for blind and visually impaired visitors at the Tate Modern.</p>	Room 2: tactile copies placed next to original artworks
6	Carolyn Lazard	<p>A Recipe for Disaster, 2017</p> <p>Film, 27 mins</p> <p>Uploaded on Vimeo by artist: https://vimeo.com/267429320</p>	Room 4: Film Installation

			
7	Frida Kahlo	<p>Self-Portrait with the Portrait of Doctor Farill, 1951</p> <p>Oil on Masonite</p> <p>41.5 x 50 cm</p> <p>Collection: Galería Arvil, Mexico City, Mexico</p> 	<p>Room 2:</p> <p>Wall, accompanied by tactile work by Heather Bowring</p>
8	Jo Pearson	<p>All in Your Head, 1991</p> <p>B/w videotape, 6 mins 25 secs</p> <p>Can be obtained via https://cinenova.org/collection/all-in-your-head/</p>	<p>Room 4: Film Installation</p>

		 <p>but dealing with the physical isn't necessarily getting to the root of it.</p>	
9	Catherine Yass	<p>Corridors, 1994</p> <p>Series of 8 photographs, Dye destruction print on transparency on lightbox 890 x 725 x 140 mm (approximate)</p> <p>Collection: Tate (not on display)</p> 	<p>Room 2: Displayed in light boxes away from the wall</p>
10	Ray Eames	<p>Large Leg Splint Sculpture, 1943</p> <p>Birch plywood, aniline dye 98 x 20.5 x 12.5 cm</p> <p>All images courtesy of Eames Office</p>	<p>Room 2: Sculpture to be suspended from ceiling, hung like a mobile</p>

			
11	Yayoi Kusama	<p>Dots Obsession (Tobas), 2006</p> <p>Acrylic on canvas</p> <p>194.2 x 194.2 cm</p> <p>Collection: Roberts Institute of Art, London</p> 	<p>Room 2: Wall, accompanied by tactile work by Heather Bowring</p>
12	Francisco de Goya	<p>Self-Portrait with Dr Arrieta, 1820</p> <p>Oil on canvas</p> <p>114.62 cm x 76.52 cm</p> <p>Collection: Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis</p>	<p>Room 2: Wall, accompanied by tactile work by Heather Bowring</p>

			
13	Christian Schad	<p>Agosta, the Pigeon-Chested Man, and Rasha, the Black Dove 1929</p> <p>Oil paint on canvas</p> <p>120 x 80 cm</p> <p>Currently on long-term loan at Tate Modern, from a private collection</p> 	<p>Room 2:</p> <p>Wall, accompanied by tactile work by Heather Bowring</p>
14	Lorenza Böttner	<p>Kain Karawahn, Lorenza Böttner, untitled (n.d.)</p> <p>6 black-and-white photographs mounted on cardboard</p> <p>34 x 49.8 cm</p> <p>Collection: VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany, 2019.</p>	Room 2

			
15	Agnes Martin	<p>Happy Holiday (1999)</p> <p>Acrylic and graphite on canvas</p> <p>152.40 x 152.40 x 4.00 cm</p> <p>Collection: National Galleries of Scotland and Tate. Acquired jointly.</p> 	<p>Room 2:</p> <p>Wall, accompanied by tactile work by Heather Bowring</p>
16	Bruce Nauman	A new artwork commissioned based on Nauman's Corridor series	<p>Room 6: Bruce Nauman Corridor Installation</p>
17	Christine Sum Kim	A new artwork commissioned, audio installation/low frequency vibrations and illustrations of sound on paper and onto walls directly	<p>Room 5: Vibrational Works</p>
		<p>The list below references works by emerging, contemporary and widely exhibited artists that would fit well into this exhibition.</p> <p>An open call for artworks will also be advertised through Neuk Collective, Project Ability and Shape Arts channels (UK based artists only).</p>	
18	Edgar Degas	Painting	Room 2

19	Daisy Lafarge	Poet and artist, commission Lafarge to record an engaging audio description of the exhibition	Audio throughout the exhibition
20	Andrew Gannon	Sculpture	Room 2
21	Judith Scott	Textile Sculpture	Room 2 or collab with Anna Farley for Sensory Room aesthetics
22	Yinka Shonibare RA	Sculpture	Room 2
23	Sasha Saben Callaghan	Mixed media collage	Room 2
24	Panteha Abareshi	Sculpture and/or film	Room 2 or Room 4
25	Riva Lehrer	Painting	Room 2
26	Jesse Darling	Sculpture	Room 2: Suspended from ceiling or wall
27	Leah Clements	Hyperbaric (2020) video documentation of performance touching on themes of care, consent and medical environments.	Room 4: Film Installation
28	David Hockney	iPad drawings	Room 2

Appendix B



Karla Black, *Punctuation is pretty popular: nobody wants to admit to much, (detail)*, 2008/2021. Plaster powder, powder paint, thread.
Fruitmarket Gallery, 2021.

Karla Black's retrospective at Fruitmarket is an example where disability compliance has been met and considered, but accessibility is not truly functional. The upper gallery was enveloped with pink powder, and a clear path was left so that visitors could view the work from various angles. Care was taken that the visitor path would be wide enough for a wheelchair to travel in a forward or backward motion. While this accommodation allowed wheelchair users to enter and exit the exhibition, it prevented them from turning to face the work. The unintended effect was that visitors with limited mobility were permitted to 'pass through' the exhibition, but not to engage with the work in any meaningful way.