

Interact at The RA: Lipspeaking and BSL Events

The Royal Academy of Arts is world famous for its art exhibitions; in particular its Summer Exhibition. This year, they have arranged a host of lipspeaking and BSL talks and events, facilitated by the Access Officer, Kate Horbury. Through these tours and events, deaf and hard of hearing people can access different perspectives on current and permanent exhibitions, which also include access at events such as InPerson, a late Friday night opportunity to create an ultraviolet mobile installation with artist Jonathan Huxley, as well as the opportunity to participate in a drumming session with Master Drummer Henry Gaobi. Workshops are an opportunity to let your hair down and try your hand at unusual creative projects. With BSL and lipspeaking support provided, these events are fully accessible for deaf and hard of hearing people.

The gallery tours begin with a talk before the exhibition. They are held in The John Madejski Fine Rooms, a beautiful wooden floored room scattered with art canvases on the wall. When I arrived, we were ushered in and served a choice of complimentary drinks – red or white wine, fruit juice or water. The atmosphere was relaxed, and we had the opportunity to mingle with other attendees before and after the talks. Being a deaf event, naturally there was a sense of bonhomie: the social aspect was very important!

The first exhibition I went to see was BSL interpreted by Jon Wilson, for *Eyewitness: Hungarian Photography in the 20th Century*. He clicked through a slide show with some of the photos whilst explaining the history of Hungarian photography, the techniques they used and how the photographs connected and related to each other. His talks are extremely interesting – at the photography exhibition the audience had a lot of fun and explained their reactions to the photographs, as well as asking questions. This interactive aspect allows the audience to discuss and see the art through different eyes. After the talks, the audience are free to visit the exhibitions at their own pace.

The lipspeaking talks are no less social, with people discussing their responses to the art and meeting new or old friends. It is worth arriving early to make sure you sit where you can see the lipspeaker. The Summer Exhibition this year was a riot of many different images; it was fascinating to get two different takes on the same exhibition by going to both the lipspeaking and BSL talk. Sometimes, the lipspeaking talk is accompanied by SSE, so if you want two different responses to the same exhibition, it is worth seeing both. For larger displays, there are often two BSL talks by different people.

The gallery talks are £3 for a deaf or hard of hearing person and hearing companions are free. The tickets can be booked online or over the phone or you can download a PDF or Word booking form. Visit the website at <http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/> for more information, by searching for BSL and lipspeaking talks.